

Key points

- The number of displaced people who are known to have arrived in southern Sudan from the Abyei area has risen to an estimated 76,000. Efforts are ongoing to determine the whereabouts and humanitarian needs of all those who fled.
- Access constraints continue to hamper the humanitarian operation in Unity State, southern Sudan, where armed clashes and military operation have continued.
- Food prices have continued rising in southern Sudan as a result of the ongoing blockage on commercial traffic from the north, exacerbating food security concerns.
- In Khartoum, some 20,000 southerners remain out in the open waiting for transport to return to southern Sudan.
- In South Darfur, restrictions on movement more than 15 km out of Nyala town remain in place.
- Access to Kalma IDP camp in South Darfur remains on a case by case basis.

1. North-South population movements

The cumulative figure of returnees to southern Sudan since 30 October 2010 has risen to some 302,700 people. There were reports of returnees from Muglad in Southern Kordofan making their way to the south spontaneously without assistance, particularly to Western and Northern Bahr el Ghazal. Partners are monitoring these and other groups as closely as they are able given the insecurity along returnee routes, including reports that southern returnees were blocked when trying to pass the Muglad-Meiram and Kharasana-Higlig roads and due to the violence in Abyei that has occurred since. In the meantime, onward transport of returnees from transit sites to final destinations continued, including from Juba to Eastern Equatoria, where 240 individuals were brought on 17 May.

Partners are further looking to improve the returns process by examining options for establishing way stations along the Nile in Melut and Tonga of Upper Nile State. This is important because return by barge is expected to increase given insecurity and border closures along main road routes through Southern Kordofan and because both locations offer road links to other final destinations.

For returnees who have already arrived in the south, reintegration activities continue. Registration of returnees in the Aweil transit sites is finishing, and the assignment of plots of land has begun and will continue into the coming week. Humanitarian partners have begun upgrading the final destination sites with activities such as the drilling of boreholes. In Bentiu, Unity, 450 households have been identified for initial land allocation, which should begin over the next few weeks following the delineation of land by surveyors who have arrived to carry out the task.

Returnees in Khartoum

The number of returnees assisted by the Joint Returns Task Force to travel from northern to southern Sudan has reached almost 5,600 people.

The majority of stranded returnees at departure points around Khartoum, estimated at 20,000 people living in the open, have been waiting for government-organised transport since November and lack access to basic services. A rise in tensions between the returnees and the surrounding communities has been reported by UNHCR and IOM. The returnees said that the rainy season, which has already started in Khartoum, is complicating their situation. Flooding regularly occurs in many of the IDP settlements, making them vulnerable to water-borne diseases and malaria, while access to health care is limited in those areas. Those in the open are particularly in need of communal plastic sheeting. Some families have split, with males going to the south to seek employment and find a place to stay. A large number of such families report a lack of food and funds to sustain themselves while they continue to wait for transportation to southern Sudan.

The Returns Sector is liaising with the governmental Commission of Voluntary and Humanitarian Work (CVHW) on possible ways to support and meet the needs of stranded returnees and to expand the registration system to all departure points.

Meanwhile, the 3,000 people stranded at the Al Shajara railway station in Khartoum (part of the estimated 20,000 people caseload) are waiting for the train to travel to Aweil and Wau. Initially, the train will transport returnees going to Wau, while those traveling to Aweil will have to wait until the train comes back from Wau. A date of departure has not been communicated by the government. It may take more than a month for the train to travel to Wau and then come back to Khartoum.

Kosti transit centre

Spontaneous returnees continue to arrive at the Kosti Way Station from various northern Sudan states, with an average of 70 arrivals per day. There are currently 2,578 people at the way station, of which about 61 per cent are children. The provision of certain services, especially shelter, is extremely overstretched. Most of the returnees at the transit centre are staying in makeshift shelters which will not be adequate to protect them from the elements during the rainy season. UNHCR is stocking plastic sheeting, mosquito nets and jerry cans to counter the impact of rain at the way station and on barges travelling to the south.

On 20 May, a barge departed Kosti to Juba with 1,505 people on board. The barge is expected to arrive in Juba during the first week of June. A water tank and pump were installed on the barge to provide clean water for returnees during the trip. Preparations for the next barge to Juba are underway.

2. Southern Sudan

Access constraints continue to hamper the humanitarian operation in Unity

The security situation in Unity State remains volatile, with clashes and military operations continuing in Mayom, Abeimnhom and Koch counties in the past few days. In Mayom, Peter Gatdet's rebel militia group clashed with Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) forces in Mankien on 20 May, temporarily occupying the town. Mankien itself is now reportedly deserted. SPLA operations are also reportedly underway in Abeimnhom, and SPLA have announced there should be no humanitarian missions to the area without prior approval. In Koch County, Gatluak Gai rebel militia group reportedly attacked Buaw payam on 21 May, allegedly destroying property, looting market food and abducting three women. Landmines continue to be a major concern, with affected areas including the Bentiu-Tharjat and Bentiu-Mayom roads. Two explosions occurred on transport routes over the last week, one hitting a police vehicle in Mayom and leaving three dead and another seriously injuring a 17-year-old boy.

With almost all humanitarian staff now outside the conflict area, partners are using church networks to secure better information on the location and movement of civilian populations and obvious needs. Current options for improving access include strengthening faith-based and other community networks on the ground and reinforcing national staff.

Two of the main supply routes remain blocked for commercial traffic

The blockage on commercial traffic along two main supply routes from the north is reported to have remained in place, despite some earlier reports that it had eased. As a result, prices have risen sharply in border areas which have intensified food security concerns, particularly in urban areas removed from rural production. The road linking Malakal and Khartoum reportedly reopened on 17 May. This has eased the movement of much needed commodities, including food items, in Malakal. For the past three weeks when the road was closed, food supplies were depleting in the market and prices were sky-rocketing.

3. Three Protocol areas

Abyei

Based on reports from a variety of sources, the number of people displaced from the Abyei area who are known

to have arrived in southern Sudan has risen to an estimated 60,000 people. People remain concentrated in Warrap State but displacement from Abyei has been confirmed in Northern Bahr el Ghazal, Western Bahr el Ghazal and Unity states. By 29 May, IOM registered 22,081 people in these three states, with some 20,537 in Warrap. IOM is continuing the registration process and is working on reaching locations where there are reports of displaced.

Relief partners in southern Sudan have continued to scale-up operations in response to displacement. However, the scale of the displacement has placed considerable strain on the humanitarian response operation and conditions among displaced groups remain concerning. Protection concerns have been compounded by the proximity of displaced groups to areas of high rebel militia activity in neighbouring Unity State. Insecurity, the lack of response partners on the ground and logistical constraints have limited access by humanitarian actors to Agok and surrounding villages. The chronic shortage of fuel across southern Sudan remains a logistical constraint to the humanitarian operation, despite ongoing efforts by partners to re-distribute fuel from other locations in the South and coordinate distributions. Harassment and looting by SPLA soldiers along major transport routes in Warrap and elsewhere have also resulted in unnecessary delays, loss of supplies, loss of funds and impacted the safety and security of staff.

In two statements on 24 and 26 May, the Humanitarian Coordinator and the UN Country Team condemned the looting of UN agency and NGO emergency relief stocks in Abyei and called on all parties to facilitate free and unhindered movement of humanitarian workers and distribution of relief items to populations in need. The Humanitarian Coordinator also reiterated the responsibilities of all parties to take the necessary measures to protect civilians, ensure the safe passage of civilians on the move and to safeguard their right to return.

For more detailed information and latest developments on the Abyei crisis, please refer to OCHA's Abyei Crisis Situation Reports.

South Kordofan

According to reports, virtually all commercial traffic through South Kordofan has been blocked on North-South roads since 2 May. The Al Muglad-Meriam road onward to Northern Bahr el Ghazal that was reported to be opened is still blocked with only limited traffic allowed through. Reports indicate that the Meriam-Wara Wara road leading to Aweil is also blocked and so is the Higlig-Kharassana-Goli to Abyei that is blocked at Goli. The closure of these roads has hampered the delivery of humanitarian assistance to Abyei and threatens to disrupt food supplies, livelihoods and commercial activities in southern Sudan.

RCSO reported that some people injured in the fighting in north Abyei started to arrive in Muglad from 21 May. According to doctors at the Muglad hospital, the total number of injured people treated by 22 May is 117. It is not clear whether they were civilians or military personnel. The Muglad hospital requested additional medical supplies and paramedics. The Ministry of Health, with support from WHO and UNFPA, has provided emergency medical supplies to the hospital. A team of surgeons and medical doctors from Kadugli was also dispatched to Muglad. According to the WHO, 71 injured people were receiving treatment as of 25 May and the rest have been discharged.

4. Darfur

Restriction of movement beyond 15 km out of Nyala town

The restriction on movement of humanitarian organisations beyond the 15 km radius out of Nyala in South Darfur, which was imposed by the Military Intelligence (MI) on 17 May, remains in place, with some exceptions on a case by case basis. As a result of this restriction, a team from the State Ministry of Health/Extended Programme on Immunisation (EPI) was prevented from taking vaccines to El-Redoum (Boram locality), where four suspected cases of Meningitis had been reported. On 20 May, the team was allowed to take vaccines to El-Redoum (Boram locality). However, on 24 May, the team was stopped in Boram and denied onward movement.

Intermittent access to Kalma IDP Camp in South Darfur

Access to Kalma IDP Camp in South Darfur, which is beyond the 15 km radius, is granted on a case by case basis. On 19 May, the American Refugee Committee (ARC) NGO was allowed to send some fuel supplies (enough to sustain vital services until 26 May) to the camp in sector 4. On 20 May, UNICEF staff were stopped at the checkpoint and they were denied access to the camp. On 22 May, UNICEF and WFP personnel were allowed to visit the camp. UNICEF assessed the WASH situation in the camp, and WFP discussed with the community leaders issue pertaining to IDP verification. On the same day, CARE International Switzerland (CIS) and Oxfam-America were allowed to deliver some fuel supplies, which would be enough to ensure the provision of clean drinking water to the camp residents until 29 May.

On 24 May, WHO staff were stopped at the check point located before the camp and denied access. CIS was also denied access to transport supplies of cement for the construction of latrines. On 26 May, UNICEF staff were denied access, but WFP and WVI staff were allowed to visit the camp. OCHA Nyala raised concerns regarding access and restriction of movement with the Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) and has also been in close contact with MI to ensure that there is adequate and sustained access to the camp. MI reported that due to the security situation around Nyala, the movement restrictions are still in place within the 15 km radius out of Nyala, including Kalma camp. The restrictions will be lifted, according to MI, as soon as the situation improves. However, HAC advised all humanitarian partners, including UN agencies, to submit notification of movement outside the 15 km radius, especially to Kalma, 24 hours in advance.

Verification of IDPs in North Darfur

IOM reported this week that they have verified 3,968 people who arrived in Tawila, North Darfur. However, there are still unverified 14,350 IDPs in Abu Zerega as reported by IOM to OCHA. These IDPs came from Shangil Tobaya, Tabit and Tukumare, in February and March following clashes between the Government forces and armed movements in parts of Darfur.

On 19 May, Omdas from Zamzam IDP Camp reported to OCHA the arrival of a small group of new IDPs in the camp following the clashes in Shangil Tobaya on 14 May. The verification of this group by IOM was postponed due to the ongoing cross-verification at the camp.

Health sector developments

UNICEF and partners conducted measles and polio vaccination campaigns in all of West Darfur localities, except Umdukhun, between 14 and 19 May. Some 192,000 children under five were targeted for measles and 213,500 children were targeted for polio vaccination. At the same time, in North Darfur, some 370,000 children (between nine months and five years old) were vaccinated against measles during the measles immunization drive.

WHO has reported that between 7 and 13 May, 72 suspected cases of Meningitis were reported from Darfur, with South Darfur accounting for 90 per cent of the cases. Also, 14 cases of measles were reported that week from Darfur, a marked decline compared to 93 reported cases of measles one week earlier. At a meeting of the South Darfur Task Force on Meningitis earlier this month, it was agreed that a meningitis campaign would be conducted after the measles immunisation drive in Nyala and Buram locality.

Missions to Kaguro and Tine

Humanitarian agencies, with UNAMID support through Operation Spring Basket, conducted missions to Tine and Kaguro in North Darfur. On 25 May, a mission travelled to Kaguro where WHO delivered medical supplies to an international NGO operating in the area to vaccinate 9,000 children against measles. On 26 May, the team visited Tine to assess humanitarian needs and deliver some assistance. Vaccination against measles was also carried out in the area by WHO and the North Darfur Ministry of Health.

Returns

On 19 May, the Technical Task Force on Returns comprising of OCHA, UNHCR and HAC met to review the return process in South Darfur. HAC will provide a list of villages of returns to enable the humanitarian actors to monitor the return areas and assess needs. There has been an increase in the number of IDPs returning to various villages as the rainy season approaches. Limited access and no presence of humanitarian partners in the deep field makes tracking the numbers of returnees difficult.

At the West Darfur State Technical Committee for Returns meeting on 23 May, members discussed a returns assistance monitoring plan and endorsed a proposal to involve HAC, line ministries and humanitarians at locality level in monitoring of implementation of the minimum returns assistance package with a view to encouraging locality level response to identified needs.

Preparedness measures ahead of rainy season

OCHA led flood preparedness planning for the upcoming rainy season in Saraf Omera on 17 May, Kutum on 18 May and Kebkabiya on 19 May with partners from El Fasher and on the ground, and support from HAC and other line ministries. It was decided to preposition NFIs, especially in areas where there is no access during the rainy season due to poor road conditions. WHO highlighted that in line with the preparedness plan for the rainy season, a plan to reduce the risk of disease transmission will be developed and solid waste management activities at health facilities will be strengthened.