

# Situation Overview: Regional Displacement of South Sudanese

March 2018

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## Introduction

The crisis in South Sudan is not confined to areas within its borders. Since renewed fighting broke out across the country in July 2016, large numbers of refugees have poured into neighbouring countries, enlarging an already significant displacement crisis. By early-2017, nearly 60,000 people were fleeing the country each month, resulting in mass depopulation of both urban and rural areas.<sup>1</sup> Though the outflux has since reduced, an estimated 2.4 million people are currently displaced out of the country;<sup>2</sup> the vast majority of whom are women and children.<sup>3</sup>

Displacement is not unfamiliar to most South Sudanese. Nearly continuous war, inhospitable landscapes, and semi-nomadic pastoralist livelihoods have contributed to generations of people who have had to move from their established homes multiple times in their life, if not every year. For some, this type of migration has been a successful coping strategy for living in a harsh landscape. For others, this movement is a desperate search for safety and the fulfillment of basic needs.

National boundaries have often played a minimal role in influencing these historical movements; instead tribal affinity, trade routes and ecological continuity have had

greater influence on the movement of people. Unfortunately, the seamless provision of humanitarian assistance is often disrupted by international boundaries.

In the vulnerable and volatile regions of the surrounding countries that have hosted this outflux, humanitarian responses have faced a data gap on the challenges and opportunities affecting South Sudanese. Responses have grappled with poor preparedness and underfunding, which has been exacerbated by the porousness of the borders and the protracted and recurrent nature of the crisis.<sup>4</sup> Because of this, there is a pronounced lack of awareness about the potential for movement of refugees out of South Sudan, and equally limited understanding of the movement, or potential for movement, back into South Sudan.

In response, REACH increased its attention to cross-border movements in and out of South Sudan. This was to provide an initial understanding of regional migration and displacement of South Sudanese into other countries, and their intentions to return, relocate or settle in the place of refuge. This should support humanitarian actors in all locations to make more informed decisions about the scale, scope, and location of response.

To do this, qualitative data collection was

Figure 1: Primary data collection sites

Country	Location	Date	KI Interviews	FGDs	Port Monitoring
CAR	Obo (remote)	Feb 2018	1	-	-
DRC	Dungu & Karaba (remote)	Feb 2018	2	-	-
Kenya	Kalobayei	Nov - Dec 2017	4	8	-
South Sudan	Akobo	Dec 2017	1	-	250
South Sudan	Kapoeta	Feb 2018	-	10	361
South Sudan	Nimule (via IOM-DTM)	Jan 2018	-	-	762
South Sudan	Renk	Jan 2018	-	-	186
South Sudan	Yambio	Jan 2018	1	1	511
South Sudan	Nationwide (via AoK)	Dec 2017	873	-	-
Uganda	Moyo	Sep 2017 - Mar 2018	15	21	-
Total			897	40	2,070

performed, port and road monitoring stations were expanded and cross-border movement indicators were added to existing data collection tools.

Qualitative assessments were conducted from September 2017 to March 2018, utilizing Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), Key Informant (KI) interviews and general observation in West Nile Sub-Region, Uganda, and Kalobayei, Kenya. These were done with displaced South Sudanese, host community government officials, and humanitarian actors.

Port and road monitoring was conducted on a

regular and ongoing basis in Yambio, Kapoeta, Akobo and Renk. This standardized survey of people arriving, departing and transiting through these locations reveals push and pull factors, intentions and movement history.

Additional KI interviews were conducted using REACH's Area of Knowledge methodology (AoK). Most of these KIs were newly arrived to select Protection of Civilians (POC) and Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) collection sites across South Sudan, and supplemented with remote phone calls to KIs living in settlements of interest. These interviews were

1 [United Nations Security Council. Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan. S/PV.7930. 25 April 2017.](#)

2 [UNHCR. South Sudan Situation – Regional Overview.](#)

3 [2017 Revised South Sudan Regional Refugee Response Plan](#)

4 [ibid](#)

conducted with selected participants using a standardised survey tool comprising questions on displacement trends, population needs, and access to basic services.

When available, data from IOM-DTM Flow Monitoring surveys was used to triangulate certain findings. Port monitoring data collection tools used by REACH and IOM-DTM were aligned starting January 2018; prior datasets are not comparable.

REACH synthesized the findings from this ongoing research to produce this overview of cross border-movement in key assessed areas. This report examines trends in population displacement of South Sudanese, region-specific movement patterns, and the situation in countries of refuge. It is important to note that displacement within South Sudan is not covered here, except where needed to explain related cross-border movements.

Data collection has been hampered by a challenging operational environment, due to insecurity and political sensitivity as well as weak transportation and communication networks across the region; broader data collection efforts are limited in most refugee

hosting areas of South Sudan's neighbours. As such, findings are indicative of the situation in assessed areas only.

Movement discussions primarily focus on Uganda (Moyo District, West Nile Sub-Region) and Kenya (Kalobayei and Kakuma, Turkana County), with some additional information on Ethiopia (Tirgol, Gambella Region) and Sudan (White Nile State), and limited information on Democratic Republic of Congo and Central African Republic. Movement patterns in and out of Northern Bahr el Ghazal, Warrap and Maban are largely untracked in this report, but REACH is currently expanding its presence in these areas and will have more information in the future.

## Population Movement and Displacement

Displacement out of South Sudan varies considerably across regions, with different patterns, driving factors, and impacts. However, some trends are shared across the country, including distinct demographics, certain push and pull factors, patterns of pendular movement, mixed intentions and a lack of information on

**Figure 2: Proportion of recorded cross-border movement being done by women and children**



<sup>5</sup> REACH. Renk port monitoring factsheet. January 2018.

<sup>6</sup> IOM-DTM. Nimule flow monitoring data. January 2018.

<sup>7</sup> REACH. Kapoeta Town Road Monitoring. February 2018.

<sup>8</sup> REACH. Akobo Port Monitoring Factsheet. December 2017.

<sup>9</sup> UNHCR. Settlement Fact Sheet: Palorinya. December 2017.

<sup>10</sup> UNHCR. Kakuma Camp Population Statistics. 22 October 2017.

<sup>11</sup> UNHCR. Settlement Fact Sheet: Palorinya. December 2017.

<sup>12</sup> Little, P. D., Mahmoud, H., Layne Coppock, D. (2000) When Deserts Flood: Risk Management and Climatic Processes among East African Pastoralists. Climate Research 19:149-159

**Figure 3: Frequently reported reasons for leaving South Sudan**



1. Insecurity
2. Lack of food
3. Family separation
4. Poor access to services

which to base movement decisions.

### Demographics

Most recorded cross-border movement was done by women and children. This was seen uniformly in port monitoring between Renk, Upper Nile State and Sudan (91% women and children);<sup>5</sup> Nimule, Eastern Equatoria State and Uganda (85%);<sup>6</sup> Kapoeta, Eastern Equatoria State and Kenya (85%);<sup>7</sup> and Akobo, Jonglei State and Ethiopia (80%).<sup>8</sup> Although not generalizable, in refugee sites with publicly available data, women and children appear to make up the majority of the population as well: South Sudanese refugees in Palorinya Refugee Settlement, Uganda are 86% women and children;<sup>9</sup> in Kakuma and Kalobayei refugee settlements, Kenya they are 82% women and children.<sup>10</sup>

### Push and Pull Factors

#### Displacement from South Sudan

In the context of South Sudan, it is difficult to identify definitive push and pull factors guiding displacement. Movement decisions are a delicate balance between deteriorating

**Figure 4: Frequently reported reasons for return to South Sudan**



1. Lack of services
2. Uncomfortable living conditions
3. Reuniting with family
4. Seeking income-generating opportunities

conditions at home and generally difficult conditions in locations of refuge, with complication added by often shifting and unpredictable provision of aid.<sup>11</sup>

FGDs with displaced South Sudanese in Uganda revealed that they tended to follow routes with historic and cultural familiarity, including places they or their families have lived in the past and areas with linguistic and tribal affinity. However, respondents often shared that, during the urgency of conflict, they would flee wherever they could, often ending up in places of refuge much further from home than they expected.

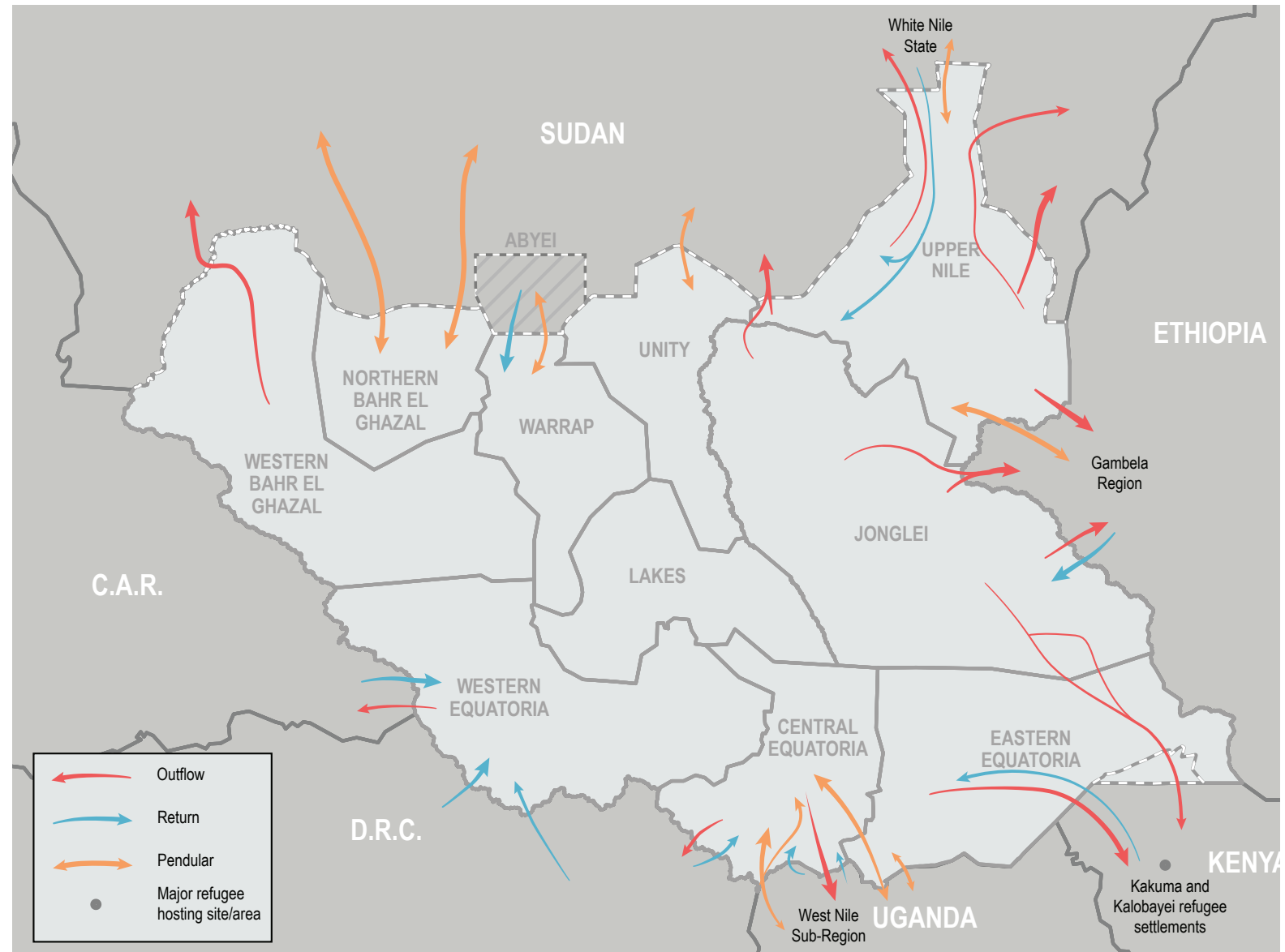
It is important to also note that traditional migration patterns should not be confused with forced displacement. Many of the region's landscapes are favorable to a nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyle. In these ecosystems, with great variations in climate between seasons and generations, migration can support income diversification and resilience. Trouble more often emerges when there are disputes over rights to resettle, either because of traditional territorial holdings or international borders.<sup>12</sup>

Map 1: Key cross-border displacement trends in South Sudan in 2017<sup>13</sup>

Nearly all areas of South Sudan have seen cross-border movement; most of this is by women and children. This is a mix of outflows to neighbouring countries, returns, and more frequent pendular movements – recurrent movement in and out.

The primary reasons for moving were insecurity, lack of food and poor access to services such as healthcare and education. Displacement routes were not always logically decided, especially if made under the urgency of conflict. But movement patterns often reflected linguistic and tribal affinity, as well as a repetition of movements people have done during previous conflicts.

Most of the outflux of people from South Sudan tapered off over the course of 2017. And, in some areas, people were beginning to return. However, these returns often faltered, being slowed and sometimes reversed by recurring violence. This is also reflective of the pendular movement often seen across South Sudan, which frequently occurs as a response to seasonality, the continuous search for livable conditions and family fragmentation. Large-scale returns are not expected anytime soon.



<sup>13</sup> Developed through participatory mapping joint analysis with senior REACH field staff and partner humanitarian actors. November 2017.

As identified by port and flow monitoring, the primary push and pull factors driving displacement within and out of South Sudan are insecurity, lack of food and poor access to services, especially healthcare and education. These reasons for leaving home were echoed in FGDs and KIs in Uganda and Kenya.

### Returns

In FGDs with displaced South Sudanese in Uganda and Kenya, returns to South Sudan were reported to be primarily driven by a insufficiency of services and challenging living conditions in refugee settlements and camps; most often this was due to shortages of food or tension with host communities.<sup>14,15</sup> A desire to reunite with family is also commonly cited.<sup>16</sup> Respondents in Kenya and Uganda also stated that men and youth often return seeking opportunities to make an income.<sup>17</sup>

Areas of South Sudan with greater reported numbers of returnees are usually areas which are relatively safe and with more opportunities for cultivation or casual labour. Examples include Akobo, Jonglei State; Renk, Upper Nile State; Ikwotos, Eastern Equatoria State; and Tambura, Western Equatoria State.<sup>18</sup> Many assessed South Sudanese who were returning from Kenya and Uganda planned to go to Juba, because it is considered relatively safe compared to more rural areas and is thought to provide greater livelihood opportunities.

### Pendular movement

A distinct feature of South Sudanese cross-border traffic is pendular movement out of

and back into the country. Most newly arrived respondents in Uganda and Kenya reported that they had been refugees in Kenya or Uganda at least once before. Major contributing factors to these movements were reported by FGDs to be seasonality of weather patterns and cultivation opportunities, inadequate support in areas of displacement, and family separation during flight from conflict.

Seasonal patterns of weather and cultivation across South Sudan are of major importance to movement decisions, both to leave and return. In the northern part of South Sudan, the wet season (roughly June to October) brings flooded roads and typically a reduction in conflict, and opportunities to cultivate food crops are usually prioritized. Because of this, there is generally a dramatic reduction in cross-border displacement from July to November of every year, especially from the northern and eastern floodplains. During the dry season (roughly November to May), travel routes open up, insecurity rises and food supplies dwindle; hunger and the opening of previously flooded travel routes lead to seasonal outflows.<sup>19</sup> This dynamic is not as strong in the Equatorias, where many roads can be traveled throughout the year.

For many respondents, arrival to a refugee camp or host community settlement is one step in a continuous search for resources and safety. KI interviews with refugees in, or returning from, all surrounding countries suggested that they face shortages of food, livelihood activities, protection and other services. This drives

continuous cyclical cross-border movement, as they seek opportunities to cultivate crops or make money, while also following distributions of food and non-food items by humanitarian aid actors. Displaced South Sudanese in Kenya and Uganda, as well as those who recently returned from Ethiopia and Sudan, repeatedly described a lack of food in the refugee settlements and a lack of opportunities to generate income in nearby towns. This lack of food drove returns even to areas that are perceived to be unsafe. Humanitarian actor KIs and displaced South Sudanese KIs in Uganda and DRC described how people, mostly men, would return to their homes in insecure areas of Central Equatoria and Western Equatoria to plant or harvest crops. Many respondents reported that those who returned like this had been killed.

An additional factor leading to increased pendular movement is the fragmentation of families during displacement. Displaced South Sudanese in Uganda and Kenya reported that they were caught suddenly in their homes by conflict and had to flee. When this happened, relatives scattered and were lost; or the old, disabled, and sometimes children had to be left behind. Some refugees in Kenya reported returning to South Sudan for the purpose of finding these family members, then departing again to their place of refuge.

Similarly, during the process of permanently returning, it is not uncommon for families to split up. South Sudanese FGD and KI respondents returning from Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia and Sudan reported that one or both parents would

return to South Sudan first to cultivate or perform cash labour, leaving children behind in the location of refuge; these children remain in safe areas, and sometimes are able to continue schooling, while their parents re-establish life in South Sudan. This spouse or parent then would travel back to the place of refuge for seasonal breaks, when cultivation or work opportunities ceased, or when it was time to gather the full family for return to South Sudan.

### Mixed intentions for the future

Displaced South Sudanese in assessed areas of Uganda and Kenya reported a mixture of intentions for the future. Most clearly stated a desire to return home, but many described this with resignation, believing that it may not be possible for years to come. Others were adamant that they will never return to South Sudan; some said this is because it is their desire to stay away, others because they have lost hope of it ever being possible.

For nearly all South Sudanese assessed by FGD and KI interview in Uganda and Kenya, the deciding factor behind return intentions was

**Figure 5: Indicators of peace that could trigger returns, as reported in FGDs and KIs in Kenya and Uganda**

1. Internationally-recognized peace agreement
2. Handover of leadership
3. Disarmament campaign
4. Repatriation program

14 REACH. Regional Displacement: Returns from Kalobayei, Kenya. December 2017.

15 REACH. Situation Overview, Greater Equatoria. October 2017.

16 IOM-DTM. Nimule flow monitoring data. January 2018.

17 REACH. Regional Displacement of South Sudanese: Kajo-Keji County, Central Equatoria, South Sudan and Moyo District, West Nile Sub-Region, Uganda. March 2018.

18 Developed through participatory mapping joint analysis with senior REACH field staff and

partner humanitarian actors. November 2017.

19 REACH. Akobo Port Monitoring Factsheet. December 2017.



peace. However, many said that it would take more than a bilateral peace agreement to draw them home. They stated that because they had seen peace agreements fail multiple times before, they would not return until there was an internationally recognized peace agreement, a handover of leadership, a disarmament campaign, and/or a repatriation program.<sup>20</sup>

However, when asked to consider the prospect of returning home if there was peace but little to no services available, respondents were more hesitant about the idea; few stated that it would stop them from returning, but many said that it would be difficult and potentially inadvisable to do so.

Very few stated any intention to continue to any location outside of their current place of refuge. Travel costs, distance from social support network, and fears of violence or legal ramifications were the biggest factors limiting continued movement in the country of refuge.

Some respondents described how their intentions, whether to return or not, are not as significant in their movement decisions as the harsh and unstable conditions of their places of refuge. Though they may have intended to stay in a refugee camp or settlement, they eventually are pushed to leave by a lack of food or tensions with the host community.

To further understand these dynamics, REACH will conduct large-scale intentions assessments in refugee settlements across Northern Uganda in mid-2018, which will inform humanitarian response in South Sudan.

## Lack of information

A lack of information characterizes much of the movement decision-making across South Sudan; FGD respondents in Kenya and Uganda reported that displacement decisions are often based on rumours and guesses. This leads to displacement patterns that are disordered and potentially harmful; displaced South Sudanese respondents in Uganda and Kenya often reported having moved along highly inefficient routes, such as traveling from Juba to Kenya because they did not know about the refugee settlements in Uganda.

Displaced South Sudanese assessed via FGD in Kalobayei, Kenya also described refugees who had heard from relatives and other contacts who had remained in their home areas of South Sudan that the situation has stabilized. Reportedly this drew some refugees to attempt return. Unfortunately, they reported that often this news of stabilization did not reflect reality, leaving returnees stranded in insecure or otherwise unstable areas of South Sudan with limited options to flee again.<sup>21</sup>

These issues point to a clear need to establish trusted, fact-based information systems to support refugees making decisions about returns. It is a humanitarian imperative to support returns through beneficiary-centric assessment cycles. Humanitarian actors could identify the conditions in sites of intended return, and provide that information to communities before any returns activities or programmes are commenced.

## Region-specific displacement dynamics

### Greater Equatoria

#### Overview

Displacement from Greater Equatoria has been primarily driven by the conflict that swept through the region starting in July 2016. Civilians caught in the fighting between armed actors first displaced into remote areas of the bush, then flee to Uganda, Kenya or the DRC over the course of a few months.<sup>22</sup> Food insecurity, heightened by drought, has also displaced some from Eastern Equatoria, as reported by South Sudanese respondents in Kenya.

Using AoK methodology in December 2017, REACH assessed 217 settlements in Greater Equatoria, covering at least 5% of settlements documented by OCHA in 10 out of 24 counties.

Over one-third of assessed settlements had less than half of their original population remaining in them (39%). This was most noticeable in Western Equatoria (50% of settlements had less than half) and Central Equatoria (37% of settlements had less than half) than in Eastern Equatoria (32% of settlements had less than half).

Displaced South Sudanese assessed via FGD in Uganda indicated that in areas of Greater Equatoria with regular insecurity, the people who remain are those whose homes are in the most remote portions of the village. Reportedly there are additional populations further from the settlements, that are primarily made up of men,

Figure 6: Proportion of population remaining from the local community in Greater Equatoria



**39% of assessed settlements in GEQ had less than half of the local community remaining**

elderly people, youth and cattle keepers.

For many FGD respondents from Greater Equatoria, this was the second or even third time they or their family had been displaced out of South Sudan; many reported leaving during the 2013 displacement crisis and/or in the second Sudanese Civil War (1983-2006). As such, they were generally most likely to return to a place they had been before, whether that was a refugee camp or a host-community settlement.

According to FGDs and KIs, small distances between places of origin and places of refuge have allowed some refugees to regularly visit Greater Equatoria to harvest crops and care for livestock. However, this has reduced over the course of 2017 because of diminishing crop supplies, continued armed conflict, movement restrictions and fear of arrests.<sup>23</sup>

Figure 7: Reported gender ratio of local community remaining in assessed settlements of Western Equatoria



**83% of assessed settlements were populated primarily or entirely by women**

<sup>20</sup> REACH. Regional Displacement: Returns from Kalobayei, Kenya. December 2017.

<sup>21</sup> REACH. Regional Displacement: Returns from Kalobayei, Kenya. December 2017.

<sup>22</sup> REACH. Situation Overview: Greater Equatoria. October 2016.

<sup>23</sup> Foltyn, Simona. "DRC steps up arrests of S.Sudan refugees to weed out rebels." 27 December 2017.

## Returns

As assessed by AoK in December 2017, 61% of assessed settlements across Greater Equatoria had seen the return of at least some displaced host community members, either from internal or cross-border displacement. This was slightly higher in Central Equatoria (69%) than in Western Equatoria (58%) or Eastern Equatoria (55%). Displaced South Sudanese in Uganda stated that this began as early as August of 2017 in some areas, and grew more sizable by December 2017 and January 2018.

According to REACH's port monitoring, returnees passing through Moyo District, Uganda and Kapoeta, Eastern Equatoria State most frequently cited Juba and Torit as their destinations, and that Juba in particular was considered relatively safe. According to IOM-DTM's flow monitoring, of those returning to South Sudan via Nimule, Eastern Equatoria State in January 2018, the primary stated destinations were Juba, Central Equatoria State (50%) and Magwi, Eastern Equatoria State (36%).<sup>24</sup>

## Travel routes

FGD respondents in Uganda stated that movement between Central Equatoria and Uganda occurs primarily through the bush and small roads due to insecurity along the border and frequently closed border points. Between Eastern Equatoria and Uganda more movement occurs along major roads, though some travel through the bush still.

Displaced South Sudanese respondents in

Figure 8: Returns to Greater Equatoria



**61% of assessed settlements in Greater Equatoria had seen the return of at least some displaced host community members**

Kalobaye reported that movement between Eastern Equatoria and Kenya occurs almost exclusively along the Kapoeta-Lokichogio-Kakuma road, with a small number of people traveling through northwest Uganda first.

## Greater Upper Nile

### Overview

In Greater Upper Nile, displacement patterns tend to be large and highly pendular, with people crossing large distances in order to gain refuge in Sudan, Ethiopia or Kenya for a few months, then returning home after the lean season or outbreak of conflict has ended.

Using AoK methodology in December 2017, REACH assessed 508 settlements in Greater Equatoria, covering at least 5% of settlements documented by OCHA in 18 out of 32 counties.

Figure 9: Proportion of population remaining from the local community in Greater Upper Nile



**52% of assessed settlements in Greater Upper Nile had less than half of the local community remaining**

Half of assessed settlements had less than half of their original population remaining in them (52%). Displacement was more noticeable in Upper Nile (60% of settlements had less than half remaining) and Unity (59% of settlements had less than half) than in Jonglei (45% of settlements had less than half remaining). Most of the people who remain in the villages are in their own homes (80%), followed by another home in the same village (13%).

Cross-border movement between Greater Upper Nile and Ethiopia is heavily mediated by refugee registration exercises. UNHCR reportedly continuously registers refugees over the course of multiple weeks or months, then transports everyone in one large convoy. As such, cross-border movement occurs in distinct waves. However, on arrival many refugees reportedly have found service provision in the camps to be inadequate, causing some to return to Akobo. Then subsequent verification exercises have led people to return again to the camps, as people seek to retain their refugee status and the potential aid with which it is associated.

## Returnees

As assessed in AoK in December 2017, 46% of assessed settlements across Greater Upper Nile had seen the return of at least some displaced host community members, either from internal or cross-border displacement. There were dramatic differences within Greater Upper Nile, however, with far more settlements seeing returns in Unity (63%) and Upper Nile (61%) than in Jonglei (29%).

Figure 10: Returns to Greater Upper Nile



**46% of assessed settlements in Greater Upper Nile had seen the return of at least some displaced host community members**

The two main reported areas of destination for returnees who had arrived from Sudan to Renk in the first half of January 2018 were Kodok town and Malakal Protection of Civilians site (POC), with few headed toward the western bank of the Nile.<sup>25</sup> IOM-DTM confirms this, with 37% of Malakal POC entries in late-January reported coming from Sudan.<sup>26</sup>

Of returnees from Ethiopia assessed by port monitoring in Akobo in September through December 2017, the primary stated reason for returning was a desire to return home and join family, followed by a lack of ration card, work, and food in their location of refuge. The primary desired destination for these returnees was Akobo County, with smaller numbers headed to Nyirol County and Uror County.

## Travel routes

KIs reported that each year as the dry season progresses and the waters of the Pibor and Sobat Rivers recede, more people cross into Ethiopia, either ferried across by canoe, or swimming with their belongings using plastic sheeting.

Additional cross border movement to Ethiopia occurs via Pagak. KIs reported that the number of people crossing between South Sudan and

<sup>24</sup> IOM-DTM. Nimule flow monitoring data. January 2018.

<sup>25</sup> REACH. Renk Port Monitoring Factsheet. January 2018.

<sup>26</sup> IOM-DTM. Weekly Report. Malakal - UNS - South Sudan. 19-25 January 2018.

Ethiopia is actually greater at Pagak than in Akobo, because it is the most direct route from Upper Nile. However, it is currently untracked due to security and logistical barriers. Additional movement monitoring would be useful here.

## Greater Bahr el Ghazal

### Overview

In the first half of 2016, over 80,000 people left Greater Bahr el Ghazal for Sudan, due to drought, inflation and hunger.<sup>27</sup> Since then, due to moderately improved harvests and periodic border closures, the outflow has reduced. However, some people are reportedly still leaving for Sudan in search of work.

Using AoK methodology in December 2017, REACH assessed 17 settlements in Greater Bahr el-Ghazal, covering at least 5% of settlements documented by OCHA in 3 out of 22 counties. These were all in Western Bahr el-Ghazal. Similar data was not available from Warrap, Northern Bahr el Ghazal or Lakes.

Three-quarters of assessed settlements in Western Bahr el Ghazal had less than half of their original population remaining in them. REACH's observations of rural areas around

**Figure 11: Proportion of population remaining from the local community in Western Bahr el Ghazal**



**72% of assessed settlements in Western Bahr el Ghazal had less than half of the local community remaining**

**Figure 12: Returns to Western Bahr el Ghazal**



**68% of assessed settlements in WBeG had seen the return of at least some displaced host community members**

Raja County by foot, car and helicopter revealed many areas devoid of nearly all able-bodied adults.<sup>28</sup>

### Returnees

As assessed by AoK in December 2017, 68% of assessed settlements across Western Bahr el Ghazal had seen the return of at least some displaced host community members, either from internal or cross-border displacement. KIs reported that, though some people have returned due to the worsening economic situation in Sudan, the continuing conflicts around Raja and Wau have generally limited returns.

### Travel routes

Travel reportedly takes place between Western Bahr el Ghazal and both CAR and Sudan. However, these areas along both sides of the borders are inaccessible to humanitarians, making it extremely challenging to track potential crossings.

## Situation in Countries of Refuge

The regions of neighbouring countries in which South Sudanese have sought refuge

are generally underdeveloped and volatile in comparison to the rest of the host country.

## Uganda

Most South Sudanese refugees in Uganda reside in one of 23 refugee settlements in West Nile sub-region, the largest of which are Bidibidi, Palorinya, Imvepi, and Rhino.<sup>29</sup> South Sudanese FGD respondents in Uganda reported that others live in the bush in Northern Uganda, close to the South Sudanese border; many of these are reported to be cattle herders who cannot bring their herds into the refugee settlements.

Some South Sudanese in Uganda live in host community settlements of West Nile sub-region, such as Moyo, Arua and Koboko, rather than the refugee settlements. When interviewed, they frequently reported living in the host community settlements because of higher quality healthcare or schools, previous connections with the host community, or the land provided in the refugee settlement was

too swampy or rocky for cultivation. Some respondents in Moyo, Uganda had been displaced there so frequently and for such a long duration that they owned land and businesses in town.

Host community government officials reported that funding for local government services was still at pre-refugee levels, which was insufficient to meet current needs.<sup>30</sup> They also reported that previous South Sudanese living in Uganda were considered wealthy, so refugees are sometimes expected to pay inflated prices.

Relations between refugee and host communities are reported to be positive in Uganda by both South Sudanese and local official KIs. Shared tribal background is commonly cited by respondents to explain this. However, respondents often share that the extended duration of displacement has strained host community resources, causing occasional tension between refugees and

**Figure 13: Estimated South Sudanese Refugee Populations of Host Countries, by arrival date<sup>31</sup>**

	Arrived before 15 Dec 2013	Arrived after 15 Dec 2013	Total
Uganda	22,000	1,015,000	1,037,000
Sudan	353,000	420,000	773,000
Ethiopia	61,000	360,000	421,000
Kenya	33,000	78,000	111,000
DRC	2,000	85,000	87,000
CAR	0	2,000	2,000
Total	471,000	1,960,000	2,431,000

<sup>27</sup> OCHA. Humanitarian Bulletin Sudan. Issue 28. 4 July – 10 July 2016.

<sup>28</sup> Previously unpublished observations made during the assessment for [REACH Raja County Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Brief, November 2017](#).

<sup>29</sup> [Uganda Refugee Response Portal](#). 2018.

<sup>30</sup> [Uganda Second National Development Plan 2015/16-2019/20](#).

<sup>31</sup> [UNHCR. Situation South Sudan](#).



**Figure 14: Recentness of refugee arrivals to Uganda**



**98% of refugees in Uganda arrived there after 15 December 2013**

hosts; this is especially seen between refugees in Bidibidi refugee settlement and the host community in Yumbe District. Some respondents also worried that if food supplies become low, these relations may devolve dramatically.

Additional information on South Sudanese refugee demographics and places of origin is limited by access restrictions on registration datasets. However, REACH has been conducting interviews with refugee settlement-based refugees for gap analysis factsheets, and has been conducting a response-wide household-level representative multi-sectoral needs assessment (MSNA) in both refugee settlements and hosting districts. In the future, REACH will also be conducting a large-scale assessment on movement intentions and housing, land and property rights. Outputs from the MSNA will be available in August 2018, and from other assessments throughout the second half of the year.

### **Sudan**

Returnees coming from Sudan reported numerous challenges to refugee life there. The vast majority of returnees who left Khartoum for Renk, Upper Nile State who were assessed

by port monitoring in November and December of 2017 cited insecurity as the primary push factor from that location, whereas those leaving refugee camps or settlements in White Nile State mostly cited uncomfortable living conditions, shortages of food and distance from family members as primary push factors.

There are also reports that a significant number of refugees from Greater Bahr el Ghazal are in Abyei for casual labour work, but a severe lack of data on Abyei hinders opportunities to confirm or disconfirm this.

### **Ethiopia**

Very little recent information is available on the situation in refugee camps in Ethiopia's Gambela Region. KIs in Akobo reported that many refugees have refused to travel to the refugee camps, because they are far into the interior, and instead have taken up residence in swampy informal sites closer to the border.

KIs reported that there is a road being constructed from Tirgol, Ethiopia, just across the Pibor River from Akobo, to Mataar and on to Gambela town. This would have significant implications for cross-border movement, as it would reduce the cost and time involved

**Figure 15: Recentness of refugee arrivals to Sudan**



**54% of refugees in Sudan arrived there after 15 December 2013**

**Figure 16: Recentness of refugee arrivals to Ethiopia**



**86% of refugees in Ethiopia arrived there after 15 December 2013**

in getting from Jonglei to the refugee camps, which currently takes place by boat; more cross-border movement may occur via Akobo when this road is complete.

### **Kenya**

Nearly all refugees in Kenya are in Kakuma refugee camp, or the newly created Kalobayei refugee settlement, which is located nearby. A pull factor to Kenya frequently cited by displaced South Sudanese there is education for children. The schools in Kakuma refugee camp have had a reputation for being high quality for many years. Unfortunately, many respondents state that this is not the case in Kalobayei refugee settlement, where most new arrivals are placed.

Preliminary findings from road monitoring in Kapoeta in February 2018 suggested that returnees from Kenya are leaving Kakuma and Kalobayei primarily due to uncomfortable living conditions (29% of returnees) and a lack of food (18%). Additionally, FGDs with refugees in Kalobayei revealed that they face major insecurity. As a newly established settlement with limited refugee services, residents are particularly vulnerable to attacks by the host community; respondents reported incidents

**Figure 17: Recentness of refugee arrivals to Kenya**



**70% of refugees in Kenya arrived there after 15 December 2013**

of being raped and beaten when collecting firewood, and having their shelters robbed at night, with extremely limited opportunities for feedback and rectification.<sup>32</sup>

Returnees from Kenya are reported to be primarily young adults who are seeking work, as refugee life largely precludes livelihood opportunities. This is particularly true in Kalobayei, where refugees reported that savings and loans associations and vocational training programs do not exist.<sup>33</sup>

### **Democratic Republic of the Congo**

Key informants in DRC described shared tribal identity between host communities and South Sudanese refugees; because of this, the refugees were considered family and easily welcomed. In addition, the area of DRC hosting South Sudanese refugees is regarded as highly supportive of self-sufficiency, due to its fertile soil and three-month harvest cycles.<sup>34</sup>

Port monitoring between South Sudan and DRC is hindered by the diffuse and fluid nature of movement across this border, with people reportedly traveling on a variety of single-track paths via foot, bicycle and motorcycle. This is especially true of the many paths that pass

<sup>32</sup> REACH. Regional Displacement: Returns from Kalobayei, Kenya. December 2017.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> UNHCR. South Sudan Situation – Congo (Democratic Republic).



**Figure 18: Recentness of refugee arrivals to Democratic Republic of Congo**



**98% of refugees in DRC arrived there after 15 December 2013**

through Garamba National Park, a sanctuary along the border with South Sudan that stretches nearly from Yambio to Yei.

KIs reported little movement along the road through Sakure, southwest of Yambio, reportedly due to insecurity in neighbouring regions of DRC. More movement (10-30 people returning per day) was reported through Gangura and Nabiapai along the Yambio-Dungu road to the southeast of Yambio; insecurity is an issue along this road in DRC as well, but the market in Nabiapai reportedly still draws considerable traffic from DRC because it is larger than any other in the area.

Further east on the border, near Yei, outflux to DRC has been diminishing. Earlier in 2017, much of the border was wide open for cross-border movement, with people moving back and forth between Lasu and Meri refugee site in Aba, DRC, which was hosting approximately 30,000 refugees. But increased conflict and movement restrictions by Congolese officials have limited this.<sup>35</sup>

Though REACH has very limited information at the moment about conditions for South Sudan refugees in DRC, capacity is currently being

**Figure 19: Recentness of refugee arrivals to Central African Republic**



**100% of refugees in CAR arrived there after 15 December 2013**

expanded to strengthen this work in the future.

### Central African Republic

Relatively high numbers of returnees have been reported in the Western Equatorial towns of Source Yuba and Tambura. The driving factor for these returns was reported to be hunger; food distributions in Obo ended in June 2017 because of insecurity along the road and restrictions on refugee cultivation. Fear of insecurity was also reported as a push factor.<sup>36</sup>

### Conclusion

South Sudanese are in the midst of a massive and prolonged displacement crisis. Currently, 2.4 million are refugees in neighbouring countries, the majority of whom were displaced in the last four years. This movement has been fueled by insecurity, economic collapse and recurrent drought. This is only the latest of multiple generations of recurring displacement for similar reasons; the landscape, livelihoods and conflicts of South Sudan have demanded regular movement on annual and generational time scales. However, the current displacement crisis has impacted more people, spread across a larger area, and hurt the national

economy more significantly than any in at least the last twenty years.

Most of the outflux of people from South Sudan has tapered off over the course of 2017, and people are beginning to return to select locations. However, returns have come haltingly, with recurring violence slowing or reversing these movements. Large-scale returns are not expected anytime soon; most respondents indicated a need for robust indicators of peace before they would consider returning to South Sudan.

Displacement from Greater Equatoria took place relatively recently, with most movement out of the region occurring in the second half of 2016 and the first half of 2017. Most of these people fled to Uganda, with smaller portions going to Kenya and DRC.

Greater Upper Nile saw a major ongoing exodus of people into Ethiopia and Sudan since late 2013. This movement has often been of people crossing large distances in order to gain refuge for a few months from hunger or conflict.

Greater Bahr el Ghazal saw mass displacement to Sudan in the first half of 2016, building upon previous displacements there in prior generations. This has tapered off, and some returns from Sudan have been reported.

Most cross-border movement is made by women and children. The primary reasons for moving were insecurity, lack of food and poor access to services such as healthcare and education. Displacement routes were not

always logically decided, especially if made under the pressure of conflict. But movement patterns often reflected linguistic and tribal affinity, as well as a repetition of movements people have done during previous conflicts. Pendular movement – recurrent movement in and out of South Sudan – has occurred frequently as a response to seasonality, the continuous search for livable conditions and family fragmentation.

Assessed South Sudanese displaced into neighbouring countries generally reported that they want to return, but fears of insecurity inhibit their movement. However, their intentions of whether to stay in places of refuge or to return are often less influential than push factors that demand they continue moving.

A lack of information has inhibited well-informed movement decisions. Limited communication infrastructure and the complexity and localized nature of many challenges in South Sudan have led people to make decisions to leave and to return guided by rumour.

In countries of refuge, the situation is generally reported to be challenging. The regions in which most South Sudanese are displaced are typically the most volatile and underdeveloped in the host country. This, compounded with chronically underfunded refugee responses and bureaucratic challenges, has led to ongoing hunger, poor service provision and major protection issues in most refugee hosting sites.

There is a critical need for information to ensure

<sup>35</sup> [Patinkin, Jason. "Congo Watches for Rebels Among South Sudan Refugees." 26 December 2017.](#)

<sup>36</sup> [REACH. Tambura Displacement Brief. November 2017.](#)

informed decision making for both displaced people and humanitarian actors in facilitating returns: This will require assessments of refugees' intentions for the future, multi-sector needs assessments on potential sites of return and clear and transparent communication with communities on the conditions in these sites before returns programmes and activities are initiated.

REACH is working to inform humanitarian response to South Sudan's displacement crisis. Within South Sudan there is continued assessment of cross-border movement dynamics through AoK, port monitoring and rapid KI interviews and FGDs. Findings are incorporated into overviews of national/regional patterns and into zoomed-in local profiles on areas of particular cross-border interest. REACH is also establishing a Communicating with Communities project to improve decision making at the community and national level through regular dissemination of relevant information to IDPs, civil society organizations and government entities in South Sudan. In Uganda, REACH is conducting multi-sectoral needs assessments of refugees and host communities. There will also be assessments of refugee movement intentions and housing, land and property rights. These findings will be shared across the region in order to inform humanitarian response for South Sudanese, both in their places of origin and in their sites of refuge.

### 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.

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