UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

BORDER MONITORING REPORT
SOUTH SUDAN
2024

Executive summary

In September 2024, 29,295 South Sudanese individuals arrived in South Sudan, as recorded by UNHCR border monitoring. According to UNHCR's new methodology, UNHCR estimates that 23,713 (81%) of these arrivals were returnees, while 5,541 (19%) were pendular movements, and 41 individuals were transiting through South Sudan to other countries. The proportion of returnees varied significantly, from 88% of those returning from Sudan to 35% of those arriving from Kenya.

The reasons for return also varied: many from Sudan were fleeing insecurity and lack of services, while those from Ethiopia were driven by food insecurity and a lack of services. For individuals returning from Kenya, Uganda, DRC, and CAR, the motivation to return permanently to their country of origin was a strong pull factor. Short-term visitors mainly travel for family and economic reasons.

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Acronyms and Terms

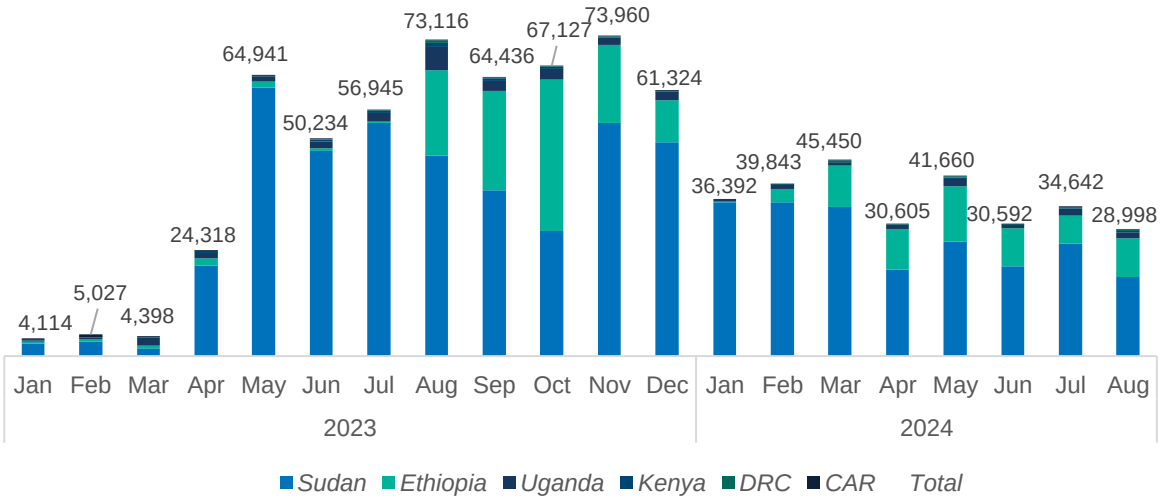
RRC	*Relief & Rehabilitation Commission*
AGD	Age, Gender, and Diversity
SSD	South Sudan / South Sudanese
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
CAR	Central African Republic
IOM	International Organization for Migration
R-ARCSS	Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan

1. Introduction

South Sudan presents a multi-layered mix of refugees, IDPs, refugee and IDP returnees, stateless persons, and persons at risk of statelessness. According to UNHCR, Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC) and partners, more than 650,000 South Sudanese individuals have spontaneously returned in a self-organised manner and by their own volition since the signing of the 2018 Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS).

With the onset of the Sudan crisis in 2023, more than 500,000 South Sudanese residing in the country were forced to move back to their country of origin due to insecurity and economic factors.

Spontaneous Return to South Sudan in 2023-2024

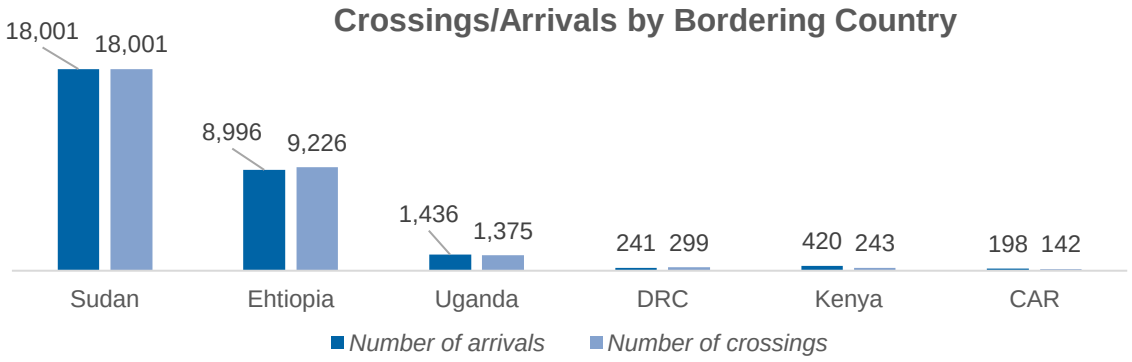


In light of this context, UNHCR, in collaboration with RRC, acknowledged the necessity of adjusting their strategies to monitor the evolving situation. The existing methodology for tracking spontaneous refugee returnees, especially at the borders, has been updated to ensure a systematic and effective collection and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data. This approach allows UNHCR and its partners to understand better the scope and trends of the ongoing spontaneous return movements.

After the launch of the new border monitoring tools by UNHCR and RRC in January-February 2024 and in May 2024 for the Sudan border in collaboration with IOM, UNHCR adopted an updated methodology for estimating returnee numbers. This updated approach, supported by RRC, has been implemented starting September 1, 2024.

2. South Sudanese Arrivals in September 2024

In September 2024, 29,295 South Sudanese individuals arrived in South Sudan, as observed and recorded by border monitoring enumerators deployed at Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, DRC, and CAR border entry points. The highest number of these arrived from Sudan (18,001) and Ethiopia (9,226), followed by Uganda (1,378).



The number of arrivals by week in September 2024 was relatively stable at 5,000 arrivals weekly, with no considerable peaks of fluctuations observed by week or country of arrival. The number of September's arrivals is slightly lower than the previous month, with weekly fluctuations around 7,000, peaking at 8,000 per week.

UNHCR estimates that out of the total arrivals, the number of returnees to South Sudan in September 2024 was 23,713 (81% of arrivals), while the remaining arrivals were pendular movement – 5,541 (or 19%), and 41 individuals were transiting through South Sudan to other countries.

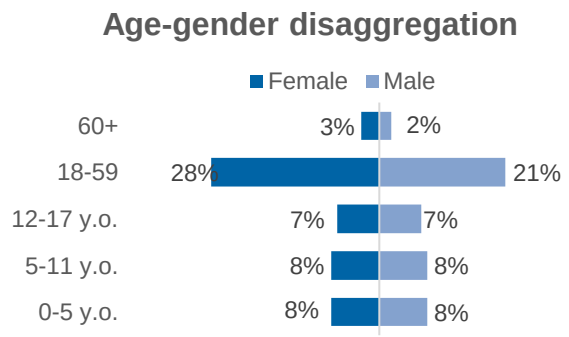
Arrivals: Crossing Types	***# of arrivals***	***% of total***
Returnees	*23,713*	*81%*
Pendular Movements	*5,541*	*19%*
Transiting	*41*	*0%*

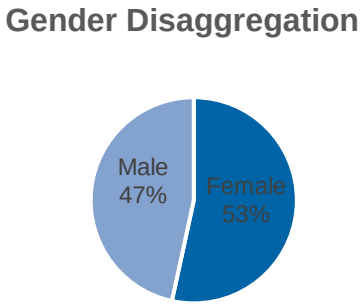
Note on the methodology.

UNHCR South Sudan, in consultation with the RRC, introduced an updated methodology for the identification of returnees since September 2024. According to this methodology, only households with the intention to stay in South Sudan for 1 year or longer are counted as returnees to South Sudan. Those with the intention to stay in South Sudan for less than one year are defined as pendular movements. In addition to returnees and pendular movements, this updated methodology also highlights individuals passing through South Sudan in order to reach other countries ("transiting").

2.1. Demographic characteristics

The data show that 53.41% of arrivals are female and 45.59% are male, indicating a slightly higher proportion of women. Age and gender disaggregation reveals that women are more represented in the 18-59 age group (28% female vs. 21% male), while other age groups show relatively balanced distributions between genders.





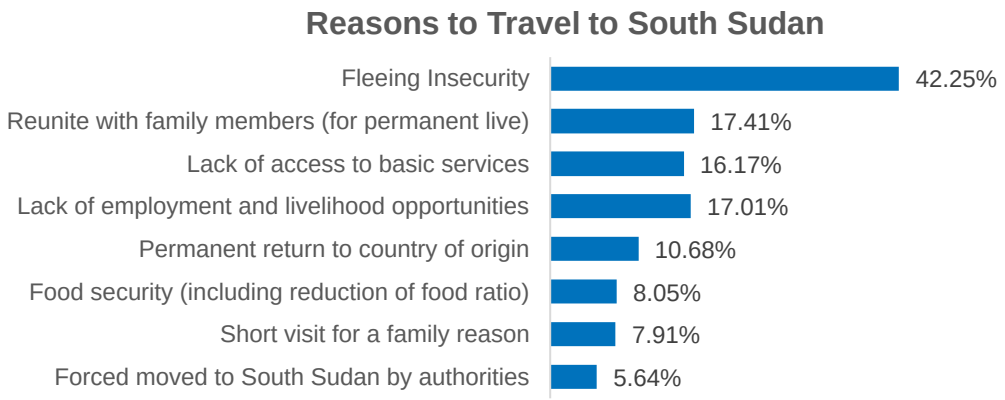
Over 35% of adult women did not intend to stay in South Sudan permanently, a higher percentage than observed in other demographic categories. They are also more likely to travel without children or alone.

The demographic trends reveal a mix of gender, age, and family structure influenced by the unique crossing dynamics at each border. Sudan and Ethiopia see a predominance of female travellers, with a significant number of elderly among long-term returnees, suggesting that families are travelling together. In Uganda, there are more adults than children, likely due to the pendular movement and children remaining behind for education. Kenya experiences mainly short-term crossings, with no elderly travellers and a slight female majority. In contrast, the borders with the DRC and CAR exhibit nearly equal gender representation across all age groups, illustrating a variety of family structures in motion.

2.2. Reasons for return

Analysis of reasons for return mentioned by South Sudanese interviewed at the border crossing points shows that most arrivals (42% of interviewed travellers) have indicated insecurity as the main push factor triggering their travel to South Sudan. Those are the travellers, mainly from Sudan, escaping ongoing insecurity in the country of asylum and degrading situations with access to services. In total, more than 30% of travellers indicated a lack of access to services or livelihood opportunities, while another 8% mentioned food insecurity as another push factor contributing to their decision to return to South Sudan from their country of asylum.

More than 17% of interviewees mentioned that they decided to reunite with family members for permanent return, which remains a strong pull factor for South Sudanese living in neighbouring countries.



Overall, common themes like insecurity, family reunification, and lack of services differ in emphasis depending on the country of origin. For those crossing from Sudan, insecurity is the primary driver, while arrivals from Ethiopia cite food insecurity, lack of services, and tensions with host communities. Uganda's returnees are motivated mainly by short family visits, family reunification, and food insecurity, whereas those from Kenya primarily mention short visits and lack of livelihood opportunities. From the DRC, key reasons include lack of services, food insecurity, and fleeing insecurity, with a notable focus on permanent return and family reunification. In contrast, arrivals from CAR emphasise permanent return, family reunification, and lack of services.

2.3. Travel Destination for Returnees

Travel destinations for those returning to South Sudan vary by country of asylum, with notable differences in destination preferences based on the length of stay and origin. Long-term returnees from Sudan mostly head to their areas of origin deeper within the country, while short-term arrivals prefer locations near the border. Similarly, over 80% of returnees from Ethiopia aim to reach their areas of origin, with pendular movements primarily staying near the border. Uganda's arrivals mostly head to their areas of origin, with children often staying behind in Uganda for schooling. In contrast, most travellers from Kenya are short-term visitors who remain close to the border. Arrivals from DRC and CAR almost entirely return to areas near the respective borders, emphasizing a pattern of regional proximity, especially for those involved in pendular movements.

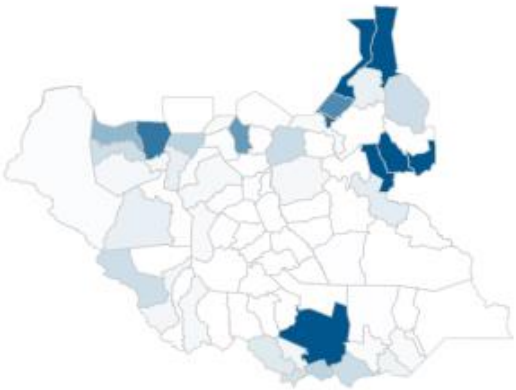
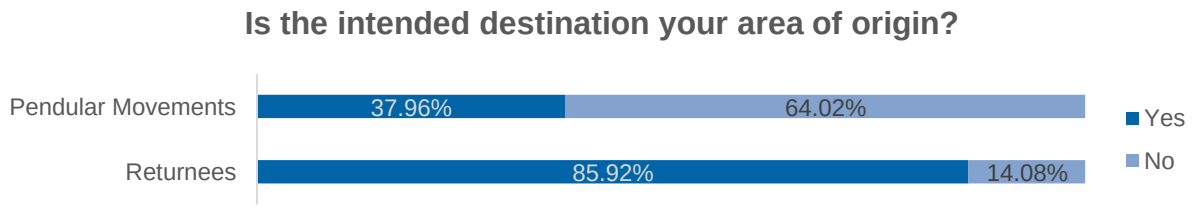
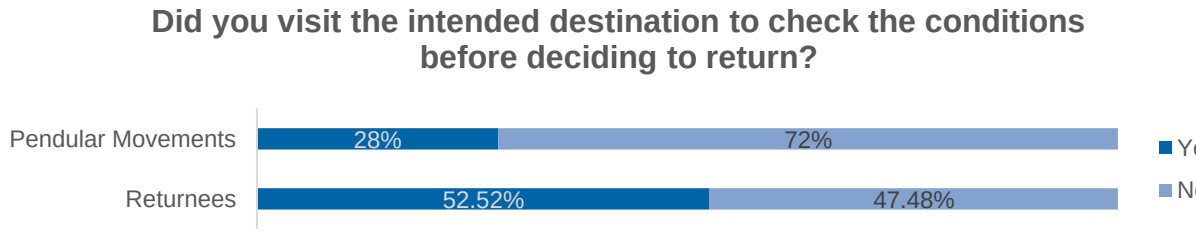


Figure 1: Intended areas of destination





Almost 90% of returnees intended to return to their area of origin, which is generally close to the borders with the respective countries of asylum. More than 50% of returnees visited the area earlier to check for conditions of return. Returnees from Kenya and Uganda were more likely not to have conducted preliminary trips to assess conditions for their return before relocating with their families. Most individuals arriving from Kenya noted that this was their first visit to South Sudan in over six months.

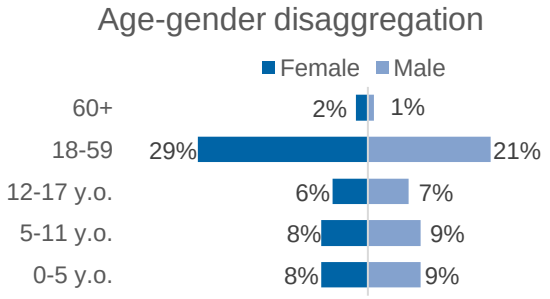
3. Border Monitoring Trends: Sudan

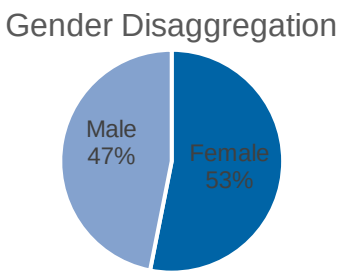
In September 2024, UNHCR partners recorded 18,001 persons of South Sudan nationality crossing the border to South Sudan from Sudan. UNHCR estimates that 14,844 returnees travel to South Sudan to stay for one year or longer, while 1,850 persons arrive short-term for less than one year.

Arrivals (Sudan): per category	***# of arrivals***	***% of total***
Returnees	*15,794*	*88%*
Pendular Movements	*2,207*	*12%*
Transiting	*0*	*0*

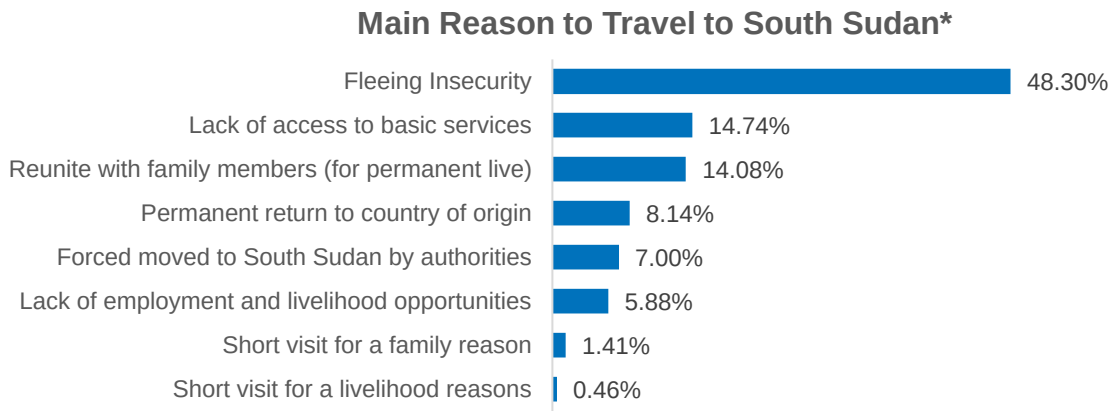
The average number of daily crossings was 4,000, fluctuating between 3,800 to 4,100. The highest number of arrivals from Sudan were registered in Wunthou (Joda), Majokinthou border points.

Arrivals from Sudan are more female (52.95%) than male (47.05%), with the largest age group being females aged 18-59 (29%), while males in the same age group constitute 21%.



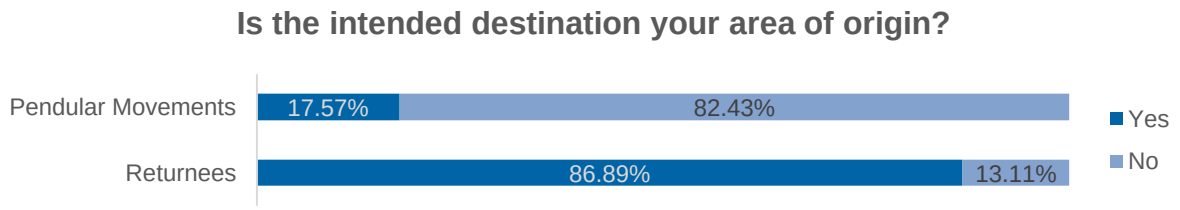


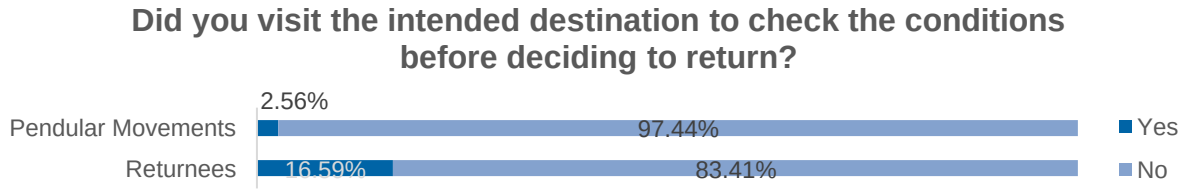
The primary reason for crossing, cited by more than half (48.3%) of respondents interviewed in September, was fleeing insecurity. Other factors include lack of access to essential services (14.74%) and absence of employment and livelihood opportunities (5.9%) as reasons for their return. Additionally, 22% of returnees reported that their primary motivations for returning were reuniting with family members or returning to their country of origin. More than 75% of those interviewed indicated reasons highlighting the involuntary nature of their return from Sudan, driven by factors directly or indirectly linked to the ongoing conflict.



**Respondents could select option*

Among those interviewed who plan to stay in South Sudan for a year or more, 87% indicated that they were returning to their area of origin, and 17% had previously visited the area to assess the conditions for return. Conversely, nearly 85% of those travelling to South Sudan for a short-term stay reported that their destination was not their area of origin. Additionally, long-term returnees travel to locations deeper within the country, while those making short-term, pendular crossings primarily head to areas near the border.





4. Border Monitoring Trends: Ethiopia

In September 2024, UNHCR partner enumerators recorded 9,226 South Sudan nationals from Ethiopia entering South Sudan. Of these, 8,996 were travelling from Ethiopia, 176 from Kenya, and 54 from Uganda.

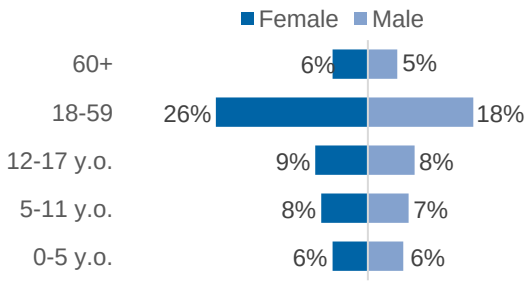
UNHCR estimates that 6,815 of these arrivals were returnees travelling to South Sudan to stay for one year or longer, 2,376 arrived short-term for less than one year, and 35 were transiting to other countries.

Arrivals (Ethiopia): Per category	***# of arrivals***	*Ethiopia*	*COA Kenya*	*Uganda*	***% of total***
Returnees	***6,815***	*6,641*	*138*	*36*	***74%***
Pendular Movements	***2,376***	*2,320*	*38*	*18*	***26%***
Transiting	***35***	*35*			***0***

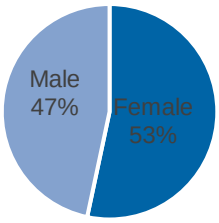
The number of crossings from Ethiopia decreased throughout the month, peaking at 2,700 in the first week and dropping to 1,790 in the last week.

There are slightly more women than men in the age-gender breakdown, with 53.3% women and 46.7% men. While the age distribution across categories is generally balanced, there is a noticeable proportion of individuals aged 60 and above. This trend is even more pronounced among those intending to stay in South Sudan for a year or longer, where 8% of women and 6% of men fall into the 60+ age group, along with representation from all child age categories. This suggests that those planning to stay long-term are likely travelling with their entire family. In contrast, among those making short-term, pendular movements, there is a disproportionately high share of women aged 18-59, with fewer children and elderly individuals.

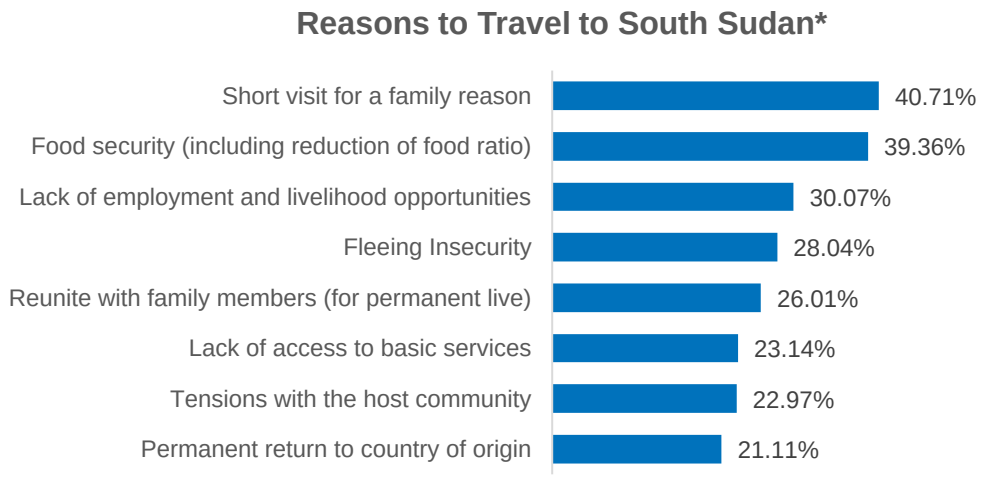
Age-gender disaggregation



Gender Disaggregation



Analysis of South Sudanese returnees at the Ethiopia border shows key reasons for returning are food security (38%), lack of services (23%), lack of opportunities (30%), and fleeing insecurity (28%). In September, 23% also cited tensions with the host community as a reason for leaving. Pull factors include family reunification (27%) and permanent return (21%).



**Respondents could select one or more options*

Over 80% of returnees aim to reach their place of origin, rising to 94% for pendular movements. All travellers from Ethiopia are heading to areas near the border.

5. Border Monitoring Trends: Uganda

In September 2024, UNHCR partners recorded 1,436 South Sudanese from Uganda crossing into South Sudan, including through border points with other countries (54 – Ethiopia, 14 – DRC).

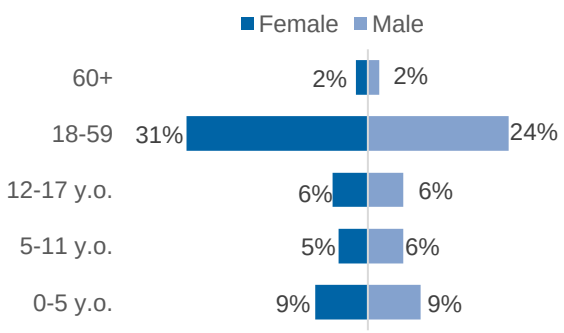
Weekly crossings were stable, averaging around 400 people, ranging from 453 early in the month to 253 by the end.

Out of all these arrivals from Uganda, 883 (61%) were classified as returnees intending to stay for a year or longer, while 550 (39%) arrived for shorter stays. Enumerators also recorded three people transiting to other countries through South Sudan territory.

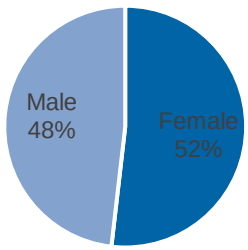
Arrivals (Uganda): per category	***# of arrivals***	*Bordering Uganda*	*country Ethiopia*	*DRC*	***% of total***
Returnees	***883***	*827*	*36*	*13*	***61%***
Pendular Movements	***550***	*531*	*18*	*1*	***39%***
Transiting	***3***	*3*			***0***

The age-gender breakdown of arrivals from Uganda differs from that of other borders, showing more adults compared to school-aged children. This disparity is due to two factors: the high proportion of pendular movement (40% of crossings) and children staying in the country of asylum for schooling. The imbalance is even more pronounced among those involved in pendular movements.

Age-gender disaggregation

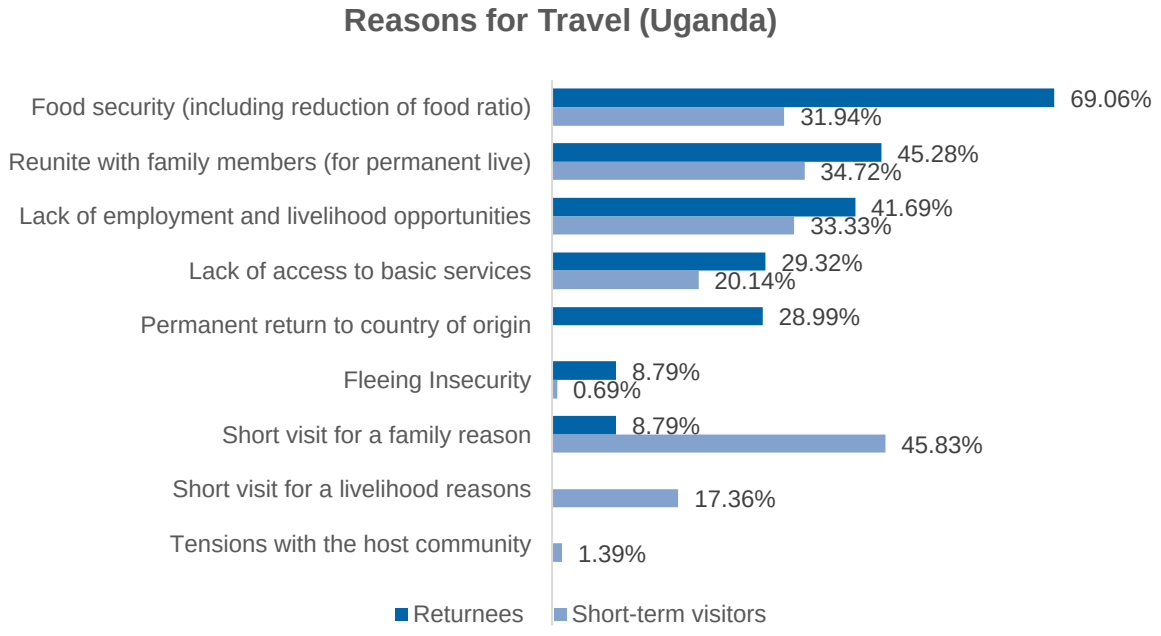


Gender Disaggregation



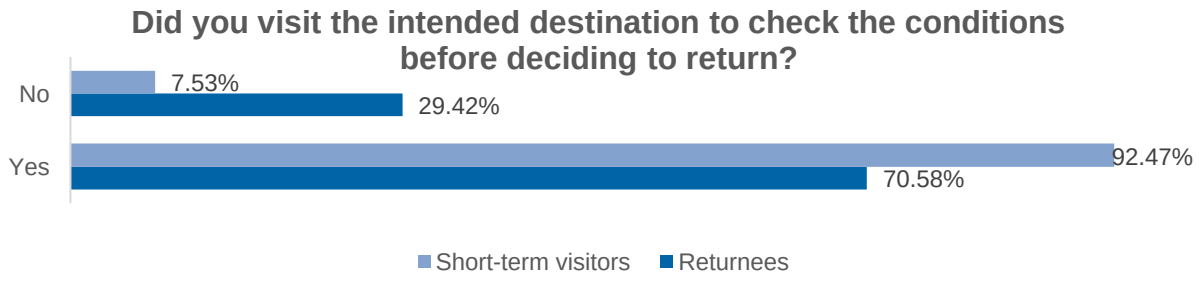
Analysis of South Sudanese returnees crossing from Uganda shows that among those intending to stay permanently, nearly 70% cited food insecurity, along with lack of employment (42%) and basic services (29%). Positive factors, like family reunification and returning home, motivated at least 44%. In the category of short visitors, 46% mentioned family and livelihood reasons (17%), explaining the high number of pendular movements at the Uganda border.

Over 30% returned to reunite with family permanently, while 9% returned to their country of origin.



**Respondents could select one or more options*

More than 98% of individuals crossing from Uganda intended to return to their original area for long and short stays. Nearly 70% of long-term returnees had recently visited their area to evaluate conditions. In contrast, 93% of short-term travellers had done so, suggesting a pattern of pendular movement in their motivation to travel.



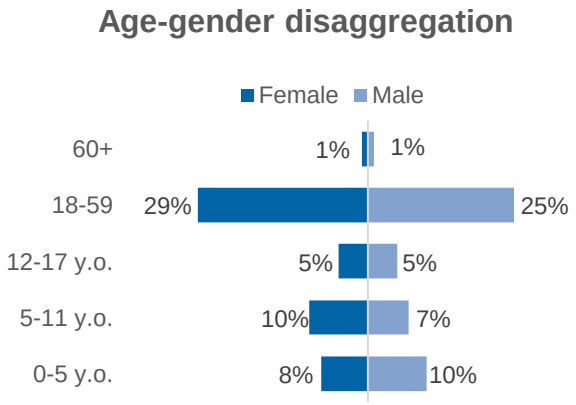
6. Border Monitoring Trends: Kenya

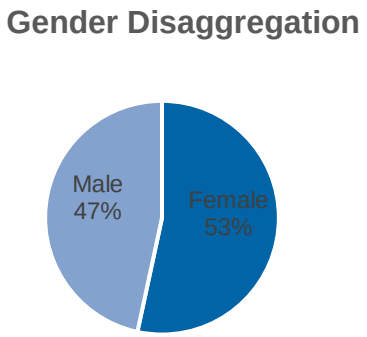
In September 2024, 243 South Sudanese individuals were recorded crossing into South Sudan at the border points with Kenya, with weekly arrivals averaging about 100 people. In addition to these 243 arrivals, 176 South Sudanese who left Kenya entered South Sudan from the border with Ethiopia, and one person crossed from Uganda.

Out of 420 arrivals from Kenya, 147 (35%) were categorised as returnees planning to stay for a year or longer, whereas 273 (65%) came for shorter visits. Notably, among those crossing from Kenya, only 3% (8 individuals) were classified as long-term returnees, while 235 were short-term visitors.

Arrivals (Kenya): per category	***# of arrivals***	*Bordering country* *Kenya*	*Ethiopia*	*Uganda*	***% of total***
Returnees	***147***	*8*	*138*	*1*	***35%***
Pendular Movements	***273***	*235*	*38*		***65%***
Transiting	***0***				***0***

The gender breakdown shows a slight majority of women (53%) compared to men (47%). Notably, the number of individuals aged 60+ who have crossed is very low, likely due to the predominantly pendular nature of movements at the Kenya border.

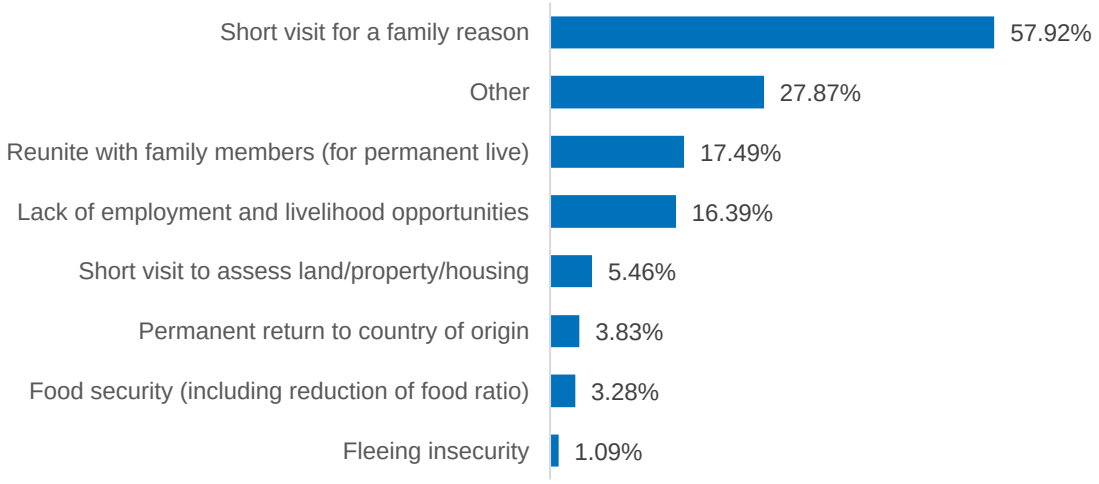




An analysis of the motivations behind South Sudanese returnees at the Kenya border reveals a pendular movement pattern. Nearly 60% reported that short family visits were their reason for crossing, while 17% sought family reunification. At least 16% cited employment scarcity, lack of livelihood opportunities, and food insecurity as factors that prompted them to leave their country of asylum.

Over 95% of those surveyed indicated that this was their first trip to South Sudan in the past six months. Furthermore, more than half of the newcomers from Kenya (133 individuals) identified Juba as their destination, all originating from Kakuma camp.

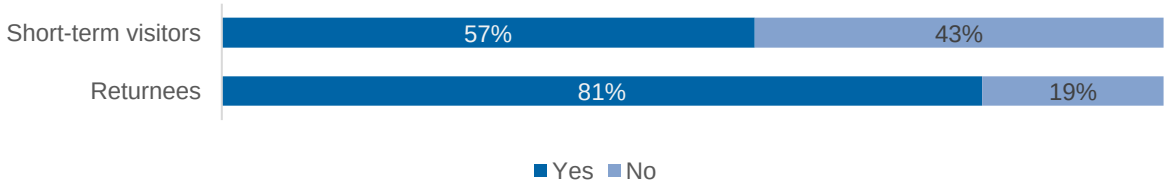
Reasons for Travel (Kenya)



**Respondents could select one or more options*

More than 40% of short-term visitors travelled to areas outside their area of origin. Among those returning for long-term stays, a significant portion of individuals crossing from Uganda aimed to reach their area of origin. This applies to both long- and short-term stays.

Is the intended destination your area of origin?



7. Border Monitoring Trends: DRC

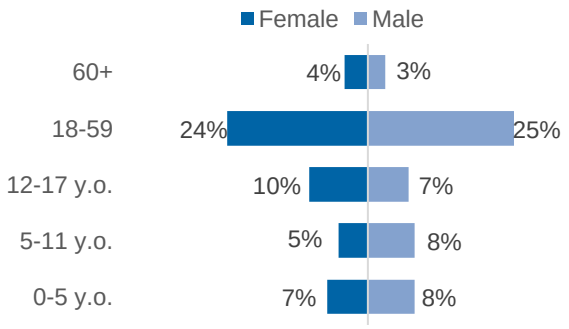
In September 2024, 241 South Sudanese returned to South Sudan from the DRC. Of them, 174 came through the DRC border, 54 transited through CAR, and 13 through Uganda. Weekly arrivals remained consistent, averaging approximately 70 individuals.

UNHCR estimates that 63% (153 individuals) were classified as returnees planning to stay long-term, 35% (85 individuals) were short-term visitors, and 1% (3 individuals) were planning to transit through South Sudan territory, travelling to other countries.

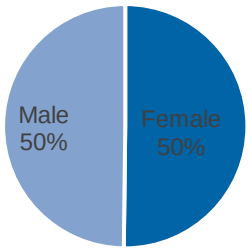
Arrivals (DRC): per category	***# of arrivals***	*Bordering country*			***% of total***
		DRC	*CAR*	*Uganda*	
Returnees	***153***	*93*	*50*	*10*	***51%***
Pendular Movements	***85***	*81*	*1*	*3*	***49%***
Transiting	***3***		*3*		***0***

The age-gender analysis of arrivals from DRC shows an almost equal distribution, with 50.2% women and 49,8% men. All age groups are represented among the arrivals, with a relatively high share of the 12-17 age category and the 60+ age group, which indicate long-term return arrivals. This is reinforced by the fact that, unlike in other countries, almost 70% of interviewed arrivals do not have remaining household members in the country of asylum.

Age-gender disaggregation

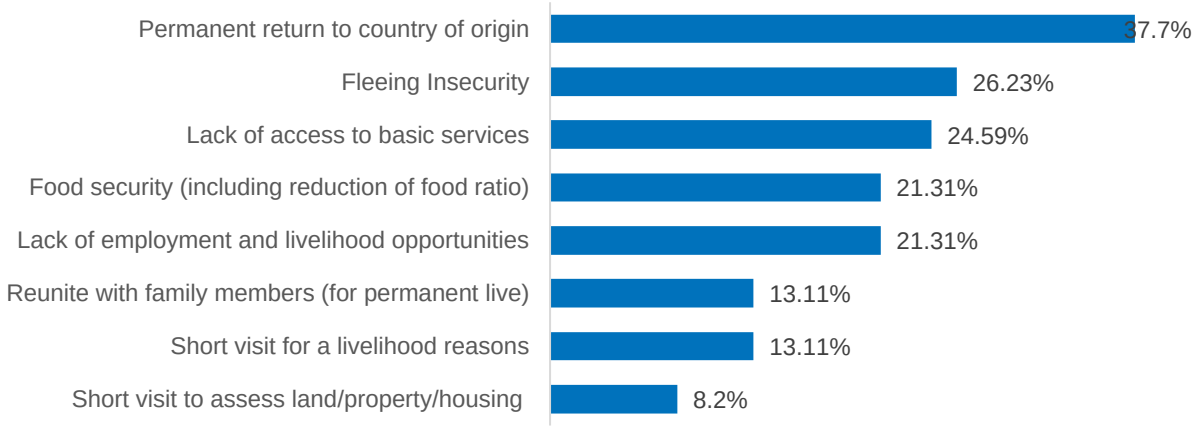


Gender Disaggregation



Analysis of South Sudanese arrivals from DRC shows that the main reasons for travel for almost 40% are the return to their country of origin, and to flee insecurity (for 26% of respondents). At the same time, more than 20% mentioned lack of access to services, food security, and lack of livelihood opportunities.

Reasons to Travel to South Sudan (DRC)*



**Respondents could select one or more options*

All arrivals from DRC were headed to areas near the CAR border, with 100% indicating that their intended destination was their area of origin. More than half of them stated that they had visited the area earlier to check the conditions of their return.

Visit to the area previously to check the conditions for return

8. Border Monitoring Trends: CAR

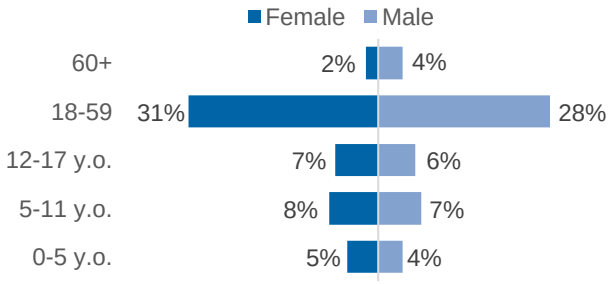
In September 2024, UNHCR partner enumerators recorded 198 South Sudanese returning from CAR. Eighty-eight crossed into South Sudan at the border points with CAR, while 110 travelled through DRC territory. Weekly arrivals from CAR fluctuated between 13 and 43 people.

According to the new methodology, out of 198 arrivals from CAR, 92 (46%) were classified as returnees intending to stay for at least one year, while 106 (54%) were short-term visitors.

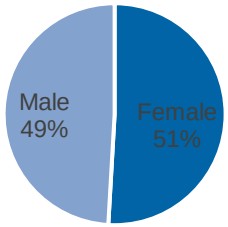
Arrivals (CAR): per category	***# of arrivals***	*Bordering DRC*	*country CAR*	***% of total***
Returnees	***92***	*45*	*47*	***46%***
Pendular Movements	***106***	*65*	*41*	***54%***
Transiting	***0***	*0*	*0*	***0***

The age-gender analysis of arrivals from CAR shows a nearly equal split, with 51% women and 49% men. All age groups are represented among the arrivals.

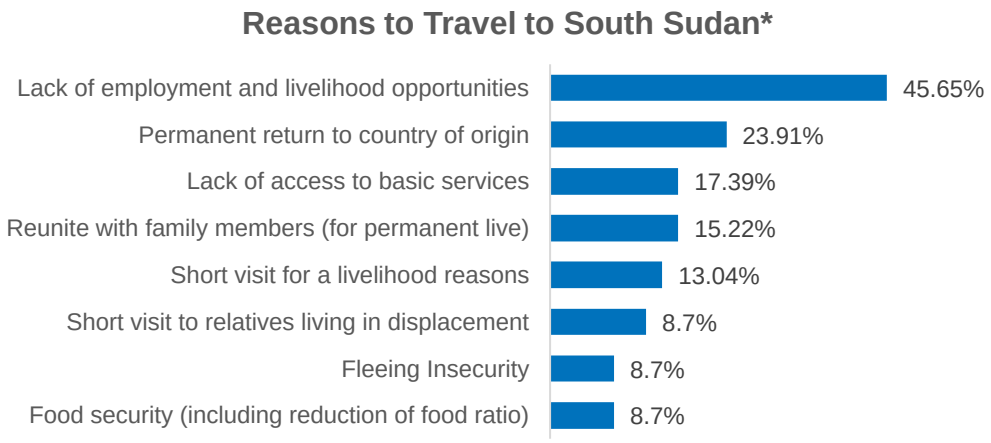
Age-gender disaggregation



Gender Disaggregation

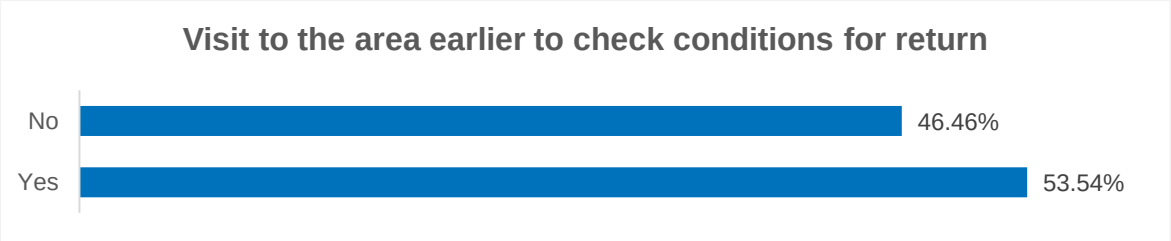


The top reasons for return from CAR in September were lack of employment and livelihood opportunities (46%), permanent return to the country of origin (24%), family reunification (15%), and lack of access to services (17%). Only about 13% cited short family visits as their reason for travel.



**Respondents could select one or more options*

All arrivals were headed to areas near the CAR border, with 100% indicating that their intended destination was their area of origin. Similar to arrivals from the DRC, just over half mentioned visiting the area earlier to check conditions for return.



Notably, the reasons for arrivals from CAR differed from those traveling from DRC. For those from CAR, lack of access to services and opportunities was a top reason, while for those from DRC, permanent return and family reunification were the primary motivations.

Annexes

Border Monitoring Methodology

Objectives

UNHCR South Sudan border monitoring aims to improve information relating to the South Sudanese population flows returning to South Sudan from its neighbouring countries. This will help understand the current return movement trends, assess the protection needs of the returnee population, and better prepare the operational response in South Sudan at the national and field office levels.

Analytical framework, data collection methods and analysis

Border monitoring is conducted by border monitors and enumerators hired by UNHCR's partners with the support of the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC). Joint UNHCR/IOM/RRC border monitoring occurs at the border crossing points with Sudan and Ethiopia.

Enumerators collect data directly from incoming and outgoing individuals and households crossing the border points.

For the spontaneous return monitoring, border monitors identify and interview SSD nationals travelling into South Sudan (inflow movement). This excludes individuals or groups who are part of recognised daily or pendular movements. They may also interview non-South Sudanese individuals and households crossing the border.

UNHCR partners exercise a presence and collect data at 42 official border points as agreed with the RRC at South Sudan's borders with Sudan, Chad, Ethiopia, CAR, DRC, Uganda, and Kenya. The South Sudan Government (RRC) has identified these border points as the main crossing points used by South Sudanese returnees.

Border monitoring enumerators conduct household-level interviews daily, for a minimum of five days each week, eight hours per day. IOM/UNHCR maintains a 24/7 presence at the Wunthow (Joda) border point in Renk County.

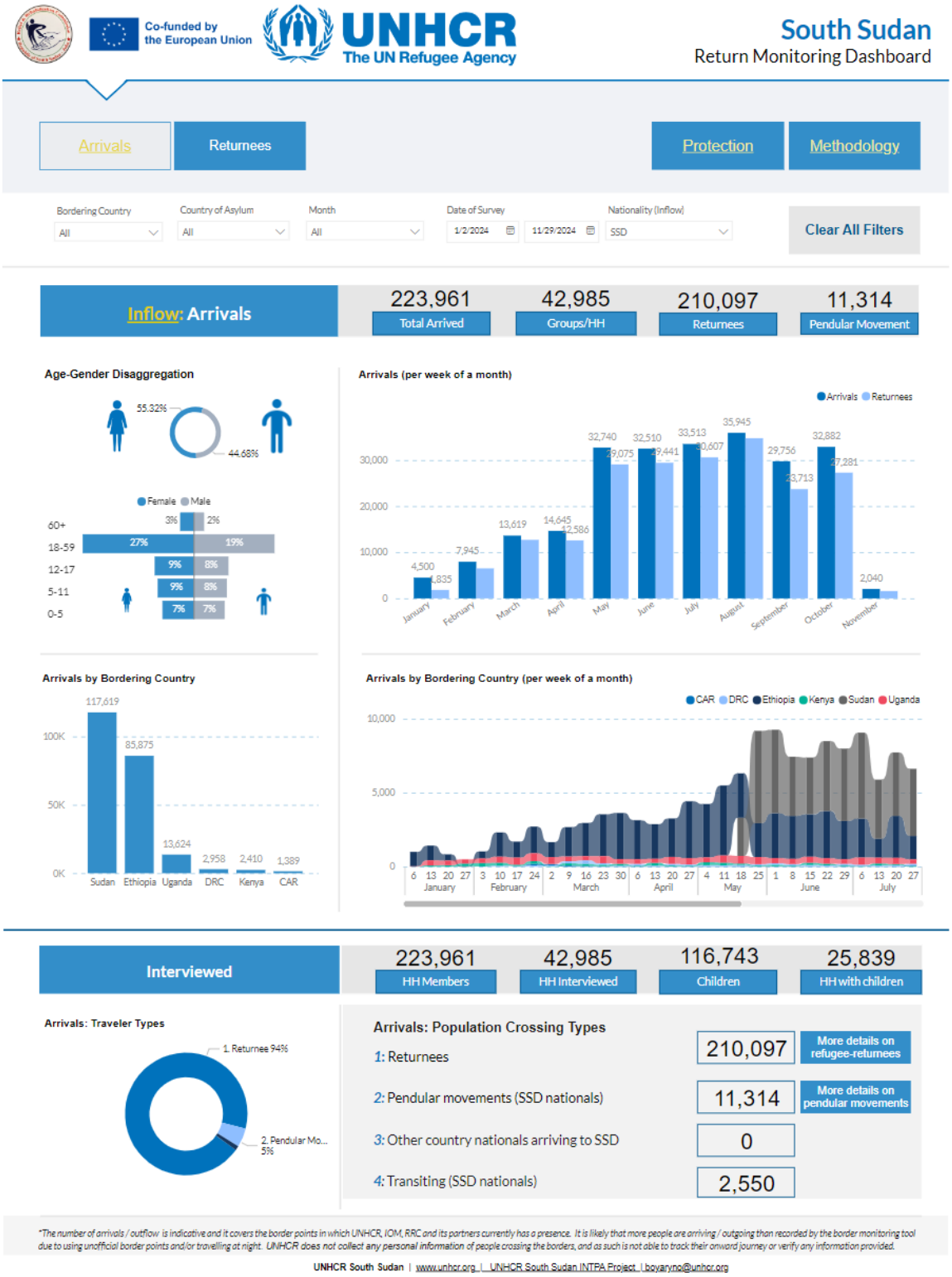
Limitations

The number of arrivals serves as an indicator, reflecting the border points where UNHCR, IOM, RRC, and their partners currently operate. However, it's probable that the actual number of arrivals exceeds those captured by the border monitoring tool, as some individuals may be using unofficial (unmonitored) border crossings or traveling at night.

UNHCR does not collect any personal data from individuals crossing the borders, which prevents them from tracking subsequent journeys or verifying any information given.

South Sudan Return Monitoring Dashboard

https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiOGU3MTQ3YTYtZTMxNi00ZWVkLWE3YjctMTdlNjM1MDIzNjM5IiwidCI6ImU1YzM3OTgxLTY2NjQtNDEzNC04YTBjLTY1NDNkMmFmODBiZSIsImMiOjh9



BORDER MONITORING REPORT
2024

South Sudan
Spontaneous Return Monitoring

October 2024

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