

## NAVIGATING INSTABILITY: A COUNTRY CONDITIONS OVERVIEW OF SOUTH SUDAN



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South Sudan, the world's youngest nation, continues to grapple with profound political, economic, and humanitarian challenges more than a decade after gaining independence on July 9, 2011. Despite hopes for peace and stability, the country has experienced recurring cycles of armed conflict, fragile governance, and widespread displacement. The consequences of civil war, coupled with ongoing intercommunal violence, human rights abuses, and a deteriorating humanitarian situation, have left millions in need of aid and protection.

This report provides an overview of country conditions in South Sudan as of August 2025.

### BACKGROUND

Peace was short-lived following South Sudan's independence. Longstanding grievances, ethnic tensions, and a political struggle between President Salva Kiir Mayardit and First Vice President Riek Machar created violence and instability between the two opposing coalitions, their supporters, and allied armed groups. Political struggle erupted into civil war in 2013 when President Kiir accused Vice President Machar of an attempted coup against him. Machar was removed from his role as vice president, and soon after, violence surged between ethnic groups—largely among the Dinka who aligned with Kiir, and the Nuer who aligned with Machar.

Violence spread rapidly across South Sudan. The civil war between December 2013 and August 2015 was marked by mass atrocities perpetrated by the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) led by Kiir, and the SPLA-In Opposition (SPLA-IO) led by Machar. Civilians were killed, sexually violated, and displaced. Civilian infrastructure was destroyed, and children were abducted and recruited as soldiers. An estimated [400,000](#) people were killed during the civil war and [millions](#) were displaced.

Peace deals between 2015 and 2018 were enacted and fell apart, returning South Sudan to violence. Kiir and Machar participated in negotiations in 2018 that led to ceasefire and power-sharing commitments, as well as a fragile peace agreement to end the war. The [Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan](#) (R-ARCSS) included a power-sharing arrangement between Kiir and Machar, and the two formed a unity government in 2020. Delays in full implementation of the plan continued to fuel insecurity and tensions in the country. South Sudan was scheduled to hold its first general elections in December 2024, however, the transitional period continues to be extended, and elections have been [postponed](#) to December 2026.

## ESCALATING VIOLENCE

In early 2025, South Sudan saw a sharp escalation in violence, signaling a troubling reversal of fragile peace. The [detention](#) of First Vice President Machar in March by President Kiir caused the 2018 peace agreement to be effectively terminated. This, combined with deteriorated trust between the longstanding rivals, delayed elections and contested authority, reignited ethnic tensions, and a worsening humanitarian crisis has placed South Sudan in a dangerous reality.

Between January and March 2025, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan's (UNMISS) Human Rights Division [recorded](#) the highest number of civilian casualties documented in a single quarter since 2020. This included 739 people killed, 679 injured, 149 abducted, and 40 subjected to conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). Central to the renewed instability were clashes between South Sudan's national army—the South Sudan People's Defence Forces (SSPDF)—and the “White Army” militia, composed of mainly Nuer-aligned youth.

The deliberate aerial bombardment of civilian sites, including [health facilities](#), has drawn international condemnation and raised alarm over violations of international humanitarian law. On July 2, 2025, the United Nations (UN) Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (SRSG-CAAC) [urged](#) the South Sudanese government and all parties to the conflict to take immediate steps to protect children. This call followed the release of the Secretary-General's [report](#) on children and armed conflict in South Sudan, which documented a sharp rise in grave violations—including recruitment and use, killing and maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence, attacks on schools and hospitals, abductions, and denial of humanitarian access for children.

UN officials [warned](#) that the country is “teetering on the brink of a return to full-scale civil war” and called on all parties to recommit to the 2018 peace agreement and respect the ceasefire. The African Union (AU) and other regional bodies also [called](#) for a cessation of hostilities and urged dialogue. These calls have largely gone unadhered to by warring parties, leaving civilians to suffer.

## HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

The current humanitarian fallout in South Sudan is severe. Around [9.3 million](#) people are in need of humanitarian aid in the country as conflict, climate shocks, disease, and food insecurity exacerbate needs.

### ***Displacement***

By the end of 2024, [1.4 million](#) people were displaced or stateless or returning from forced displacement within South Sudan, and an estimated 2.3 million South Sudanese were refugees, asylum-seekers, or in need of international protection. The country also hosted [500,000](#) refugees and asylum-seekers by the end of 2024, mainly from [Sudan](#) where ongoing civil war forced people to flee.

The escalation of violence in South Sudan since February 2025 has resulted in renewed displacement. Armed conflict has severely impacted Upper Nile State and Jonglei State but spread to other parts of the country as well. As of August 11, 2025, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) [recorded](#) about 149,000 people who fled to neighboring countries since March 2025. An estimated 30,000 crossed into the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), 35,000 in Ethiopia, 60,000 in Sudan, and approximately 24,000 in Uganda. The agency [estimated](#) that, since February 2025, there have been 200,000 new internally displaced people (IDPs) in locations affected by the conflict. This mass displacement contributes to a broader regional displacement crisis in the East and Horn of Africa. As of July 31, 2025, there were a total of 2,386,592 refugees and asylum-seekers from South Sudan worldwide. Uganda hosts the majority (1,019,173 people), followed by Sudan (661,958 people), Ethiopia (445,245 people), Kenya (201,038 people), and the DRC (55,599 people).

Many South Sudanese who once sought refuge in neighboring countries have been pushed to return to South Sudan due to war and insecurity in host countries. About 16,381 South Sudanese returnees were [verified](#) in June 2025 alone—97 percent were returning from Sudan. Others have returned due to food ration cuts following [halts to humanitarian aid](#) in refugee camps, such as in Kenya, and worsening [hunger crises](#) across the East Africa region. In August, it was [reported](#) that 367 returnees arrived in Torit Town in Eastern Equatoria State following food reductions in Kakuma Refugee Camp in northwestern Kenya that left them with no food and water. The returnees explained that on their way to South Sudan, other returnees with them died of “hunger, thirst, and harsh conditions.”

### ***Food Insecurity***

At current writing, South Sudan faces an acute food insecurity crisis. In June, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) [reported](#) that 7.7 million people (57 percent of the population) face acute food insecurity, with pockets of catastrophic hunger (IPC Phase 5) in the country and “conflict as a core driver.” The agency warned that two counties in South Sudan were at risk of famine in the coming months as armed conflict continued to destroy communities and impede delivery of humanitarian aid. In Upper Nile State, 11 of the 13 counties faced emergency levels of hunger.

On August 28, Save the Children [reported](#) that South Sudan is one of four countries in Africa expected to run out of Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Food (RUTF) in the next three months if cuts to humanitarian aid are not urgently restored. This micronutrient paste is vital to save the lives of severely malnourished children. The number of children under five years old experiencing acute malnutrition in South Sudan [increased](#) in 2025 by 10.5 percent to 2.3 million children, while 714,000 children are at risk of severe acute malnutrition. Kenya, which [hosts over 200,000](#) South Sudanese refugees, is also one of the four countries expected to run out of RUTF in three months.

Even where limited resources exist for South Sudan, they are not reaching those who need it most. South Sudan ranks as the [second most dangerous](#) place in the world to be a humanitarian worker. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) [documented](#) that, since the start of 2025, there have been 26 casualties in South Sudan (15 humanitarian workers and 11 contractors) who were killed or injured. OCHA recorded over 200 incidents of direct violence against humanitarians and assets in South Sudan between January and July 2025, and 56 humanitarian workers were forced to relocate from their operational areas due to escalating insecurity. The obstruction of humanitarian aid puts civilians—especially women, children, and people with disabilities—at grave risk and without the lifesaving care they desperately need.

### ***Cholera***

As hunger spreads so does disease. South Sudan is grappling with its largest—and longest—cholera crisis on record. The outbreak was declared by the Ministry of Health in October 2024. As of June 30, 2025, South Sudan [reported](#) a total of 77,555 suspected cholera cases and 1,401 deaths. By July, documented cases [exceeded](#) 80,000.

In July 2025, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)/Doctors Without Borders [called](#) for an immediate scale-up of water and sanitation programs to prevent further spread of cholera in the country. MSF highlighted that displacement is fueling the outbreak and its rapid spread as people are forced to live in overcrowded informal settlements. Amiet market hosts over 50,000 refugees from Sudan and MSF [reported](#) that, due to a lack of water and sanitation infrastructure in the settlement, “many are forced to defecate in the open...increasing the risks of further spread of diseases.”

The rainy season, now underway, has greatly impeded response efforts: flooding obstructs access to communities, disrupts medical supply routes, and hampers vaccination campaigns. Floods [double](#) the likelihood of spreading bacterial diarrheal diseases and increase the frequency of cholera outbreaks. The fragile health infrastructure in South Sudan—already weakened by conflict, underfunding, and displacement—with many clinics nonfunctional, continues to hinder access to care. Furthermore, recent cuts to aid by the United States have led to clinic closures and reduced access to lifesaving services, contributing to preventable deaths among vulnerable populations who must now travel long distances for treatment. In April 2025, eight people in South Sudan, including five children, [died from cholera](#) when they were forced to walk for hours to reach the nearest clinic.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

South Sudan remains gripped by profound instability, with the resurgence of violence in 2025 underscoring the fragility of its peace process and the enduring volatility of political and ethnic divisions. Armed conflict, widespread displacement, deteriorating humanitarian conditions, and grave human rights violations—particularly against children and vulnerable populations—continue to define the country's landscape. The collapse of key provisions under the 2018 peace agreement, along with limited state capacity and weakened rule of law, has left millions at risk. As food insecurity, disease outbreaks, and intercommunal violence escalate, civilians face persistent threats to their safety, dignity, and access to essential services. These conditions reflect not only a deepening crisis but also the urgent need for sustained international engagement, protection measures, and humanitarian support to prevent further deterioration.

- All parties to conflict must **uphold their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law to protect civilians** and **allow the safe and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance to affected populations**.
- All actors and stakeholders should **uphold the peace agreement** and return to dialogue to achieve **credible and safe elections by December 2026**.
- Abrupt funding cuts and suspensions prohibit lifesaving humanitarian assistance from reaching those who need it most. **Donor governments should urgently reconsider cuts to aid and restore funding to the humanitarian response in and around South Sudan.**
- Neighboring states should **respect the principle of non-refoulement** and refuse any tactics that arrest, arbitrarily detain, and result in other pushback policies against South Sudanese refugees.
- The United States Government should **immediately extend and redesignate [Temporary Protected Status](#) (TPS) for South Sudan** in response to ongoing armed conflict and extraordinary and temporary conditions in the country.