Evaluation of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan Implementation of the Protection of Civilians Mandate

26 June 2025

IED-25-012

OIOS
Office of Internal Oversight Services

INSPECTION AND EVALUATION DIVISION

Project team members include:
BRIAN DIENER, Team Leader
DAISY REBECCA NAKASI, Team Member
EDWARD RENZI, Consultant
GATYANG YAR, Consultant
LINGQI GAO, Intern
YUNER JIANG, Intern

Contact Information **OIOS-IED Contact Information:**
phone: +1 212-963-8148; fax: +1 212-963-1211; email: ied@un.org

RAKIB HOSSAIN, **Chief of Section**
Tel: +1-917-239-3613, e-mail: hossainr@un.org

DEMETRA ARAPAKOS, Director
Tel: +1 917-367 6033, e-mail: arapakos@un.org

Contents

Summary

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) evaluated the relevance, coherence and effectiveness of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) implementation of the of the Protection of Civilians (POC) mandate in the lead-up to national elections.

UNMISS employed a range of complementary modalities to prevent and respond to threats against civilians, which were well aligned with its POC mandate. The mission made initial efforts to adapt the modalities in anticipation of the national elections planned for December 2024, but their adaptation was limited by electoral uncertainty, insufficient focus on persons with disabilities, refugees and climate-related risks and the absence of best practice reviews.

UNMISS contributed to conflict prevention by expanding civic and political spaces and strengthening links between government and community actors. The mission employed stakeholder engagement, political forums, community reconciliation projects and capacity building of the security sector to promote social cohesion and peaceful coexistence. These UNMISS interventions were broadly perceived by the public as contributing to increased safety and conflict mitigation. Nonetheless, the effectiveness of these modalities was constrained by several factors, including limited participation of civil society organizations, a reactive rather than proactive approach and a lack of follow-up on capacity-building initiatives and several were also not always fully aligned with the geographic distribution and evolving nature of violence.

UNMISS contributions to de-escalating conflict achieved mixed results, as overall levels of violence in the country remained steady. While the presence of bases contributed to reduced violence in surrounding areas, patrol deployments, dialogues and key leadership engagement had varied effectiveness in reducing incidents of violence. Furthermore, while coordination among UNMISS components and between UNMISS and external stakeholders was generally effective, internal coherence was hindered by data management challenges, while external coherence faced gaps in collaboration with community-level stakeholders.

OIOS makes five key recommendations to UNMISS to:

i. revise its POC strategy;

ii. enhance the follow-up mechanism for capacity building activities;

iii. strategically allocate resources for key activities, training, quick impact projects and patrols based on needs and evolving conflict dynamics;

iv. renegotiate and revise the JVMM framework; and

v. establish a reporting system that integrates internal mission data management systems.

I.   Introduction and objective

1.   The overall objective of this Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) evaluation was to determine, as systematically and objectively as possible, the relevance, coherence and effectiveness of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) implementation of the Protection of Civilians (POC) mandate in the lead-up to national elections. The evaluation was conducted in conformity with the norms and standards for evaluation in the United Nations System.[1]

2.   Management response from UNMISS on the draft report is included in Annex I. OIOS wishes to thank the evaluation focal points who assisted with the conduct of the evaluation.

II.   Background

Mandate and objectives

3.   UNMISS was established on 9 July 2011 by the Security Council in its resolution 1996 (2011). Following the outbreak of civil war in South Sudan in December 2013, the Security Council shifted the UNMISS mandate focus from "consolidation of peace" to four key areas, which remained largely consistent since 2014. The latest mandate of UNMISS as provided in resolution 2729 (2024) included:

   a. protection of civilians;
   b. creating conditions conducive to the delivery of humanitarian assistance;
   c. supporting the implementation of the peace agreement and peace process; and
   d. monitoring, investigating and reporting on violations of international humanitarian and human rights laws.

4.   The 2018 Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan" (R-ARCSS) serves as the cornerstone framework for peacebuilding and political transition efforts in South Sudan. The mission's mandated objective was to assist the Security Council in advancing a three-year strategic vision to prevent a return to civil war, build durable peace at the local and national levels and support inclusive and accountable governance and free, fair and peaceful elections in accordance with the R-ARCSS and the subsequent agreement on the road map to a peaceful and democratic end to the transitional period signed by the parties to the agreement on 4 August 2022. As of 2024, the mandate included a multiyear strategic vision with largely the same objectives and included the enablement of the self-reliance of South Sudan.

South Sudan context

5.   The political and security situation in South Sudan has remained fragile, with slow progress on the implementation of the R-ARCSS. In September 2024, the government extended the transitional period by two years, pushing national elections from December 2024 to December 2026. Electoral preparations remain slow, with delays in reconvening the Joint Task Force,[2] limited deployment of the Necessary Unified Forces (NUF) and financial constraints in the constitution-making process.[3]

---

[1] United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG). Norms and Standards for Evaluation, 2016.
[2] The Joint Task Force is a coordination mechanism led by the government to support to the electoral and constitution-making processes. It includes the African Union, IGAD, UNMISS, the Troika (Norway, the United Kingdom and the United States) and other national stakeholders.
[3] S/2024/54 paras 7, 10 and 12.

6.   The humanitarian situation in South Sudan remains dire, with about nine million people in need of humanitarian assistance including food, shelter and healthcare. Additionally, floods and conflicts have contributed to worsening conditions for over 2.1 million internally displaced persons (IDPs).[4] Furthermore, as of April 2024, over half a million refugees sought refuge in South Sudan.[5]

III.   Scope and Methodology

7.   The evaluation focused on examining the extent to which UNMISS considered threats to civilians in the lead-up to national elections, on election day and in the period immediately following elections in its POC strategy.[6] It further assessed UNMISS mitigation of those threats using different modalities linked to the three tiers of its POC efforts as shown in Figure 1.[7]

Figure 1: Modalities assessed across the three tiers of POC

Tier 1: Protection through dialogue and engagement	Tier 2: Protection through physical protection	Tier 3: Establishment of a protective environment
• Multi-stakeholder and multi-thematic workshops • Key leadership and stakeholder engagement • Political forums and events • Dialogues and community violence reduction projects • Early warning mechanisms	• Peacekeeper deployments • Scenario planning • Patrols • Operating bases	• Training to South Sudan government and security forces • Joint operational collaboration • Quick Impact Projects

8.   The evaluation covered the 2021-2024 period and used a mixed-methods approach, incorporating the data sources listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Data sources

💬	104 semi-structured interviews with UNMISS staff and stakeholders from the United Nations Country Team (UNCT), Government of South Sudan (GoSS), civil society organizations (CSOs), non-government organizations (NGOs) and academics. Among the interview participants, 30 per cent were women.
👥	10 focus group discussions (FGDs) with representatives from CSOs and local population, including IDPs.
🖥️	Secondary data from the Situational Awareness Geospatial Enterprise (SAGE), Secretary-General's reports, UNMISS activity and training reports and databases, external data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED).
📚	Desk review of 473 internal and external documents including Security Council resolutions, Secretary-General's reports, mission plan, concept notes, POC strategy, budget documents, workplans, project reports, meeting minutes, strategic reviews, UNCT reports, external research, perception surveys and United Nations Peacekeeping Best Practices Database.
👥	Case studies on mission responses to three selected incidents of violence in Tambura County, Western Equatoria (June – September 2021), Leer County in Unity (February – April 2022) and Adidiang, Upper Nile (July – September 2022). Additionally, six state-level political forums conducted in 2024 in Western Bahr el Ghazal, Central Equatoria, Lakes, Unity, Western Equatoria and Jonglei states were reviewed.
👁️👁️	Direct observations of the Mission Leadership Team meeting and visit to an IDP camp.

---

[4] https://dtm.iom.int/south-sudan.

[5] OCHA South Sudan Humanitarian Response Plan 2024.

[6] Rule of law, strategic communications and children and armed conflict, were excluded as they were covered in recent OIOS evaluations.

[7] While some modalities are applied across multiple POC tiers, Figure 1 provides a framework for assessment of the modalities in this evaluation.

IV. Evaluation Results

A. UNMISS modalities were well aligned overall to its POC mandate, but their adaptation in anticipation of national elections was limited by election-related uncertainty, insufficient focus on persons with disabilities, refugees and climate-related risks and the absence of best practice reviews

UNMISS modalities for POC were generally well aligned with its mandate

9. UNMISS employed a range of complementary modalities to prevent and respond to threats against civilians, which were well aligned with its POC mandate. The mission engaged with government actors, local authorities, CSOs and local communities through its Tier 1 POC modalities, including hosting dialogues, workshops and community violence reduction projects to address causes of violence, building trust and strengthening local capacities for conflict prevention. Through organizing political forums, the mission contributed to the expansion of the civic and political spaces by providing inclusive platforms for promoting social cohesion, fostering confidence in the electoral process and empowering stakeholders to peacefully participate in political processes.

10. The mission's Tier 2 POC modalities of peacekeeper deployment, patrols and establishment of temporary operating bases (TOBs) served as key protective measures that enhanced the mission's physical presence and response to emerging threats. The alignment was further reflected in the Tier 3 POC modalities through capacity building sessions that equipped the South Sudanese military and police with the necessary competencies to protect civilians. These efforts were complemented by the Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) modality, which provided small-scale infrastructure to support the operational effectiveness of the security actors. Additionally, modalities such as scenario planning, joint operational collaboration and early warning mechanisms were utilised to identify risks and inform decision making on appropriate adaptive and mitigation strategies.

UNMISS made initial efforts to adapt its POC modalities in anticipation of national elections

11. In preparation for the elections planned for December 2024, UNMISS attempted to adapt its POC modalities to meet the needs of the election period. Key initiatives included:
- scenario planning by the Elections Security Analysis Working Group (ESAWG) since January 2024 to identify risks and prepare adaptive strategies for election security, with the ESAWG chaired by the Joint Mission Analysis Centre (JMAC) and comprised of 12 members from key mission sections including both uniformed and civilian components;
- regular biweekly coordination meetings on Elections and Constitution-Making Process, which coordinated discussions on electoral developments and necessary adaptation measures;
- joint operational collaboration by the Electoral Affairs Division (EAD), Joint Operations Centre (JOC), JMAC and the United Nations Police (UNPOL) through scenario planning and briefings to management on required election security measures;
- capacity building and training efforts geared toward supporting state actors such as State commissioners and National Police Service (NPS) officers on election security, prevention of electoral offenses and human rights to enhance their readiness to protect civilians during the electoral process;[8] and

---

[8] UNPOL training reports; South Sudanese law enforcement personnel sensitized on human rights | UNMISS

- targeted training bringing together representatives from the Electoral Commission (EC), law enforcement and defence forces to strengthen their understanding of legal frameworks and the role of security actors in ensuring free and fair elections (e.g., training of 40 representatives in Upper Nile).[9]

12.   Additionally, in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNPOL developed manuals on election security and violence against women and introduced a new training line on elections. The Trilateral Taskforce on Permanent Constitution-Making and Electoral processes, comprising UNMISS, the African Union (AU) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), also supported electoral and constitution making processes. Furthermore, the ESAWG assessed election-related insecurity drivers in February 2024 and reassessed risks in October 2024, after elections were postponed.

Uncertainty regarding the election timeline hindered more proactive and strategic planning

13.   Despite initial efforts to adapt its POC modalities to the electoral context, proactive planning was constrained by:

- electoral uncertainty: the lack of clarity around the December 2024 elections [10] discouraged substantial operational changes. Many mission interviewees noted that it was not feasible to implement major adjustments to POC modalities without confirmed electoral timelines or processes;
- balancing of commitments: while noting that caution was necessary to avoid committing resources or actions prematurely, mission interviewees also warned that prolonged delays in proactive planning could leave the mission underprepared if elections are quickly mobilized in 2026; and
- gaps in POC strategy: a review of the revised UNMISS POC strategy[11] found that it did not sufficiently address risks of electoral violence or include adaptive mechanisms to address potential escalations, despite UNMISS being aware of the upcoming elections at the time of the revision.

UNMISS POC modalities were responsive to some vulnerable groups but less so to persons with disabilities and refugees and did not systematically consider climate risks

14.   UNMISS integrated the perspectives of some vulnerable groups into national elections preparations through targeted consultations and capacity-building workshops on constitution making and electoral processes. For example, in 2023 the mission engaged 547 participants, including 187 women and IDPs from seven localities.[12] In 2024, similar activities in two states reached 160 IDPs (87 women) and 50 women leaders.[13] To advance gender inclusion, UNMISS organized workshops, launched women networks and provided gender-sensitivity training. The mission was responsive to youth and women, but reported fewer activities focused on IDPs, persons with disabilities (PWDs) and refugees.

---

[9] Civil and military leaders trained on importance of respecting human rights ahead of elections | UNMISS
[10] Key benchmarks had yet to be achieved (specifying the election type, duration, registration of parties, etc.)
[11] UNMISS Protection of Civilians Strategy 2022-2024, revised in 2022.
[12] S/2023/433, para. 37
[13] S/2024/572, para. 37

15.	To address climate-related risks, the mission undertook a few initiatives, including a climate security assessment and reporting project in Unity state, contributed to a United Nations system wide flood risk analysis and preparedness plan and constructed dikes in Bentiu to protect IDPs. The mission also conducted community sensitization activities and stakeholder consultations to address tensions arising from flooding in four states and developed a climate dashboard.

16.	Despite these initiatives, preparedness for inclusive electoral-related POC efforts was constrained by the limited focus on IDPs, PWDs and refugees. Some external stakeholders interviewed also noted limited inclusivity in UNMISS activities and repeated engagements of the same actors. Furthermore, although climate-related security risks were increasingly recognized as a significant driver of vulnerabilities in South Sudan, [14] they were not adequately addressed in election preparations. Key weaknesses included fragmented initiatives, inconsistent implementation across the ten states and inadequate use of the climate dashboard, which incorporated data from only one section.

UNMISS had yet to systematically consider lessons from other countries and United Nations peace operations in its POC planning for elections

17.	The mission had not conducted a comprehensive review of strategies employed internationally, including by other United Nations peace operations, relating to elections and POC, which could provide valuable lessons to inform preparation for election-related POC efforts in South Sudan. Interviews with mission staff reinforced this missed opportunity, as they were unable to recall specific examples of best practices from other countries and peace operations supporting POC before, during and after elections that would have been helpful for their own work.

18.	An OIOS review of best practices on POC and elections revealed several key strategies and innovative methods. These practices focused on partnerships to build election trust and strengthen security, some of which were already in place in UNMISS, such as the use of integrated teams and combating misinformation through media like Radio Miraya. However, other good practices were not yet being followed in the mission. The absence of a structured review of past mission experiences led UNMISS to miss critical lessons from comparable contexts that could have informed and contributed to improvements in its electoral preparedness.

B.	**UNMISS contributed to conflict prevention by expanding civic and political spaces and capacity building of the security sector, but several external and internal challenges constrained its overall effectiveness**

UNMISS strengthened links between government and community actors for conflict prevention

19.	UNMISS effectively employed the modality of stakeholder engagement to strengthen links between government and community actors for conflict prevention. Between 2021 and 2024, the mission's initiatives included:
- 28 dialogues and mediation efforts involving 2,346 (453 women) participants, including government actors, traditional leaders, security forces and civil society to build trust and coordination and resulted in local laws curbing revenge killings;
- workshops on seasonal migration in Warrap and Western Bahr el Ghazal states that contributed to mitigating tensions and facilitated safer seasonal movements;

---

[14] South Sudan: On the front line of climate change by UN Humanitarian

- dialogues in Jonglei state that helped reduce revenge attacks among the Nuer, Dinka and Murle communities; and
- community reconciliation projects, such as one in Western Bahr el Ghazal that brought together former combatants and community members to foster peaceful coexistence through socioeconomic reintegration, including vocational training and microgrant schemes.

20.   At the subnational level, the mission implemented numerous modalities such as dialogues, workshops and training sessions for CSOs, local government, NGOs and community stakeholders to resolve conflicts among groups, equip community leaders to manage disputes, reduce tensions and promote peaceful coexistence. For example, its Civil Affairs Division (CAD) conducted approximately 120 programmatic activities and reached over 28,000 beneficiaries annually during 2021-2024. Overall, external stakeholders interviewed praised UNMISS for its efforts to mediate disputes and prevent conflicts.

UNMISS effectively engaged political parties to promote social cohesion and addressed security challenges posed by armed groups and militias

21.   The mission engaged political parties in promoting social cohesion, mainly through political forums focused on governance, electoral conduct and civic participation. These initiatives created a platform for inclusive dialogue, fostered confidence in the electoral process and empowered citizens to participate in political processes. For example, the mission:
- organized a series of national political party forums culminating in the endorsement of a voluntary code of conduct for political parties;
- supported six state-level political forums with political party participation; and
- facilitated the inaugural meeting with the Political Parties Council (PPC) and the National Elections Commission (NEC).

22.   The mission also supported the PPC with party registration, regulations and funding and organized workshops on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and gender equality. These contributed to a more structured and transparent party participation process and the implementation of the 35 per cent quota for the participation of women.[15] However, effectiveness of these initiatives was hindered by complicated party registration processes, insufficient funding for many parties, restrictions on organizing and holding rallies and deep mistrust between government and opposition parties.

23.   The mission addressed challenges posed by armed groups through community violence reduction projects, capacity building and awareness activities focused on enhancing human rights awareness, strengthening the capacity of local actors to prevent violence, as well as through security monitoring and patrols to document cases and provide assistance to survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. These contributed to enhanced protection and resilience in the affected communities.

UNMISS contributed to the expansion of civic and political spaces through inclusive forums

---

[15] The quota originates from the R-ARCSS as part of a broader commitment to promote gender equality and ensure women's meaningful participation in governance at national and state levels.

24.   UNMISS leveraged political and civil society forums as key modalities to expand civic and political space at national and subnational levels, implementing over 400 activities between 2021 and 2024. Key initiatives included:

- monthly national political party forums discussed above in para 21;
- state-level political forums fostering open dialogue among diverse actors (conflicting political parties, security forces and CSOs) for the first time focusing on electoral preparedness, security sector neutrality and inclusive governance. Notably, the Yambio forum resulted in a state order mandating freer political engagement. [16] Mission and external interviewees praised these forums as innovative; and
- quarterly civil society forums bringing together CSOs, police and political stakeholders at the state level to enhance civic participation and served as a platform for CSOs to raise concerns about government harassment and restrictions.

UNMISS provided extensive training to South Sudanese military and police

25.   Through its capacity building modality, UNMISS conducted numerous sessions to train the South Sudan People's Defence Forces (SSPDF), NPS and other organized forces on POC and conflict management issues. During 2021-2024, approximately 3,344 personnel were trained in areas such as civil-military cooperation, leadership, peacebuilding, military justice, child protection, human rights and prevention of conflict-related sexual violence. Additionally, UNPOL conducted 753 training sessions on POC and election security management for the NPS and other community actors, reaching approximately 33,000 participants to enhance law enforcement and community safety capabilities.

26.   UNMISS also implemented some QIPs as a mechanism to equip state forces with essential infrastructure to support their operational effectiveness. These projects included constructing police stations, prisons and renovating rule of law institutions that enhance POC through improved security presence and access to justice. External interviewees viewed QIPs as effective in addressing community needs and having potential to support POC before the elections, such as by building police posts that could serve as voting centers.

The effectiveness of conflict prevention modalities was constrained by external and internal challenges

27.   Notwithstanding the positive results of the mission's conflict prevention efforts as discussed above, mission staff and external stakeholders interviewed noted several challenges that limited their effectiveness. Key external challenges included:

- government resistance to CSO participation, leading to repeated engagements of the same individuals or groups and limiting inclusion of some community level stakeholders;
- accessibility limitations hindering wider CSO participation in some locations;
- low participation of women in some activities;
- inconsistent follow-through on forum commitments. For example, despite communiqués issued after the state-level political forums, 16 violations[17] of freedom of expression and arbitrary arrests were recorded by UNMISS across six states, highlighting a gap in translating commitments into tangible change that expands civic and political spaces;

---

[16] Western Equatoria-State Order No. 21/2024.
[17] Juba (6), Wau (6), Western Equatoria (1), Unity (1), Jonglei (1) and Lakes (1).

- unresolved systemic drivers of conflict that further weakened long-term impact; and
- lack of political will from the GoSS on human rights and implementation of the peace agreement benchmarks.

28.   Internal challenges related to engagement and dialogue modalities included: (a) the overall mission approach being more reactive than proactive; (b) the mission taking a leading role in executing activities rather than supporting local communities and stakeholders to do so, which limited empowerment of and ownership of the initiatives by local communities; and (c) limited follow up and strategic engagement for the implementation of commitments made during forums.

29.   Furthermore, regarding the capacity building modality specifically, the lack of follow up mechanisms at the mission to monitor whether trainees effectively applied learnings limited the assessment of training outcomes. Mission staff interviewed also noted inefficiencies in training delivery, including repeated training of the same personnel, often driven by incentives of receiving per diems for participation. To address these issues, UNPOL launched a database in 2023 to track trainees; however, mechanisms to assess the impact of trainings remained limited.

30.   Additionally, UNMISS deployment of several cross-tier modalities were not always aligned with the geographic distribution of violence as shown in Table 2. For example, in terms of capacity building, community engagement and conflict management activities organized by CAD, Central Equatoria received 52 per cent of the CAD project funding despite accounting for only 8 per cent of reported violent incidents, whereas Jonglei, one of the most violence-affected states with 23 per cent of incidents, received just two per cent of activities as shown in Table 2. The mission noted that the CAD annual budget was equally allocated across all field offices and adjusted based on utilization of the allocated funds and needs assessments later, including through realignment of resources from other sections with no field office experiencing a funding shortfall during 2021-2024.

Table 2: Distribution, cost and reach of CAD programmatic activities for conflict management versus level of incidents of violence per state, 2021-2024

State	Per cent of Incidents	Average		Per cent of Total		
		Participants/activity	Cost/activity	Activities	Funding	Participants
Central Equatoria	8	69	$35.1K	12	53	4
Eastern Equatoria	15	393	$6.9K	6	5	12
Jonglei	23	70	$4.2K	11	6	4
Lakes	10	440	$4.9K	10	6	22
Northern Bahr el Ghazal	1	157	$5.0K	12	7	9
Unity	5	119	$1.7K	6	1	4
Upper Nile	7	413	$2.6K	12	4	25
Warrap	26	192	$6.1K	6	5	6
Western Bahr el Ghazal	1	89	$5.5K	12	8	5
Western Equatoria	4	136	$2.7K	12	4	8

Source: CAD and SAGE data

31.   Similarly, some misalignment was observed in the distribution of UNPOL training, as shown in Table 3. For example, Jonglei, which accounted for 17 per cent of violent incidents, received only 6 per cent of training. Multiple factors in addition to violence incidents, including the availability and reliability of data, accessibility of conflict-affected areas, local absorption capacity (e.g., staff turnover, prior training levels) and the ability of local authorities to release personnel without compromising public safety, influenced programmatic choices. Nevertheless, the disparities shown in Table 3 suggested gaps in prioritization and responsiveness to evolving conflict dynamics. Furthermore, the wide variability in activity costs and reach suggested a gap in the use of standardized criteria to guide programming based on actual needs and risks in violence-prone areas.

Table 3: UNPOL training distribution versus level of incidents of violence per state, 2021-2024

State	Per cent of incidents (includes crime, communal violence and armed conflict)	Per cent of projects	Per cent of $	Per cent of participants reached
Central Equatoria	15	24	27	19
Eastern Equatoria	11	11	6	15
Jonglei	17	6	8	5
Lakes	10	8	11	12
Northern Bahr el Ghazal	2	9	8	7
Unity	13	9	8	11
Upper Nile	7	4	4	5
Warrap	13	10	8	9
Western Bahr el Ghazal	4	13	13	13
Western Equatoria	8	7	8	5

Source: UNPOL training reports and SAGE data

UNMISS contributed to public perceptions of increased safety despite fears of electoral violence

32.   UNMISS interventions were broadly perceived by the public as contributing to increased safety and conflict mitigation. According to a perception survey conducted by UNMISS in 2024,[18] 87 per cent of respondents reported feeling safer due to the presence of UNMISS peacekeepers, suggesting that physical presence and patrolling activities contributed to a sense of protection. Furthermore, 88 per cent felt the mission's human rights monitoring helped prevent violence and abuse, while 87 per cent credited UNMISS with reducing intercommunal conflict and contributing to durable peace. However, external survey data revealed wide variations in public perceptions of the mission's protection efforts across different states.[19] Additionally, another external survey[20] reported that while there was strong public support for holding elections, fears of electoral violence remained widespread across many communities.

---

[18] https://unmiss.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/summary_2024_unmiss_perception_survey.pdf
[19] Human Security Survey by PAX Protection of Civilians, available at: https://protectionofcivilians.org/topics/human-security-survey/
[20] 2023 Perceptions of Peace (PoP) survey, available at: https://peacerep.org/perceptions-peace-south-sudan/

C. UNMISS contributions to de-escalating conflict achieved mixed results in part due to operational constraints

UNMISS modalities of deployments, dialogues and key leadership engagement achieved mixed success in de-escalating conflict, as the overall level of violence remained steady

33.   Between 2021-2024, overall violence levels in South Sudan remained steady, suggesting mixed success in the mission's efforts to curb violence. During 2021-2024, the mission's SAGE database recorded 4,202 incidents and 9,091 fatalities from armed conflict and communal violence (excluding crimes), as shown in Figure 2, averaging one death nearly every four hours. Total incidents decreased by approximately one per cent while fatalities rose by six per cent. Communal violence accounted for 89 per cent of incidents and 86 per cent of fatalities, while armed conflict accounted for 11 per cent of incidents and 14 per cent of fatalities. An analysis of biennial moving averages indicated a downward trend for armed conflict incidents and fatalities, in contrast with communal violence incidents and fatalities.

Figure 2: Incidents and fatalities 2021-2024
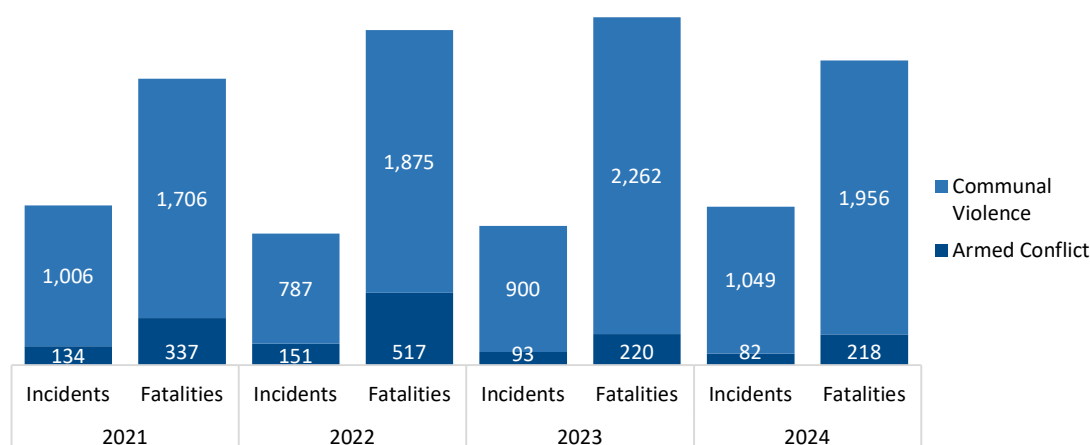
Source: SAGE data 2021-2024

34.   With regard to de-escalating violence, UNMISS deployed peacekeepers to more than 30 bases including field offices, TOBs[21] and company operating bases to expand its reach and deter attacks. This UNMISS strategy was viewed positively by mission interviewees, with some highlighting the use of female peacekeepers to address sexual and gender-based violence and conflict-related sexual violence. On the other hand, some external stakeholder interviewees expressed concern that the reduced deployments at most POC sites due to their transition to government control in 2021 contributed to attacks on returnees.

35.   Beyond these military deployments, UNMISS also utilized dialogue and key leadership engagement modalities, particularly through its good offices, to de-escalate conflicts, including in the three case study locations reviewed (as discussed in para 48). For example, in Tambura (2021), UNMISS led a delegation with the European Union (EU), AU, Troika and IGAD to mediate and issue a

---

[21] This included three extended-duration TOBs in Koch, Jamjang and Tambura.

joint press statement, which contributed to the government taking de-escalatory measures. Other examples included the:

- Vice President's House Standoff (April 2022): diplomatic engagement helped defuse a political crisis and prevent potential violence.
- mobilization of armed youth near Malakal (2024): political engagement at national and state levels prevented clashes threatening civilians.

36.   As part of violence mitigation, the mission also provided logistical support to key actors and supported infrastructure development. These included: facilitating travel to hard-to-reach locations for politicians; providing protection and safe spaces for dialogue; and constructing dykes, flood barriers and repairing roads. These were all noted as useful by both mission and external interviewees.

37.   Several mission interviewees described UNMISS as "firefighting", noting that its engagements were necessary but insufficient for lasting peace. This was observed in all three case studies reviewed, where initial UNMISS interventions helped reduce conflict, but where violence eventually reoccurred, but at a reduced intensity. Additionally, other key areas where violence persisted between 2021 and 2024 included Warrap, Jonglei and Upper Nile, where intercommunal violence resulted in numerous civilian casualties despite UNMISS efforts.

*The modality of operating bases contributed to reduced violence*

38.   Fewer incidents occurred in areas near operating bases, indicating that base presence was a deterrent for violence. The use of TOBs in high-risk areas was perceived by mission interviewees as effective in enabling UNMISS to project force in hard-to-reach areas and provide safe havens for displaced populations. An analysis of violence before and after TOB establishment in Abiemnhom in 2024 indicated that incidents and fatalities decreased following the TOB opening, when including adjacent counties, as shown in Figure 3. Similarly, incidents and fatalities including in adjacent counties significantly decreased after a TOB was opened in 2024 in Maper, Lakes (Rumbek North), but increased sharply after the TOB was closed, as shown in Figure 4. Statistical analyses also showed that incident rates increased in proportion to distance from a base, confirming that base proximity enhances deterrence and security.

Figure 3: Decrease in incidents and fatalities in Abiemnhom and adjacent counties was sustained with the presence of a TOB
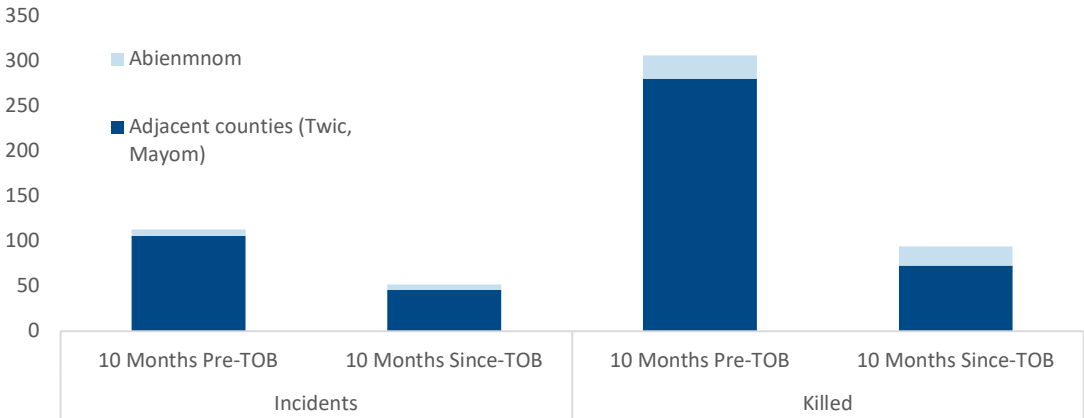
Source: SAGE 2023-2024

Figure 4: Incidents and fatalities in Rumbek North and adjacent counties increased after closure of the TOB
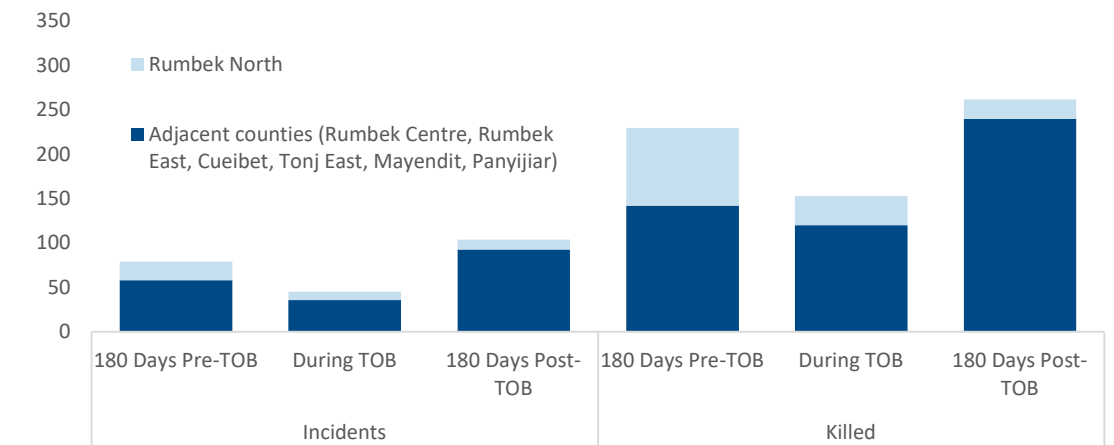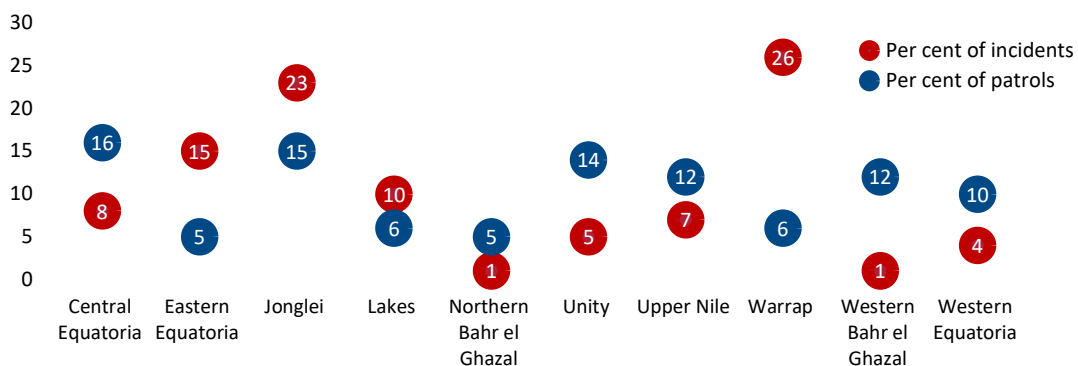

Source: SAGE 2023-2024

There was limited evidence that the modality of patrols effectively deterred or responded to violence, as they were largely unaligned with the locations and timing of violent incidents

39.   There was a misalignment between patrols[22] and incidents – states with higher shares of incidents (e.g., Jonglei) received disproportionally fewer patrols, while areas with lower violence (e.g., Western Bahr el Ghazal) had a higher share of patrols, as shown in Figure 5. While this alone may not fully indicate resource misallocation, as fewer incidents could signal successful prevention, interpreting results was complicated by the lack of distinction between preventive and responsive patrols in SAGE, which was expected to show different patterns in the data. [23] Additionally, interviewees noted inconsistencies in data entry for patrol types (e.g. short-duration, long-duration, air, foot-based), further compromising reliability.

Figure 5: Share of incidents and patrols by state 2021-2024
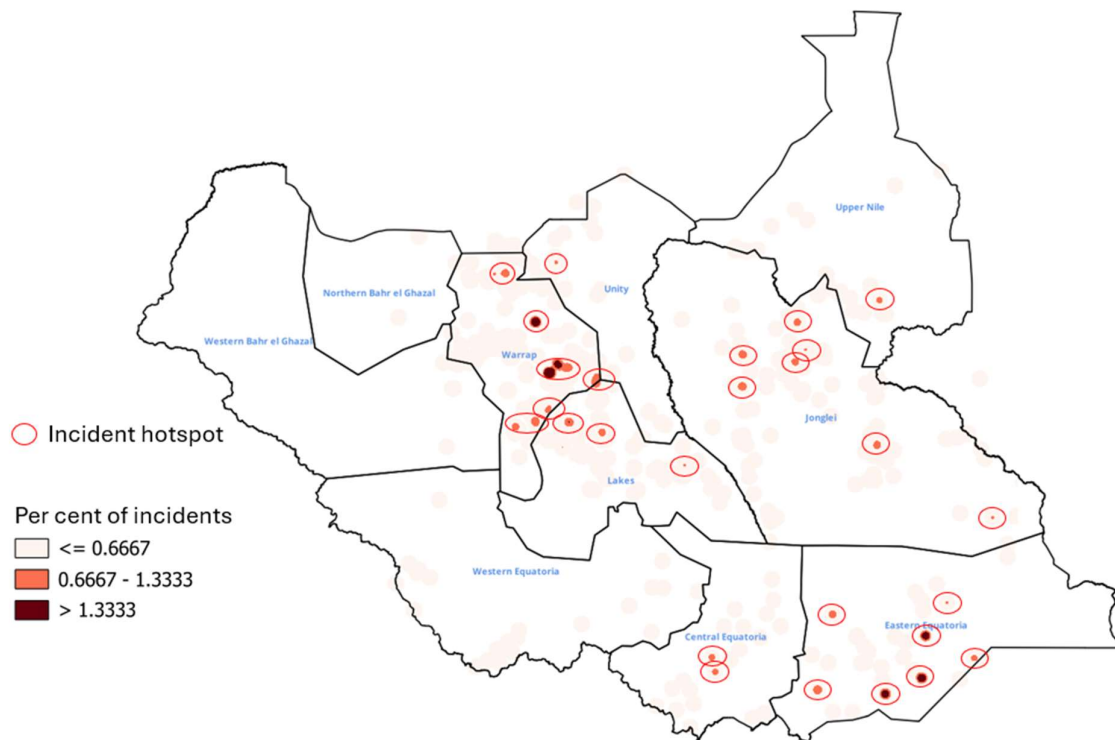

Source: SAGE 2021-2024

---

[22] Between 2021-2024, SAGE data recorded 125,182 patrols. UNPOL POC Site activities, while coded as patrols in SAGE, were excluded from this analysis.
[23] If most patrols are preventive, fewer incident points would be expected; if largely responsive, both patrol and incident points would appear in the same locations.

40.   Further analysis of patrol data showed that patrols did not evolve with the changing conflict dynamics and trends, as their distribution did not align with changes in incident proportions by state. For example, in Eastern Equatoria, while its share of incidents increased from 2022 and 2023 (10 to 19 per cent), its share of patrols remained between 4-5 per cent from 2022 to 2024. Some mission staff interviewed alluded to this misalignment by questioning the strategic planning behind patrol allocation.

41.   There was a concentration of patrols near UNMISS bases, often related to perimeter security.[24] Between 2021 and 2024, 80 per cent of patrols and 16 per cent of incidents occurred within 5km of UNMISS bases. To address this concentration, heatmaps focused analyses on outside the 5km zone around bases, which found high-incident zones received lower patrol coverage, as shown in Figure 6 and Figure 7. While some misalignment can be attributed to access denials and terrain challenges, these results suggested that patrol prioritization was not always driven by incident trends. In that regard, the mission noted that patrol distribution and prioritization were also informed by careful consideration of mandated responsibilities, operational constraints and the broader security context, rather than a failure to respond to incident trends. These operational realities often affected patrol effectiveness; statistical analyses suggested that patrols did not significantly help prevent or respond to violence.
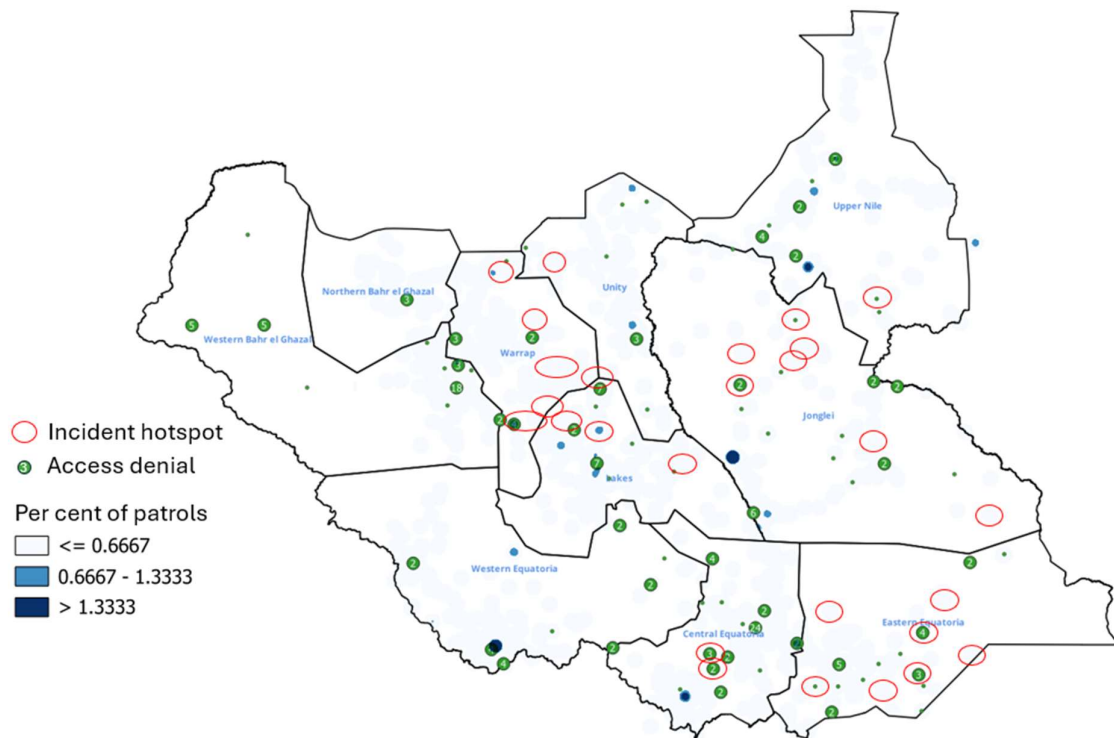
Figure 6: Incident hotspots (outside 5km zones around bases) in 2024

Source: SAGE 2024

---

[24] For example, in Unity in 2023, 4,791 patrols, representing 72 cent of patrols in that state that year, were coded to a single point.

Figure 7: Incident hotspots overlaid with patrol hotspots and access denials in 2024

42.   Furthermore, there was limited evidence on the effectiveness of patrols as a timely deterrent or response to violence. To assess this, the presence of at least one patrol within 20km of an incident – either within the seven days before (as a measure of deterrence) or after (as a measure of response) – was used as a proxy. Most incidents had no patrol nearby in the week before or after, as shown in Figure 8, suggesting that patrols were not always linked to these events. However, between 2021 and 2024, the share of incidents with a nearby patrol in the week before or after increased, indicating that patrols were becoming more aligned with the timing of incidents. Additionally, the mission noted that several factors informed strategic patrol deployment decisions, including proactive risk assessments and threat analyses, logistical and security constraints and the need for proactive positioning in areas of emerging or anticipated tensions to deter violence.

Figure 8: Percentage of incidents with patrols within 20km before and after seven days, 2021-2024

Overall (2021-2024)

39% within 7 days before

41% within 7 days after

By Year

35% 2021 · 33% 2022 · 42% 2023 · 47% 2024 — within 7 days before

36% 2021 · 35% 2022 · 44% 2023 · 49% 2024 — within 7 days after
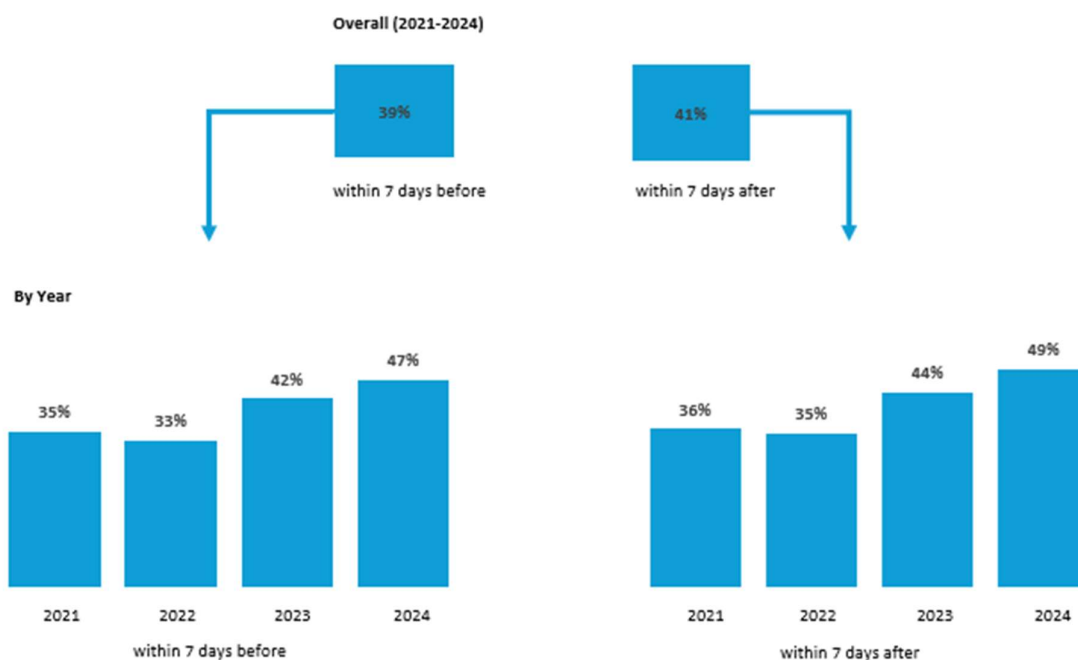
Source: SAGE 2021-2024

Effective responses to violence were uneven and constrained by gaps in early warning coverage, difficult terrain, logistical challenges and restrictive coordination requirements under the Joint Verification Monitoring Mechanism (JVMM)

43.   The effectiveness of the early warning mechanisms modality was mixed. A review of mission situation reports revealed that it collected detailed early warning information on developing tensions and forward-looking concerns from government officials, county commissioners, humanitarians, CSOs, local communities and community protection networks in some locations. Additionally, in 2022 the mission established Integrated Response Planning (InRep) meetings, which brought together substantive sections to discuss early warning concerns and make recommendations to mission leadership. While mission interviewees unanimously saw this as a positive development, they noted that early warning was not always present. Specifically, mission staff interviewed mentioned that it was difficult for UNMISS to verify smaller-scale threats, while some external stakeholders also noted that they were excluded from the early warning system; these stakeholders perceived that UNMISS relied more on information from the government and select CSOs and less from community engagement. Furthermore, Western Equatoria community leaders highlighted a lack of two-way communication, noting that UNMISS received information without relaying potential threats back to communities.

44.   Furthermore, there was widespread consensus among mission and external stakeholders interviewed that UNMISS responses to violent incidents were often delayed or reactive. Many external interviewees noted that even when early warning information was shared, there was a lack of timely response from the mission. Additionally, case studies revealed that while the mission had early warnings in Adidiang and Tambura, UNMISS was slow or unable to prevent violence. The mission's response efforts faced several operational barriers, including:

- terrain challenges and poor infrastructure, especially during the rainy season when flooding was more prevalent;
- logistical challenges, including a lack of dedicated aerial surveillance (drones), limiting the ability to track mobilizations across large areas and limited air assets to reach far off locations; and
- planning constraints associated with the JVMM structure.

45.   With regard specifically to the JVMM, which was officially designated as a system to share information with the government,[25] it functioned in practice more as an approval procedure, limiting access and movement. In order to submit biweekly patrol plans in time to JVMM, patrols were planned by the mission 1-2 months in advance, making rapid response to emerging threats difficult. Emergency requests could be made but were often delayed, with processing times between 3 and 5 days.

46.   While the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) only required information sharing about mission movements, the JVMM unduly limited UNMISS movements. JVMM "denials" were often justified on security grounds to safeguard UNMISS personnel, though interviewees noted they were sometimes related to government security operations and possible human rights violations. Between 2022 and 2024, 454 patrol access and movement restrictions were imposed on UNMISS as shown in Table 4, split between "administrative" restrictions at the national level and "field" restrictions, where UNMISS patrols were stopped mid-course. Recent trends indicated an increase in field restrictions, while administrative restrictions declined.

Table 4 : Administrative and field restrictions of UNMISS movements by the JVMM

	2022	2023	2024	Total
Administrative	97	68	65	**230**
Field	7	77	140	**224**
Total	**104**	**145**	**205**	**454**

Source: Mission data

47.   Views on the effectiveness of UNMISS use of force were mixed among interviewees. Most mission staff interviewed noted that while the mission has a Chapter VII mandate, direct interposition or confrontation was not possible and the mission intervened to the extent possible given its available resources and operating context. Others – including a few from within the mission and several from outside the mission – noted a reluctance from the mission to intervene assertively. For instance, in Upper Nile, external interviewees cited an incident near the Malakal POC site where civilians were killed and UNMISS peacekeepers did not act, eroding trust in their protective capacity.

Case studies highlighted challenges UNMISS faced in responding to violence

48.   In all three case studies,[26] conflicts were driven by ethnic tensions, political rivalries and local power struggles – resulting in high civilian casualties, mass displacement and, in two of the cases, looting and burning of aid warehouses and attacks on aid workers. In all three cases, UNMISS used dialogues and patrols to de-escalate tensions. Additionally, TOBs were established in two cases – Tambura and Leer – although in Tambura, mission patrols were denied access.

49.   While UNMISS helped reduce tensions and supported post-crisis recovery, key cross-cutting challenges and resulting lessons emerged across all three cases:

---

[25] Under the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), UNMISS must notify authorities of its movement plans. It does this via the JVMM which is a body made up of representatives from the government and SSPDF.
[26] Case studies included: Tambura County, Western Equatoria (June – September 2021), Leer County in Unity (February – April 2022) and Adidiang, Upper Nile (July – September 2022).

- limited early warning and rapid deployment: known risks were not acted upon quickly due to delays in decision-making and limitations in force agility and positioning.
- ineffective deterrence posture: the presence of UNMISS troops did not appear to deter armed groups.
- gaps in political and community engagement: engagement efforts fell short in addressing the underlying ethnic and political grievances driving violence.
- gaps in protecting humanitarian space: coordination and access negotiations were inadequate, limiting the mission's ability to protect aid workers and maintain humanitarian access.
- sustainability and follow-through issues: violence reoccurred in all three cases, underscoring gaps in sustaining presence, following up on engagements and developing long-term strategies to address root causes.
- data and information management weaknesses: fragmented and inconsistent data across mission components hindered accurate analysis and responsive decision-making. For example, in Leer and Tambura, SAGE data on civilians killed, injured, or kidnapped was incomplete or inconsistent with figures from the mission's Human Rights Division. While variances were expected in casualty figures between SAGE and the human rights datasets due to methodological differences, these were significant.[27]
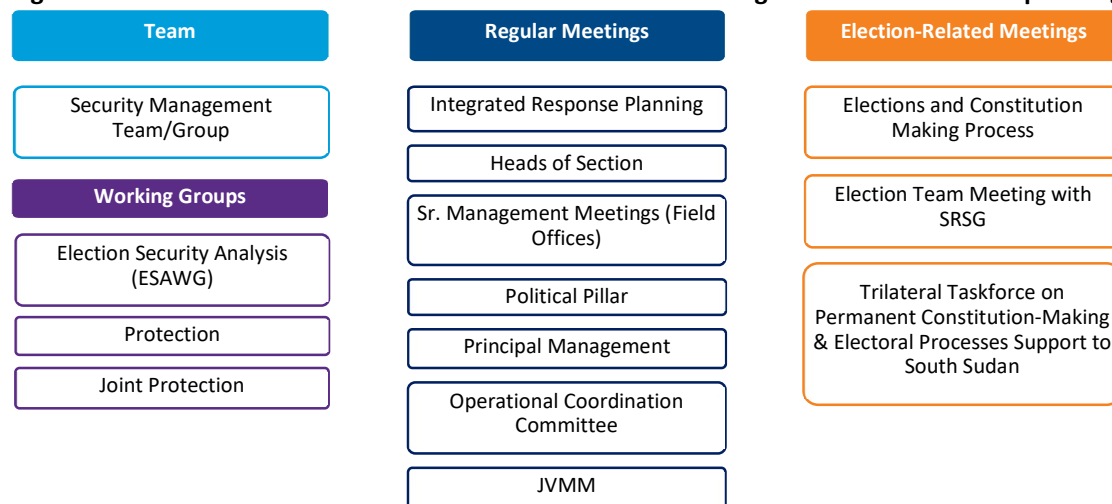
D. While coordination between mission components and with external stakeholders was generally effective, insufficient data management, information access delays and limitations in collaboration with government and community level stakeholders detracted from internal and external coherence

Internal mission coordination was strong, but faced data and reporting challenges

50. Coordination between mission components was strong overall. Excluding bilateral or regional meetings, there were at least 14 structured coordination mechanisms across the mission aimed at coordinating various aspects of POC and/or elections, as shown in Figure 9. These included thematic working groups, senior management and inter-section meetings, which facilitated information sharing, joint planning and strategic alignment among the different mission components. While most mission staff interviewed rated internal coordination positively, some noted that there are too many meetings and a few mentioned instances where teams had worked in silos, with overlapping or unclear responsibilities concerning efforts related to civic and political spaces and the integration of civilian and uniformed components.

---

[27] For Leer case: https://unmiss.unmissions.org/attacks-against-civilians-southern-unity-state-south-sudan-february-%E2%80%93-may-2022; for Tambura case:
https://unmiss.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/tambura_report_infographics_0.pdf

Figure 9: Formal coordination mechanisms within UNMISS dealing with POC or electoral planning

Team	Regular Meetings	Election-Related Meetings
Security Management Team/Group	Integrated Response Planning	Elections and Constitution Making Process
Working Groups	Heads of Section	Election Team Meeting with SRSG
Election Security Analysis (ESAWG)	Sr. Management Meetings (Field Offices)	Trilateral Taskforce on Permanent Constitution-Making & Electoral Processes Support to South Sudan
Protection	Political Pillar	
Joint Protection	Principal Management	
	Operational Coordination Committee	
	JVMM	

Source: Mission data

51.   Despite the positive assessment and existence of coordination mechanisms discussed above, operational coordination was constrained by challenges in staffing the dedicated POC advisor position and inadequate data management practices, characterized by data fragmentation, inconsistency, duplicated efforts and delays in accessing reliable information. Senior mission staff interviewed noted that the volume of reports, many containing duplicative information, detracted from their usefulness and overwhelmed decision-makers. They also cited other data-related challenges, including:

- different reporting systems and reporting of the same information differently led to discrepancies (e.g., SAGE patrol categories, UNPOL training data);
- gaps in tracking persons with disabilities and refugees in activities, distinguishing routine vs. responsive patrols, linking patrols with incidents and recording patrol waypoints instead of single geocoordinates;
- data entry errors, gaps in data literacy and absence of a structured verification process to ensure data accuracy;
- reporting focused on activities rather than outcomes and impact;
- dual reporting lines which created confusion;
- no systematic capture of SRSG, D/SRSGP and Head of Field Offices' (HoFo) good offices efforts; and
- limited management awareness of the extensive manual effort required to compile information from different systems.

52.   In recognition of these challenges, the mission implemented several measures between 2021 and 2024 to streamline and strengthen data management systems, including:

- piloting Unite Aware, a corporate system to consolidate some data systems into a single point of access;
- modernizing Political Affairs Division data systems;
- reducing the number of fields in the Field Integrated Operations Centre (FIOC) reports and categories in SAGE; and
- developing a database to track participants of UNPOL trainings.

53.   Beyond the internal data challenges, there were also inconsistencies with external data, including discrepancies in the reporting of QIPs in UNMISS and DPO databases. For example, during the last four fiscal years between 2022 and 2025, the DPO QIPs database identified 204 QIPs, in

contrast to the 166 QIPs identified in the UNMISS QIPs database with each missing some information.[28] Additionally, there were variations in reported incidents and fatalities from communal and armed conflicts between UNMISS and ACLED as shown in Figure 10. These differences are partly attributed to methodological variations between the two sources.[29] These examples highlighted concerns about data reliability, credibility of sources and possible under reporting of QIPs, incidents of violence and fatalities.

Figure 10: SAGE vs ACLED data, 2021-2024
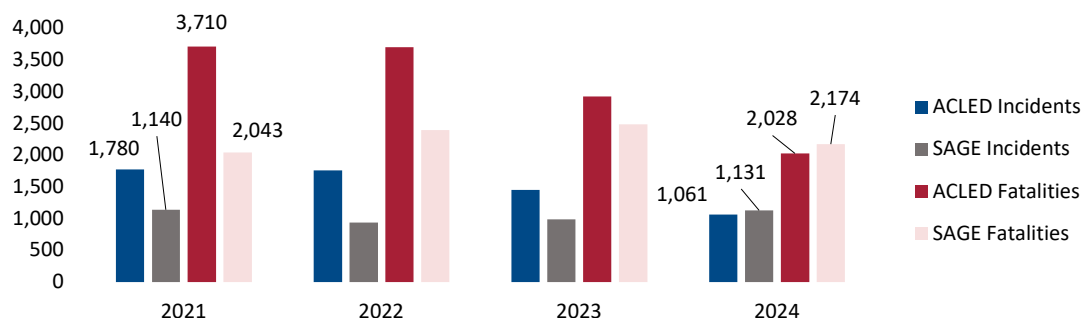
Source: UNMISS SAGE and ACLED data 2021 to 2024

Coordination with external stakeholders was generally effective but with some limitations

54.   Collaboration between UNMISS and GoSS was viewed as generally effective by both parties. In this regard, the mission collaborated with various ministries on a variety of topics, including:
- gender-based violence prevention and response;
- SSR actors to integrate women and facilitated engagements through governor forums; and
- workshops and meetings with the NEC and the National Constitutional Review Commission.

55.   Good coordination between UNMISS and the UNCT was specifically exemplified through:
- joint working groups on election security;
- protection cluster meetings;
- the Multi-Partner Trust Fund,
- collaboration with various UN agencies to facilitate consultations and workshops on constitution-making and electoral processes;
- a partnership with UNDP and the government to convene a national conference of traditional authority leaders from 10 states to discuss mitigating tensions and supporting peace in the context of elections.; and
- jointly supported peace dialogues with the International Organization for Migration, the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) and UNDP.

56.   Despite these successes, UNCT members interviewed noted occasional delays in information sharing between the mission and UNCT, particularly on crises, political engagements and dialogues. They also pointed to overlapping project mandates in peacebuilding, governance and infrastructure

---

[28] DPO: 2024-2025 (Q1 and Q2) and UNMISS 2020-2021 (Q3 and Q4) and 2021-2022 (Q1 and Q2).

[29] For example, SAGE data included incidents and fatalities coded as armed conflict and communal violence. ACLED data included incidents and fatalities coded as demonstrations and political violence including battles, protests, riots and violence against civilians.

which, combined with fragmented operational level collaboration, hindered coherent implementation.[30]

57.   Collaboration with NGOs, civil society, journalists and humanitarians was also perceived by mission and external stakeholders interviewed as broadly positive, especially regarding their involvement in capacity building, awareness sessions and peace dialogues. However, some external stakeholders interviewed highlighted gaps in reaching some community level stakeholders in remote areas and providing protection for human rights activists via safe houses and relocation when necessary.

V.   Conclusion

58.   UNMISS has made important contributions to the protection of civilians in South Sudan. As the country moves toward national elections in 2026, the stakes for effective protection will rise significantly, particularly regarding election-related violence. Going forward, deepening partnerships with diverse stakeholders, supporting local communities and stakeholders to execute activities rather than doing so on its own, ensuring continuity and following up on commitments from political forums and dialogues will be critical to the mission's success. Additionally, the mission will need to become more anticipatory, needs-driven and accountable to those most at risk. This requires linking activities more systematically to emerging threats, ensuring that resources are deployed to where they can have the greatest impact and scaling back interventions that have shown limited results.

59.   A recalibrated POC approach – one which is more proactive, data-informed and responsive to local needs – will be essential to navigating the challenges of the electoral period and beyond. Protection strategies must be inclusive of all vulnerable groups, responsive to climate-related risks and rooted in lessons learned from similar contexts. The recommendations in this report aim to guide this evolution and support the mission in closing critical gaps, meeting rising expectations, reinforcing credibility and fulfilling its mandate within the challenging security context in South Sudan.

VI.   Recommendations

60.   OIOS-IED makes five important recommendations, all of which were accepted by UNMISS.

Recommendation 1: (Result A)

61.   **UNMISS should revise its POC strategy to ensure approaches are flexible, proactive and coordinated.** This may include incorporating:
   a. needs of vulnerable people (especially PWDs and refugees);
   b. engagements with new actors (e.g. CSOs, NGOs, community/traditional/religious leaders);
   c. climate risks considerations; and
   d. international best practices related to POC before, during and after elections from other United Nations peace operations.

Indicator of implementation: Revised POC strategy.

---

[30] Despite inefficiencies, the overall level of need remained high and these efforts meaningfully contributed to addressing critical gaps.

Expected change (s): Enhanced inclusivity, protection, engagement of key actors, climate resilience and best practices-informed POC in elections context.

Recommendation 2: (Result B)

62.   **UNMISS should implement a structured follow-up mechanism for assessing whether beneficiaries retain and apply skills gained in capacity building activities over time.**

Indicator of implementation: Follow-up mechanism to assess skill retention and application established.

Expected change (s): Enhanced monitoring of activity outcomes.

Recommendation 3: (Result B and C)

63.   **UNMISS should develop a strategic plan to allocate resources for key activities, training, QIPs and patrols based on needs and evolving conflict dynamics.**

Indicator of implementation: Development of strategic resource allocation plan.

Expected change(s): Enhanced effectiveness in allocation of limited resources and targeting of interventions based on data-driven prioritization.

Recommendation 4: (Result C)

64.   **UNMISS should renegotiate and revise the JVMM framework to address bottlenecks that limit its responsiveness.**

Indicator of implementation: Revised JVMM framework developed through inclusive consultations with all relevant parties

Expected change(s): Enhanced responsiveness in patrol planning and reduced delays and denied patrols.

Recommendation 5: (Result D)

65.   **UNMISS should establish a reporting system that integrates internal mission data management systems, ensuring consistency, elimination of duplication and enhancing decision making.**

Indicator of implementation: A unified reporting system developed with the ability to extract mission data from multiple sections simultaneously.

Expected change (s): Improved data accuracy, reduced duplication, transparency and consistency in reporting, performance measurement and decision-making.

Annex I: Management response from UNMISS

UNITED NATIONS
United Nations Mission
in South Sudan

**United Nations Mission
in South Sudan
(UNMISS)**
INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

NATIONS UNIES
Mission des Nations Unies
au Soudan du Sud

Date: 24 June 2025

To: Demetra Arapakos, Director
Inspection and Evaluation Division
Office of Internal Oversight Services

From: Ms. Anita Kiki Gbeho,
Deputy Special Representative to the Secretary-
General (Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian
Coordinator) and OIC HOM, UNMISS

Subject: **Management Response to the Draft Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the Evaluation of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan Implementation of the Protection of Civilians Mandate.**

1.   UNMISS acknowledges receipt of the draft report from OIOS on the Evaluation of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan Implementation of the Protection of Civilians Mandate dated 11 June 2025.

2.   Please find attached the Mission's management response to the recommendations.

3.   Thank you for your consideration and support.

cc: Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, DPO
Ms. Catherine Pollard, DMSPC
Mr. Atul Khare, DOS
Mr. Uren Pillay, JIU
Mr. Sejong Lee, BOA
Ms. Andrea Cook, EOSG
Mr. Moses Bamuwamye, IAAC
Ms. Karen Lock, DMSPC
Mr. Zachary Ikiara, DMSPC
Mr. Henri Fourie, DOS
Mr. Frederic Renoux, DPO
Ms. Leda Limann, UNMISS
Ms. Tina Pihl, UNMISS