

# **2019 Returnees Scenario Planning Report**

## 1. Introduction

This brief takes stock of different data sources available on returns, aiming to provide a snapshot in time of current trends in the country. Multiple agencies (OCHA, IOM DTM, REACH, WFP VAM, Protection Cluster and UNHCR) contributed their datasets to support joint analysis to strengthen the evidence base on returns. Considering that data was deemed insufficient at this stage to come up with a comprehensive set of reliable projections on likely developments of return trends in the months ahead, this document instead highlights what is known to date and identifies data gaps, which ought to be filled in order to support exercises of a similar nature. The brief focuses on trends rather than absolute numbers, given that most data sources consulted do not collect data on returnee figures, and looks at both returnee flow from neighbouring countries back to South Sudan as well as returns within South Sudan. It is the first of what is meant to be a regular inter-agency exercise to gain a better collective understanding of the trends and trajectory of population movement.

### 1.1 Key messages

- Whilst most areas of South Sudan reported returns movements over the past 12 months, these appeared to only represent a fraction of those that have been displaced since 2013.
- In the Equatorias region, return movements appeared to be primarily partial household returns, cautiously testing the ground, whilst retaining strong family links to refugee settlements in Uganda and Kenya.
- Information for the Greater Bahr-el-Ghazals overall remains rather patchy, but for the Wau PoC AA site, intentions survey findings suggest that a fifth of the remaining population of 15,272 individuals intend to depart in the first quarter of 2019, continuing the

- population decline in the PoC site observed throughout 2018.
- In Greater Upper Nile, findings suggest that return movements on a larger scale from Sudan to Panyikang/Fangak are primarily driven by difficult living conditions in displacement sites, whilst movements via Renk from Sudan towards the western bank seem to be related to more direct pull factors such as family reunification.
- Overall, whilst return dynamics vary according to locality, across different areas, it is mainly partial households that are observed to be returning in staggered phases. Given urban areas are considered as key transit areas to acquire resources and information and potentially reside in longer term, given their higher service presence and economic opportunities, these could see increased population inflows in 2019.
- Overall, observed trends could be classified as driven by a mix of 'cautious optimism' in some areas versus 'coping strategy' in other areas, to cope with difficult living conditions in displacement sites, particularly in view of reduced access to assistance. From a needs perspective, the poor humanitarian situation in some key areas of return are of concern, with all counties that reported greater numbers of returns in northern Jonglei, and Upper Nile classified as IPC Phase 4 as of September 2018.
- Conflict sensitivity in both the analysis and response to returns will be a key issue to ensure a "do no harm" approach. Major unmet preconditions to more permanent returns include access to basic services, access to food, and uncertainty in regard to the security outlook and resolution of housing, land and property issues. The potential role of authorities in assisting returns remains an issue that requires further analysis. A better understanding of what

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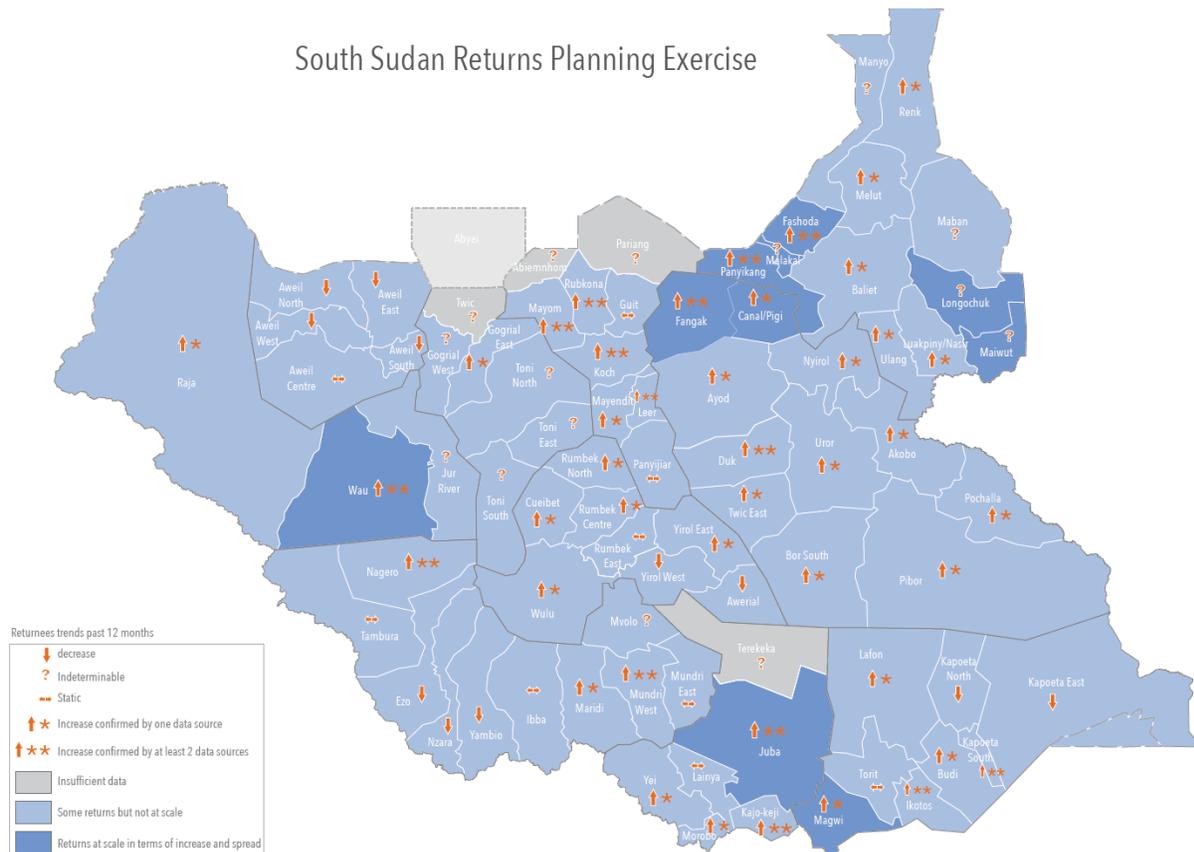
pre-conditions South Sudanese communities need to see in place to enable them to return is also needed.

- The factors to watch in 2019 that may impact return movements include progress on the implementation of Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) as well as political developments in neighbouring countries. Furthermore, it will be necessary to observe how seasonal patterns may affect both temporary and longer-term movements of populations. Likewise, disease outbreaks, for instance, Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) has the potential to change movement patterns: if an outbreak were confirmed in South Sudan, this could act as a barrier

to return, but if an outbreak spreads abroad, this could act as a push factor, including in already affected DRC and potentially affected Uganda.

- All factors remaining constant, it is expected that returns would continue to evolve on a cautious path, whereby seemingly more stable locations with access to services could see higher levels of return, whilst any renewed or continuing conflict and communal clashes may trigger further displacements. However, there remain many unknown factors, including the degree to which political actors will push for increased returns, with facilitated returns having the potential to drastically change the scale of flows.

**Map: Stock-taking of return trends observed through a combination of data sources in 2018**



## 2. Methodology

The exercise took stock of available data sources, seeking to obtain a better understanding of both presence of returnees and trends over the past 6-12 months. Table 1 summarizes the different data sources consulted:

**Table 1**

<b>Data source</b>	<b>Type of assessment</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Type of data</b>	<b>Methodology</b>
<b>IOM - DTM</b>	Mobility tracking	July-August 2018	Returnee numbers per location and year of arrival	Key informant (KI) interviews based data collection at payam level with direct observation
<b>REACH</b>	Area of Knowledge (AoK)	Dec 2017 – Dec 2018 (monthly)	Percentage of assessed settlements reporting presence of returnees	KI interviews with people in or coming from the settlements concerned
<b>WFP VAM</b>	FSNMS	Round 22 July/August	Percentage of sampled households reporting to be returnees	Randomly sampled households
<b>DTM/REACH</b>	Flow/ Port Monitoring	July-December 2018	Movement trends of people coming from abroad into South Sudan intending to stay for longer periods	Household-level surveys conducted at key transit hubs
<b>OCHA</b>	Field Reports	Dec 2017-Dec 2018	Various	Various
<b>UNHCR/REACH</b>	Spontaneous refugee returns Monitoring Pilot	Oct – Dec 2018	Movement trends of people coming from abroad into South Sudan intending to stay for longer periods	Purposive sampled household surveys
<b>UNHCR</b>	Protection Profiling and Intention Surveys	May – Dec 2018	Intention data on preferred areas of return	Household-level surveys conducted at PoC and collective sites

Since no single data source provides nation-wide analysis, the group focused on convergence of different sources of evidence in order to determine the current return situation in each county. Based on Food Security and Nutrition Monitoring System (FSNMS), mobility tracking (MT) and Area of Knowledge (AoK) data, it was possible to make tentative statements about increasing, stagnating or decreasing return trends, at different levels of confidence depending on the

degree of convergence between the different sources and whether multiple or only one data sources were available for a given county. This was further complemented through qualitative data sources and validated with a broader group of stakeholders during the Returns Scenario Retreat convened by OCHA on 18 January 2019. Nevertheless, significant data gaps remained - see Limitations/Gaps section.

For presence of returnees, the group distinguished between the following categories to rank locations: insufficient data, some returns but not at scale, returns at scale in terms of absolute figures and/or geographic spread. For trends of the past 12 months with a confidence score, the group consulted returnee figures as reported by DTM Mobility Tracking Round 3 (July-August 2018, with data calculated forward for the last four months of 2018) and REACH Area of Knowledge data (December 2017 versus December 2018 to allow for comparison of 2017 to 2018 returnee numbers in assessed areas). These were complemented by qualitative information and expert judgement to rate each county along the following categories: increase (of figures and/or geographic spread) reported by at least two data sources – higher confidence; increases reported by one data source – lower confidence; static; decrease reported. It is important to keep in mind that none of the data sources had country-wide coverage, as such; a lower confidence does not equate to contradiction in sources, but rather to lack of additional evidence to triangulate the observed trends. Moreover, results only indicate the presence of returnees but do not assess the suitability of these areas for returns or whether people remain there permanently.

In terms of the returnee definition, the group, in principle, agreed that distinctions should be

### 2.0 Data gaps/limitations

Significant data gaps were identified, which made it difficult to project, at this stage in time, possible future return trends. The most critical gap relates to understanding the intentions' and pre-conditions for return as perceived by those currently displaced within the country and abroad. Whereas intentions surveys and profiling data was available for some of the Protection of Civilians (PoC) sites, little is known about intentions of the displaced living within

made such as whether someone is returning to their habitual residence, relocating/resettling to an area of their choice, or integrating in their current location, and that specific timeframes ought to be considered, since at some point returnees essentially become parts of the host community. It was noted that for most data sources, there is ambiguity in the terminology used and understood by those collecting and contributing data at the field level. Road/ flow monitoring data does not allow this report to ascertain with confidence, whether someone will be a returnee, since intentions can change along the route and respondents are not asked directly if they consider themselves to be returnees. As such, the reference to returnees' presence in the analysis provided needs to be understood pragmatically, acknowledging it will also include some individuals in transit or using locations as transit points on the way to their final location of return, relocation or resettlement. It is also acknowledged that reporting on returns from abroad can have unintended effects on neighbouring countries' perceptions as to the need for providing asylum, hence the authors would like to underline that asylum space and international protection for South Sudanese nationals remains critical given the continued uncertainty over the future trajectory of the peace agreement implementation in South Sudan.

the host communities or the over 2 million individuals displaced abroad. As such, conducting intentions surveys in neighbouring countries' refugee camps as well as expanding the scope of coverage of return intention focused data collection activities within South Sudan are deemed critical to enable projections about expected future trends.

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Another critical gap relates to the scarcity of documented conflict scenarios to use as a basis for analysis on the impact of different possible scenarios in the conflict, especially on return trends. It would be useful to engage with conflict analysts in mapping out possible scenarios based on assumptions about growing, stagnating or decreasing stability, in order to determine the broader impact on the country's trajectory as well as the impact on displacement and return trends. Another factor currently unclear which has the potential to change the returns' landscape is to which extent national authorities will engage and support facilitated returns.

With regards to the data sources consulted, it was noted that some had not purposefully collected data on returnees, leading to potential under-representation of returnee households. Whilst some sources did not yet have data available on developments following the signing of the peace agreement, projections done to undertake the analysis are not necessarily reflective of the actual evolution of returnee figures in the final quarter of 2018. Aligning information from REACH port/road

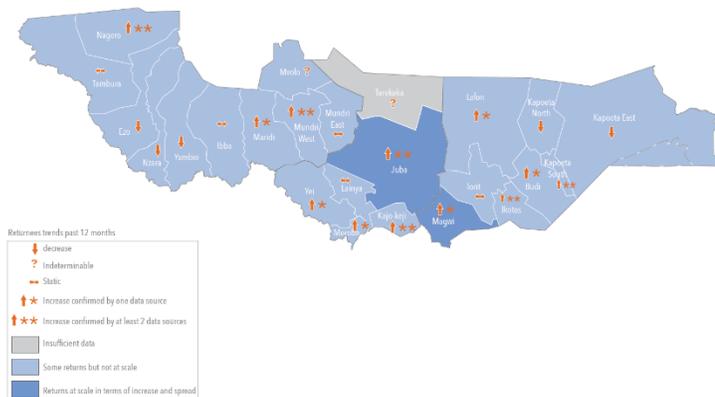
monitoring and IOM flow monitoring also brought some challenges due to different definitions used to explain the reasons for the journey, making it difficult to gauge whether these are likely returns or other movements.

The relatively limited timeframe for the exercise also made it challenging to obtain timely inputs from all actors, comprehensively consult all qualitative data sources available and to obtain systematic inputs from local coordination forums. However, attempts were made to feed in information from the field level through field coordination focal points, key informant networks and the combined knowledge of actors contributing to the exercise. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that “no data” does not equal “no returns”. Future efforts need to be focused on filling some of the data gaps identified, including gaining a better understanding of return dynamics in urban settings. In order to gain a better understanding of scale of returns from abroad versus from within the country, it would be necessary to distinguish more clearly between refugee returnees and IDP returnees.

### 3.1 Greater Equatoria region

#### Map: Stock-taking of return trends in 2018 - Greater Equatoria

Greater Equatoria Returns Map



The Greater Equatoria region has seen widespread displacement following the eruption of fighting in Juba in July 2016. While a large proportion of those displaced crossed the border to neighbouring countries - primarily Uganda but also Kenya, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the Central African Republic (CAR) – a sizeable proportion sought shelter inside South Sudan by moving away from

major towns and main roads in fear of retaliation by armed personnel. While general mobility of South Sudanese has increased along border

points and within R-ARCSS, permanent returns toward areas of origin remain localized.

As of the end of 2018, South Sudanese living in countries neighbouring the Equatoria region were increasingly mobile. Daily cross-border movements increased between refugee settlements and areas within South Sudan as a growing number of displaced persons travelled back to their settlements of origin - mostly to verify conditions on the ground or to look for income-generating activities. In most counties assessed by REACH and from which large outflows took place since the onset of conflict, a majority of assessed settlements reported presence of returnees in December 2018 (Yei river area, Western Equatoria, Magwi and Torit). However, permanent returns are likely not occurring on a large-scale and appear to remain localized to urban centers or areas with relatively more stability for prolonged periods, particularly where livelihood opportunities are perceived to be more sustainable such as Juba and Magwi County.

In Mundri West and Morobo counties where populations were internally displaced to remote areas away from main roads over a year prior before the signing of the R-ARCSS, increased mobility was noted among Internally Displaced People (IDPs). Partners reported that roads were increasingly busy and IDPs are more likely to travel toward urban or semi-urban centers. IOM DTM Mobility Tracking revealed that both counties had seen a large increase in the number of IDPs reported to have returned to their habitual residence in 2018 contrary to 2017. However, in both counties, the proportion of individuals reported to have returned is a small fraction of the population who reported to remain displaced. Further reports indicated that some IDPs households have begun to move back closer to their original settlements, but are temporarily settling strategically in areas that

provide easier access to services, markets and income-generating activities. Among the IDPs populations displaced by recent waves of insecurity along the Yambio-Nagero axis of Western Equatoria, reports from partners suggest that some are returning to their areas of origin such as Nagero County, but many remain wary of returning to areas that have changed and during the insecurity period. While local initiatives to hold meetings among signatories of the R-ARCSS have reportedly contributed to build confidence, reluctance to return permanently to various remote areas of the Equatoria region suggests that broader confidence-building measures are expected by the refugee / IDP population to support their decision making about returning home.

Meanwhile, continued incidents of armed conflicts in the Yei River area, the Maridi / Mundri axis and in southern Juba County towards the end of 2018 sent a negative signal to both IDPs and refugees who may have intended to return. Even in marginally stable areas such as the Greater Torit area (Magwi, Torit and Ikotos Counties), returns from neighbouring countries did not occur on a large-scale over the past few months, and presence of returnees in those areas appeared to be temporary, in contrast to permanent returns. It was observed that refugees preferred to retain ties to the country of asylum to continue having access to services in the refugee settlements in order to cope with limited access to food, services and livelihood opportunities. For example, it was reported that many of those that returned to Magwi and Torit in the second part of 2018 quickly went back to the refugee settlements of Uganda and Kenya following crops' failure. While returnees to the Equatoria region would likely be able to re-build agricultural schemes relatively rapidly compared to other parts of South Sudan, returnee households lack support in terms of tools and agronomic inputs while coping



for locations such as Cueibet, Rumbek Centre, Rumbek North, Wulu and Yirol East.

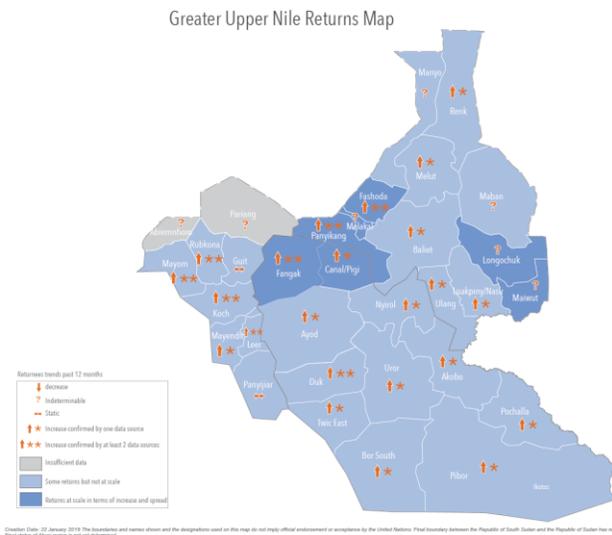
For Northern Bahr El Ghazal, there are overall less returnees reported to have arrived in 2018 as compared to 2017. According to REACH AoK data, between 18-44 per cent of assessed settlements reported presence of returnees in December 2018. As such, there appeared to be a decline or at least stagnation in the volume of returns, while the geographic spread remained limited. Warrap remains relatively under-assessed. However, AoK data suggests that 83% of assessed settlements in Gogrial West report presence of returnees, as well as 50% of assessed settlements in Tonj North. Tonj South and Tonj East reported slightly lower figures (44% and 33% respectively) while no data is available for Twic and Gogrial West. Displacement in the area has been linked to cattle raiding primarily, whilst poor weather conditions and food insecurity are further push factors. Preliminary FSNMS data available on Gogrial East showed that 7% of surveyed households identified as returnees, an increase from the previous round where none of the sampled households reported as such. The strongest evidence base is available for Wau in Western Bahr El Ghazal. Mobility tracking AoK data indicated that there is an increase in scale and geographic spread of returns. This is further underlined by other types of assessments – for example, monthly headcount data from the Wau PoC AA site showed a steady decline in the number of site residents throughout the 2018, and an intention survey conducted in the same

site highlighted that a fifth (20%) of the remaining population intended to depart in the first quarter of 2019.

Both displacement and return trends have been very localized in Wau, with areas of former habitual residence as well as intended return concentrated in Wau North, Wau South, and to a lesser extent Bagari and Beselia. That those who have moved out of the PoC sites continue to live in close proximity is also visible during monthly food distributions, where the number of beneficiaries (authenticated through their fingerprints) remained well over 30,000 – i.e. more than double the resident population. Lack of basic services outside the Wau PoC site is another factor negatively impacting the population's ability to return. For other areas of Western Bahr El Ghazal, the evidence is a bit more sketchy. While for Jur River, returnee presence is confirmed by multiple data sources, the direction of the trend is unclear, with AoK data indicating a stable geographic spread of settlements reporting presence of returnees (73% versus 67% relative to the previous year). Data suggested fewer returnees' arrivals in 2018 compared to 2017. For Raja, there is an increase in assessed settlements reporting presence of IDPs (97% in December 2018 compared to 60% in December 2017), whilst FSNMS data indicate 15% of sampled households declared to be returnees. Nevertheless, it remains unclear in how far these trends are representative of Raja at large, or only of urban concentrations such as Raja Town.

### 3.3 Greater Upper Nile

**Map: Stock-taking of return trends in 2018, Greater Upper Nile**



Consisting of Unity, Jonglei and Upper Nile states the Greater Upper Nile region has seen sustained levels of displacement since the eruption of conflict in 2013, hosting approx. 968,000 IDPs as of December 2018 - the largest proportion of IDPs among the three greater regions of South Sudan. In the same time period, neighbouring Sudan and Ethiopia host 852,080 and 422,240 South Sudanese refugees respectively, many of them originating from the GUN region. As demonstrated in the above map, the vast majority of counties in this region could be described as having reported some return movements over the past 12 months but not at scale, while for the Panyikang/Fangak/Canal-Pigi, Maiwut/Longochuk and Fashoda areas, located in northern Jonglei and Upper Nile states returns at scale in terms of absolute figures and/or geographic spread were noted. Data was insufficient to arrive at conclusions for Abiemnhom and Pariang counties in northern Unity.

### Unity

Counties in Unity reported some returns but not at scale, albeit at varying degrees. According to REACH AoK and IOM DTM Mobility Tracking, Mayom and Rubkona report relatively higher returnee presence, likely from Bentiu PoC, as compared to Panyijiar and Guit for which trend data suggests that the presence of returnees remained static over the past 12 months. In Guit, this may be due to recurrent incidents of insecurity making this location less suitable for returns whilst for Panyijiar large distances between displacement and return location may be a key factor. Central Unity saw a combination of return movements: Localized IDP returns of those displaced by conflict in May 2018 took place from nearby remote locations, largely the Sudd islands, back into previously more populated mainland settlements, which often coincided with food distribution sites; as well as a few IDP returns from Bentiu PoC. Given the widespread negative impact of recurrent years of conflict in Central Unity on food insecurity and livelihoods, current IDP returns appear to be primarily of those displaced during the 2018 conflict, while those displaced longer and further such as to Panyijiar or Juba PoC 3 are yet to return on a larger scale.

### Jonglei

With the exception on Fangak and Canal-Pigi, explained in the Upper Nile section due to similarity in dynamics, all counties of Jonglei reported to have noted some returns but not at scale. Probably due to low overall service presence, relative economic and geographic isolation and persistent food insecurity, Ayod saw a comparatively lower reported returnee presence than the Bor South-Duk corridor. The Greater Pibor area also saw some returns, mainly from Ethiopia driven reportedly by inter-communal conflict in Gambella. Within Greater Akobo, presence of returnees in Akobo county appears to be comparatively higher than in Uror and Nyirol, which may be due to the geographic proximity of Akobo to neighbouring Ethiopia,

offering better economic opportunities as well as the ability to retain family ties to refugees' camps in Gambella. More broadly, overall inflow levels via Akobo remained low and net outflows continued to far surpass net inflows over the past 12 months, which could have been partially influenced by an ongoing verification exercise in refugee camps in Ethiopia. A recent intention survey conducted in late December 2018 shows that over a quarter of Bor PoC residents discuss leaving the PoC site, out of which 29% consider as first choice their place of origin as intended destination and 21% their place of habitual residence; with Uror by far being the preferred destination, followed by Akobo, Ayod and Bor counties.

### *Upper Nile*

Within the Greater Upper Nile region, the majority of counties reporting returns at scale are located within Upper Nile. In Renk REACH port and road monitoring found that inflows from Sudan to South Sudan continued to exceed outflows over the past three months, with inflows reported towards Renk, Melut, Maban and Fashoda counties as well as to Malakal PoC site and primarily motivated by family reunification. Qualitative information from Malakal PoC suggests that households returning by way of Malakal PoC site may use this as a family reunification hub before some household members proceeded to more remote settlements in order to assess security and available services. According to CCCM data, Aburoc in Fashoda reportedly also saw new returnees from Sudan in November and December 2018. However, due to acute water shortages, most reported returns merely used Aburoc as a family reunification site before proceeding to other areas. Lul and Kodok reported arrival of IDPs from Aburoc, while reports of increasing food insecurity, matched by REACH AoK data remained a concern.

Return dynamics in Manyo, which is believed to act more as a transit rather than destination area, and Baliet, which has overall very low basic services, are less well understood, along

with areas such as Nasir and Ulang. Panyikang/Canal-Pigi/Fangak area reported returns at scale: the areas display a combination of movement dynamics: Smaller-scale IDP returns from other parts of South Sudan such as Bor PoC, Malakal PoC and Bentiu PoC (with arrivals from the latter citing insecurity in the PoC as the main push factor) are observed alongside sizeable returns from Sudan, driven by a shortage of water, food and an outbreak of diseases in the refugee settlements/camps in Sudan as well as conflict with the host community. The push factors in Sudan may explain why people are returning despite concerning conditions: Panyikang and Canal/Pigi reported populations in IPC Phase 5 ('Catastrophe') as of September 2018, with 70% of FSNMS surveyed households in Panyikang declaring to be returnees. The region also serves as a transit point from Upper Nile to Unity via Fangak.

Maiwut/Longochuk areas also reported returns at scale: these two counties have more return movements from neighbouring Ethiopia. Movement could be partly driven by issues South Sudanese refugees reportedly experience with the host community in Gambella and some cautious optimism of improved security on the South Sudan side, while the potential role of authorities in return movements in this area remained less well understood. Households arriving from Ethiopia to Pagak reportedly proceeded to more remote settlements such as Maiwut, Jekow and Jetome in Maiwut, whilst others arrived in Wanding and Lire in Ulang County, which may be an indication of increased confidence in the stability of the area.

In sum, given the scale of displacement over the years in Greater Upper Nile region, reported returns appeared to constitute a fraction of the total individuals reported to remain displaced. Finally, in areas reporting returns at scale, an overlap of different return and movement dynamics is observed, whilst the poor humanitarian conditions reported in these areas

were of key concern with all the above listed counties noting returns at scale classified as IPC Phase 4 ('Emergency') as of September 2018.

### 4.0 Way forward

The group convened to conduct this exercise does consider it useful to replicate a similar scenario building activity in a few months' time, when additional data sources ought to be available and considering the fluidity of the situation with the still recent signing of the revitalized peace agreement. Building on the experience gathered in this iteration of the exercise, contributing actors feel confident that it will be possible to improve the evidence base and consolidate it through joint analysis to feed into planning of both humanitarian and transition/recovery actors. In the meantime, it is recommended that data on returns be systematically compiled, including in already ongoing exercises with country-wide coverage, whilst expanding the scope of the current IDP Working Group (IDP-WG) to track both IDP and return trends across the country.