

Inspection of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei Humanitarian Aid Function

25 March 2026

IED-25-021



INSPECTION AND EVALUATION DIVISION

Function *“The Office shall evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the implementation of the programmes and legislative mandates of the Organization. It shall conduct programme evaluations with the purpose of establishing analytical and critical evaluations of the implementation of programmes and legislative mandates, examining whether changes therein require review of the methods of delivery, the continued relevance of administrative procedures and whether the activities correspond to the mandates as they may be reflected in the approved budgets and the medium-term plan of the Organization;”* ([General Assembly Resolution 48/218 B](#)).

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Summary

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an inspection of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) implementation of its humanitarian aid function. The inspection examined how UNISFA facilitated humanitarian aid delivery and the free movement of humanitarian personnel during July 2020 to November 2025.

The Mission's core operational modalities for humanitarian aid, particularly patrols and logistical support provided through air transport and security escorts, were highly relevant and well-targeted in facilitating humanitarian aid delivery. Patrol deployments aligned with key humanitarian supply routes, and air transport and escorts were critical in enabling community access, especially during the rainy season. Furthermore, the Mission's advocacy, coordination with humanitarian agencies and programmatic activities engaged the right actors in further facilitating humanitarian aid delivery.

The Mission also effectively enabled free movement of humanitarian personnel across the Abyei Area. The Mission's patrols, road maintenance, mine-action activities and regular sharing of security information to support operational planning were effective in facilitating the free movement of humanitarian personnel. UNISFA was also effective in maintaining the Main Supply Route (MSR), repairing approximately 70 per cent of the route and undertaking critical infrastructure repairs and upgrades. However, mandate limitations and resource constraints restricted the Mission's ability to maintain secondary supply routes beyond the MSR.

The Mission also directly supported community access to humanitarian aid through its programmatic activities, which included the Abyei Joint Programme (AJP) and Quick Impact Projects (QIPs). The Mission contributed to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), health, livelihoods, education, peacebuilding and rule of law activities, thus enabling community access to essential services. Nonetheless, these programmatic activities lacked several essential elements across their design, grant set-up, implementation, monitoring and evaluation phases, constraining their overall effectiveness.

Emerging security risks created by armed actors in Abyei undermined the Mission's ability to create a safe and enabling environment for humanitarian operations. A deteriorating security landscape, characterized by the presence of armed actors and the spillover effects of the conflict in Sudan, has forced complex logistical rerouting and strained local protection mechanisms. Additionally, administrative and coordination challenges negatively affected the Mission's efficiency in implementing its humanitarian aid function.

With most United Nations humanitarian actors scaling down their presence or reducing operations in Abyei due to funding constraints significantly diminished humanitarian actors' footprint in Abyei, risking the sustainability of UNISFA gains in facilitating humanitarian aid delivery. This will necessitate the Mission to adopt a nimbler approach to facilitating humanitarian aid delivery and the movement of humanitarian personnel.

OIOS makes four recommendations to UNISFA to:

- i) designate a Mission-level humanitarian coordination focal point;
- ii) establish a Coordination Committee for the AJP;
- iii) reinforce messaging on equitable humanitarian aid facilitation across northern and southern Abyei; and
- iv) develop an action plan to improve the coordination of the different programmatic activities related to humanitarian aid delivery.

I. Introduction and objective

1. The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an inspection of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) implementation of its humanitarian aid function. The inspection was conducted in conformity with the norms and standards for evaluation in the United Nations System.¹
2. UNISFA management response on the draft report is included in Annex I. OIOS wishes to acknowledge and thank the inspection focal points who assisted with the conduct of the inspection.

II. Background

Mandate and objectives

3. The UNISFA was established in June 2011 by the Security Council through resolution 1990 (2011) to help stabilize the Abyei Administrative Area in response to escalating tensions, largely driven by disputes between Sudan and South Sudan over control of the Abyei region. The Mission mandate and tasks as set out in resolution 1990 (2011) have been renewed multiple times to reflect the evolving political and security dynamics, most recently through resolution 2802 in November 2025.
4. The mandate of UNISFA emphasizes the following priority tasks:
 - i. Monitor and verify the redeployment of armed forces from the Abyei Area in accordance with the 20 June 2011 Agreement;²
 - ii. Participate in relevant Abyei Area bodies as stipulated in the Agreement;
 - iii. Provide de-mining assistance and technical advice;
 - iv. Facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid and the free movement of humanitarian personnel in coordination with relevant Abyei Area bodies as defined by the Agreement;
 - v. Strengthen the capacity of the Abyei Police Service (APS); and
 - vi. Provide security for oil infrastructure in the Abyei Area when necessary and in cooperation with the APS.
5. In addition to the priority tasks above, UNISFA is also authorized under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter to:
 - i. Protect UNISFA personnel, facilities, installations and equipment;
 - ii. Protect United Nations personnel, facilities, installations and equipment;
 - iii. Ensure the security and freedom of movement of United Nations personnel, humanitarian personnel and members of the Joint Military Observers Committee and Joint Military Observer Teams;
 - iv. Protect civilians in the Abyei Area under imminent threat of physical violence;

¹ <https://www.unevaluation.org/unevaluation/publications/unevaluation-norms-and-standards-evaluation-un-system>

² Agreement between the Government of the Republic of the Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement on temporary arrangements for the administration and security of the Abyei Area (S/2011/384).

- v. Protect the Abyei Area from incursions by unauthorized elements, as defined in the Agreement; and
- vi. Ensure security in the Abyei area.

Humanitarian context in Abyei

6. The humanitarian situation in the Abyei Area has changed significantly over time, shaped by evolving political, security and social dynamics and marked by access and movement restrictions. Stalled peace efforts and lack of progress on the political resolution on the final status of Abyei, continued intercommunal tensions and sporadic localized violence involving armed groups kept displacement high and humanitarian vulnerabilities widespread. This was exacerbated by the outbreak of the Sudanese conflict in April 2023, disrupting supply routes and triggering displacement into and around Abyei. Returnees and secondary displacement increased pressure on limited services and humanitarian capacity.

7. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimated that 300,000 people were expected to require humanitarian assistance in Abyei in 2025.³ Amidst this rising humanitarian need, 2025 has been marked by reductions in humanitarian presence and operations in Abyei with the majority of United Nations agencies scaling back their presence, relocating offices or withdrawing programs due to funding constraints.

Key Mission modalities of mandate implementation

8. The Mission implemented its humanitarian function through a set of modalities aimed at creating a safe and enabling environment for humanitarian actors. Central to this approach were patrols and the creation of a protective presence. The Mission's modalities of mandate implementation and corresponding key activities underpinning these modalities are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: UNISFA modalities for implementation of its humanitarian aid function

Modalities	Activities
Patrols	Providing a protective presence along supply routes, humanitarian hubs and communities to reduce security risks and enable safe movement of humanitarian actors.
Logistic support	Enabling access to hard-to-reach or insecure areas through security escorts particularly during periods of restricted access. Providing air transport support to humanitarian actors. Repair and maintenance of humanitarian supply routes and the conduct of mine action and explosive ordnance risk reduction activities.
Advocacy	Promoting understanding and acceptance of humanitarian activities through outreach and engagement, reducing access constraints arising from mistrust between communities.
Coordination	Aligning activities of humanitarian actors, United Nations entities and Resident Coordinator Offices (RCOs), improving information-sharing and operational efficiency.
Programmatic activities	Partnering with the Sudan and South Sudan RCOs to support the implementation of the Abyei Joint Programme (AJP). Implementing QIPs related to humanitarian assistance.
Peace building and community stabilization	Reducing intercommunal tensions and local conflict drivers, helping prevent disruptions to humanitarian access and improving community acceptance of aid delivery.

³ <https://humanitarianaction.info/document/sudan-humanitarian-needs-and-response-plan-2025/article/51-abyei-response-plan>

Modalities	Activities
Capacity building and technical support	Strengthening community-based protection structures such as Community Protection Committees (CPCs), Joint Protection Committees (JPCs) and traditional authorities to strengthen facilitation of humanitarian aid delivery.
Monitoring and reporting	Generating security information on access conditions and threats that might hinder humanitarian activities, enabling humanitarian actors and the Mission to adjust movements and delivery plans, particularly during high-risk periods.

III. Scope and Methodology

9. The inspection assessed the Mission’s achievement of the following two immediate outcomes resulting from its humanitarian aid function: (i) free movement of humanitarian personnel and (ii) safe and secure access to critical supply routes and communities by humanitarian actors. To a lesser extent, the inspection also assessed the Mission’s contributions to ensuring community access to humanitarian aid.

10. The inspection was focused primarily on accountability and covered the period from July 2020 to November 2025. It used a mixed-methods approach incorporating the following quantitative and qualitative data sources shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Inspection data sources and analysis methods

Document review	Review of key internal and external documents, including Security Council resolutions, Secretary-General’s reports, budget performance reports, Daily Situation Reports (DSRs), AJP documents and QIP progress reports, and external assessments and reports on Abyei.
Interviews with staff and external stakeholders	Forty-two interviews were held in total, including with 29 UNISFA personnel and 20 external stakeholders. Women represented 25 per cent of all interviewees. Interviews with the Mission staff included walk-throughs of the project cycle phases of the AJP and QIPs.
Staff survey	The online survey was administered in English to 296 individuals, of which 178 responded, representing a 60 per cent response rate. Women accounted for 26 per cent of respondents.
Stakeholders survey	The survey was administered, in paper format or online, to 40 stakeholders, of which 37 responded, representing a 92 per cent response rate. Women made up 19 per cent of respondents.
Focus Group Discussions	Eight focus groups were conducted, including four with members of the Ngok Dinka community and four with members of the Misseriya community. Women constituted 29 per cent of participants across the focus groups.
Case studies	Two case studies were conducted to assess: (i) how UNISFA patrols and actions enabled safe and secure access to critical supply routes and communities for WFP; and (ii) impact of the introduction of new Mission support procedures on humanitarian agencies’ operations.
Secondary data	Data were extracted from: the Situational Awareness Geospatial Enterprise (SAGE); Civil-Military Coordination (CIMIC); security escorts; and Movement of Persons (MOP) databases. Geo-spatial analysis conducted using geo-codes from these different data sources to understand the spatial alignment and convergence.
Field visits	Missions were undertaken to host communities in Abyei, and AJP and QIP implementation sites.

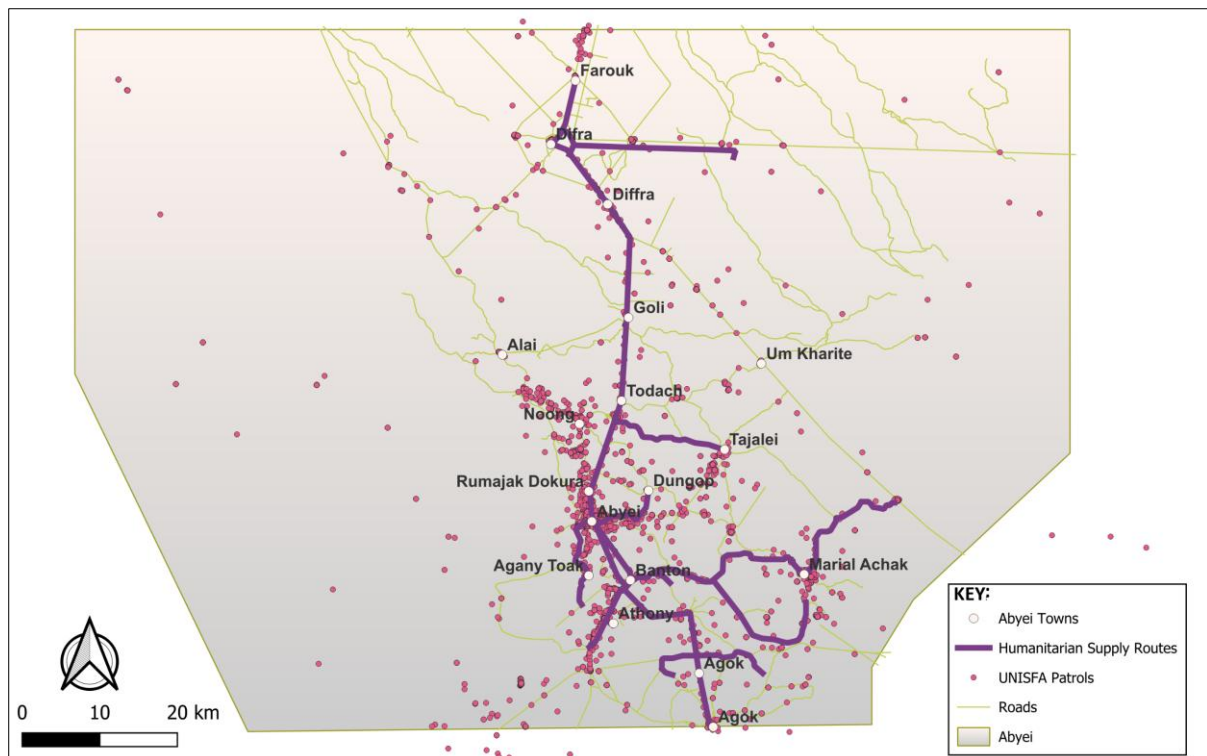
IV. Inspection Results

A. The UNISFA modalities of patrols and logistical support provided through air transport and security escorts were highly relevant and well-targeted in facilitating humanitarian aid delivery

UNISFA patrols were aligned with humanitarian delivery routes

11. UNISFA patrols were aligned with the main humanitarian supply routes used by humanitarian actors operating in the Abyei Area. As illustrated in Figure 1, the spatial distribution of UNISFA patrols closely overlapped with identified humanitarian supply routes between July 2020 and June 2025. Patrol concentrations were particularly visible along the Main Supply Route (MSR) that humanitarian actors relied on to transport aid and reach communities. The MSR is the primary road axis across the Abyei Area, linking Farouk, Diffra, Goli, Todach, Abyei Town, Athony and Agok, and serves as the logistical artery for the Mission and for the movement of humanitarian personnel and aid supplies.

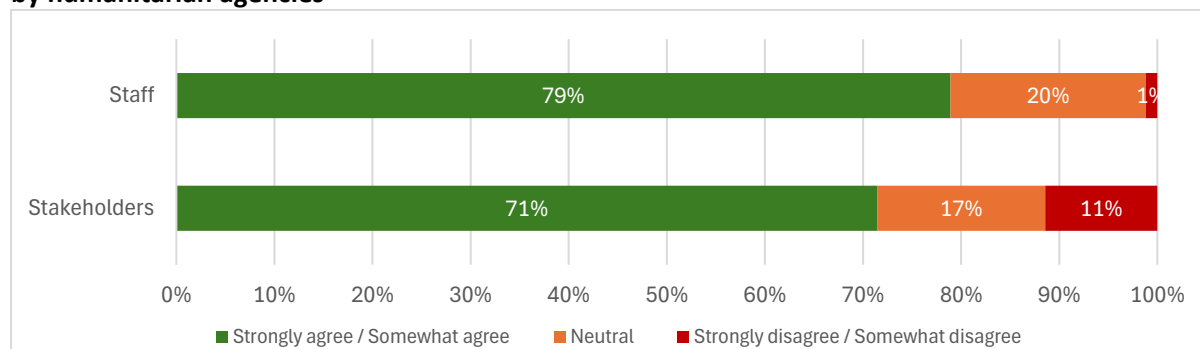
Figure 1: Spatial distribution of UNISFA patrols and humanitarian supply routes, July 2020 - June 2025



Source: UNISFA SAGE datasets

12. Staff and stakeholders surveyed concurred with this assessment, with most (79 per cent of staff and 71 per cent of stakeholders surveyed) agreeing that UNISFA patrol routes were aligned with the routes used by humanitarian actors for aid delivery, as shown in Figure 2. This perception of high alignment between patrol routes and humanitarian corridors was broadly consistent across different stakeholder groups surveyed, including United Nations Agencies, Funds and Programmes (AFPs) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).

Figure 2: Staff and stakeholder perceptions on alignment of UNISFA patrols with the routes used by humanitarian agencies



Source: OIOS survey

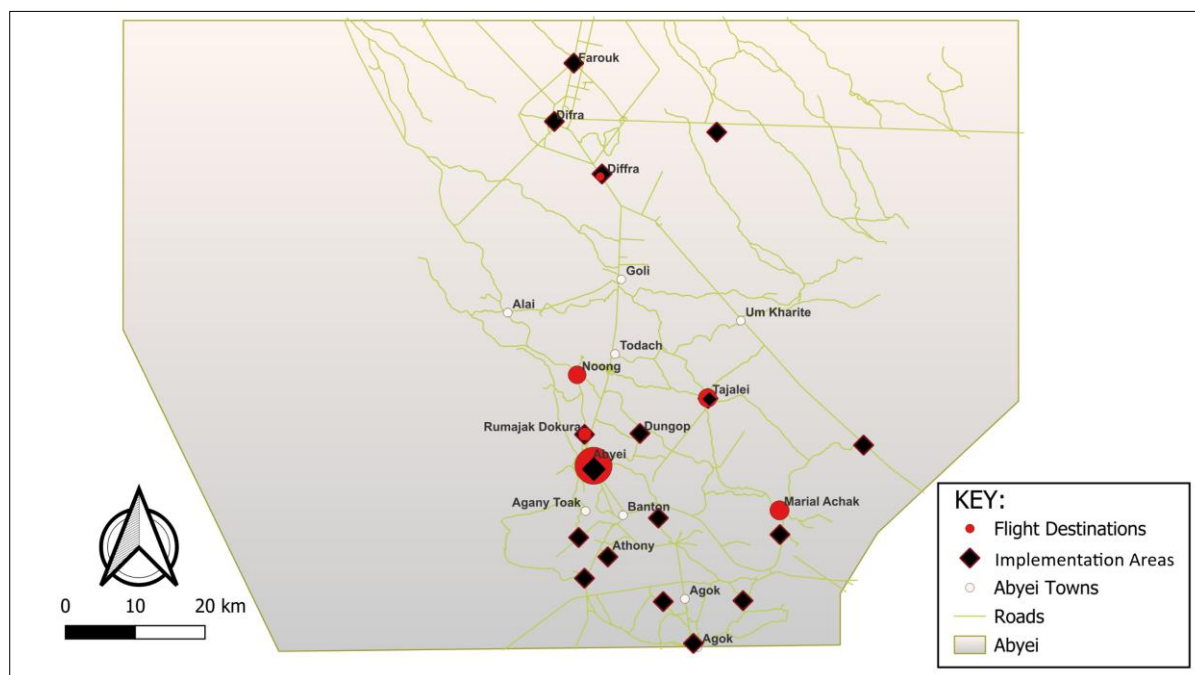
13. Furthermore, both staff and stakeholders interviewed agreed that UNISFA patrols were appropriately placed along the main humanitarian aid routes. They highlighted the consistent UNISFA focus on securing the MSR and key population and service hubs, which functioned as the primary arteries for humanitarian movement across the Abyei Area. Staff interviewed also indicated that UNISFA patrols were deployed adaptively in response to changing security conditions. For example, following incidents or escalations, the Mission issued security alerts and increased patrols along affected routes and advised humanitarian actors that movement could only occur under Mission-provided force protection, allowing humanitarian operations to continue even during periods of heightened insecurity.

14. Focus group participants identified specific benefits to the alignment of patrols and aid routes. They stated that this alignment provided reassurance to communities, deterred potential threats along key routes and enabled humanitarian actors to access locations that would otherwise have been difficult or unsafe to reach. They also provided concrete examples of how patrols and UNISFA security support enabled humanitarian assistance to reach intended beneficiaries. For example, women focus group participants from the Misseriya Community in the North of Abyei described how UNHCR was able to deliver non-food items, including shelter materials, blankets and cooking equipment, to targeted communities due to the protective presence of UNISFA. Focus group participants from the Dinka community in the South noted that NGOs relied on UNISFA security support to conduct assessments and deliver assistance from Agok to surrounding areas.

UNISFA logistical support was critical in enabling the free movement of humanitarian personnel and providing operational support to the AJP

15. UNISFA air transport support was essential in enabling the free movement of humanitarian personnel across the Abyei Area. As illustrated in Figure 3, UNISFA flights facilitated access to sites in the northern, central and southern parts of Abyei, with destinations located in close proximity to areas of humanitarian programme implementation. The reliance on UNISFA air transport by humanitarian actors was significantly higher during the rainy season, when road movement was severely constrained by floods. During rainy season, the number of humanitarian personnel transported by UNISFA flights nearly doubled compared to the dry season, highlighting the essential role of UNISFA air assets in sustaining humanitarian access when conditions were the most challenging and road access was constrained.

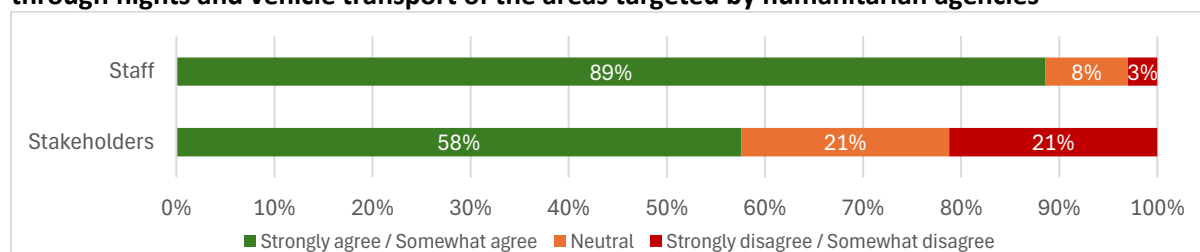
Figure 3: UNISFA flight destination and areas of humanitarian activities implementation



Source: UNISFA Field Support Suites (FSS) data and stakeholder participatory mapping.

16. Humanitarian actors surveyed and interviewed consistently emphasized that UNISFA flights were essential for staff movement, particularly during periods of heightened insecurity and the rainy season. Several noted that, in the absence of UNISFA air transport, humanitarian presence in certain locations would have been impossible or highly inconsistent since the Mission was the sole provider of air transport and no viable alternative means of movement existed, especially during the rainy season. Survey respondents further underscored the relevance of UNISFA logistical support, with a majority of survey respondents (89 per cent of staff and 58 per cent of stakeholders) agreeing that UNISFA logistical support through flights and vehicle transport covered areas targeted by humanitarian agencies for aid delivery, as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Staff and stakeholder perceptions of the extent of coverage of UNISFA logistical support through flights and vehicle transport of the areas targeted by humanitarian agencies



Source: OIOS survey

17. Additionally, UNISFA provided logistical support to UNFPA, WHO and UNDP through transportation, handling, storage and delivery of humanitarian supplies,⁴ which included:

- Transportation and storage of approximately 43 metric tons of medical supplies and equipment;
- Air transport of humanitarian supplies from Wau to Abyei, including locations assessed as inaccessible during the rainy season;

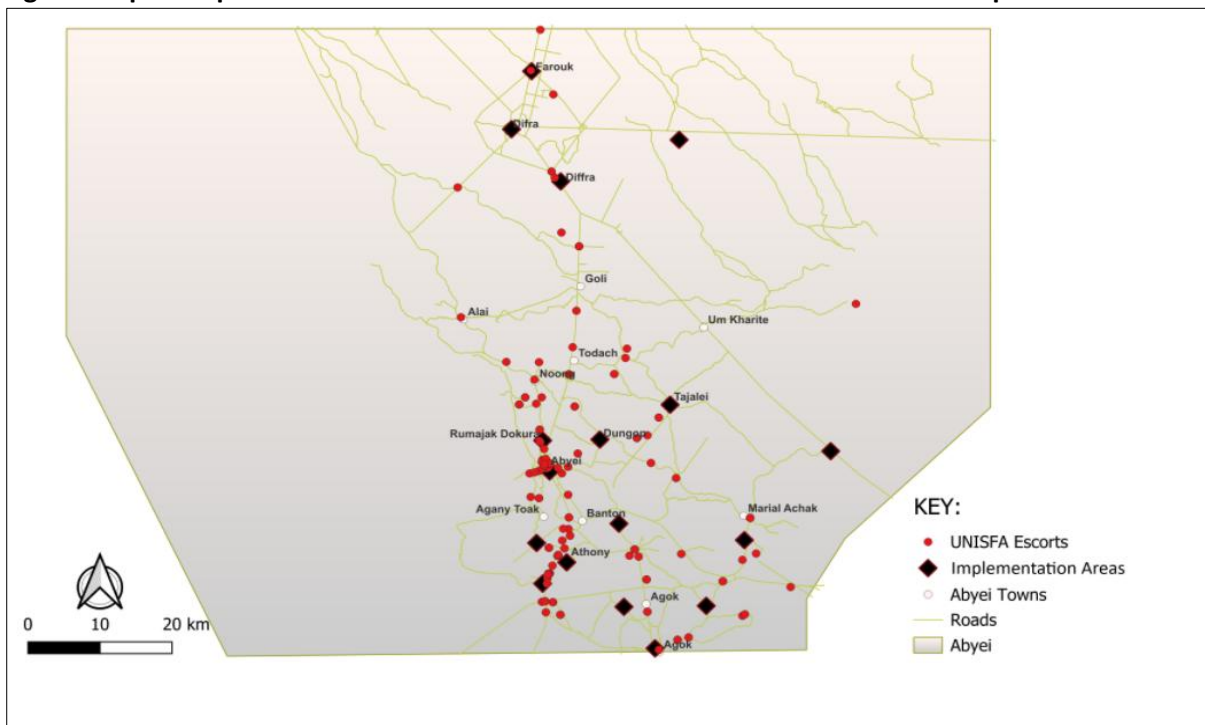
⁴ UNISFA 2024–2025 Mission Support Operational Documentation

- Support for the handling, storage and delivery of medical supplies and equipment; and
- Provision of storage infrastructure, including temperature-controlled facilities, to safeguard medical commodities during periods of access constraints.

UNISFA security escorts were also essential for humanitarian personnel to move freely to areas of need

18. UNISFA escort support was a critical modality for enabling the free and safe movement of humanitarian personnel to areas of humanitarian activities implementation across the Abyei Area. As illustrated in Figure 5, the spatial distribution of UNISFA escorts closely corresponded with locations of humanitarian activity in the northern, central and southern parts of Abyei. This spatial convergence indicates alignment between escort deployments and the operational access needs of humanitarian agencies. Interviews with stakeholders further highlighted that UNISFA consistently provided security escorts whenever they requested. A review of escort data between October 2023 and November 2025 also confirmed that UNISFA consistently provided escort support to requesting humanitarian actors.

Figure 5: Spatial spread of UNISFA escorts and areas of humanitarian activities implementation



Source: UNISFA SAGE datasets; stakeholder participatory mapping

19. Staff, and to a lesser extent stakeholders, confirmed the relevance of UNISFA escorts. While 89 per cent of staff respondents agreed that UNISFA escort arrangements were designed to meet the operational needs of humanitarian agencies, fewer stakeholders (58 per cent) shared this view. The lower positive assessment by stakeholders can be explained by several limitations they highlighted with regard to UNISFA escorts for humanitarian aid delivery, including:

- Late departures** which reduced the time available for field activities and overall productivity;
- Rigid escort protocols** which limited operational flexibility for humanitarian actors; and
- Limited escort capacity** which necessitated UNISFA to combine humanitarian escorts with other Mission movements, such as patrols, outreaches or other field visits, at times resulting in operational delays.

Despite challenges, the UNISFA modalities of advocacy, coordination and programmatic activities all engaged the right actors in further facilitating humanitarian aid delivery

20. UNISFA advocacy activities appropriately engaged a wide range of stakeholders with the capacity to influence humanitarian access and delivery. These stakeholders included:

- i. **Traditional leaders** who helped to mediate migration and grazing disputes and facilitating dialogue through migration-related conferences, thereby reducing tensions and enabling safe humanitarian movement;
- ii. **Women's groups** who were engaged in promoting women's participation in humanitarian activities and supporting community acceptance of humanitarian interventions; and
- iii. **Local administrators** who were engaged in advocacy related to governance, peace and security, thereby helping to create a conducive environment for humanitarian actors to operate.

21. Overall, 88 per cent of staff and 80 percent stakeholder survey respondents agreed that UNISFA advocacy activities engaged stakeholders and local authorities with the capacity to influence humanitarian access and delivery. These advocacy efforts were geographically dispersed across the northern and southern parts of Abyei, indicating that the Mission made deliberate efforts to reach both the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya communities and authorities.

22. However, these advocacy efforts had limited success in addressing entrenched mistrust and perceptions of bias between communities. All community leaders interviewed and majority of focus group participants in the south questioned why humanitarian assistance was directed toward the northern areas. Conversely, participants in all four FGDs conducted in the north believed communities in the south received more humanitarian aid. These divergent perceptions underscore the importance of sustained advocacy by the Mission to explain the rationale underpinning its humanitarian facilitation approach and to reinforce the principle of equitable access across the Abyei Area.

23. On coordination with AFPs, UNISFA established and utilized multiple coordination mechanisms that met the needs for humanitarian aid delivery in the Abyei Area. These mechanisms involved mission leadership, substantive mission components, OCHA, Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO), Force and the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS). Ninety-three per cent of Mission staff and 73 per cent of stakeholders surveyed perceived these coordination mechanisms to be relevant for engaging actors with the capacity to deliver humanitarian assistance. However, representatives of three non-UN humanitarian actors interviewed identified one key limitation with coordination between the Mission and AFPs. UNISFA relied on OCHA to represent the Mission in key external humanitarian coordination forums, which, with the departure of key OCHA and UNISFA staff involved in coordination and without immediate replacement, resulted in the Mission missing representation in several key coordination meetings. As a result, non-UN humanitarian actors did not consistently receive security updates, incident reports or situational analyses from the Mission, thus limiting their ability to plan movements and assess risks effectively. UNISFA noted that coordination with humanitarian actors at the field and sector level was maintained through its CIMIC engagement.

24. Lastly, UNISFA programmatic activities, implemented through the QIPs and AJP, were relevant in responding to community needs across the Abyei Area and appropriately targeted those needs. QIPs targeted WASH, livelihoods, health, education, social development and rule of law. On the other hand, the AJP operated with a larger budget and engaged a wider range of partners beyond UNISFA. Through partnerships with AFPs, the AJP supported interventions in WASH, livelihoods, health, gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health, peacebuilding and nutrition. Survey data indicated strong stakeholder perceptions of relevance for both interventions with the humanitarian

needs in Abyei, representing 79 and 85 per cent of favorable stakeholders’ perception for QIPs and the AJP, respectively.

B. The Mission effectively enabled free movement of humanitarian personnel across the Abyei Area

UNISFA effectively facilitated the free movement of humanitarian personnel across the Abyei Area

25. Through a combination of patrols, road maintenance and security escorts, UNISFA successfully supported the free movement of humanitarian personnel across the Abyei Area. Representatives from humanitarian organizations interviewed emphasized the following points about the Mission’s work in this regard:

- i. Road maintenance support enabled safer movement by reopening key supply routes and reducing the risk of ambush or attack;
- ii. Route verification and mine-action activities mitigated explosive-hazard risks;
- iii. Protective presence enhanced freedom of movement and the safe delivery of assistance across Abyei; and
- iv. Provision of security situational awareness and movement-related information informed humanitarian actors’ decisions on field movements and operational planning.

26. A detailed review of WFP operations further confirmed that the Mission modalities supported WFP ability to move staff and deliver food assistance to communities, as illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3: UNISFA modalities supported personnel movement and humanitarian aid delivery by WFP

UNISFA modalities	How modality aided WFP humanitarian work
1) Patrols along key routes used by WFP	Increased patrol presence coincided with higher WFP food distribution volumes over time, indicating that UNISFA protective presence supported WFP staff movement and delivery of food assistance.
2) Maintenance of critical supply routes, including the MSR	Enabled safer movement of WFP food convoys within Abyei, which was critical given that UNISFA is the sole actor conducting road repair and maintenance in the area.
3) Provision of armed escorts for WFP food convoys from Juba and Wunrok into Abyei	Facilitated secure delivery of food assistance, particularly at key entry points where WFP staff required additional protection.
4) Route verification and mine-action activities along key corridors	Reduced explosive hazards and enabled WFP to assess and use routes that would otherwise have been considered unsafe.
5) Sharing of security situational awareness and movement-related information (e.g., incidents, road conditions, risk levels)	Informed WFP operational planning and decision-making, allowing adjustments to routes and delivery timing and supporting the free movement of staff and continuity of operations in Abyei.

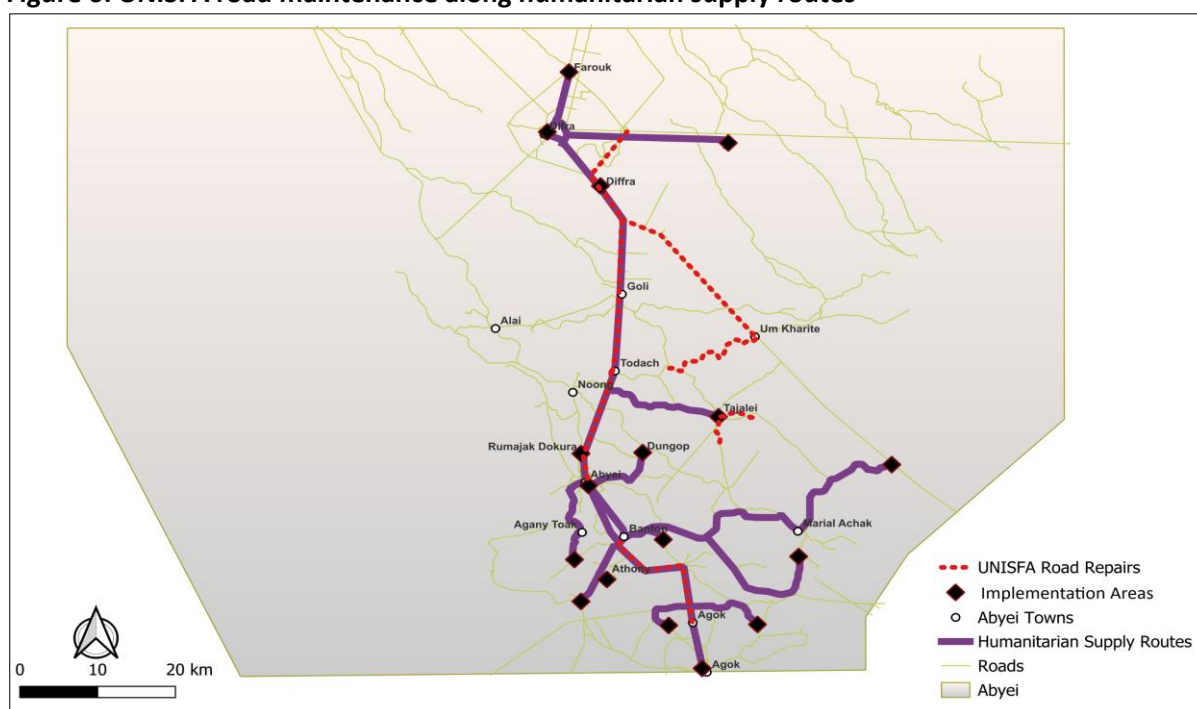
Source: Stakeholder interview; WFP progress reports

C. The Mission was effective in maintaining the MSR but faced challenges in maintaining secondary supply routes used for humanitarian aid delivery

UNISFA was effective in maintaining the MSR

27. In line with its mandate to maintain the MSR and roads required for force mobility, the Mission was effective in maintaining the MSR. During the 2024/25 financial year, the Mission maintained approximately 70 per cent of the MSR, as shown in Figure 6. Humanitarian actors and mission staff interviewed highlighted instances in which UNISFA facilitated humanitarian access by maintaining and reopening critical sections of the MSR. For example, the Mission supported the repair of the Banton Bridge and the Doukra 2–Amiet Market–Todach corridor, which were essential for movement of patrols and humanitarian convoys, particularly during and after the rainy seasons. Stakeholders also underscored the Mission’s efforts in flood-mitigation works, including the replacement of culverts, excavation of drainage channels, construction of ditches and berms and correction of road slopes near bridge approaches, which helped restore access.

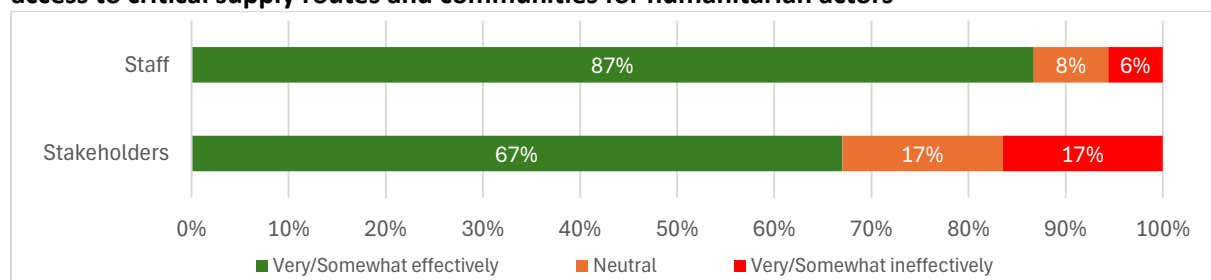
Figure 6: UNISFA road maintenance along humanitarian supply routes



Source: UNISFA SAGE datasets; Stakeholder participatory mapping

28. The majority of staff and stakeholders surveyed affirmed that UNISFA was effective in ensuring safe and secure access to critical supply routes and communities for humanitarian actors, as shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Staff and stakeholder perceptions of UNISFA contribution to ensuring safe and secure access to critical supply routes and communities for humanitarian actors



Source: OIOS survey

Mandate limitation and resource constraints precluded UNISFA from undertaking maintenance of supply routes beyond the MSR

29. UNISFA mandate on road maintenance was limited to maintaining the MSR. Feeder roads extending from the MSR into communities and to locations where humanitarian activities were implemented fell under the responsibility of the national authorities. Consequently, as shown in Figure 6, the Mission's road repair and maintenance activities did not extend beyond the MSR. This mandate limitation constrained UNISFA ability to maintain the broader network of routes required by humanitarian actors such as routes from Noong to Tajalei, Difra to Al Radiyah, Abyei Town to Dungop, Abyei Town to Agany Toak, Banton to Athony and Banton to Marial Achak. Additional factors that further reduced the Mission's capacity to maintain full network of supply routes, included:

- i. UNISFA annual funding for road maintenance was approximately USD 1.1 million, representing less than three per cent of the total engineering budget of about USD 40 million; and
- ii. Staff interviewed noted the lack of locally available construction materials and recurrent road damage during the rainy season increased construction costs, reduced the durability of repairs and constrained the Mission's ability to repair the full road network.

D. With some limitations, UNISFA supported community access to humanitarian aid

The Mission's modalities supported community access to humanitarian aid

30. The combination of Mission modalities outlined in Table 1 supported community access to humanitarian aid. As highlighted in paragraph 14, focus group participants widely acknowledged the Mission's contributions in enabling humanitarian assistance to reach intended beneficiaries and shared specific examples. These included:

- i. Women focus group participants in northern Abyei highlighted instances of internally displaced persons and vulnerable groups accessing essential assistance from UNICEF with visible UNISFA roles in the process;
- ii. Stakeholder interviewees and focus group participants in southern Abyei cited that following the conflict between Twic Dinka and Ngok Dinka youth, UNISFA facilitated intercommunal dialogue and peace agreement, reducing tensions and reopening routes, resulting in their access to humanitarian assistance; and
- iii. Stakeholders interviewed noted UNISFA logistical and technical support, through flights, cargo shipment and road maintenance, enabling humanitarian operations to reach communities.

More specifically, the Mission directly contributed to ensuring community access to humanitarian aid through its own programmatic activities

31. The Mission's modality of programmatic activities was particularly effective in directly contributing to ensuring community access to humanitarian aid. Examples of specific programmatic activities which have enhanced community access to humanitarian aid are shown in Table 4.

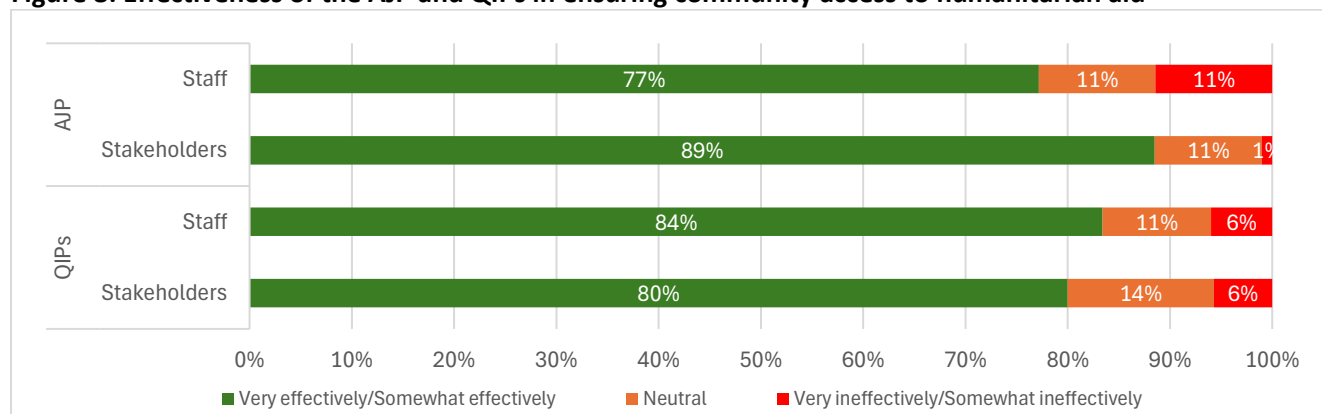
Table 4: UNISFA programmatic activities which facilitated community access to humanitarian aid

Sector	AJP (through AFP implementing partners)	QIPs
WASH	Provided access to safe drinking water for 7,950 people.	Constructed and rehabilitated several solar water yards and hand pumps across Abyei.
Gender-based Violence (GBV)	GBV risk-mitigation messaging reached between 6,000 and 10,800 men and women.	
Livelihoods	275 youths and 86 business trainees provided with vocational training	Provided income-generating community assets for small-scale livelihood opportunities.
Health	Supported approximately 16,000 consultations, conducted 24 supervision visits and distributed medical supplies	Constructed primary healthcare centers, X-ray building, training school and few buildings at Abyei Main Hospital. Undertook rehabilitation and minor construction work for health facilities (e.g., fencing, lighting, water access), improving the functionality and safety of primary health care points.
Education		Constructed or rehabilitated schools and education-related infrastructure.
Peacebuilding	Conducted dialogues reaching 350–500 participants	Constructed and rehabilitated youth centers, women’s training centers and Abyei Radio Service
Rule of law	Operationalized one paralegal center and trained 65 paralegals and supported the release of six detainees.	Constructed or rehabilitated juvenile detention facilities and community-level infrastructure, supporting local dispute resolution and protection mechanisms.
	Initiated Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms.	Rehabilitated detention centers and provided equipment and necessary personal items for Community Protection Committees (CPCs).

Source: AJP and QIP progress reports

32. Furthermore, survey respondents considered the AJP and QIPs as effective in ensuring communities with humanitarian aid, as shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Effectiveness of the AJP and QIPs in ensuring community access to humanitarian aid



Source: OIOS survey

Weaknesses in humanitarian-related programmatic activities across their project cycle phases limited their effectiveness as a modality for implementing the Mission’s humanitarian aid function

33. The AJP and QIPs lacked several essential elements across their project cycles as shown in Table 5, which limited their effectiveness. These gaps were partly attributed to the challenging operating environment, including limited staffing capacity and access and logistical constraints which affected monitoring, oversight and grant management processes.

Table 5: Gaps identified in walk-throughs of the AJP and QIP project cycles

Phase	AJP	QIPs
Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project proposals did not disaggregate beneficiary targets by gender or disability 	
Grant set-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fragmented grant set-up process resulted in delays Key staff lacked Grant Management Module (GMM) certification No established criteria for allocating funds across AFPs 	
Baseline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only one AFP had baseline data in place, most did not Where it existed, baseline data was not disaggregated by location, gender, age or vulnerability status 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No baseline report to capture initial project conditions
Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Performance tracking was not in place Lacked standardized implementation guidelines for implementing partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contractors were not required to sign a code of conduct, exposing the Mission to potential operational risks Lacked standardized QIP design templates, resulting in inconsistent designs Higher budget execution did not translate into timely project completion in three out of five years reviewed
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No comprehensive evaluation of the AJP conducted across the three completed implementation cycles 	

Source: Interview with mission and AFP staff and documents review

E. Emerging security risks created by armed actors in Abyei undermined the Mission’s ability to create a safe and enabling environment for humanitarian operations

34. The presence of armed actors across the Abyei Area significantly undermined the ability of UNISFA to create a safe and enabling environment for humanitarian operations, with particularly pronounced effects in the northern parts of Abyei. These actors constrained humanitarian access, weakened community protection mechanisms and heightened insecurity, thereby limiting the Mission’s ability to meet the objectives of its humanitarian aid function. The conflict in Sudan between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) continued to drive population displacement and refugee inflows into Abyei, while simultaneously generating heightened security uncertainty linked to the presence of armed groups, leading to the collapse of northern resupply routes and therefore forcing humanitarian actors to reroute all assistance through southern corridors, thereby increasing logistical complexity and delivery times. In addition, the RSF takeover of

Community Protection Committees (CPCs) weakened local protection systems that had previously supported community-based protection. Collectively, these dynamics worsened humanitarian conditions and further constrained the ability of humanitarian actors to operate, particularly in the northern parts of Abyei.

35. In the southern part of Abyei, the presence of the South Sudan People's Defense Forces (SSPDF) similarly affected the humanitarian operating environment. SSPDF control over certain areas restricted UNISFA freedom of movement and, consequently, its ability to provide protective presence to humanitarian actors. As in the north, CPCs were taken over by armed actors undermining the neutrality of community protection structures, affecting their engagement with humanitarian agencies. In addition, the SSPDF - Twic conflict contributed to population displacement and deteriorating humanitarian conditions, further increasing humanitarian aid needs while constraining access.

36. The extent to which the Mission has been able to mitigate the risks created by armed groups has been mixed. Survey respondents shared low perceptions of the Mission's ability to adapt its operations to the presence of armed actors, with only 37 per cent of staff and 46 per cent of stakeholders respectively assessing the Mission as effective in this regard. Staff interviewed highlighted several operational constraints that limited the Mission's adaptability to the presence of the armed actors, including:

- i. The Mission's delayed recognition of the presence of armed actors, particularly the RSF, constrained the ability of AFPs to take early operational level actions;
- ii. The lack of operational directives on how staff should respond when RSF-affiliated individuals intruded into field activities, resulting in inconsistent and ad hoc responses; and
- iii. The general security classification of northern parts of Abyei as "green" or safe zone despite the presence of RSF, which did not reflect operational realities and affected humanitarian planning and risk-mitigation efforts.

F. Administrative and coordination challenges negatively affected the efficiency of UNISFA in implementing its humanitarian aid function

The Mission's mechanism to share security reports with the humanitarian agencies was collaborative, but incident reporting in the security reports was not timely

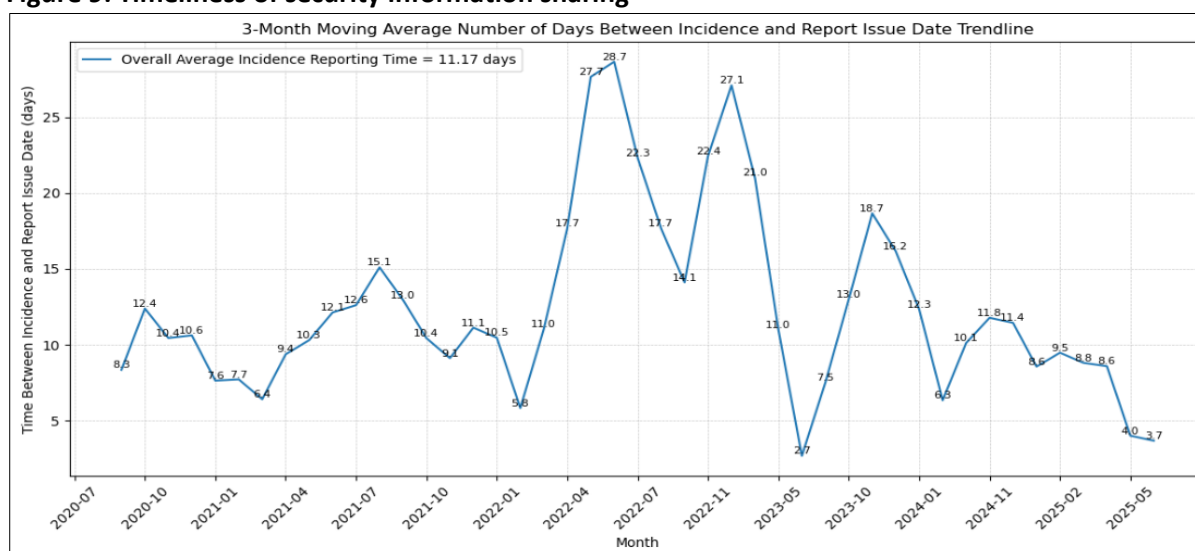
37. UNISFA maintained a collaborative security information-sharing framework with humanitarian agencies, working closely with UNDSS and UNISFA Force to support humanitarian access and movement across the Abyei Area. The Mission operated multiple informal and formal information-sharing channels that enabled regular engagement with humanitarian actors and supported joint situational awareness. Informal channels included direct calls and instant message notifications as well as ad hoc security briefings convened in response to emerging incidents. Formal channels included:

- i. joint operations and security meetings;
- ii. daily security briefings;
- iii. daily security reports and route-risk assessments;
- iv. advisories, email and message alerts; and
- v. emergency communications through radio rooms.

38. Staff and humanitarian actors interviewed noted that this information-sharing architecture was generally inclusive and responsive. Humanitarian agencies reported receiving a broad range of security updates, including access briefings, threat advisories, route assessments to guide escorts and real-time alerts related to emerging risks such as gunfire or demonstrations, viewing them as essential for movement planning and risk mitigation.

39. During the assessment period, UNISFA operated under significant staffing shortages within UNDSS and experienced communication constraints resulting from insecurity-related disruptions, which negatively affected timeliness of formal reporting of security incidents. As shown in Figure 9, the average time between the occurrence of a security incident and the issuance of a corresponding security report was approximately 11 days, with notable fluctuations over time. This delay had negative implications for urgent response or operational adjustments by humanitarian actors. Notwithstanding the formal incident reporting delays, UNISFA real-time message alerts and emergency communications through radio rooms helped humanitarian agencies with movement planning and risk mitigation.

Figure 9: Timeliness of security information sharing



Source: UNISFA Daily and Weekly Information Bulletins

The introduction of Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) on Movement Control (MOVCON) reduced the efficiency of logistical support through flights

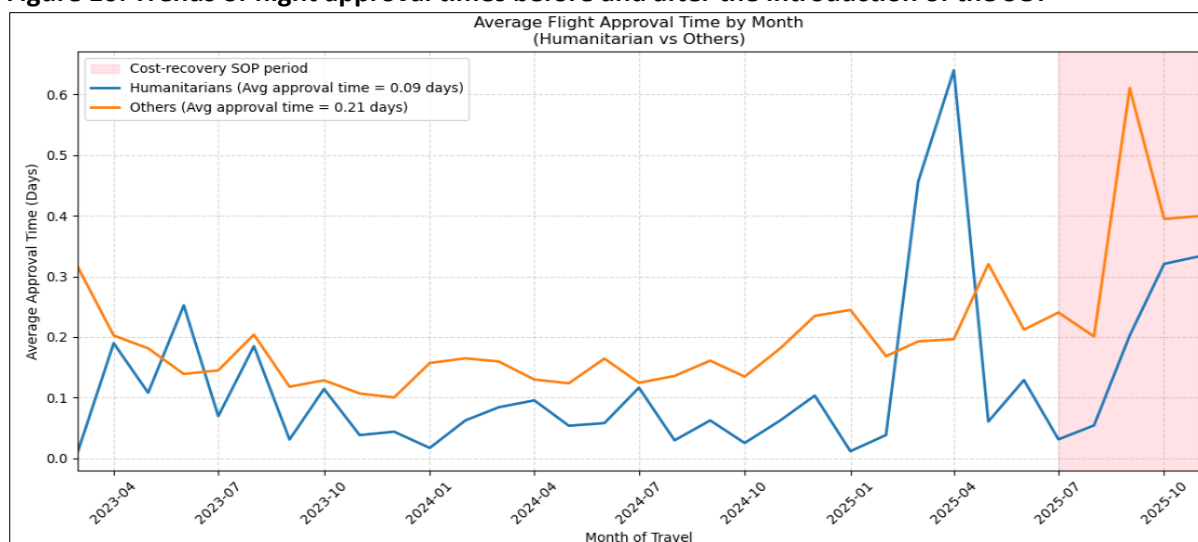
40. In line with the 2025 Secretariat-wide directive on aviation cost recovery, UNISFA introduced the MOVCON SOP in June 2025 for passenger movement, outlining procedures for recovering costs related to flight transport. Under this new approach, additional steps were incorporated into the flight requesting and booking processes, including:

- i. cost-recovery procedures involving cost calculation by Aviation Unit and confirmation by the humanitarian agencies;
- ii. AFP travel requiring Chief of Mission Support (CMS) authorization by memo before Movement of Person (MOP) requests are processed; and
- iii. multi-layered approval process before MOVCON confirmation of booking.

41. These additional steps increased the time between the issuance of the MOP requests and their approval. Although the SOPs were intended to standardize flight support procedures and ensure cost recovery for the use of Mission air assets, their initial implementation introduced additional administrative and procedural requirements that adversely affected operational timeliness for

humanitarian actors. The time between MOP issuance and approval has increased following the introduction of the SOP, as shown in Figure 10. Nevertheless, flight requests from humanitarian agencies were approved quicker than other users, demonstrating continued prioritization for humanitarian operations by UNISFA.

Figure 10: Trends of flight approval times before and after the introduction of the SOP



Source: FSS Data

42. Mission staff and humanitarian actors interviewed confirmed that the revised procedures led to slower approval processes. Under the revised arrangements, humanitarian agencies were also required to complete additional documentation, which further increased administrative burdens and contributed to delays. Moreover, individual AFPs and travelers were required to submit flight requests individually, which was previously coordinated and managed by OCHA. Staff and humanitarian actors interviewed noted that this change increased processing time and reduced the efficiency gains previously achieved through streamlined coordination.

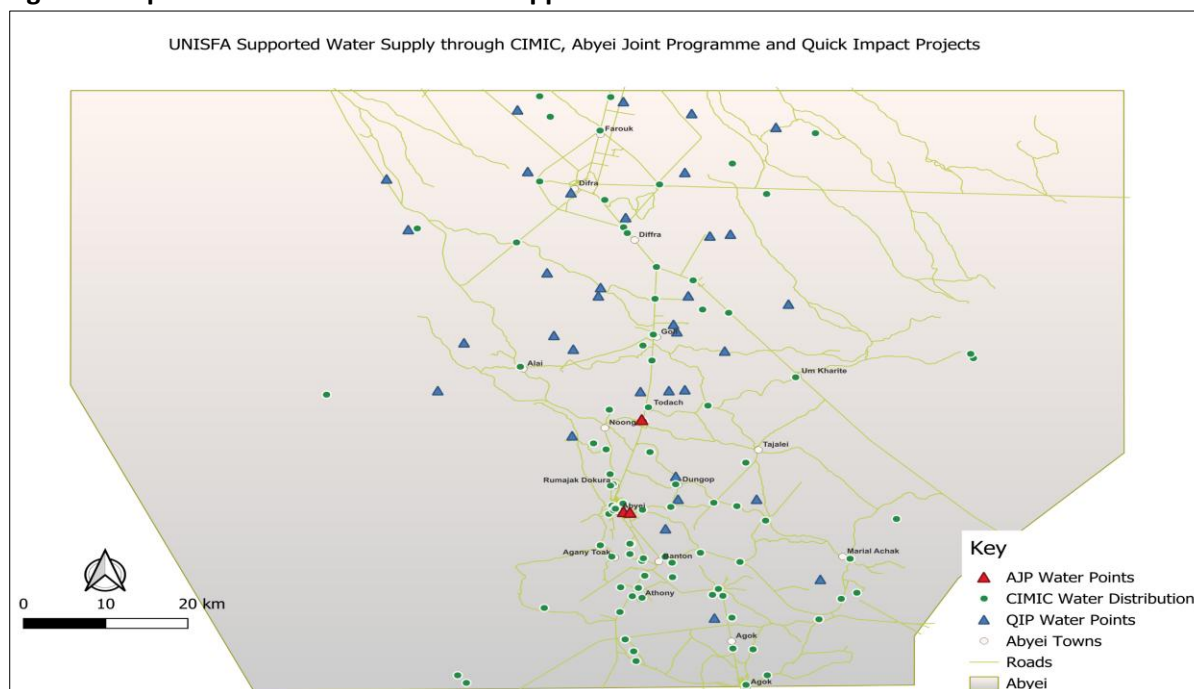
43. In some cases, delays and procedural complexities associated with flight approvals led humanitarian personnel to consider alternative means of travel. Several interviewees from the AFPs reported instances where staff opted for road travel due to uncertainty or delays in flight approval, exposing them to heightened security risks. Several staff and AFP interviewees attributed these challenges to be associated with adjusting to the new SOP and cost-recovery requirements. They also pointed to the positive example of the fuel cost-recovery mechanism in place between the Mission and AFPs. Representatives from OCHA interviewed indicated strong support for the MOVCON SOP, viewing it as being aligned with a broader, system-wide UN framework. However, interviewees indicated the need for a dedicated Mission focal points to manage humanitarian flight requests and formally communicate their roles, responsibilities, contact details and communication hierarchy to all humanitarian agencies.

Duplication of efforts, notably in the delivery of water projects through the AJP, QIPs and CIMIC efforts, negatively affected the Mission’s efficiency

44. The Mission was involved in water projects or water distribution activities through three mechanisms: (a) implementing water projects in partnership with AFPs through the AJP; (b) delivering water infrastructure directly through QIPs; and (c) CIMIC-led water distributions by troop-contributing countries. These modalities were intended to be complementary with CIMIC water distribution designed as an immediate life-saving response during surge demand or infrastructure failure while QIPs and the AJP address longer-term infrastructure needs. However, instances of spatial overlap among these modalities indicated inefficiencies and potential duplication of efforts as shown in Figure

11. Several examples of CIMIC water distributions conducted near existing QIP or AJP water points were noted, including in Majbong, Todach and Dokura villages.

Figure 11: Spatial distribution of UNISFA supported water distribution efforts



Source: UNISFA SAGE datasets; AJP progress reports; QIP progress reports

45. Furthermore, Mission staff and stakeholders interviewed indicated that, in some instances, when water infrastructure provided through QIPs or the AJP broke down, communities had limited incentives to repair or maintain these facilities because water continued to be supplied through CIMIC distributions. This dynamic undermined the sustainability of programmatic water investments and reduced the overall efficiency of UNISFA water-related interventions. Mission staff interviewed also noted that CIMIC water distributions were, in certain circumstances, implemented as a complementary measure during periods of increased demand. For example, when the influx of refugees into Amiet market exceeded the capacity of existing water yards, CIMIC water distributions were used to temporarily supplement AJP and QIP water points to meet urgent needs.

46. Duplication of efforts extended beyond water-related initiatives to additionally include peacebuilding and dialogue activities. Mission staff and stakeholders interviewed highlighted instances where similar activities targeting the same communities and objectives were implemented in close succession through different modalities, reducing overall efficiency and coherence. For example, in May and June 2025, UNISFA organized a migration conference and a women’s peace conference involving the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya communities. Shortly thereafter, UNDP convened another peace conference for the same groups under the AJP, resulting in both activities being funded by UNISFA with similar objectives and target audiences.

V. Conclusion

47. Overall, UNISFA has proven to be vital in enabling humanitarian operations in the Abyei Area, with its patrols, security escorts and air transport services serving as the primary lifelines for aid delivery. The Mission’s operational footprint is strategically targeted, its air assets remain indispensable during the rainy season, and its adaptive security posture has allowed humanitarian actors to maintain a presence in volatile areas that would otherwise be inaccessible. However, the Mission’s effectiveness is increasingly challenged by a deteriorating security landscape, characterized

by the presence of armed actors and the spillover effects of the conflict in Sudan, which have forced complex logistical rerouting and strained local protection mechanisms.

48. Crucially, with most United Nations humanitarian actors scaling down their presence or reducing operations in Abyei due to funding constraints, the sustainability of UNISFA gains in facilitating humanitarian aid delivery may be at risk. Community expectations for humanitarian aid could shift increasingly toward the Mission at a time when its ability to meet such rising expectations will be constrained, not just by the scope of its mandate, but also by external factors beyond its control, including the ongoing conflict in Sudan, continued refugee inflows into Abyei and a deteriorating humanitarian situation. Against this backdrop, the Mission's adoption of a nimbler approach to facilitating humanitarian aid delivery and the movement of humanitarian personnel will be critical as the humanitarian footprint continues to shrink and the humanitarian actors who continue to operate in the area must do so with fewer resources.

VI. Recommendations

49. OIOS makes four important recommendations, all of which were accepted by UNISFA.

Recommendation 1: (Result C and D)

50. **UNISFA should designate a humanitarian coordination focal point** with responsibilities that may include:

- a. Representing the Mission in key humanitarian coordination platforms, including the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG) and relevant working groups;
- b. Serving as the primary liaison between UNISFA and humanitarian actors, ensuring the timely sharing of security updates, incident reports and situational analyses; and
- c. Overseeing and strengthening internal coordination of humanitarian-related programmatic activities, including the AJP, QIPs and CIMIC activities, to reduce duplication and improve coherences.

Indicator of implementation: Designation of a humanitarian coordination focal point.

Expected change(s): Improved coordination and working relationships between UNISFA and humanitarian actors and improved implementation of programmatic activities through the AJP, QIPs and CIMIC activities.

Recommendation 2: (Result C)

51. **UNISFA should establish a Coordination Committee for the Abyei Joint Programme (AJP) to enhance transparency in funds allocation among implementing partners and improve operational efficiency.** The responsibilities of this committee may include:

- a. Establishing transparent and consistent criteria for allocating AJP funds among implementing partners;
- b. Ensuring that all programme officers involved in AJP implementation complete necessary Umoja training; and

- c. Streamlining and standardizing the grant set-up process to reduce delays and administrative bottlenecks.

Indicator of implementation: AJP Coordination Committee established and operational, as evidenced by regular meetings and follow-up of agreed upon action points.

Expected change(s): Improved efficiency and predictability of AJP grant processing.

Recommendation 3: (Result A)

52. **UNISFA should introduce specific activities in its advocacy work to reinforce communication on equitable humanitarian aid facilitation** by highlighting the principles and rationale underpinning equitable humanitarian aid facilitation between the northern and southern parts of Abyei. This may include:

- a. Mapping activities through which UNISFA engages community and traditional leaders from the Dinka and Misseriya communities;
- b. Engaging communities and leaders to understand their concerns regarding the Mission's equitable humanitarian facilitation approach; and
- c. Developing common messages on the principles and rationale underpinning equitable humanitarian aid facilitation and embedding those messages in all activities as appropriate.

Indicator of implementation: Introduction of specific advocacy-related activities which clearly communicate the principles and rationale underpinning equitable humanitarian aid facilitation developed and embedded in Mission activities as appropriate.

Expected change(s): Improved community understanding of humanitarian aid allocation principles.

Recommendations 4: (Result D)

53. **UNISFA should develop an action plan to improve the coordination of the AJP, QIPs and CIMIC activities** with a view to minimizing duplication among these interventions. This may include:

- a. Developing an integrated annual plan consolidating planned activities, budgets, timelines and locations for AJP, QIPs and CIMIC;
- b. Sharing the integrated plan with the AFPs to improve alignment and complementarity;
- c. Developing a GIS-based joint mapping of all programmatic interventions to identify overlaps and gaps; and
- d. Convening monthly coordination forums to review progress, address overlaps and adjust implementation as needed.

Indicator of implementation: Action plan developed.

Expected change(s): Reduced duplication of programmatic activities.

Annex I: UNISFA management response

UNITED NATIONS  NATIONS UNIES
UNISFA

United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei
قوة الأمم المتحدة المؤقتة في أبيي

INTER OFFICE MEMORANDUM

Date: 16 March 2026

Reference: HOM/MHQ/IOM/009-2026

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

From: Major General Ganesh Kumar Shrestha
Acting Head of Mission and Force Commander
United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei

G. K. Shrestha
16/3/26

Subject: Management Response on the Draft Report of the Inspection of the UNISFA Humanitarian Aid Function

1. Your interoffice memorandum OIOS-2026-00419 dated 2 March 2026 refers.
2. I am pleased to submit herewith UNISFA's formal management response and the completed recommendation action plan on the Draft Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the Inspection of the UNISFA Humanitarian Aid Function.
3. The Mission has reviewed the draft report (IED-25-021) in detail and confirms its full acceptance of all four recommendations. In accordance with your request, the attached action plan outlines the Mission's implementation steps, responsible offices and indicative timelines.
4. UNISFA appreciates the professionalism of the inspection team and the constructive engagement extended throughout the inspection process. The Mission remains committed to cooperating with OIOS and providing any additional information required to support the finalization of the report.
5. Please accept the assurances of my highest consideration.

cc: Mr. Rakib Hossain, Chief of Section, Inspection and Evaluation Division, OIOS
Mr. Alexander Rose, Chief of Staff, UNISFA