

CRISIS IMPACT OVERVIEW

By 13 February 2026, renewed conflict in Jonglei state had **displaced at least 280,000** people, with population movements accelerating as front lines shifted across northern counties (OCHA 13/02/2026). Fighting that resumed on 29 December between the South Sudan People's Defence Forces (SSPDF) and the Sudan People's Liberation Army-in-Opposition (SPLA-IO), alongside allied groups and including the use of aerial bombardments, directly triggered displacement, with households fleeing in the days immediately following the strikes (OCHA 13/02/2026).

Between 29 December 2025 and 19 January 2026, approximately 180,000 people were displaced; a figure that had risen to roughly 280,000 by 10 February, a nearly 56% increase in just three weeks. This figure carries inherent uncertainty because some counties remain inaccessible, a situation likely to evolve further as a result of continued access constraints in conflict-affected areas, limiting comprehensive data collection. Displaced populations have primarily moved to Akobo, Canal/Pigi, and Twic East counties in Jonglei state, as well as to Mingkaman (Lakes state) and Ulang (Upper Nile state). Given the fluid security context, these movements may reflect interim relocation rather than stable settlement (OCHA 10/02/2026 and 03/02/2026; Sudans Post 27/01/2026; Radio Tamazuj 29/12/2025).

Military advances, mobilisation, and rhetoric have increased the risk of wider escalation and heightened civilian protection concerns. The SPLA-IO takeover of Pajut in northern Jonglei has brought opposition forces closer to Bor, the state capital and a key administrative centre located along the Nile River corridor, which hosts major humanitarian coordination and supply routes. Humanitarian responders and state authorities have expressed concern that the reduced distance could expand active front lines and increase insecurity along critical population and river transport corridors (Radio Tamazuj 16/01/2026; OCHA 19/01/2026). On 19 January, SPLA-IO leaders called for mobilisation toward Juba, while a senior SSPDF commander issued (and later withdrew following public backlash) instructions encouraging indiscriminate targeting. Although no specific incidents have been directly attributed to these statements, they signal heightened tensions and increase the risk of abuses against civilians (Reuters 19/01/2026; BBC 27/01/2026).

Government-ordered evacuations have disrupted humanitarian operations and reduced civilian access to assistance. On 25 January, SSPDF authorities instructed civilians, UN personnel, and humanitarian responders to leave Akobo, Nyirol, and Uror counties ahead of planned operations against SPLA-IO forces. The directive led to the relocation

of some aid staff and restricted air and river access, although several organisations continued operating through community-based personnel. Authorisation to resume travel to previously restricted areas was granted on 16 February, though access constraints may persist. The order triggered the relocation of aid workers and suspension of some programmes, undermining lifesaving service delivery and limiting pre-positioning efforts at a critical time before the April–November rainy season. More than 11 health facilities have been rendered non-functional by looting and destruction, disrupting inpatient, maternity, and emergency care. Airstrikes affecting medical facilities in Lankien (Nyirol county) and Akobo have further reduced access to health services, leaving an estimated 400,000 people without adequate care. The disruption also constrained efforts to stockpile essential supplies, including food and medicines, before seasonal flooding limits road and river access (Sudans Post 25/01/2026; Radio Tamazuj 25/01/2026 and 24/01/2026; OCHA 17/02/2026, 30/01/2026, and 06/02/2026; MSF 04/02/2026).

By 11 February, clashes continued across northern and central Jonglei, sustaining displacement and acute humanitarian needs, while insecurity and rapidly shifting front lines severely limited access and visibility, constraining assessment of the scale and location of needs. Continued ground fighting and periodic airstrikes are increasing civilian exposure to shelling in populated areas, explosive remnants of war (ERW), and risks of forced recruitment and gender-based violence (GBV), while insecurity continues to restrict humanitarian access. Displaced populations are sheltering in overcrowded sites and makeshift structures with limited access to safe water, healthcare, and food, increasing vulnerability to communicable diseases. **Cholera cases have been confirmed in affected areas, heightening the risk of transmission in densely populated displacement sites with inadequate water and sanitation services.**

Reports indicate growing strain on host communities and basic services, reinforcing the emergency nature of needs as insecurity persists (OCHA 03/02/2026; Care 09/02/2026). Since December 2025, heightened insecurity has led to the relocation of at least 48 humanitarian personnel and the loss of 16 vehicles and other assets across Akobo, Ayod, Duk, Nyirol, and Uror counties, constraining operational capacity. Evacuation directives issued by conflict parties, the Government's imposition of a no-fly zone in Jonglei state, and the looting and seizure of humanitarian assets by all parties have further disrupted operations and weakened access to lifesaving healthcare. Reported incidents have contributed to the closure or reduced functionality of more than 11 health facilities and limited the availability of essential medicines and emergency services in affected areas; AP 02/02/2026; OCHA 19/01/2026).MSF 02/02/2026; AP 02/02/2026; OCHA 19/01/2026).



ANTICIPATED SCOPE AND SCALE

Localised hostilities are likely to persist across northern Jonglei, particularly around administrative hubs and key river corridors such as Yuai and Walgak, as intermittent clashes and limited evidence of effective de-escalation measures suggest neither side is disengaging. These river corridors are strategically significant for military movement, civilian trade, and humanitarian river transport along the Nile system, increasing the likelihood that fighting in these areas will disrupt supply routes and drive further displacement as front lines shift. Continuing SSPDF aerial bombardments and SPLA-IO ground offensives are already constraining humanitarian access via air and river movement restrictions and insecurity along active front lines. Continued hostilities are likely to further restrict civilian movement along key displacement routes and limit access to opposition-held areas if fighting expands and route insecurity increases (OCHA 03/02/2026 and 17/02/2026; TRT World 25/01/2026).

Conflict dynamics increasingly intersect with identity-based narratives and patterns of displacement. Conflict is not solely driven by ethnic cleavages, as intra-elite competition and divisions within communities continue to influence mobilisation and alignments among armed groups. Communities fleeing insecurity in Ayod, Nyirol, and Uror counties – areas predominantly inhabited by Nuer populations – are moving into ethnically mixed or Dinka-majority areas. While displacement composition data remains limited, population movements are likely to reflect the demographic profile of the areas of origin. In a context where rhetoric by armed groups has invoked ethnic identity, these movements are likely to heighten protection risks including retaliatory violence, forced recruitment of displaced populations, targeting, discrimination, restricted access to services, and risks of secondary displacement, particularly in areas already under strain from hostilities (BBC 27/01/2026; AJ 28/01/2026).

An alleged Ugandan military presence and cross-border troop movements in support of government operations, if substantiated, could increase the intensity and duration of hostilities. Additional external support – including potential air assets, logistical reinforcement, or intelligence sharing – may enhance operational capacity and shift battlefield dynamics. If sustained or expanded, external military backing would likely enable larger offensives and contribute to a wider geographic spread of fighting, including in opposition-held areas such as northern Jonglei (Sudans Post 22/01/2026; AJ 28/01/2026). This would likely increase displacement from Ayod, Duk, Nyirol, and Uror, prolong access restrictions to opposition-held areas, and further disrupt food assistance and market flows along key corridors – including river transport routes on the Nile and road links connecting northern Jonglei to Bor and onward to central markets – during the critical pre-lean season.

Disputes over opposition leadership, stalled negotiations, arrests, and escalating rhetoric may trigger further mobilisation and intensify clashes. Recurrent violations of key provisions in the 2018 Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan – including delays in security sector reform, weaknesses in ceasefire monitoring mechanisms, and the unresolved integration of unified forces – are incrementally weakening institutional safeguards. If clashes expand, insecurity, restrictions on political mobilisation, and administrative disruption could interfere with preparations for the December elections, including voter registration, campaigning, and access to polling sites. While regional and international stakeholders continue to pursue mediation efforts, shrinking political space and limited progress in implementing core agreement benchmarks may incentivise armed groups to seek leverage through territorial control and military positioning. This would increase the risk of sustained hostilities in populated areas, further displacement, and interruptions to voter registration, campaigning, and broader pre-election processes (Sudans Post 22/01/2026; Eastleigh Voice 28/01/2026).

According to FEWS NET, Emergency (IPC Phase 4) levels of food insecurity are projected to expand across north-central Jonglei, including Akobo, Ayod, Canal/Pigi, Duk, Fangak, Nyirol, and Uror counties, between February–May 2026. The anticipated deterioration will primarily be driven by conflict-related market disruption (restricted trade routes and price volatility), reduced access to own-produced food as a result of displacement and insecurity, interruptions to humanitarian food assistance deliveries, and constrained humanitarian access (FEWS NET 30/01/2026; REACH 30/01/2026). If hostilities intensify and isolate populations for a sustained period, restricting livelihoods and humanitarian access, the risk of households facing Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5) levels of food insecurity would become credible in the most affected and inaccessible areas. Prolonged isolation would accelerate asset depletion, disrupt trade flows, and prevent agricultural activities and assistance deliveries, potentially precipitating an earlier and deeper April–August lean season (FEWS NET 30/01/2026; REACH 30/01/2026). While this does not imply a formal famine declaration, sustained access constraints combined with conflict-driven food and income losses would significantly elevate the risk of extreme food consumption gaps and excess mortality.

Overcrowded displacement settings, particularly in parts of Akobo, Canal/Pigi, and Duk counties, are increasing the risk of communicable disease outbreaks. The confirmation of cholera in Duk, combined with limited access to safe water, inadequate sanitation, and overstretched health services in IDP-hosting locations, is likely to increase transmission risk. Congested shelter conditions and repeated population movements also heighten the risk of acute watery diarrhoea and malaria, especially among children and newly displaced households. Overcrowding and poor WASH conditions increase faecal–oral transmission of acute watery diarrhoea, while stagnant water during the rainy season (typically April–November in Jonglei) supports malaria vector proliferation. Newly

displaced households, particularly children under five, face increased vulnerability to such diseases because of limited access to preventive and curative services, including routine vaccination, distribution of insecticide-treated mosquito nets, oral rehydration salts, and timely case management (OCHA 06/02/2026 and 10/02/2026; Radio Tamazuj 30/01/2026; Oxfam 09/02/2026).

CRISIS IMPACTS

Displacement and shelter

Rapid and repeated displacement across Ayod, Duk, Nyirol, and Uror is overwhelming informal sites and host communities, exposing displaced people to severe shelter gaps. By 30 January, Jonglei state was already hosting over 358,600 IDPs. Since 29 December 2025, however, an additional 280,000 people have been newly displaced by escalating violence, bringing the estimated total displaced population in the state to approximately 638,600. This represents a roughly 78% increase in the IDP population within a matter of weeks, significantly compounding pre-existing displacement pressures in the state (IOM 21/01/2026; OCHA 10/02/2026; UNHCR 20/01/2026). Ground offensives and air activity in and around displacement routes and receiving areas are constraining civilian movement and limiting safe relocation options (OCHA 03/02/2026 and 30/01/2026).

Uror county is currently the epicentre of displacement in Jonglei, with approximately 105,400 people displaced by 10 February, nearly half of the county's estimated pre-crisis population of approximately 215,000 (based on the latest available county-level population projections). Additional displacement has been reported from Nyirol (57,200), Duk (27,000), Ayod (17,000), Akobo (11,000), Twic East (8,000), and Bor South (4,300) (OCHA 10/02/2026; IOM 12/02/2026).

Women, children, older people, and people with disabilities are likely to make up a large share of the displaced population and face heightened protection risks – including conflict-related sexual violence, forced recruitment, and family separation – throughout displacement (Care 09/02/2026; OCHA 10/02/2026). Rapid assessments indicate that people are sheltering in churches, schools, informal collective sites, and open areas, often without adequate cover or access to basic services, including healthcare. Secondary displacement risks remain high as clashes continue across locations where displaced populations have sought refuge, including parts of Upper Nile and within Jonglei itself. Movements have been recorded to neighbouring states, including 29,500 people registered in Mingkaman (Awerial county, Lakes state) and approximately 12,000 new arrivals in Ulang county, Upper Nile state, primarily originating from Nyirol. Host

communities are facing growing pressure on already limited resources, including food, water, and health services (OCHA 19/01/2026, 03/02/2026, and 30/01/2026). Priority needs include safe and adequate shelter, essential NFIs, and strengthened site management to address congestion and service gaps (OCHA 13/02/2026).

Residual floodwaters from the previous rainy season continue to limit mobility and access to safer locations (REACH 30/01/2026). As clashes persist, repeated displacement cycles are likely, particularly in communities already affected by recurrent conflict.

Food security

During the 2026 lean season (April–July), an estimated 7.55 million people in South Sudan are projected to face Crisis (IPC Phase 3) and above levels of food insecurity, with the number of counties in IPC 4 expected to double between February–May 2026 compared to September–November 2025 (WHO 29/01/2026; FEWS NET 30/01/2026; IPC 04/11/2026). Counties of highest concern include those directly affected by active hostilities and displacement, notably southern Upper Nile (Longochuk, Nasir, Panyikang, and Ulang counties) and north-central Jonglei (Akobo, Ayod, Canal/Pigi, Duk, Fangak, Nyirol, and Uror counties), as well as structurally vulnerable areas with high pre-existing humanitarian needs and exposure to spillover effects, including central Unity state (Panyijar and Leer).

Current conflict dynamics, such as airstrikes, the imposition of flight restrictions, and attacks on humanitarian convoys, are disrupting market functionality and restricting food assistance deliveries. In affected areas, insecurity is constraining trade flows and limiting physical access to markets, while heightened transport costs and supply chain interruptions are contributing to price volatility. Although food prices declined seasonally following the lean season peak (April–November 2025), markets in Jonglei began recording renewed upward price movements in December. In affected counties, prices remain significantly higher than the national median and above those recorded in relatively stable states, reflecting reduced purchasing power driven by currency depreciation, livestock losses, limited wage opportunities, and elevated transport costs linked to insecurity and disrupted trade routes. These combined pressures continue to constrain household food access (REACH 05/01/2026; FEWS NET 30/01/2026; Development Aid 02/02/2026).

Food insecurity in South Sudan remains recurrent and structurally driven by the combined effects of protracted conflict, climatic shocks, and economic fragility. Between 2021–2023, up to 87% of the population experienced moderate or severe food insecurity, underscoring the country's chronic vulnerability to shocks. In Jonglei and Upper Nile,



the current escalation is compounding these structural pressures by disrupting markets, displacing households from productive assets, and constraining humanitarian access, increasing the likelihood of rapid deterioration in already fragile food security conditions (NUPI 31/03/2025).

Protection

Women and girls are experiencing disproportionate impacts. An inter-agency rapid needs assessment conducted on 14 February 2026 in Duk and Twic East counties identified escalating protection concerns, including conflict-related sexual violence, family separation, and the alleged recruitment and use of adolescents by armed groups. Protection responders report urgent gaps in safe spaces, a lack of GBV caseworkers as a result of insecurity, insufficient psychosocial support, child-friendly spaces for displaced children operating beyond capacity, and limited protection monitoring. Overcrowded displacement sites without gender-segregated latrines, adequate lighting, dignity kits, and safe access to water points are increasing exposure to GBV risks. At the same time, disruptions to maternity and emergency obstetric and newborn care services are compounding risks for pregnant women. According to Health Cluster partners, at least 16 health facilities have been attacked or looted since late December 2025, 13 in Jonglei, constraining access to essential reproductive and maternal health services (Care 09/02/2026; OCHA 10/02/2026, 13/02/2026, and 17/02/2026).

Children face elevated protection risks linked to ERW as clashes continue across areas already nationally identified as among the most heavily contaminated, including Jonglei. Continued fighting and shifting front lines are likely to leave additional ERW in civilian areas and along displacement routes, increasing risks for returning and displaced populations. According to national mine action reporting, children accounted for over 80% of all recorded ERW casualties nationwide between January–December 2025. While this figure reflects national data instead of Jonglei-specific reporting, it underscores children's heightened vulnerability to ERW in conflict-affected areas. Newly displaced households unfamiliar with hazardous terrain face increased exposure as they move through contested locations or settle in previously militarised areas. On 9 February in Uror county, two suspected unexploded ordnance incidents occurred: an explosion in Dik village injured two children and another in Yuai killed a teenage boy and injured one other (OCHA 12/02/2026 and 13/02/2026; UNICEF 11/02/2026). While such incidents do not represent conflict-specific casualty data for the current escalation, they do indicate heightened exposure for at-risk groups.

People with disabilities and older people are likely to experience barriers accessing assistance as a result of mobility constraints, inaccessible distribution points, and disrupted support networks, increasing risks of exclusion and unmet needs (OCHA 12/01/2026; Care 09/02/2026).

Hostilities and displacement continue to disrupt access to education and increase protection risks for children. More than 3,000 children in Jonglei state missed the 2 February school reopening as a result of displacement, exposing them to heightened risks of exploitation, family separation, and prolonged learning interruption (OCHA 06/02/2026). Repeated population movements are also increasing the number of unaccompanied and separated children, raising concerns around neglect, abuse, and other protection violations, particularly among households already vulnerable to protection concerns (OCHA 19/01/2026).

Statements and directives from senior military leaders, combined with identity-based mobilisation rhetoric, are increasing the assessed risk of targeted violence against civilians. While patterns of systematic targeting have not been formally established, these dynamics elevate the likelihood that civilians may be singled out on the basis of perceived affiliation or identity, beyond generalised protection threats associated with active hostilities. Reported "spare no one" orders, even if later withdrawn, may reduce restraint among fighters and increase the risk of indiscriminate or retaliatory violence against communities perceived to support opposing forces (Radio Tamazuj 24/01/2026; OHCHR 26/01/2026; BBC 27/01/2026). Civilians in contested areas, along displacement routes, and in newly controlled locations face heightened risks of reprisals, forced recruitment, and retaliatory attacks. Conflict-related sexual violence and abductions were already increasing prior to the current escalation, reflecting entrenched protection concerns across conflict-affected areas. UN monitoring indicates that abductions had risen by around 20% and conflict-related sexual violence had also increased between the July–September 2025 period compared with April–June. Continued displacement, family separation, and reduced access to protection services are expected to further constrain reporting mechanisms, as insecurity limits GBV referral pathways and the closure of protection desks increases exposure to these violations, particularly among women, girls, and children (UN News 09/01/2026; OHCHR/UNMISS 09/01/2026).

Health and WASH

It is estimated that 6.3 million people in South Sudan are in need of health assistance in 2026, driven by escalating conflict and displacement, attacks on health facilities, forced evacuations of medical workers, fragile infrastructure, and a chronically underresourced health system (WHO 29/01/2026). By 6 February, the number of people injured during recent clashes and those displaced with medical needs remained uncertain. Continued flight

suspensions and insecurity are disrupting medical evacuations from areas difficult to access and delaying referrals for severe trauma and obstetric emergencies. In Jonglei, a significant proportion of health facilities in counties such as Ayod, Nyirol, and Uror rely on air transport for the delivery of medical supplies and vaccine replenishment, particularly during periods of insecurity or seasonal inaccessibility. As such, continued flight restrictions pose a direct operational constraint. Widespread vaccine spoilage has not yet been reported, but prolonged disruption risks compromising cold-chain integrity for routine immunisation and essential temperature-sensitive medicines in remote locations. As hostilities continue, unmet health needs and preventable morbidity are expected to increase in both displacement sites and isolated communities. Nationally, only about 55% of the population can reach a health facility within one hour, and 43% identify distance as a major barrier to accessing care (OCHA 19/01/2026 and 10/02/2026; UN News 10/02/2026).

Medical aid supplies have not been distributed since December 2025, severely disrupting access to lifesaving medicines for people with chronic and acute conditions. As a result, patients have been forced to interrupt treatment, increasing the risk of serious and potentially fatal outcomes. Health infrastructure across parts of northern Jonglei has been repeatedly affected by looting, damage, and forced closures linked to escalating hostilities. Several facilities in areas such as Waat and Rieng in Nyirol county and Yuai and Kaljak in Uror county have been vandalised or stripped of equipment, resulting in the suspension of services (OCHA 19/01/2026 and 10/02/2026). An estimated 400,000 people, representing the combined catchment populations of major health facilities in Akobo, Lankien, and Pieri, are likely to face major gaps in essential health services, increasing mortality risks from trauma, obstetric complications, cholera, and severe malnutrition (MSF 04/02/2026 and 02/02/2026). This incident, alongside the looting of health facilities in Pieri and Yuai, reflects the repeated attack/looting of health facilities (Radio Tamazuj 04/02/2026). Insecurity has resulted in the closure of 24 nutrition facilities in Jonglei, interrupting lifesaving services for nearly 8,000 children, including more than 2,600 with severe acute malnutrition (UN News 10/02/2026).

WASH conditions and overcrowding in displacement and host locations are compounding and risk accelerating the cholera outbreak, particularly in Duk county. By late January 2026, nearly 985 suspected cholera cases and 30 deaths had been reported in Jonglei state, where treatment centres were overwhelmed and facing critical supply shortages (OCHA 30/01/2026). Nationally, the outbreak that began in September 2024 had reached 98,195 cumulative cases and 1,619 deaths by 12 February 2026 (OCHA 13/02/2026). Many displaced households and host communities rely on untreated surface water sources, while overcrowded settlements and widespread open defecation are likely accelerating the transmission of cholera ; Radio Tamazuj 30/01/2026).Oxfam 09/02/2026; Radio Tamazuj 30/01/2026).

HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

This information may not cover all efforts, especially local support and community initiatives, given information gaps and the time constraints of the analysis.

Access to information

Insecurity and movement restrictions have limited humanitarian access to displacement sites, preventing comprehensive needs assessments (OCHA 03/02/2026). As a result, detailed and verified information on the number, profile, and priority needs of displaced populations remains limited. Even organisations relying on community-based staff face significant operational constraints from air and river movement restrictions, reducing their ability to monitor population movements, verify displacement figures, or sustain regular programming (OCHA 19/01/2026).

Humanitarian constraints

Clashes, military directives, and access restrictions continue to limit humanitarian operations across northern and central Jonglei. Government flight limitations and escalating insecurity have contributed to the relocation of aid workers and the suspension of programmes, disrupting assistance to an estimated 366,000 people in north and central Jonglei (OCHA 30/01/2026 and 19/01/2026; AP 02/02/2026).

These disruptions coincide with the post-flood access window when responders typically pre-position supplies ahead of the April–November lean and rainy seasons, increasing the risk of delayed assistance in the coming months (FEWSNET 30/01/2026; REACH 30/01/2026). In December 2025, these constraints were also seen, including bureaucratic impediments such as delays in travel authorisations and cargo clearances, as well as violence, intimidation, and interference with humanitarian assets. In Jonglei and Upper Nile, authorities forcibly entered NGO compounds and confiscated equipment. Along riverine routes in Canal/Pigi county, seven contracted commercial boats were detained at checkpoints along the Sobat River, with demands of SSP 1 million per vessel, disrupting humanitarian logistics and reducing operational reach (OCHA 19/01/2026 and 21/01/2026).

Destruction of essential infrastructure has further weakened response capacity. The warehouse of the Médecins sans Frontières hospital in Lankien was destroyed, affecting critical medical supplies, and a health facility in Pieri was looted by unknown assailants (MSF 04/02/2026). Essential infrastructure, including warehouses and health facilities, have also been destroyed in various incidents in Akobo, Ayod, Nyirol, and Uror counties (WFP 04/02/2026).

Taken together, flight restrictions, transport disruptions, and facility damage are constraining humanitarian supply chains, reducing field presence, and limiting service delivery. If sustained, these pipeline interruptions are likely to contribute to deteriorating food security outcomes, increased protection risks, and heightened mortality from untreated trauma, disease outbreaks, and severe malnutrition during the approaching lean season.

Funding and response capacity

Following the escalation of violence, recent funding commitments have enabled a partial scale-up of humanitarian assistance in Jonglei state. While still insufficient given the number of affected people, the Central Emergency Response Fund has made USD 10 million available to support time-critical, lifesaving interventions for an estimated 178,000 people, implemented through UN agencies and humanitarian responders. The funding prioritises health, WASH, shelter and NFIs, cash-based food assistance, and protection services, including GBV and child protection. Additional support is expected through the South Sudan Humanitarian Fund, alongside limited, primarily in-kind private sector contributions. Significant gaps likely remain, however, including cholera infrastructure for health surge capacity, cholera prevention infrastructure, nutrition services (as nearly 24 nutrition facilities have closed), logistics access, and site management (OCHA 27/01/2026, 30/01/2026, and 03/02/2026).

COMPOUNDING/AGGRAVATING FACTORS

These are external factors, not the direct drivers of the crisis, that may make the humanitarian impacts or the crisis itself more complex.

Poverty

It is estimated that 91% of the population in South Sudan lives on less than USD 3 per day, while around 54% of the urban population and 80% of the rural population face multidimensional poverty. From 2011–2024, the nation's real per capita economic output declined by 8.4% annually, leading to a significant deterioration in household living standards. Poverty in South Sudan is driven by structural factors including prolonged conflict, limited economic diversification, and weak infrastructure. Recurrent environmental shocks such as flooding further erode household assets and livelihoods, deepening existing poverty and reducing resilience to subsequent crises (WB 14/10/2025). Consecutive flooding and insecurity have significantly reduced household coping capacity in Jonglei (REACH 30/01/2026). Loss and distress sales of livestock, the primary store of wealth, have limited households' ability to finance transport, access markets, or relocate to safer areas. As a result, poorer households – such as those in Jonglei – are more likely to remain in high-risk locations or undertake unsafe displacement. Disrupted livelihoods, restricted movement, and market access constraints are increasing dependence on humanitarian assistance and accelerating the adoption of coping strategies with potential harmful effects.

Climate vulnerability

South Sudan has arid regions in the far north and southeast. The country typically experiences rain between April–November that tends to result in river flooding. Increased hydroclimatic variability characterised by prolonged dry spells followed by intense rainfall has heightened flood risks. Extended drought conditions reduce soil moisture and vegetation cover, decreasing the land's absorption capacity. When heavy rains occur, this leads to increased surface runoff, soil erosion, and more severe flooding. In 2024, around 1.4 million people were affected by flooding; in 2025, that number stood at around 1.35 million. Flood risk is projected to remain high, with the largest rainfall increases in March–November and the largest increase in extreme precipitation events in July–August (NUPI 31/03/2025; IFRC 26/02/2026; OCHA 30/11/2025). Jonglei remained among the states most affected by flooding in 2025, with more than 630,000 people affected by 30 November. Persistent floodwaters continue to affect mobility in some areas,

potentially limiting civilians' ability to move away from active hostilities. In January 2026, field reporting indicated that flooding along the Akobo East–West road corridor may have hindered displacement routes for people attempting to leave nearby Uror (FEWS NET 07/01/2026; REACH 30/01/2026).

Heavy rainfall and flooding are likely to increase humanitarian needs, particularly among IDPs in fragile shelters, through shelter damage, water contamination, and disruption to sanitation facilities. Flooding also affects seasonal agropastoral and labour cycles by delaying planting, damaging crops, restricting grazing, and limiting access to markets and income sources, undermining household livelihoods and food security (REACH 30/01/2026; FEWS NET 07/01/2026). The current conflict also limits communities' capacity to respond to climate shocks, increasing the likelihood of deterioration into IPC 4 outcomes in already affected counties.

South Sudan has a score of 8.5 on the Climate Change Risk Index, meaning the country faces risks from the effects of climate change. This score reflects high exposure to flooding and climate variability, combined with limited adaptive capacity (EC accessed 08/02/2026). Communities are likely to become more vulnerable to the effects of environmental shocks.

DRIVERS OF THE CRISIS

Escalation of hostilities

A marked escalation in hostilities began in late December 2025, when clashes between the SSPDF and SPLA-IO expanded into coordinated military operations across northern Jonglei state over control of strategic administrative towns (AJ 28/01/2026; Radio Tamazuj 29/12/2025). A significant development occurred on 2 January 2026, when SPLA-IO forces captured Yuai, the administrative centre of Uror county. This was followed by further territorial gains, including the takeover of Pajut in Duk county and Wau in Ayod county, consolidating opposition control across parts of northern Jonglei (Radio Tamazuj 16/01/2026 and 27/01/2026).

In response, the SSPDF launched counteroffensives aimed at reversing these advances, including the reported capture of Tiam and Wek villages on the outskirts of Yuai (Radio Tamazuj 27/01/2026). As front lines shifted and military positions consolidated around these towns, civilian areas increasingly became sites of active fighting. The escalation has been accompanied by SSPDF aerial bombardments across Ayod, Duk, Nyirol, and Uror counties, contributing to civilian harm and damage to essential infrastructure (Radio Tamazuj 03/12/2025; OCHA 27/01/2026).

The escalation in late December coincided with the dry season, when improved road conditions and mobility facilitate military movements. Following months of flooding (April–November) that paralysed ground movement, receding waters in December 2025 opened a narrow tactical window (FEWS NET 07/01/2026). The dry season enabled the deployment of heavier weaponry and more sustained ground operations by both the SSPDF and the SPLA-IO.

Aerial strikes have been concentrated in predominantly Nuer-majority areas where opposition forces maintain a presence. While this pattern may reflect efforts to weaken opposition positions, it also heightens protection risks for civilians living in or near contested areas, particularly when perceived affiliations overlap with ethnic identity (AJ 28/01/2026; Radio Tamazuj 29/12/2025).

Government-imposed flight bans affecting contested locations suggest an effort to control information flows, limit humanitarian access, and constrain opposition logistics while maintaining operational flexibility in government-aligned areas (SCR 01/02/2026; MSF 30/01/2026).

Institutional and political breakdown

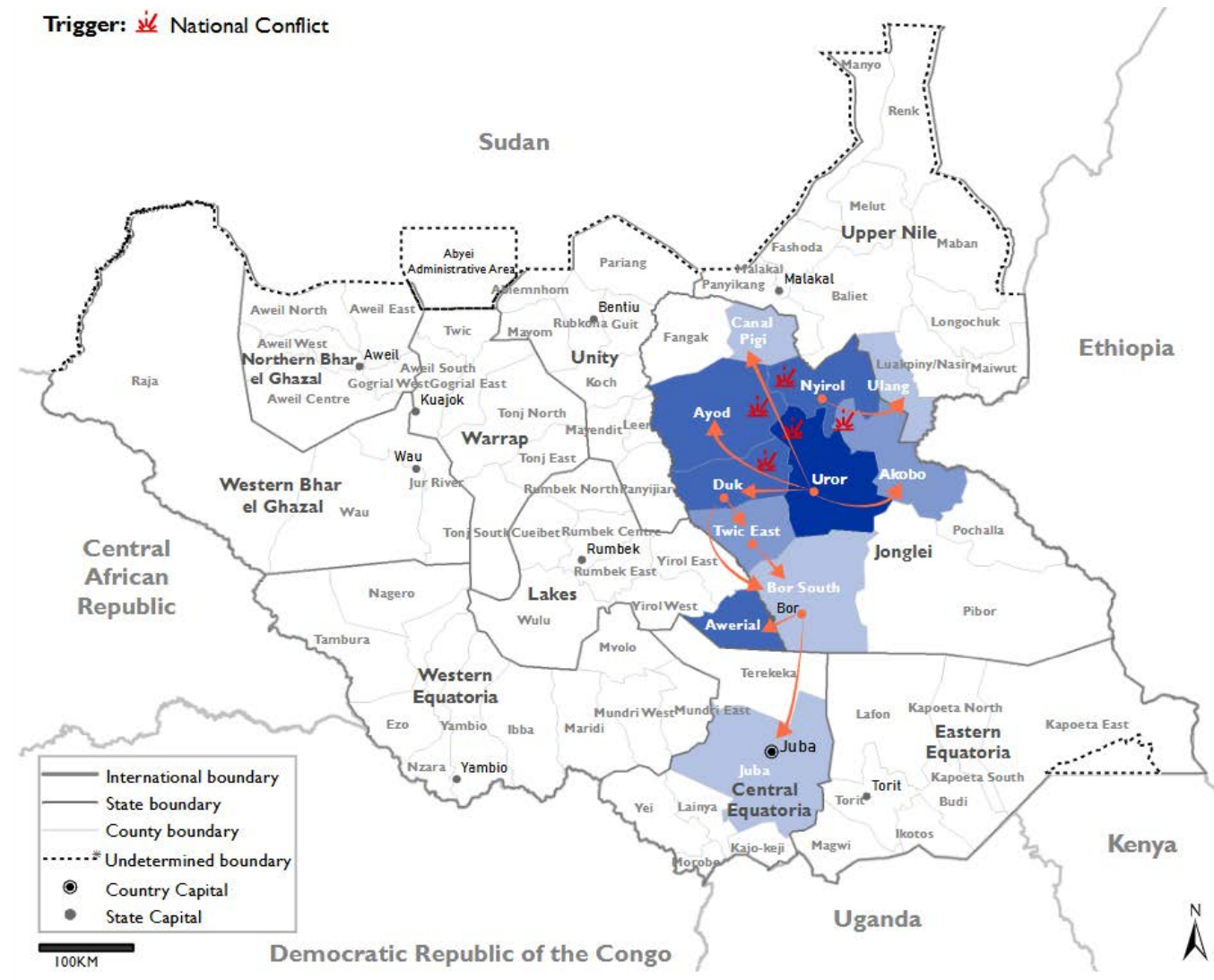
Weak implementation of the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan commitments, including delayed reforms and stalled elections, is shrinking political space and increasing reliance on military positioning instead of formal negotiation. Stalled security sector reforms, specifically the failure to unify and deploy the Necessary Unified Forces, have left a security vacuum that has been filled by partisan militias. Fragmentation within opposition movements and declining confidence in national institutions have reduced incentives for compromise, increasing the use of coercive measures to maintain leverage and territorial influence (SCR 09/02/2026; Horn Review 23/01/2026; Sudans Post 23/10/2025; Amani Africa 22/01/2026). As institutional pathways for dispute resolution narrow, armed groups appear more willing to continue territorial contestation through military means, heightening the risk of sustained escalation and undermining prospects for de-escalation through political mechanisms (UN News 10/02/2026; Radio Tamazuj 11/02/2026). Regional and international stakeholders, including the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and the African Union, continue to engage in diplomatic and mediation efforts, but the effectiveness of political mechanisms remains constrained by continuing hostilities and deteriorating trust between parties (OHCHR 18/01/2026; IGAD 28/01/2026).

Ethnic mobilisation and rhetoric

Ethnic polarisation, particularly along Dinka–Nuer lines, is intensifying mobilisation and lowering restraints on violence. Political alignments remain fluid and include significant intra-ethnic divisions. Senior military and political figures on both sides have contributed to escalating tensions through inflammatory rhetoric and calls for mobilisation, at times framed along ethnic lines. Reported statements attributed to SSPDF-aligned commander Johnson Olony instructing forces in Jonglei to “spare no one” – later publicly retracted – heightened protection concerns. In mid-January, the SPLA-IO leadership also called on forces to mobilise and advance toward Juba, further raising fears of broader confrontation (Radio Tamazuj 24/01/2026; GCR2P 28/01/2026; ST 19/01/2026).

Political messaging increasingly frames communities as collective security threats, potentially contributing to fear-based recruitment and increasing the risk of retaliatory attacks against civilians perceived as aligned with rival groups. Inflammatory statements and permissive directives can weaken command restraint, blur distinctions between combatants and civilians, and elevate the risk of unlawful targeting in contested areas (UNMISS 25/01/2026; OHCHR 18/01/2026). These dynamics may deepen grievances, expand recruitment pools, and heighten the likelihood that localised clashes – particularly in identified hotspots such as Ayod, Duk, and Uror – escalate into broader intercommunal violence.

Map 1. Jonglei Displacement and conflict-affected locations



Source: IOM (19/02/2026)