

A photograph of two women in a dry, open field. The woman in the foreground is wearing a patterned headscarf and a blue and white patterned dress, looking down. The woman behind her is wearing a blue and white patterned dress and a headscarf, looking towards the camera. The background shows a dry, open landscape with some distant figures.

A lifeline at risk: food assistance at a breaking point

South Sudan country report

2025 September



World Food
Programme

SAVING
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Foreword

The global humanitarian landscape is undergoing a profound transformation, driven by an unprecedented crisis in international funding. As major donors scale back their commitments, the ripple effects are being felt across the humanitarian system, threatening the ability of organizations like the World Food Programme (WFP) and its partners to deliver life-saving assistance to millions. In 2025 alone, WFP is facing a staggering 40 percent reduction in funding, with projections of USD 6.4 billion compared with USD 9.8 billion in 2024.

In response to this challenge, WFP initiated a study to examine the food security implications of the funding crisis. The first phase of the research revealed alarming projections: dramatic reductions in WFP's reach could severely undermine global food security. Building on these findings, the second phase focused on country-level realities – exploring how reduced foreign aid is reshaping humanitarian operations and affecting the lives of vulnerable populations. The study was conducted in five countries – Afghanistan, Haiti, Niger, South Sudan and Uganda – each offering distinct political, economic and social contexts that reflect the diverse settings in which these cuts are unfolding.

This in-country research explored the impacts of funding reductions through three key questions:

1. How does reduced Official Development Assistance (ODA) affect the economies of aid-dependent countries and specific government sectors?
2. How are funding shortfalls impacting WFP, local partners and the broader humanitarian sector in their efforts to deliver assistance?
3. How are these cuts affecting – or expected to affect – people in need and their food security?

By combining rigorous quantitative analysis with rich qualitative insights, this study aims to provide compelling evidence to support global advocacy. The findings will inform strategic decision-making, guide operational adjustments, and ultimately contribute to safeguarding food security in a time of profound change.

Acronyms

| ACRONYM | Acronym spelled out |
|---------|---|
| ADB | African Development Bank |
| AMN | Acute Malnutrition |
| CBT | Cash-Based Transfers |
| CPs | Cooperating Partners |
| DAC | Development Assistance Committee |
| EFSA | Emergency Food Security Assessment |
| ESARO | East and Southern Africa Regional Office |
| EU | Europe |
| FAO | Food and Agriculture Organization |
| FLA | Field Level Agreement |
| FTS | Financial Tracking Service (OCHA) |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| HNRP | Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan |
| HQ | Headquarters |
| IDPs | Internally Displaced Persons |
| IFAD | International Fund for Agricultural Development |

| ACRONYM | Acronym spelled out |
|---------|--|
| IMF | International Monetary Fund |
| IOM | International Organization for Migration |
| IPC | Integrated Food Security Phase Classification |
| MAM | Moderate Acute Malnutrition |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organization |
| OCHA | UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs |
| ODA | Official Development Assistance |
| PBW | Pregnant and Breastfeeding Women |
| RUTF | Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Foods |
| SAM | Severe Acute Malnutrition |
| UK | United Kingdom |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| UNHAS | United Nations Humanitarian Air Service |

| ACRONYM | Acronym spelled out |
|---------|--|
| UNHCR | United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |
| UNMISS | United Nations Mission in South Sudan |
| US | United States of America |
| USAID | United States Agency for International Development |
| USD | United States Dollar |
| WASH | Water, Sanitation and Hygiene |
| WFP | World Food Programme |
| WHO | World Health Organization |

Key messages



South Sudan faces one of the world's worst food and nutrition crises

In 2025, 7.7 million people – 57 percent of the population faced high levels of acute food insecurity. 83 000 were in Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5), with a risk of Famine in Nasir and Ulang counties, Upper Nile State. Malnutrition reached record levels, with 2.3 million children acutely malnourished. These extreme needs form the backdrop against which steep cuts in humanitarian funding are now being felt. As of mid-August, South Sudan's 2025 Humanitarian Response Plan was only 28 percent funded, down from 70 percent in 2024.



WFP can only reach the most severe cases of acute food insecurity in late 2025–2026

WFP has received just USD 220 million so far in 2025 – less than half of 2024 levels. Emergency operations have halved since 2022, now reaching only 38 counties. While foresight has helped soften the blow for WFP's emergency assistance in the first half of 2025, the outlook for 2026 is particularly alarming. Without urgent funds, 2.6 million people will lose or receive incomplete assistance by late 2025.



Expensive last-resort operations at risk

Populations in Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5) are often in remote, conflict-affected areas, where costly airdrops are the only lifeline. Maintaining aircraft for food deliveries costs USD 3.8 million per month. Funding cuts are putting these operations at risk, potentially leaving communities facing catastrophic hunger without urgently needed food assistance as floods make river routes unreliable.



Nutrition, health and WASH services are collapsing

Funding shortfalls forced UNICEF and WFP to close hundreds of nutrition sites, leaving four out of ten states without active treatment. Coverage dropped from 37 percent to 24 percent in one year, even as acute malnutrition worsened. More than 500 000 women and children are expected to lose life-saving support by late 2025 without new funding. Only 54 percent of health facilities are functioning, many with reduced staff. WASH funding cuts have suspended water treatment and sanitation, raising the risk of disease. The country faces its worst cholera outbreak on record.



Earmarking reduces WFP's flexibility

Earmarked contributions now represent 87 percent of WFP funding, limiting its ability to reallocate resources. Cash donations, crucial for cash-based assistance and resilience activities, fell from 71 percent in 2024 to 55 percent in 2025. This shift reduces WFP's capacity to respond dynamically and has gutted longer-term recovery programmes needed to reduce future aid dependency.



Rising risks of conflict and cross-border instability

Cuts in assistance are fueling communal tensions at a time of already severe insecurity. Shrinking aid is also driving dangerous cross-border movements: tens of thousands of South Sudanese returned to conflict-affected Sudan in 2025 after aid was cut, while Sudanese refugees left Maban camps for Blue Nile, citing reduced rations. Returnees from Kakuma camp in Kenya, where assistance has been cut, have also been recorded.



Rethinking approaches

While official development assistance accounts for 25 percent of the South Sudanese GDP, the allocation of public revenues to social and humanitarian affairs is minimal and the country remains underdeveloped. As provision of basic services has been outsourced to foreign actors, the reduction in humanitarian assistance is now threatening the population's only safety net. WFP is rethinking established approaches and modalities and turning every stone to better support the population, while also trying to ensure that assistance enables and requires necessary government reforms.



Severe cuts risk derailing the humanitarian reset

The humanitarian reset, which seeks to reduce duplication and streamline mandates, is a response to shrinking resources but is also threatened under severe funding cuts. Joint programming, such as WFP–UNICEF nutrition sites, works when it is funded, but it falters under scarcity. When one agency scales back, overlapping mandates leave children without treatment for severe or moderate malnutrition.

Introduction



Since independence in 2011, South Sudan has relied heavily on external aid. It has received about USD 20 billion in Official Development Assistance (ODA) over the years. However, as government spending on social and humanitarian affairs is minimal and basic government services and core functions are missing or deficient, the country remains underdeveloped, with most people living in extreme poverty and acute hunger.

The deprivation of the population is deeply gendered. The impacts of an uneven distribution of public funds are disproportionately borne by women and girls, who are lacking education, healthcare and maternal support.¹

Today, South Sudan faces a perfect storm of economic deterioration, frequent extensive flooding, persistent insecurity and largescale population displacement.

The conflict in neighboring Sudan adds pressure, disrupting trade and threatening vital oil pipelines.

This protracted crisis is characterized by recurring shocks, creating an environment of extreme uncertainty for millions of people. The government has left its people at the mercy of international aid — making major cuts to humanitarian assistance a direct threat to their only safety net.

This report examines the implications of these cuts for the humanitarian sector, WFP and the food and nutrition security of vulnerable populations, based on key informant interviews with WFP staff, other UN organizations, the Nutrition Cluster and co-operating partners. It also relies on analysis of secondary data.

Background

South Sudan, the world's youngest country, gained independence in 2011 after decades of civil war in Sudan, but hopes for peace were short-lived as another brutal conflict erupted in 2013 and lasted until 2020. Despite vast oil reserves that provide most government revenue, the country's socio-political-economic state remains extremely fragile, marked by ethnic divisions, weak governance, and recurring violence.

Frequent and severe flooding, exacerbated by climate change, has compounded the crisis. Between 2019 and 2022, four consecutive years of major

floods devastated communities, and in 2022 alone, nearly 600 000 people were displaced.² In 2024, severe flooding occurred again and was forecast for 2025.³

South Sudan's economy is almost entirely dependent on oil exports, leaving it highly vulnerable to global economic shocks, while weak institutions and limited diversification further constrain economic resilience.

The country also faces one of the world's most complex displacement crises with 2.6 million displaced (including IDPs and refugees) and increasing numbers of



Displaced populations in South Sudan



Source: UNHCR, September 2025, IOM February 2025

vulnerable returnee refugees. As a result of the conflict in Sudan since April 2023 alone, approximately 1.2 million people have been forced to cross into South Sudan from Sudan, including 400 000 Sudanese refugees and around 800 000 South Sudanese refugee returnees.⁴

In 2025, the UN appealed for USD 1.7 billion to support South Sudan, but only 28 percent (USD 481 million) has been funded thus far compared with 70 percent in 2024 (USD 1.2 billion), underscoring the scale of unmet needs.⁵

Food security and nutrition

In South Sudan, an estimated 7.7 million people were projected to face high levels of acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 or above) during the lean season from April to July 2025, representing 57 percent of the population.

The most severe levels of acute food insecurity were projected in the counties of Pibor, Nasir, Ulang and Malakal, where approximately 5 percent of the population is expected to experience Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5). Nasir and Ulang counties were projected to be at risk of Famine in the worst-case scenario.⁶

Food insecurity is primarily driven by conflict and civil insecurity, which continue to displace households, disrupt markets and people's livelihood activities, and hinder the delivery of humanitarian assistance. The populations facing Catastrophe are in

conflict-affected parts of Upper Nile, while in ten counties where violence has eased, food security improved, shifting from IPC Phase 4 to IPC Phase 3. Compounding the situation is a deepening economic crisis, marked by local currency depreciation, soaring food prices, and declining household purchasing power. Furthermore, recurrent climatic shocks, particularly droughts and floods, are damaging agricultural production, disrupting market functionality, and destroying vital infrastructure such as roads.

The conflict in Sudan is contributing to South Sudan’s worsening food security crisis by driving large numbers of Sudanese refugees into the country and pushing already vulnerable South Sudanese to return. The prevalence of acute food insecurity is much higher among displaced populations and returnees than residents. Of the 83 000 people projected to be in Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5), nearly half – around 39 000 – are returnees.⁷

Renewed conflict, poor health and WASH access,^{8,9} a rising disease burden of malaria, diarrhoea and cholera, and reduced humanitarian assistance due to funding cuts are driving a worsening nutrition crisis, according to the latest IPC analysis (see Figure 1).



In 2025, 2.3 million children aged 6–59 months are estimated to be acutely malnourished. This includes 714 000 children suffering from severe acute malnutrition and 1.6 million with moderate acute malnutrition. In addition, 1.2 million pregnant and breastfeeding women need treatment for acute malnutrition.

Between April and June 2025, acute malnutrition worsened in 62 of the 80 counties analysed. Three counties– Rubkona, Nasir and Ulang – were projected to shift from Critical (IPC AMN Phase 4) to Extremely Critical (Phase 5). This marks the first IPC AMN Phase 5 classification for Nasir and Ulang since the IPC’s launch in 2007. Baliet county remained in IPC AMN Phase 5.

Number and share of people facing high levels of acute food insecurity, April to July 2025

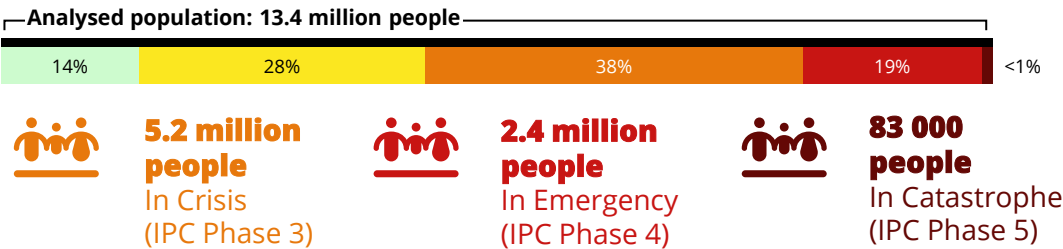
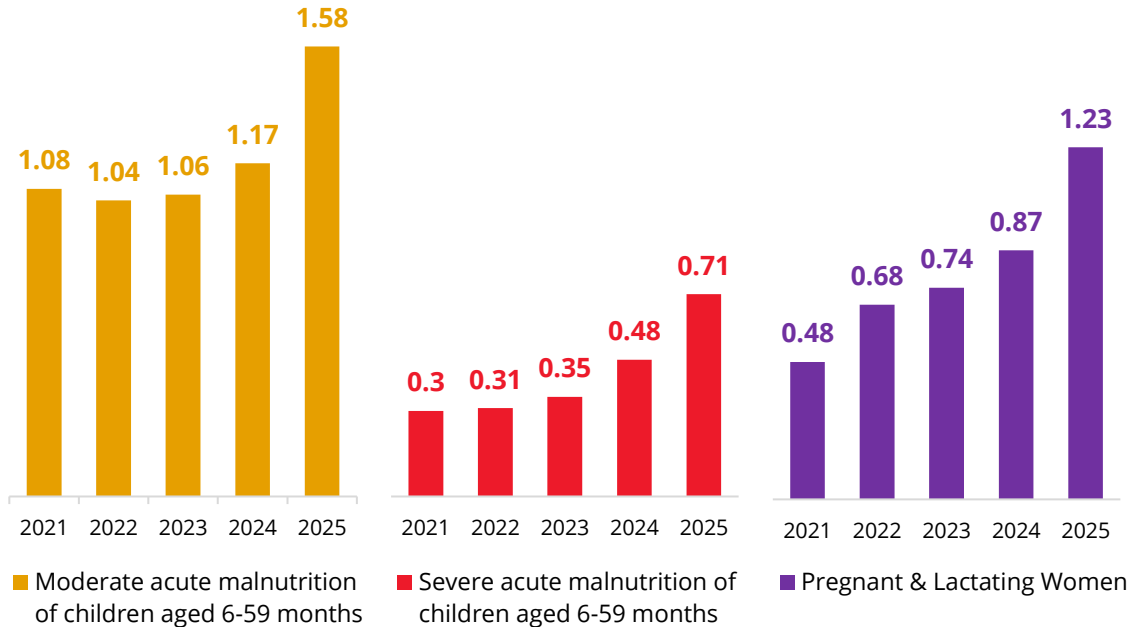


Figure 1: People in need of nutrition services (millions), 2021-2025



Source: IPC

The economy

South Sudan's economy has contracted over the last four years and experienced an overall negative growth over the last decade. GDP contracted by 7.2 percent in 2024 and is projected to shrink by 30 percent in 2025, with per capita income estimated to have halved since 2020.¹⁰ This is largely due to disrupted oil exports after a pipeline was damaged during the Sudan conflict. The oil sector represents over 50 percent of GDP, 90 percent of government revenues, and about 80 percent of exports, making South Sudan highly vulnerable to fluctuations in oil production and prices.¹¹ A rebound in growth is expected in 2026, following the resumption of oil production.

High inflation continues to erode people's purchasing power. Since the conflict in Sudan began in April 2023, the cost of a standard food basket has risen nearly 700 percent.¹² The IMF projects headline inflation to reach 65.7 percent in 2025, slowing down thereafter.¹³ Over the past year, the South Sudanese Pound has lost half of its value, with a 29 percent gap between official and parallel market rates,¹⁴ reflecting a severe foreign currency shortage.

A staggering 99.8 percent of South Sudan's population is estimated to live below the national poverty line in 2025 – up from 92 percent in 2024 – while the country ranked last in the 2023 Humanitarian Development Index.¹⁵ Debt – forecasted at 58 percent of GDP for 2025 – and reduced and diverted oil revenues have hindered public development investments and expenses, with public servants, including soldiers, having gone unpaid for months.¹⁶



99.8% of population estimated to live below the national poverty line in 2025



GDP -30% in 2025



90% of government revenues are from oil



Official Development Assistance represented 25 percent of GDP in 2023, underscoring its central role in providing foreign income.¹⁷ While this is the case the government allocated only 0.4 percent of total government expenditures to the two ministries responsible for agriculture, food security, livestock, and fisheries over four consecutive national budgets (2020–2024).¹⁸ Some 96 percent of nutrition sites are non-government funded. Already low government investments have further

declined, including a reduction in the national health budget from 2 percent in 2024 to 1.5 percent in 2025.

Structural weaknesses, including poor governance and weak infrastructure, perpetuate fragility in South Sudan. Without sustained reforms and international support, economic recovery will remain out of reach for most. The outlook remains fragile, with recovery highly dependent on peace, stability and greater government accountability.

Key stakeholders

Government actors are key partners for WFP. WFP provides support to the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management to coordinate emergency responses and develop and implement anticipatory action.

For advocacy, policy development and national programme design, WFP supports the Ministries of Agriculture and Food Security, Environment and Forestry, and Livestock and Fisheries. WFP collaborates with the Ministry of Health to provide nutrition services to vulnerable individuals and with the Ministry of Education and General Instruction on school feeding. The agency works

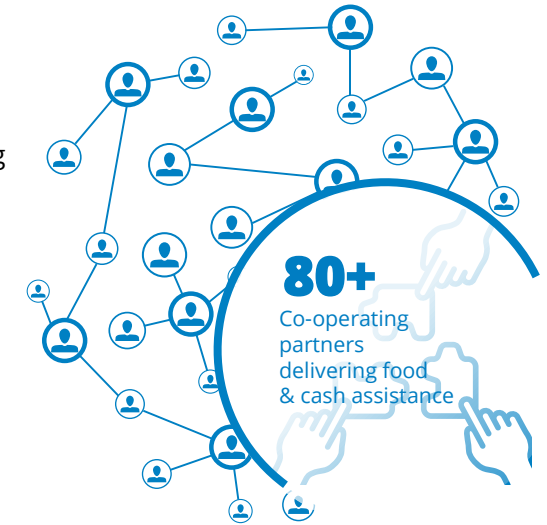
with the Ministry of Roads and Bridges to coordinate infrastructure development and flood-mitigation efforts.

UN agencies are key partners in delivering coordinated humanitarian and development assistance. WFP provides assistance to new arrivals, refugees and IDPs in collaboration with UNHCR and IOM.

For malnutrition, programmes are split between WFP and UNICEF, with UNICEF handling severe acute malnutrition and WFP moderate acute malnutrition.

WFP and FAO's partnership fosters community resilience and ensures households targeted under WFP's lean season response receive FAO's livelihood support. WFP also works with other UN agencies, such as IFAD, UNMISS, UNDP and WHO, to implement activities.

NGOs and co-operating partners (CPs) play a vital role in implementing WFP programmes on the ground and reaching vulnerable communities. WFP works with 80 CPs to deliver emergency food and cash assistance, nutrition support and resilience-building activities. These partners also help WFP to adapt to evolving needs and contexts.



International financial institutions have become an increasingly important partner. WFP's collaboration with the African Development Bank aims to strengthen flood response and resilience efforts. WFP provides food security analyses that inform policy for institutions like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF).

WFP also supports the South Sudan government on innovative funding mechanisms such as a Green Climate Fund to strengthen the country's climate resilience.



WFP operations

WFP’s South Sudan country strategic plan (2023–2025) was the first in a series of three plans laying the foundations for an integrated, sequenced and layered approach to WFP operations in South Sudan over the next 13 years. This timeframe was to enable WFP to, while saving lives, pursue incremental gains in resilience, development and peace over multiple years and interrelated programme cycles. The long-term ambition was to reduce the need for humanitarian assistance by promoting self-reliance and resilience and strengthening national capacity and systems.

Despite internal and external challenges, the trajectory of assistance in South Sudan was still on track in 2024. While the country faced multiple intersecting crises in 2024 – as outline above – WFP kept assistance on track, reaching a total of 4.5 million people (59 percent of them female) with 163 000 metric tonnes of food and USD 60 million in cash-based transfers.

This included emergency support for 2.9 million crisis-affected people as well as assistance to 301 000 returnees, 437 900 refugees and 281 500 IDPs, a lean season response and a flood response. Since April 2023, assistance to returnees and refugees from Sudan has been an important part of WFP operations in South Sudan.



WFP assisted over **4.5M people** in 2024



It distributed over **163 000 MT** of food in 2024



WFP disbursed **USD 60M** cash-based transfers in 2024

To help reduce malnutrition, WFP supported 1.1 million children and pregnant or breastfeeding women through malnutrition treatment programmes and another 366 000 through malnutrition prevention programmes.

Additionally, emergency school-feeding programmes reached 192 000 crisis-affected children and long-term school feeding reached another 175 000 children. The programme provides on-site feeding with freshly prepared meals and take-home rations.

WFP supported 393 000 people through asset creation and livelihood activities. Households created community assets and received trainings to strengthen livelihoods, while WFP provided safety nets by distributing food and cash-based transfers (CBT) during the lean season.

The United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) and the Logistics Cluster provided critical access for humanitarian and development partners, transporting 65 000 passengers, 15 000 metric tonnes of cargo by river and road convoys, and 2 000 metric tonnes of food and non-food items on behalf of partners.



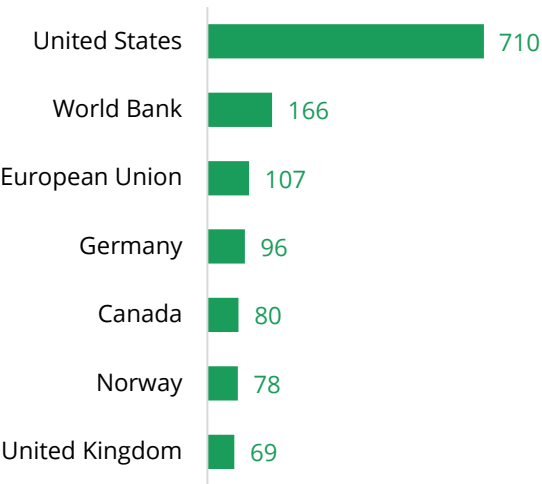
Funding situation

Development funding

Official Development Assistance (ODA) peaked at USD 2.21 billion in 2021 before falling to USD 1.79 billion in 2023 (25 percent of GDP). Most support (70 percent) came from Development Assistance Committee (DAC) member countries, led by the United States, with smaller contributions from multilateral organizations such as

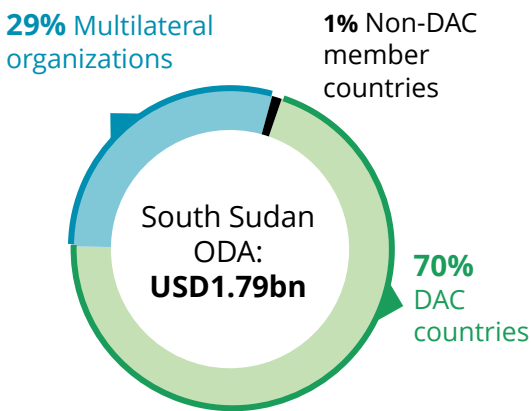
the World Bank and the European Union. Preliminary data suggest a further decline in 2024, with sharper reductions projected for 2025. This could lead to a funding shortfall for South Sudan of USD 150–280 million.

Figure 2: Donors in 2023 (USD millions)



Source: OECD DAC

ODA contributors, 2023



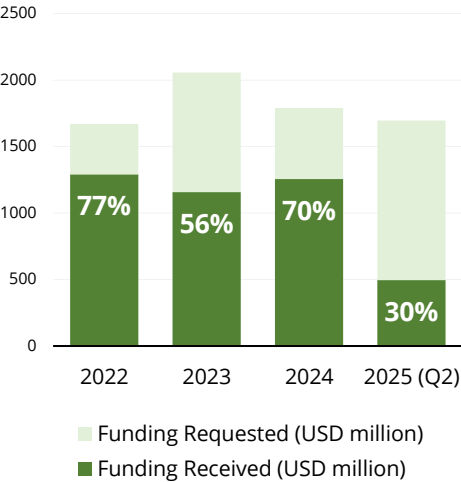
Humanitarian funding

While overall funding requirements have gradually declined from USD 2.06 billion in 2023 to USD 1.78 billion in 2024, and further to USD 1.69 billion in 2025, donor contributions have dropped at an even faster rate. This has led to a sharp decrease in humanitarian funding coverage – from 70 percent in 2024 to just 28 percent halfway through 2025 – raising serious concerns about meeting critical needs.

In response to global funding shortfalls, the emergency relief coordinator launched a reprioritization exercise. The updated HNRP now focuses on the most critical needs, without replacing the broader goals of the full plan. For South Sudan, the reprioritized funding requirement stands at USD 1.03 billion, a 40 percent decrease from the initial plan.

In 2025, the United States remains the largest donor to South Sudan’s humanitarian response, contributing 26 percent of the funding secured so far. However, its support has significantly declined – by mid-year, it had provided only 18 percent of what it gave in 2024.

Figure 3: Funding received through HNRP versus requirements, 2022-2025

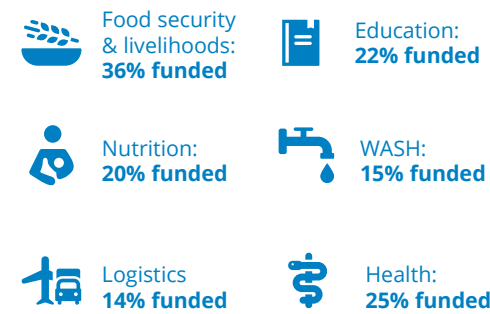


Source: OCHA FTS

Germany and Norway have also reduced their contributions since 2024. In contrast, some donors are stepping up to help fill the gap, including the European Union and Canada. The African Development Bank has increased its funding from USD 1.1 million in 2024 to USD 22.5 million in 2025, highlighting the growing role of regional organizations. Despite stepped-up contributions from a few donors, the gap left by the United States remains far from being closed.

The Food Security and Livelihoods cluster is the largest component of the HNRP for 2025, requiring USD 475 million. By mid-year, only 36 percent of this amount had been secured. The other clusters where WFP is active are facing even larger shortfalls: the nutrition cluster is just 20 percent funded, the logistics cluster only 14 percent – all of which is allocated to WFP – and the education cluster, which supports WFP’s school meals programme, stands at 22 percent.

Cluster funding by August 2025



WFP funding

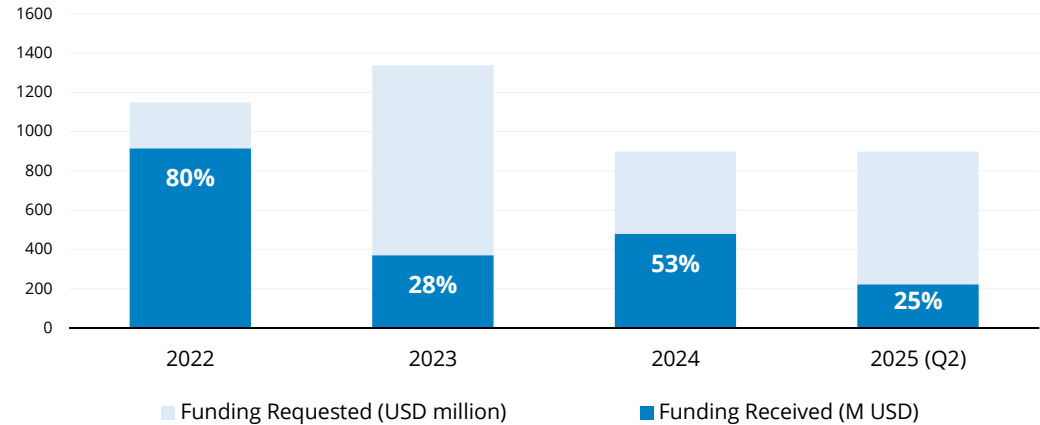
In 2024, contributions to WFP for South Sudan reached USD 480 million – already a dramatic fall from the USD 900 million secured in 2022. As of end of July 2025, just USD 220 million had been confirmed, 46 percent of the 2024 funding.

Yet, the country’s portfolio needs for 2025 stand at USD 898 million. Without urgent action, WFP South Sudan will face devastating shortfalls, putting critical programmes at risk.

WFP South Sudan has always been reliant on a handful of donors. In 2024, the United States alone provided 60 percent of all contributions. Combined with the UK, the EU and Germany, the four donors accounted for 93 percent of total 2024.

In parallel, cash contributions are dropping more sharply than in-kind donations. The share of cash donations has fallen from 71 percent in 2024 to 55 percent in 2025. While in-kind donations can be used for emergency response, they cannot easily be redirected toward resilience-building activities, leaving critical long-term recovery efforts underfunded.

Figure 4: Funding contributions to WFP South Sudan, 2022–2025



Source: WFP

Implications of funding cuts

Methodology

To assess the effects of reduced funding on food security and beyond, this study draws on desk research, quantitative data analysis and qualitative interviews conducted in the field by expert WFP staff.

WFP, local partners and the broader humanitarian sector

While foresight has helped soften the blow for WFP's emergency assistance in the first half of 2025, severe reductions have already hit nutrition and livelihood operations.

There is a growing gap between needs and resources, which is forcing WFP to prioritize the most vulnerable and focus on communities in urgent need of action to save lives and livelihoods (IPC Phases 4 and 5). Without urgent funding, 2.6 million people will receive incomplete food rations or lose assistance entirely.

In addition, 500 000 vulnerable women and children are at risk of being cut off from life-saving nutrition support in October.

The reductions pose a serious threat to longer-term development by forcing a focus on emergency assistance and dramatically cutting livelihood activities. A balanced approach that combines life-saving aid with programmes that support people to rebuild their livelihoods and strengthen their ability to cope with future shocks is essential to enable families to move out of acute food insecurity and reduce needs over time.

WFP emergency assistance

Since 2022, emergency support in South Sudan has been sharply reduced by WFP and other humanitarian partners because of declining funding.

In early 2025, WFP's provision of emergency assistance has been in line with its operational plan thanks to funding carry overs and field level agreements (FLAs) being in place with co-operating partners before major cuts were announced.

Without urgent funding



2.6 million people
At risk of incomplete food baskets or losing assistance



500 000 women & children
At risk of losing life-saving nutrition support

However, without additional contributions, WFP will be forced to largely cut emergency operations in late 2025. The funding shortfall has forced the agency to reduce its workforce and field presence, which reduces implementation capacity and may compromise oversight of operations.

Since 2023, counties with a lower share of the population experiencing IPC Phase 4 have been deprioritized, with emergency assistance only delivered to counties classified in IPC Phase 4 with pockets of population in Phase 5, counties with the highest share of population in IPC Phase 4, counties with the highest acute malnutrition prevalence,

Cuts between 2022 and 2025



78 → 38 counties
where WFP delivers emergency assistance



70% rations
Areas with population in IPC Phase 5



50% rations
All other prioritized areas

and the highest incidence of classification in IPC Phase 4 over the past five years.

As a result, the number of counties where WFP delivers emergency assistance has halved from 78 in 2022 to 38 in 2025, when another eight counties classified in IPC Phase 4 were de-prioritized.

The number of partners through which WFP provides assistance has declined from over 90 to just over 40.

Rations have also been reduced. Areas with pockets of populations in IPC Phase 5 now receive 70 percent rations, and all other locations prioritized for assistance receive 50 percent rations.

Local partners

The operations of some local partners, including international NGOs, are already or are expected to be significantly affected by funding cuts in 2025. Since the start of the stop-work orders by the United States earlier this year, at least 12 of WFP's CPs received a termination of grant notice. Despite the number of CPs with active FLAs rebounding to 47 in mid-2025, many still face uncertainty due to funding challenges and the potential impacts of reduced support.

Some CPs have been unable to continue implementing WFP's resilience and livelihood activities. Programmes run by international NGOs – particularly those heavily reliant on USAID contracts – have been among the most affected.

Field presence has been scaled down, and fewer staff are retained under active FLAs. Some partners have transitioned to mobile distribution teams, with one team covering multiple locations, and have consolidated roles. Other efficiency measures are also being introduced, including increased reliance on virtual work and reduced field travel.

The situation for CPs is expected to deteriorate further. Several anticipate



major staffing reductions by the end of September, with cuts of up to 40 percent across their country programmes. Further reductions are expected in 2026, which may affect programme quality and safe delivery.

Health, WASH and nutrition

Funding cuts in 2025 have severely constrained nutrition and health services in South Sudan, with major consequences for treatment of acute malnutrition among children and women. These cuts come at a time when the country is facing its worst recorded cholera outbreak¹⁹, and high numbers of returnees, refugees and IDPs, all of which intensify pressure on an already fragile system.

A critical bottleneck is the weakness of South Sudan's health infrastructure. Health facilities are already too sparsely distributed and only about 54 percent of delivery points are providing services.²⁰ Staffing is a major challenge: many health personnel – including community workers – have left due to non-payment, and turnover is particularly high in remote locations. The downsizing of humanitarian health interventions means further closures and reducing equitable access to care.

Nutrition services are largely delivered through dedicated sites, many of which are integrated within health facilities to provide a continuum of care. WFP

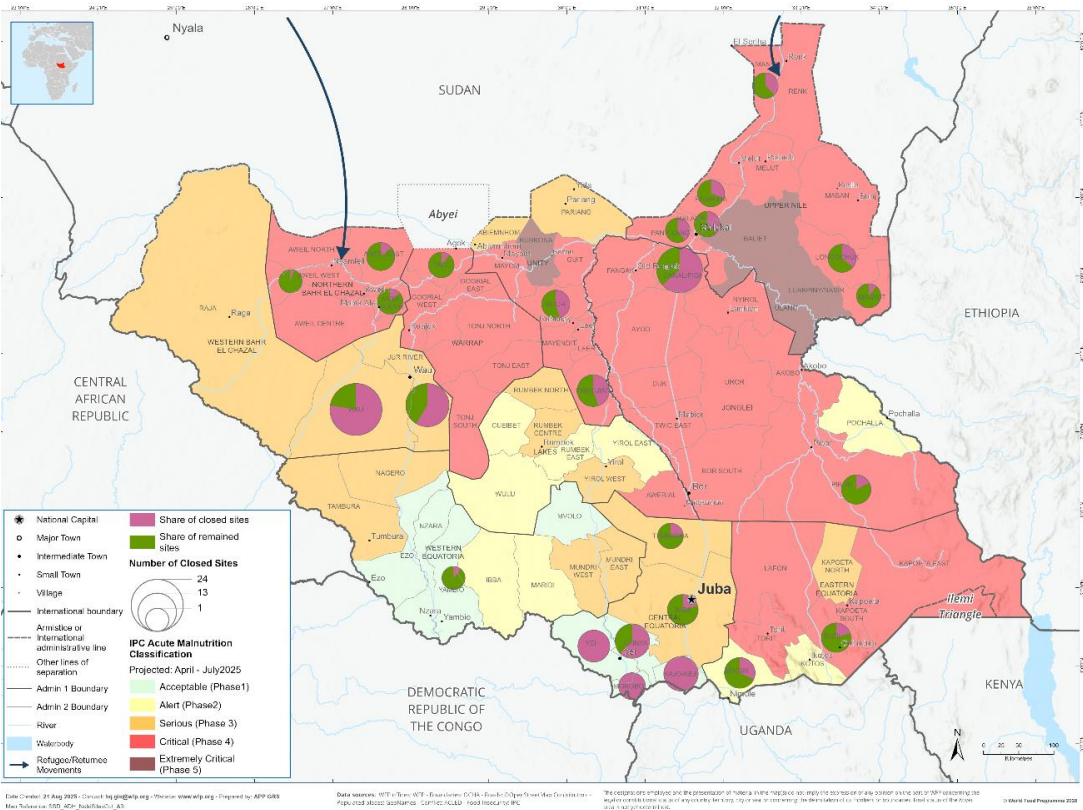
operates many of these sites in close collaboration with UNICEF. However, funding shortages have sharply reduced coverage. WFP began scaling down in 2023, phasing out activities in the Equatorias and Western Bahr el Ghazal and reducing the number of sites from around 1 300 to 870. The latest funding cuts in 2025 has forced UNICEF to phase out acute malnutrition treatment and as a result, 4 out of 10 states currently have no active support for malnutrition treatment.



4 of 10 states left without malnutrition support

The funding gaps are disrupting joint cost-sharing mechanisms. In early 2025, shifts in US funding led UNICEF to temporarily concentrate efforts in Greater Upper Nile, which left only 3 out of 10 states with adequate support. While renewed US engagement in April allowed some expansion, several local partners warned they could not continue unless WFP covered UNICEF's 50 percent share. As a result, some partners suspended their activities, and although a few resumed when partial funding was restored, the sustainability of services remains in doubt.

Figure 5: Closure of nutrition sites in 2025



The funding cuts have also reduced WASH services, disproportionately impacting the most vulnerable populations. Without urgent funding, essential WASH infrastructure risks collapse.

The suspension of water treatment and sanitation programmes puts tens of thousands of refugees at risk. Figure 5 shows where UNICEF closed nutrition sites in early 2025. Even in states

where malnutrition prevalence is critical, the number of sites has been substantially reduced. Treatment coverage fell sharply, from 37 percent of the caseload in the first half of 2024 to 24 percent in the first half of 2025. Overall sector achievements have declined in 2025. As shown in Figures 6–8, treatment for SAM, MAM and pregnant and breastfeeding women (PBW) in South Sudan dropped in 2025. Figure 6 shows

that the share of SAM children who have been treated has declined each year since 2022, when 60 percent of the targeted caseload was treated. In 2025, it is expected to be as low as 25 percent. A similar, but slightly flatter trend for MAM children is shown in Figure 7. The drop in treatment has also been dramatic for PBW (Figure 8).

Figure 6: Number of children aged 6–59 months treated for severe acute malnutrition (SAM), July 2021 – July 2025.

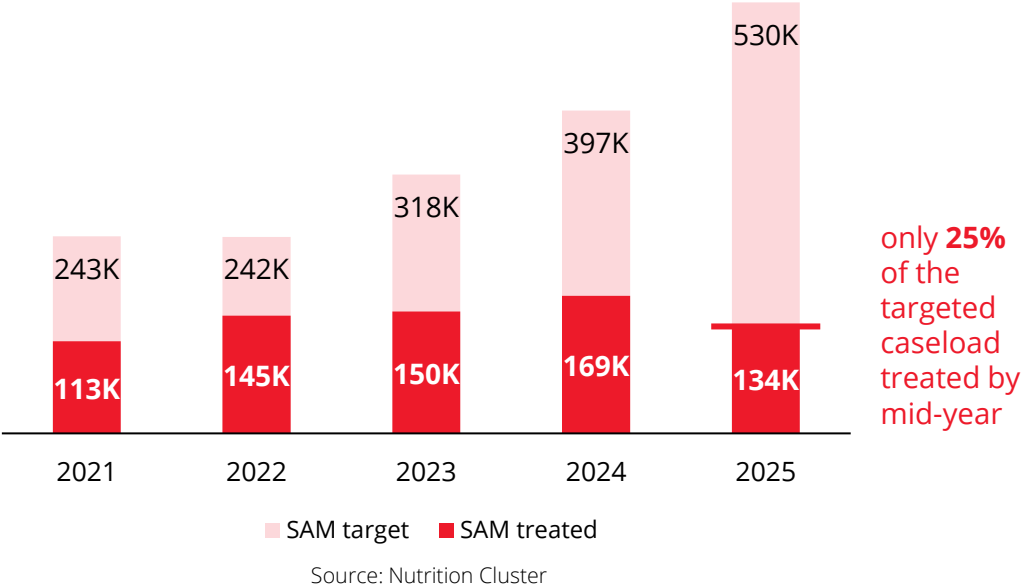
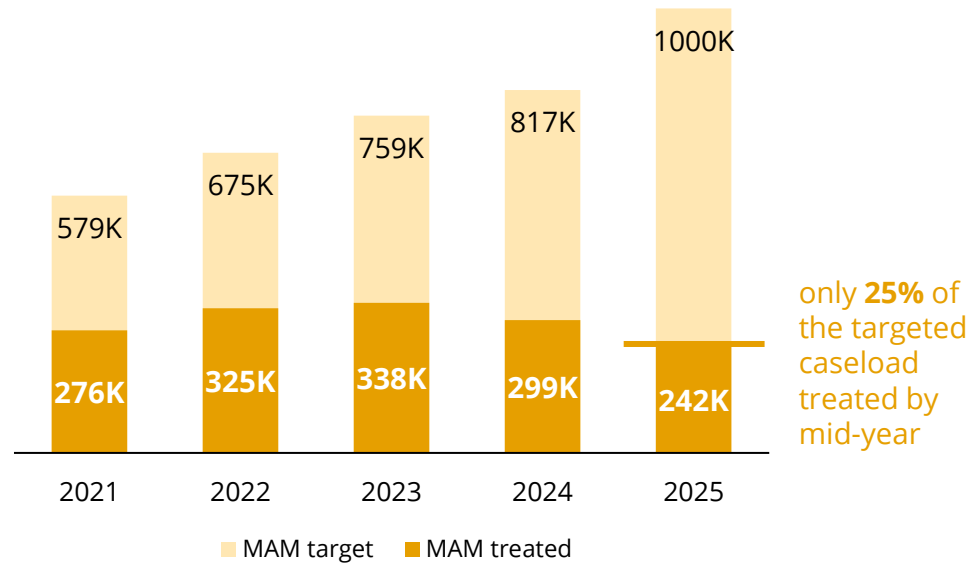
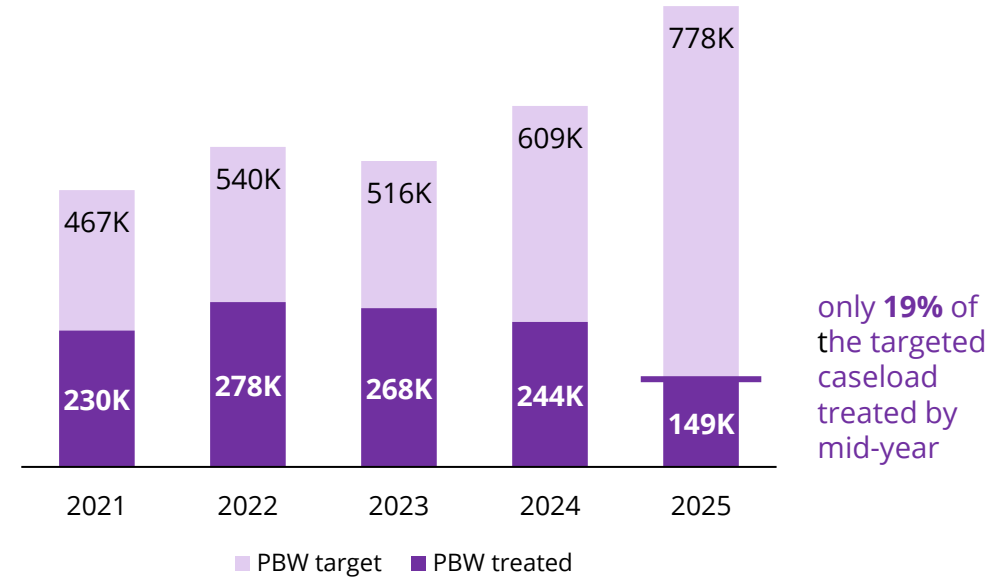


Figure 7: Number of children aged 6–59 months treated for moderate acute malnutrition (MAM), July 2021 – July 2025



Source: Nutrition Cluster

Figure 8: Number of pregnant and breast-feeding women treated for acute malnutrition, July 2021 – July 2025



Source: Nutrition Cluster

Food security and nutrition implications of the cuts

Nutrition impacts

Since the stop-work order and funding cuts in February 2025, there have been widespread stockouts in nutrition sites. People suffering from acute malnutrition have been unable to receive treatment at

clinics due to the lack of essential supplies. Children attending nutrition facilities typically remain in programmes for around seven weeks, but without the necessary Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Foods (RUTF), there is no meaningful improvement in their condition.

In 2025, an estimated 2.3 million children are suffering from acute malnutrition. Four counties (Baliet, Nasir, Rubkona and

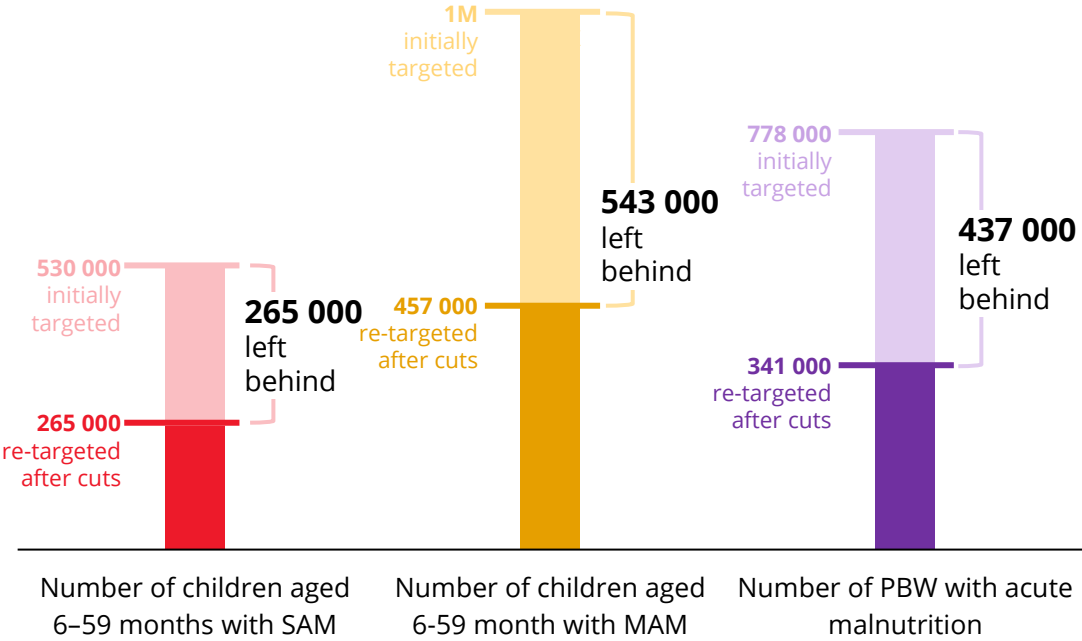
Ulang) were projected to have Extremely Critical (IPC AMN Phase 5) levels of acute malnutrition, meaning that at least 30 percent of children are acutely malnourished.

The IPC acute malnutrition report identified renewed conflict, reduced access to health and WASH services, high disease burden (malaria, diarrhoea and cholera), and reduced humanitarian

capacity as the main drivers of the deterioration since 2024.²¹

Figure 9 shows the impact of reduced funding, with reprioritization reducing coverage and leading to populations losing nutrition intervention support.

Figure 9: Number of children, girls and women initially targeted for acute malnutrition treatment versus number re-targeted after funding cuts



Source: Nutrition Cluster

Food security impacts

Emergency assistance in South Sudan is projected to face dramatic cuts in late 2025 and early 2026, with the outlook for 2026 particularly alarming.

WFP’s requirements for 2026 are estimated at USD 685 million, yet only USD 180 million is currently confirmed. Without urgent and sustained funding, WFP will be forced to drastically scale back already prioritized emergency response

activities as well as nutrition and health interventions for the most vulnerable groups.

Although insufficient to meet the needs of all people facing severe acute food insecurity, humanitarian food assistance continues to play an important role in

reducing risks of catastrophic acute food insecurity outcomes. The IPC estimates that an additional 370 000 people would be in Crisis or worse (IPC Phase 3 or above) in South Sudan had they not received food assistance.²²

The high cost of reaching people facing catastrophic hunger

Scaling back emergency assistance in South Sudan is particularly difficult because WFP is also supporting populations in Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5), which is both costly and operationally complex. These communities are often in the most remote and inaccessible areas, where conflict and flooding severely restrict ground access, making air operations the only viable lifeline.



Preventing famine in such conditions requires timely analysis, meticulous preparation, and advance planning – not just the physical delivery of food. Yet, funding for airdrop operations will cease by mid-September, leaving the response almost entirely dependent on river routes, which are highly unreliable during the flood season.

Maintaining aircraft for food drops alone costs USD 3.8 million per month, while helicopter capacity for the Logistics Cluster to support partners requires an additional USD 2.5 million per month.

Impacts beyond food security



A public health crisis unfolding

Scaling down health, WASH and nutrition interventions leads to heightened risk of uncontrolled outbreaks of communicable diseases, including cholera and acute watery diarrhoea. An emergency assessment conducted in July 2025 in nine locations in Nasir and Ulang counties, projected to be at risk of Famine, portrays an extreme and persisting public health crisis with an intractable cholera outbreak, and a heightened risk of death from disease and starvation.



Heightened violence and conflict

Assistance cuts in South Sudan can exacerbate the risk of violence and conflict. Peacebuilding efforts backed by ODA have contributed to decreases in insecurity and violence in the country, but these efforts have been directly affected by funding cuts.²³

Falling humanitarian assistance also heightens the risk of intra-communal conflict and violence. In access-constrained areas, food convoys

sometimes pass through one community to reach another with which tensions already exist. When assistance has been cut in the past, WFP convoys have been attacked to prevent food from reaching prioritized populations.

Reduced access to food incurs the risk of starvation being used as a weapon in South Sudan's ongoing political conflicts, a practice that has been documented in the past.²⁴



Regional spillover - Refugee and returnee inflows into Sudan

Despite Sudan's ongoing civil war, more people are crossing into the country from South Sudan – including many who had previously fled Sudan due to violence. A key driver of this movement is reduced food assistance in South Sudan, largely resulting from funding cuts that have forced humanitarian agencies to scale back support. Returnees to the Blue Nile state in Sudan reported that they had not received assistance for over seven months.²⁵ Approximately 3 400 South Sudanese returned from Kakuma camp in Kenya to South Sudan. These returns were triggered following the reduction in food assistance in the refugee camp.²⁶

Highly complex displacement dynamics – the people ‘fleeing’ to conflict-riven Sudan

This situation underscores the harsh reality faced by these displaced populations: many are forced to undertake dangerous journeys back into a country engulfed in civil war – not because conditions have improved, but because the hunger they face in South Sudan has become even more unbearable. As of early September 2025, the estimated influx from South Sudan into Sudan since April 2025 totals 199 500 people, including 69 600 newly arrived South Sudanese and 129 900 Sudanese returnees.²⁷



| | | |
|----------------------|---|--|
| Who? | 45 000 South Sudanese – both those who were previously refugees in Sudan and new refugees fleeing worsening conditions | 41 000 mostly Sudanese refugees leaving Maban camps in South Sudan |
| When? | April to June 2025 | Since February 2025 |
| Where to? | White Nile State, Sudan | Blue Nile State, Sudan |
| Why? | Hunger is one main driver, as food assistance has been cut in many areas of origin. | Reduced food assistance and essential services as WFP has cut rations and moved to vulnerability-based targeting. Access disruptions, insecurity in Maban, and political or ethnic tensions between camps have also contributed. |
| How may this evolve? | Pendular movements are likely, as people shift in response to changing security, aid availability and livelihood prospects. Projections remain highly uncertain and depend on evolving conflict dynamics, but a useful reference point is the approximately 800 000 South Sudanese refugees who have returned since the start of the Sudan conflict – an unpredictable share of whom may move back to Sudan if security improves. | An additional 60 000 refugees could return if the remaining population of the three camps leaves. |

Conclusions

The dramatic funding cuts anticipated for 2026 are forcing WFP and other UN agencies to adopt strict efficiency measures. These include staff reductions, reduced field presence, and greater reliance on national partners. While these steps aim to reduce costs, many carry significant risks, including reduced service coverage, compromised quality and oversight, and operational challenges in fragile contexts such as South Sudan. For example, localizing assistance is not always less expensive and community-based organizations often lack delivery capacity and compliance systems.

WFP delivers catalytic interventions – such as Food Assistance for Assets, feeder road construction, and integrated programming – that generate multiplier effects and are feasible even in fragile contexts like South Sudan. When combined with general food assistance, these activities help restore community assets and open pathways to resilience. Yet when funding falls short, such livelihood components are often deprioritized, leaving communities dependent on aid and vulnerable to recurring crises.

WFP also intends to increase its cash-based interventions as cost-efficiency

analysis indicates advantages of cash in many locations.

Sustained donor investment in catalytic interventions will enable households to move out of dependency, reducing future caseloads and costs. While maintaining life-saving assistance remains essential, scaling up resilience-building measures is the smarter, more cost-efficient path to securing long-term stability and lowering both financial and human costs.

The humanitarian reset, which seeks to reduce duplication and streamline mandates, is another response to shrinking resources. In principle, this approach can create efficiencies, but in practice, it needs to be implemented carefully and with foresight. The experience of WFP and UNICEF in nutrition programming illustrates that this collaboration works well when adequately funded, but under scarcity, complementary mandates become a liability. When one agency deprioritizes an area, nutrition sites risk closure, leaving gaps in treating both severe and moderate malnutrition. Merging efforts without foresight can therefore undermine life-saving services.



South Sudan's experience has broader messages for the global humanitarian community.



The humanitarian reset falters under funding cuts – measures like shifting mandates and joint programming (e.g., WFP-UNICEF nutrition sites) aim for transformation but often result in reduced coverage and service gaps when resources shrink.



Resilience requires strategic investment not retreat – humanitarian aid has long been a vital source of support for communities, often in the absence of viable alternatives. Abrupt funding cuts risk deepening suffering, while integrated interventions and development-focused programming offer a path towards lasting food security and reduced future costs.



Advocating for and working toward lasting peace and a full cessation of hostilities is essential – without this, humanitarian and development efforts cannot succeed.

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Acknowledgements

This study was conducted by the Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Service of the World Food Programme, under the leadership of Director Jean-Martin Bauer. Arif Husain, WFP Chief Economist and Director of the Analysis, Planning and Performance Division provided guidance and advice throughout the process. Moctar Aboubacar (ESARO), Guadalupe Galambos (HQ), Stefan Meyer (HQ), Anna Ong (HQ), Susanna Sandstrom (HQ), Marie-Joe Stoeri (HQ), Sabina Tyulyuova (HQ), and Katharine Williams (HQ) contributed to the study. It was carried out in close collaboration with WFP Country Offices in South Sudan. We extend our sincere thanks to Mary-Ellen McGroarty and her team, especially Friederike Greb, Anne-Claire Mouilliez and Grace Omondi, for their invaluable contributions.

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