NATIONAL STUDY: CHILD LABOUR IN SOUTH SUDAN

Empowering Futures: A national and grassroots initiative to end the worst forms of **child labour** through targeted interventions that focus on **prevention, protection,** and **rehabilitation** of **affected children** in South Sudan

Funded by the European Union

Save the Children

The study has been conducted by:

Acknowledgment

On behalf of the **Ministry of Labour of the Republic of South Sudan**, I extend my sincere appreciation to all partners and stakeholders who contributed to the successful completion of this **Child Labour Study Report**.

This report represents a significant milestone in our collective effort to understand the scope, causes, and impacts of child labour in South Sudan. It provides a solid evidence base to inform policy decisions, strengthen interventions, and guide the implementation of both national and international commitments toward ending child labour in all its forms.

We extend our sincere appreciation to **Save the Children for its invaluable technical support**, and to the **European Union for funding the study and the project "Empowering Futures: Ending the Worst Forms of Child Labor in South Sudan**. Your collaboration demonstrates our shared vision of South Sudan where every child grows up in safe, and with access to quality education, free from exploitation and hazardous work.

Special recognition goes to the research team, enumerators, and Ministry staff for their dedication and professionalism in conducting this study, as well as to community leaders, employers, parents, and most importantly, the **children**, whose voices and lived experiences have given this report depth and human meaning.

The Ministry reaffirms its commitment to transforming the findings and recommendations of this study into concrete **actions and policies** that protect children's rights and promote decent work for all. Through sustained partnerships and community engagement, we can ensure that no child in South Sudan is left behind.

Sincere

Hon. James Hoth Mai
Minister of Labour
Republic of South Sudan

Foreword

Child labour remains one of the most pressing social and economic challenges facing South Sudan today. Child labour can not only deprive children of their childhood and education but also undermines our nation's long-term human capital and development prospects. Recognizing the urgency of this issue, the Ministry of Labour, in collaboration with its partners, undertook this **Child Labour Study** to generate evidence that will inform policies and practical actions aimed at protecting children and promoting decent work for all.

This study provides a comprehensive understanding of the magnitude, causes, drivers, and consequences of child labour across different sectors and communities in South Sudan. It highlights both the challenges and the resilience of families struggling to meet basic needs, and it reminds us of our shared responsibility to ensure that no child is forced to work under harmful or exploitative conditions.

I wish to commend all those who contributed to the success of this study, the research team, technical experts, and the data collectors who worked in often difficult environments to gather accurate and credible information. Our heartfelt appreciation also goes to our partners, particularly **Save the Children**, the **European Union (EU)**, and other national and international stakeholders for their technical, financial, and moral support throughout this process.

This report comes at a critical time, as the Government of South Sudan continues to strengthen labour governance, improve access to education, and develop national strategies to eliminate child labour. The findings and recommendations presented herein will serve as valuable tools for evidence-based planning, policy dialogue, and coordinated action among government institutions, civil society, and the private sector.

As we look forward, the Ministry remains committed to building a South Sudan where every child enjoys a safe, enabling environment to seize every opportunity to realize their full potential. Through continued partnership and collective action, we can ensure that no child in South Sudan is left behind. Protecting our children today is the surest investment in the future of our nation.

Sincere

Hon: Deng Tong
Undersecretary, Ministry of Labour
Republic of South Sudan

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ACRONYMS

CAAC	Children and Armed Conflict
CES	Central Equatoria State
COVID 19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSE	Commercial Sexual Exploitation
CSO	Civil Society Organizations
DAP	Data Analysis Plan
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
EES	Eastern Equatoria State
ECLT	Eliminating Child Labour in Tobacco Growing Foundation
EU	European Union
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (UK)
FCS	Food Consumption Score
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
HH	Household
hHH	Head of Household
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICC/ESOMAR	International Code on Market, Opinion and Social Research and Data Analytics
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
ILO	International Labour Organization
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation

IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRB	Institutional Review Board
KII	Key Informant Interview
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey of 2008
NBG	Northern Bahr el Ghazal
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
ODK	Open Data Kit
OPAC	Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict
PBS	Population-Based Survey
PMS	Protection Monitoring System
PPS	Probability Proportional to Size
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
QA	Quality Assurance
QC	Quality Control
RT	Research Team
SCISS	Save the Children South Sudan
SCI	Save the Children International
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SSPDF	South Sudan People's Defence Forces
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infection
ToR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNICEF	United Nations' Children's Fund
US	The United States of America
USDoL	United States Department of Labor

WBG	Western Bahr el Ghazal
WES	Western Equatoria State
WFCL	Worst Forms of Child Labour
WFP	World Food Programme

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Armed Conflict	A situation involving organised violence between state or non-state armed groups, often resulting in significant human rights violations, including the recruitment of children as soldiers. *(Source: Adapted from International Committee of the Red Cross definitions)*
Child Labour	Work that deprives children of their childhood, potential, and dignity, and is harmful to their physical and mental development. It refers to work that: • Is mentally, physically, socially, or morally dangerous and harmful to children; and/or • Interferes with their schooling by depriving them of the opportunity to attend school; obliging them to leave school prematurely; or requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work. *(Source: International Labour Organization, ILO Convention No. 182)*
Child Protection	Measures and structures to prevent and respond to abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence against children, ensuring their safety and well-being. *(Source: UNICEF, 2023)*
Child-Sensitive Approaches	Research methods and practices tailored to children's needs, maturity, and vulnerabilities, ensuring their safety and dignity are upheld throughout participation.
Child Soldiers	Children under 18 years associated with armed forces or groups, used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, or for sexual purposes. (Source: Paris Principles, 2007)
Commercial Sexual Exploitation	The sexual abuse of children for financial or economic gain, including prostitution and pornography, often linked to human trafficking. (Source: ILO, 2021)
Community Buy-In	The process of engaging local leaders, authorities, and community members to gain their support and ensure cultural appropriateness, security, and effectiveness of fieldwork.
Desk Review	The synthesis of existing secondary data and literature related to child labour in South Sudan and comparable contexts. This includes analysis of policy frameworks, national statistics, programmatic reports, and academic studies.
Direct Observation	A non-intrusive method of data collection where researchers systematically observe work environments and behaviours of children engaged in labour, using a structured guide to assess conditions and risks.

Domestic Work	Work performed in or for a household, often including cleaning, cooking, or childcare, where children, especially girls, may face exploitation. (Source: ILO, 2021)
Do No Harm	An ethical principle requiring that research activities must not put participants at increased risk of harm, exploitation, or trauma.
Ethical Safeguarding	A framework of protocols to protect children and vulnerable participants during research. This includes informed consent, confidentiality, trauma-informed techniques, and referral pathways.
Focus Group Discussion (FGD)	A guided discussion with a small group of participants to explore social norms, perceptions, and experiences related to child labour, disaggregated by age, gender, and stakeholder group.
Forced Labour	Work or service exacted from a person under the threat of penalty and for which the person has not offered themselves voluntarily, including cattle herding or domestic servitude. *(Source: ILO Forced Labour Convention, 1930)*
Gender-Responsive Research	Research design and analysis that accounts for gendered experiences and differences in exposure, vulnerability, and impact of child labour between girls and boys.
Hazardous Child Labour	Work that is performed by children in dangerous and unhealthy conditions that can harm children's health, safety, or morals as a result of poor safety and health standards or employment conditions, , such as mining or handling dangerous machinery. *(Source: ILO Convention No. 182)*
Human Trafficking	The recruitment, transportation, or harbouring of persons through force, fraud, or coercion for exploitation, including child labour. *(Source: UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, 2000)*
Key Informant Interview (KII)	A qualitative method involving in-depth interviews with individuals who have specialized knowledge or influence on child labour issues, including government officials, NGO representatives, community leaders, and employers.
Light Work	Non-hazardous work that is permissible for children above a certain age, as long as it does not interfere with their education or harm their health and development.

Minimum Age for Employment	The age below which it is prohibited by law to employ children. According to ILO Convention No. 138, the minimum age should not be less than the age of completion of compulsory schooling and, in any case, not less than 15 years.
Mixed Methods	An integrated research approach combining quantitative (e.g., household survey) and qualitative (e.g., FGDs, KIIs, observations) methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of child labour.
Participatory Methods	Approaches that directly involve children and community members in the research process, often through creative or visual tools like storytelling, drawing, or problem trees.
Population-Based Survey (PBS)	A statistically representative household survey designed to estimate the prevalence, characteristics, and drivers of child labour among children aged 12–17 in selected counties across South Sudan.
Prevention	Strategies aimed at stopping child labour before it occurs, such as education access and awareness-raising, a focus of the study's outcomes.
Probability Proportional to Size (PPS)	A sampling method where clusters are selected in proportion to their population size, ensuring larger clusters have a higher probability of inclusion.
Rehabilitation	Processes to restore the physical, psychological, and social well-being of children removed from labour, including education and counselling.
Social Protection	Policies and programs designed to reduce poverty and vulnerability (e.g., cash transfers, school feeding), driving child labour.
Stratified Cluster Sampling	A probability sampling technique used in the PBS where population groups (strata) are divided by location and demographic characteristics, and clusters (e.g., bomas, villages) are randomly selected within each stratum.
Systems Strengthening	Enhancing the capacity and coordination of institutions and stakeholders to address child labour effectively.
Triangulation	The process of validating findings by comparing and integrating evidence from multiple sources and methods (e.g., survey, FGDs, KIIs, observations).

Worst Forms of Child Labour (WFCL)

As defined by ILO Convention No. 182, these include:

- All forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom, and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict;
- The use, procuring, or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography, or for pornographic performances;
- The use, procuring, or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in the relevant international treaties;
- Work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety, or morals of children.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Child labour in South Sudan is both widespread and deeply rooted in the country's protracted crises, with an estimated 34% of children aged 5–17 engaged in child labour as of 2023. South Sudan ranks among the four worst countries globally in the Verisk Maplecroft Child Labour Index 2024. The practice is particularly prevalent in rural and pastoralist communities, where poverty, insecurity, and social norms converge to normalize child labour. Children are exposed to a range of the worst forms of child labour (WFCL), including recruitment into armed groups, commercial sexual exploitation, debt bondage, hazardous agriculture, and domestic servitude.

Despite South Sudan's commitments under international conventions, implementation of child protection laws remains limited due to poor enforcement capacity, overlapping legal gaps, and weak accountability systems. This national study, conducted under Save the Children's "Empowering Futures" initiative with EU support, fills critical evidence gaps and supports strategic planning for prevention, protection, and rehabilitation efforts.

Methodology

The study took place across 8 counties in 7 states: Akobo (Jonglei), Kapoeta South (Eastern Equatoria), Magwi (Eastern Equatoria), Wau (Western Bahr el Ghazal), Yambio (Western Equatoria), Juba (Central Equatoria), Rubkona/Bentiu (Unity), Renk (Upper Nile). These locations were selected through a purposeful, risk-informed sampling strategy aimed at capturing the diverse manifestations, drivers, and severity of worst forms of child labour (WFCL) across South Sudan.

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, grounded in both quantitative and qualitative research:

1. A population-based household survey of 418 households across the eight high-risk counties, selected using stratified cluster sampling with Probability Proportional to Size (PPS). The household survey component of the study was conducted through structured interviews with one caregiver and one child per household, selected based on specific eligibility criteria. Participation of children was strictly contingent upon the informed consent of the caregiver and the assent of the child.
2. 26 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with national and subnational government officials, law enforcement, civil society, and international partners.
3. 9 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with adolescents (12–17 years), complemented by 31 structured observations of workplaces and environments.
4. An extensive desk review of national policies, legal frameworks, sector reports, and regional best practices contextualized the field data.

Data collection emphasized gender responsiveness, child safeguarding, and intersectional vulnerabilities, with a focus on children at risk due to disability, displacement, orphanhood, or gender-based discrimination

Summary of key findings

1. High prevalence of WFCL: Children are engaged in exploitative work across all sectors—particularly herding, mining, market vending, domestic work, and forced military recruitment: 64.1% of children surveyed were engaged in WFCL, with Kapoeta South and Yambio reporting the highest prevalence at 90%, followed by Magwi (79.7%) and Akobo (79.5%). This county-level variation was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 52.54$, $p = 0.000$), confirming strong geographic disparities in risk exposure.

2. Geographic variation: Counties such as Akobo, Kapoeta South, Bentiu, and Yambio show alarmingly high risk profiles, driven by conflict, displacement, food insecurity, and poor institutional presence. For example, the prevalence of children involved in WFCL reached 90% in Kapoeta South, 79.5% in Akobo, and 79.7% in Magwi, with Bentiu and Renk also displaying elevated vulnerability across multiple indicators, including child recruitment, bonded labour, and trafficking.

3. Gendered vulnerabilities: Boys face higher risk of hazardous labour and recruitment by armed groups, while girls are more vulnerable to domestic servitude, sexual exploitation, and child marriage. Data from the study show that 61% of boys in work were engaged in hazardous labour and disproportionately affected by recruitment into armed groups, while girls were more likely to be involved in unpaid domestic work and at higher risk of sexual exploitation, with over 70% of known sexual exploitation cases involving other children.

4. Gendered exposure to hazardous labour condition: A striking 60% of working children reported exposure to hazardous work environments. Girls were primarily exposed to fire and heat hazards, particularly in domestic tasks like cooking, while boys were more vulnerable to physical risks in sectors like construction, vending, and manual labour. Juba, Magwi, and Kapoeta South were identified as key exposure zones for both groups.

5. Gender disparities in child labour compensation: Girls are more likely to work without pay or be compensated in-kind, while boys receive monetary compensation more often. Among working children, 9.8% of boys received cash payment versus only 5.9% of girls, reflecting the systemic undervaluation of girls' labour, especially in domestic work and caregiving roles that are less visible and less regulated.

6. Income-generating work is common among children: More than a third of children (35.1%) reported engaging in income-generating activities. Magwi accounted for the highest share (18.92%), while Juba reported the lowest (8.78%). The differences across counties were statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 64.99$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting structural and economic factors influencing child work engagement.

7. Child recruitment into armed groups remains a reality: 10% of surveyed children disclosed that they had been recruited into armed groups, with the majority of these cases occurring in Akobo, Kapoeta South, and Bentiu. This confirms the ongoing intersection of child labour with armed conflict, insecurity, and displacement dynamics, and underscores the urgency of integrated child protection responses in these areas.

8. Caregiver awareness doesn't guarantee protection: There is a borderline statistically significant relationship between caregiver awareness of child labour laws and the child's involvement in hazardous work ($\chi^2 = 3.82$, $p = 0.051$). Surprisingly, 72.5% of children engaged in hazardous labour came from households where caregivers reported being aware of such laws, suggesting that awareness alone is insufficient without viable alternatives or enforcement.

9. Sharp disparities in legal and service awareness: Many children and caregivers are unaware of child labour laws or their rights. While 69% of households were aware of the existence of child labour laws, less than half (45%) of caregivers knew how or where to report abuse or exploitation. At the same time, only 33% of children knew of any protection services in their area. Awareness levels were markedly higher in Yambio, Akobo, Magwi, and Kapoeta South, while Renk, Juba, and Wau lagged significantly.

10. Drivers of child labour: Food insecurity, school exclusion, lack of livelihoods for caregivers, harmful social norms, and debt-repayment arrangements were among the most consistent and powerful drivers. Notably, children from food-insecure households were 4.4 times more likely to be involved in WFCL, and 68.6% of children in bonded labour situations said they were working to repay family debt.

11. Protective factors: The strongest among these is current school attendance, which significantly decreases the risk of WFCL when combined with caregiver support and consistent access to education. Household head education is also critical: children from households where the head, especially if female, has secondary or post-secondary education are far less likely to be involved in WFCL, with rates dropping to just 7.8% when the head has post-secondary education, compared to 36.9% when they have none. Food security plays a major role; children from households with Acceptable Food Consumption Scores are 4.4% less likely to be engaged in WFCL than those from

food-insecure homes. Caregiver awareness of child rights further enhances protection, as does emotional and material support within the household, 37.3% of children cited family support as the most important factor in achieving their goals. Community-level factors also matter: access to services such as education, protection, and psychosocial support, as well as the presence of positive role models and non-normalised attitudes toward exploitative work.

12. Weak legal enforcement: Legal protections according to the data remain largely symbolic. Enforcement mechanisms are under-resourced, with few prosecutions, weak coordination, and gaps in law. e.g., the hazardous work list remains incomplete, and the minimum employment age (14) does not align with the end of compulsory education (13). There have been no reported prosecutions for child labour violations in over a decade, and the Labour Inspectorate operates only in Juba, with no presence in high-risk counties.
13. Service fragmentation: Protection, education, health, and justice systems operate in silos, with constrained or absent referral mechanisms for children engaged in WFCL. Despite some localised efforts by NGOs and frontline actors, children withdrawn from labour frequently lack access to sustained reintegration services such as case management, psychosocial support, or school reintegration. Key informants across ministries confirmed that no national referral pathway or cross-sectoral protocol is currently operational. Only 33% of children reported knowing any source of support in their community for working or vulnerable children, illustrating a broader institutional visibility gap. In interviews, senior officials repeatedly cited lack of inter-ministerial coordination, funding constraints, and absence of clear mandates as major barriers to providing follow-up and holistic support.

Summary of recommendations

Policy-Oriented:

1. Close legal gaps: Ratify the Palermo Protocol, finalize the hazardous work list, and harmonize laws on minimum work and education age.
2. Strengthen enforcement: Expand and train labour inspectors, publish enforcement data, and establish referral pathways linking law enforcement, social welfare, and health systems.
3. End military recruitment: Enforce the Child Act's 18-year minimum and ensure all armed forces and affiliated groups comply.
4. Revitalize national coordination: Re-establish the National Steering Committee on Child Labour, dormant for over a decade.

Programmatic:

1. Target high-risk counties with integrated packages: Combine education, cash transfers, legal aid, and child protection.
2. Build local capacity: Train teachers, police, health workers, and child protection staff to identify and respond to WFCL.
3. Strengthen case management: Develop standardized, gender-sensitive tools for reintegration and follow-up.
4. Support alternative livelihoods: Provide vocational training and cash-based programming for households reliant on child labour.
5. Expand access to education: Eliminate informal fees, improve school infrastructure, and ensure education for out-of-school children and returnees.

Conclusions

Objective 1 – Prevalence and Forms of WFCL:

The study confirms that child labour is widespread in South Sudan, with 64.1% of children engaged in WFCL. The prevalence varies across counties, peaking in Kapoeta South, Yambio, Magwi, and Akobo, and spans multiple sectors, including hazardous domestic work, street vending, agriculture, fishing,

construction, and charcoal production. Notably, forms such as commercial sexual exploitation, trafficking, bonded labour, and recruitment into armed groups are present, especially in conflict-affected and border regions.

Objective 2 – Drivers of Child Labour:

Child labour in South Sudan is driven by a complex mix of household-, community-, and structural-level factors. Key household factors include poverty, food insecurity, school exclusion, lack of parental education, and debt bondage. At the community level, harmful social norms, lack of services, weak awareness, and normalization of child work exacerbate the problem. Structural drivers include displacement, conflict, lack of birth registration, and limited livelihood opportunities for adults.

Objective 3 – Legal and Policy Gaps:

Despite South Sudan's ratification of key international conventions, the domestic legal framework remains incomplete and poorly enforced. There is no standalone child labour law, no adopted list of hazardous work, and no effective inspection or enforcement mechanisms. Disjointed mandates, budget constraints, and lack of inter-ministerial coordination hinder systemic responses. While individual commitment exists within ministries, capacity and legal authority remain insufficient to prevent or prosecute WFCL effectively.

Objective 4 – Strategic Pathways for Eradication:

A holistic, location-specific, and systems-based approach is required to address WFCL. Priority interventions should combine education access, social protection, legal reform, and community-based child protection. Counties such as Kapoeta South, Akobo, Magwi, Bentiu, and Yambio warrant urgent, integrated responses. Prevention must be supported by a national action plan, inter-agency coordination, strengthened child protection systems, and investment in reintegration services for children withdrawn from labour.

1. INTRODUCTION

Child labour remains a critical challenge in South Sudan, with "34 % of children aged 5-17 reported as engaged in child labour in 2023 (UNICEF MICS). Years of conflict and economic instability have heightened children's vulnerability, with child labour being encountered throughout the country, especially in rural communities, notably pastoralist ones. South Sudan has recently ranked as one of the four worst performing countries among 198 countries in the Verisk Maplecroft Child Labour Index, 2024 and despite international conventions and national policies aimed at eradicating child labour, the practice persists due to a range of interlinked factors, including poverty, food insecurity, limited access to education, and weakened social support systems –because it is so widespread, child labour often lacks social stigma,[2] and children often becoming primary income earners for their families, exposing them to risks such as exploitation, abuse, and interrupted development.

1.1. SAVE THE CHILDREN'S WORK ON CHILD LABOUR IN SOUTH SUDAN

Save the Children has consistently advocated for the eradication of child labour, particularly its worst forms, in South Sudan, proactively responding to severe protection challenges faced by vulnerable children across the country. Recognizing persistent issues stemming from conflict, economic instability, and limited institutional capacity, Save the Children's initiatives, as well as prior research on the topic aim to foster sustainable solutions through targeted prevention, protection, and rehabilitation efforts.

"Empowering Futures: A national and grassroots initiative to end the worst forms of child labour through targeted interventions that focus on prevention, protection, and rehabilitation of affected children in South Sudan" is a project funded by the European Union and implemented by Save the Children in South Sudan. This initiative aims to address the critical issue of child labour through targeted interventions in prevention, protection, and rehabilitation. As part of this broader project, the current national study serves as a crucial step forward, designed to gather robust evidence on the prevalence and magnitude of child labour within key sectors such as agriculture, mining, construction, the service industry, and involvement with armed groups. The findings will directly inform Save the Children's advocacy strategies, policy recommendations, and capacity-building efforts aimed at combating child labour in South Sudan.

Specifically, under the "Empowering Futures" initiative, Save the Children's activities are structured around three core outcomes, presented below with their respective indicators:

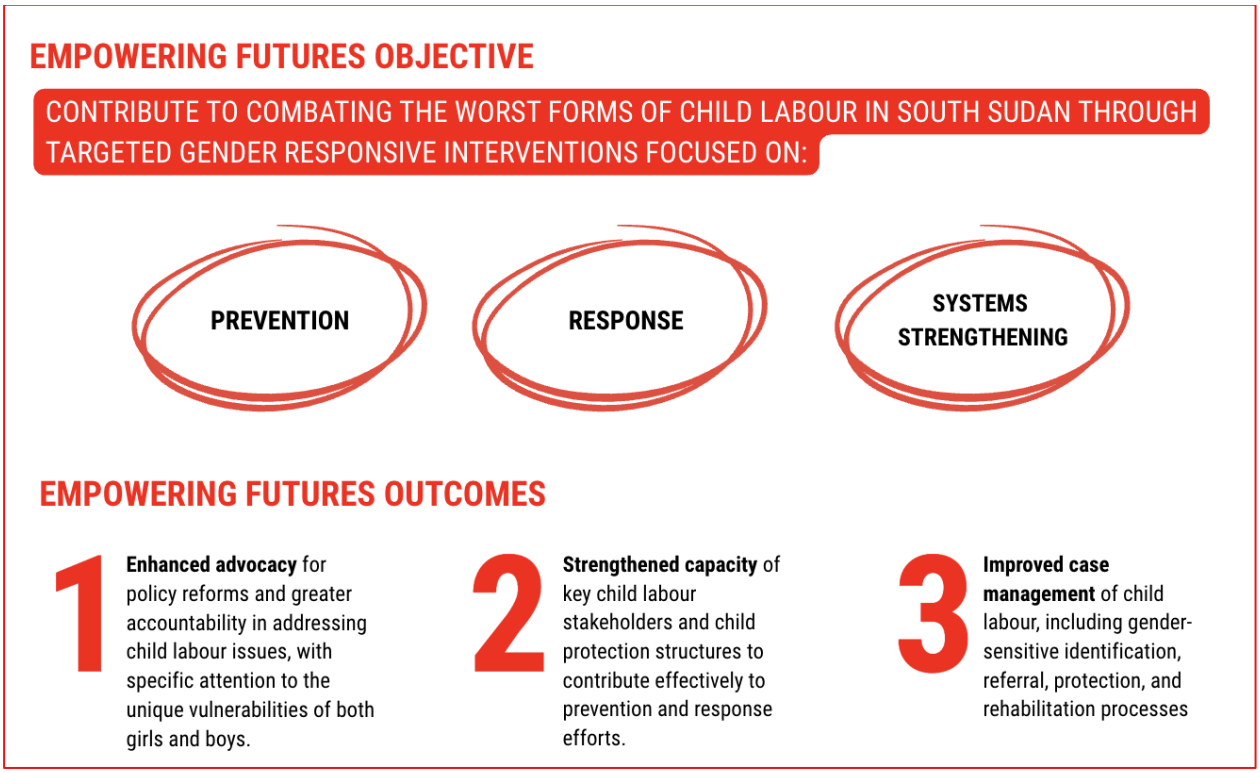
1. Enhanced Advocacy: The program promotes policy reforms and improved accountability measures, ensuring child labour issues, particularly the unique vulnerabilities faced by boys and girls, are prioritized on national and local agendas.
    - Indicator: Share of new or revised child-protection laws, policies or budgets that include sex-disaggregated targets for ending WFCL
(0 → ≥ 80 % by project end).
2. Capacity Strengthening: Through targeted training and support, the program enhances the skills and capabilities of child labour stakeholders and local child protection structures, empowering them to effectively prevent and respond to the worst forms of child labour.
    - Indicator: Percentage of trained stakeholders who can correctly apply SC's gender-responsive child-labour guidelines in simulated cases
(baseline tbc → ≥ 75 % post-training

[2] This question allowed respondents to select multiple reasons, so the percentages reported for each category represent the proportion of respondents who chose that reason. Because respondents could select more than one reason, the total percentages across all categories exceed 100%,

3. Improved Case Management: The project focuses on establishing robust, gender-sensitive case management systems, including identification, referral pathways, and the provision of comprehensive protection and rehabilitation services for affected children.
    - Indicator: Proportion of boys and girls withdrawn from WFCL who receive a case plan that meets at least 3 gender-specific needs (e.g., SRHR for girls, PSS for formerly armed boys)
(0 → ≥ 70 % by Year 3)

This national study commissioned under "Empowering Futures" fills critical knowledge gaps, providing evidence on the extent, drivers, and necessary policy interventions to comprehensively combat child labour. The study's results will guide targeted actions and interventions, enabling informed decision-making among government entities, community leaders, and international partners.

Figure 1:Objective and Outcomes of 'Empowering Futures'



2. RESEARCH SCOPE

2.1. RESEARCH PURPOSE

The primary purpose of this study is to generate robust and actionable evidence on child labour in South Sudan, with a focus on understanding the prevalence, drivers, and consequences of the worst forms of

child labour (WFCL) across the country. This includes activities in sectors such as mining, military recruitment, construction, informal service industries, agriculture, and domestic work. By doing so, the study will support stakeholders, government actors, NGOs, and donors, in refining prevention and response strategies, strengthening existing frameworks, and guiding policy and resource allocation. Ultimately, this research aims to support interventions that lead to measurable, lasting, and gender-responsive change in the lives of affected children in South Sudan.

2.2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study is underpinned by the following four interrelated objectives:

1. Provide disaggregated evidence on the existence, forms, and possible magnitude of the WFCLacross sectors and different locations in South Sudan. These include:
   - Forced labour in cattle herding, domestic work, and market vending
   - Commercial sexual exploitation (CSE)
   - Human trafficking
   - Forcible recruitment by state and non-state armed groups
2. Identify the main driving factors behind child labour at different levels, particularly at the household and community levels, with attention to intersectional vulnerabilities such as gender, disability, orphanhood, and displacement.
3. Identify specific policy and enforcement gaps, and provide evidence-based and actionable recommendations on how to prevent and eliminate child labour across multiple sectors, in line with national legislation (Child Act 2008, Labour Act 2017) and international standards (ILO Convention 182, UN CRC Article 32).
4. Develop a holistic, gender-sensitive and community-informed approach to eradicating child labour, especially its worst forms, in the identified high-risk locations across South Sudan.

Figure 2: Objective and Outcomes of this study

2.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To guide data collection and analysis, the following key questions are addressed:

1. What is the current prevalence and distribution of the WFCL among children aged 12–17 in South Sudan?
   a. How does prevalence vary by state, county, and urban/rural location?
   b. What are the most common types of worst forms of work children are engaged in (e.g. forced recruitment, hazardous labour, commercial sexual exploitation) and in which sectors are these concentrated?
   c. What are the demographic profiles (e.g., age, gender) of children engaged in these forms of labour?

2. What are the main socio-economic, environmental, and security-related factors driving children into child labour/WFCL?
   a. How do household level factors (such as poverty, food insecurity, parental education, displacement, armed conflict, and breakdown of social protection systems) contribute to increasing child labour/WFCL risks?
   b. What role do community-level issues, including displacement and conflict, play in increasing child labour risks?
   c. How do cultural practices and social norms influence the acceptance of child labour in different communities?

3. What are the barriers to education for children engaged in labour, and how does this perpetuate the cycle of child labour?
   a. How does involvement in child labour impact school enrolment, attendance, and completion rates?
   b. What are the main barriers (e.g., cost, distance, safety) preventing working children from accessing education?
   c. How can education initiatives be leveraged to reduce child labour in high-risk areas?

4. How do employers and the private sector contribute to the persistence of child labour in South Sudan?
   a. What are the practices and motivations of employers in sectors like agriculture, domestic work, and informal markets for hiring children?
   b. How aware are employers of child labour laws, and what accountability measures are in place?
   c. What incentives or regulations could encourage employers to eliminate child labour in their operations?

5. What are the strengths and weaknesses of current policies and programs aimed at reducing child labour?
   a. How well do national laws and policies on child labour align with international standards, and where are the gaps in enforcement?
   b. What are the challenges faced by government and humanitarian actors in implementing child labour interventions?
   c. How can coordination between stakeholders (e.g., government, NGOs, UN agencies) be improved to address child labour more effectively?

6. How do gender and vulnerability factors shape children's experiences of child labour/WFCL?
   a. What are the differences in the types of labour and associated risks faced by boys versus girls in high-risk sectors?
   b. How do vulnerabilities such as disability, orphanhood, or displacement increase the likelihood of exploitation in child labour?
   c. What is the relationship between early marriage and unpaid or hidden labour, particularly for girls?

7. What are the existing community-based mechanisms for preventing and addressing child labour?
   a. How is child labour/WFCL understood, accepted or challenged at the household/community level?

b. What social norms and cultural beliefs enable or prevent its continuation?
c. What informal systems (e.g., community networks, traditional leaders) exist to protect children from labour exploitation?
d. How effective are formal mechanisms like child protection committees or local authorities in responding to child labour cases?

8. What are the most effective strategies and recommendations for eradicating child labour/WFCL in South Sudan's high-risk areas?
   a. What community-led initiatives or alternatives to child labour (e.g., vocational training, income support) show promise in reducing child labour?
   b. How can education, economic empowerment, and legal enforcement be integrated into a comprehensive approach to eliminate child labour??
   c. What are the specific needs of high-risk locations in terms of resources, infrastructure, and capacity building to prevent child labour.

2.4. GENDER AND CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

Grounded in Save the Children's Gender Equality and Inclusion Policy, and its commitment to gender equality, disability inclusion, and child rights, this study adopts principles of transformative inclusion, equitable participation, ethical safeguarding, and respectful power dynamics. This study pays particular attention to how gender norms shape children's risk of entering the labour force, especially in high-risk sectors such as domestic work, herding, or informal trade. It also considers how overlapping forms of discrimination, such as gender, disability, displacement, and orphanhood, compound vulnerability.". Our prior experience with these methodologies will be instrumental in applying a transformative gender lens by examining how boys and girls experience child labour differently, and how interventions can be adapted to meet their specific needs.

Implementing ethical research practices that prioritise the safeguarding of children and caregivers, balancing respect for local customs with adherence to international standards on research ethics In line with United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms and Standards towards Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Research and Evaluations,[3] the research included practical safeguards to protect respondents' physical, emotional, and psychosocial well-being and maintaining confidentiality. This ensured that ethical considerations remained at the forefront of the data collection process and analysis By addressing child labour in South Sudan through a rights-based and gender-responsive lens, this study contributes to global progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8.7 (Decent Work and End Child Labour), and SDG 16.2 (End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against children).

[3] UNEG (2024) *UNEG Guidance on Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluations*

Figure 3: The UN SDGs and targets the study advances

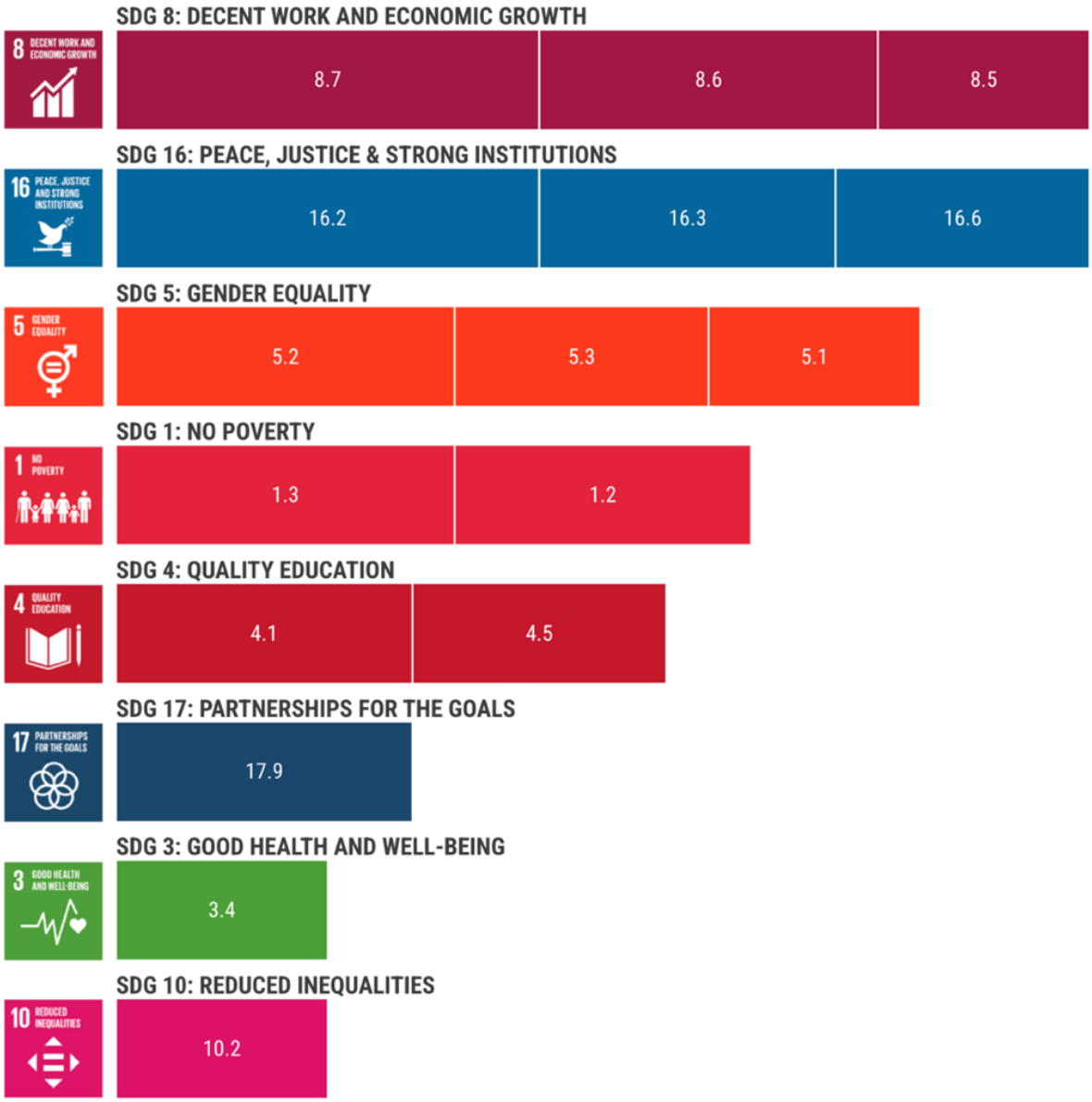


Figure 4: The two primary UN SDGs sub-targets the National Child Labour Study in South Sudan furthers

TARGET 8.7

Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms.

TARGET 16.2

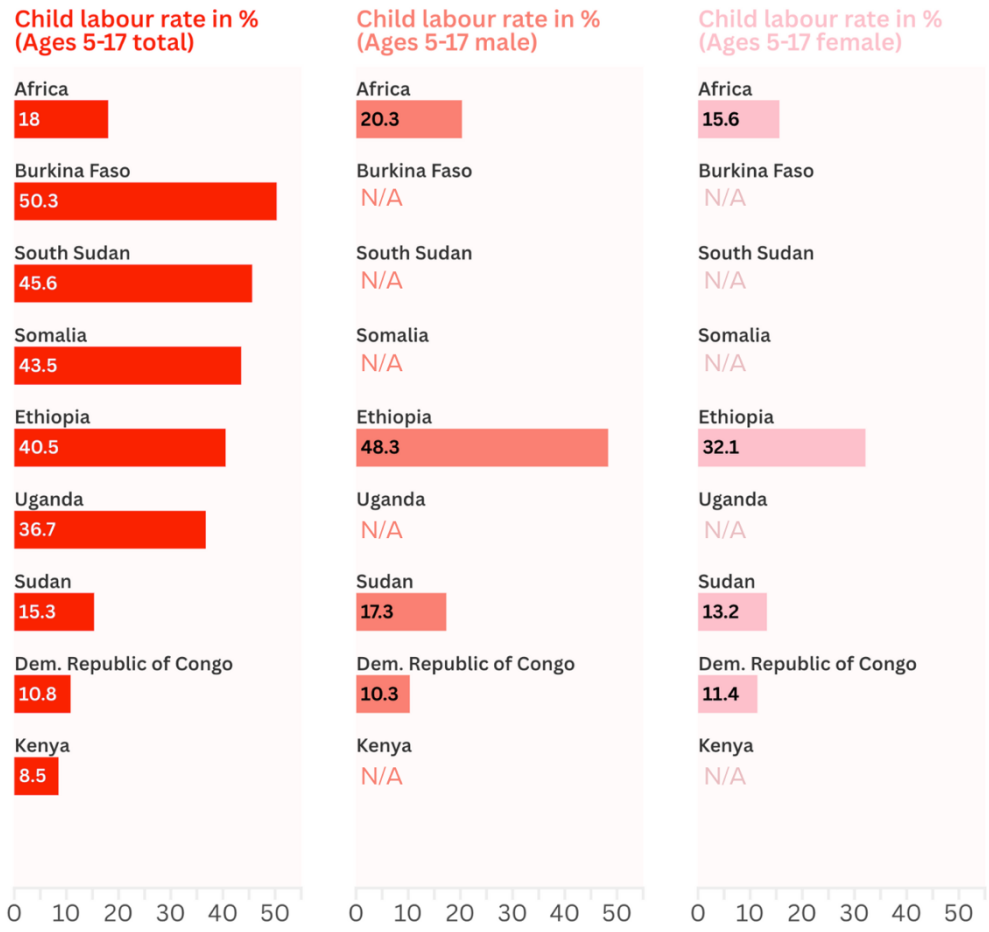
End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children.

3. DESK REVIEW

South Sudan's prolonged conflict and humanitarian crises have created fertile ground for widespread child labour. An estimated 45.6% of South Sudanese children aged 5 to 14 are engaged in work, one of the highest rates globally.[4] Figure 5 illustrates child labour rates among children aged 5–17 across selected African countries (South Sudan's rates refer to ages 5-14 years old), offering both an all-gender total and disaggregated data by sex where available. The continental average for Africa stands at 18%, but South Sudan's estimated child labour rate is more than double that, at 45.6%, placing it among the highest in Africa, second only to Burkina Faso (50.3%) that rates the highest in the continent.[5,6]

What is particularly striking is that South Sudan's rate is the highest among its immediate neighbours in the region, surpassing: Somalia (43.5%), Ethiopia (40.5%), Uganda (36.7%), Sudan (15.3%), Democratic Republic of Congo (10.8%), Kenya (8.5%). This positions South Sudan not only as a regional outlier, but also as a country facing a severe child labour crisis relative to other conflict-affected or post-conflict contexts in East and Central Africa. Data disaggregation by sex is available for only a few countries, and notably absent for South Sudan, highlighting a broader gap in gender-sensitive reporting. Among the countries with available data, Ethiopia shows a significantly higher child labour rate among boys (48.3%) than girls (32.1%), a pattern that may be relevant for South Sudan but remains unverified due to the lack of sex-disaggregated figures.

Figure 5: Child labour in South Sudan: Regional and continental context



Source: ILO (2020); Ortiz-Ospina & Roser (2024)

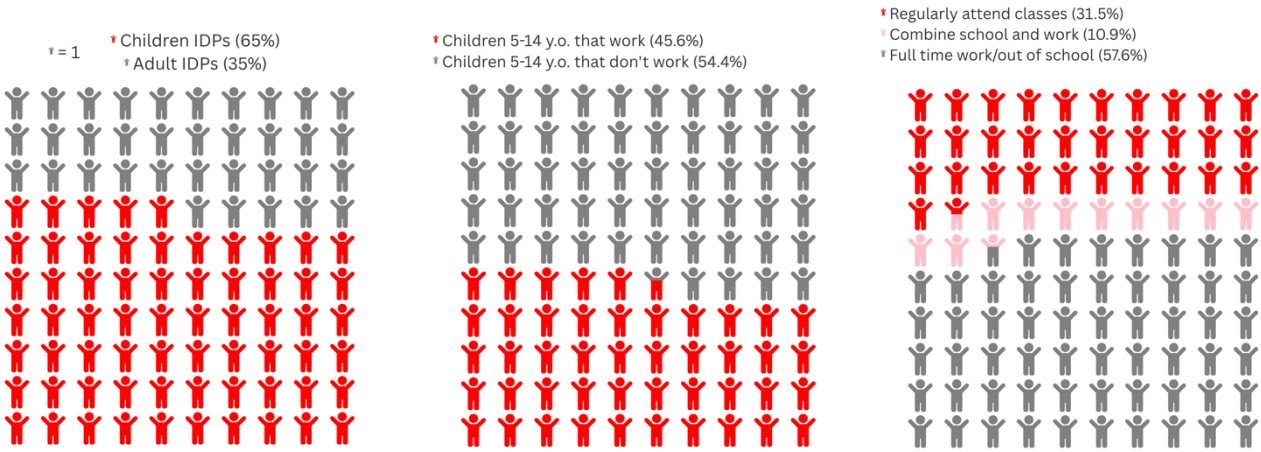
[4] US Department of Labour (2023) *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor*
[5] ILO (2024) *Child labour: Global estimates 2020, trends and the road forward*
[6] Ortiz-Ispina E. & Roser M. *Child Labor. Our World In Data*

At the same time, school attendance in South Sudan remains among the lowest globally. Only about 31.5% of primary-school-age children (6–14 years old) regularly attend classes,[7] and just 10.9% manage to combine school with work. The remainder are either engaged in full-time labour or excluded from education altogether. Long working hours, physical risks, and the mobility often required by child labour significantly undermine school participation, performance, and completion. Recurrent displacement and frequent school closures due to conflict and flooding further erode access to education.[8,9,10]

These overlapping challenges contribute to a cycle of intergenerational poverty and exclusion, with working children more likely to remain in insecure, informal labour into adulthood. Additional barriers, such as chronic underfunding, teacher absenteeism, informal school fees, cultural biases favouring boys' education, and the lack of inclusive infrastructure, push many children out of the classroom and into the workforce. Although legislative frameworks exist, significant legal gaps persist, particularly around child trafficking and inconsistencies between minimum work and compulsory education ages, leaving many children unprotected and exposed to exploitation.[11]

This situation is exacerbated by war, displacement and economic collapse.[12] Over 4 million children require humanitarian assistance and every second person in South Sudan faces acute food insecurity, pushing countless children into labour or street life out of sheer necessity for their families' survival.[13]

Figure 6: Prevalence of child labour, school attendance and displacement status among children



Source: Data from the US DoL Reports (2012-2023). Visualisation by the RT.

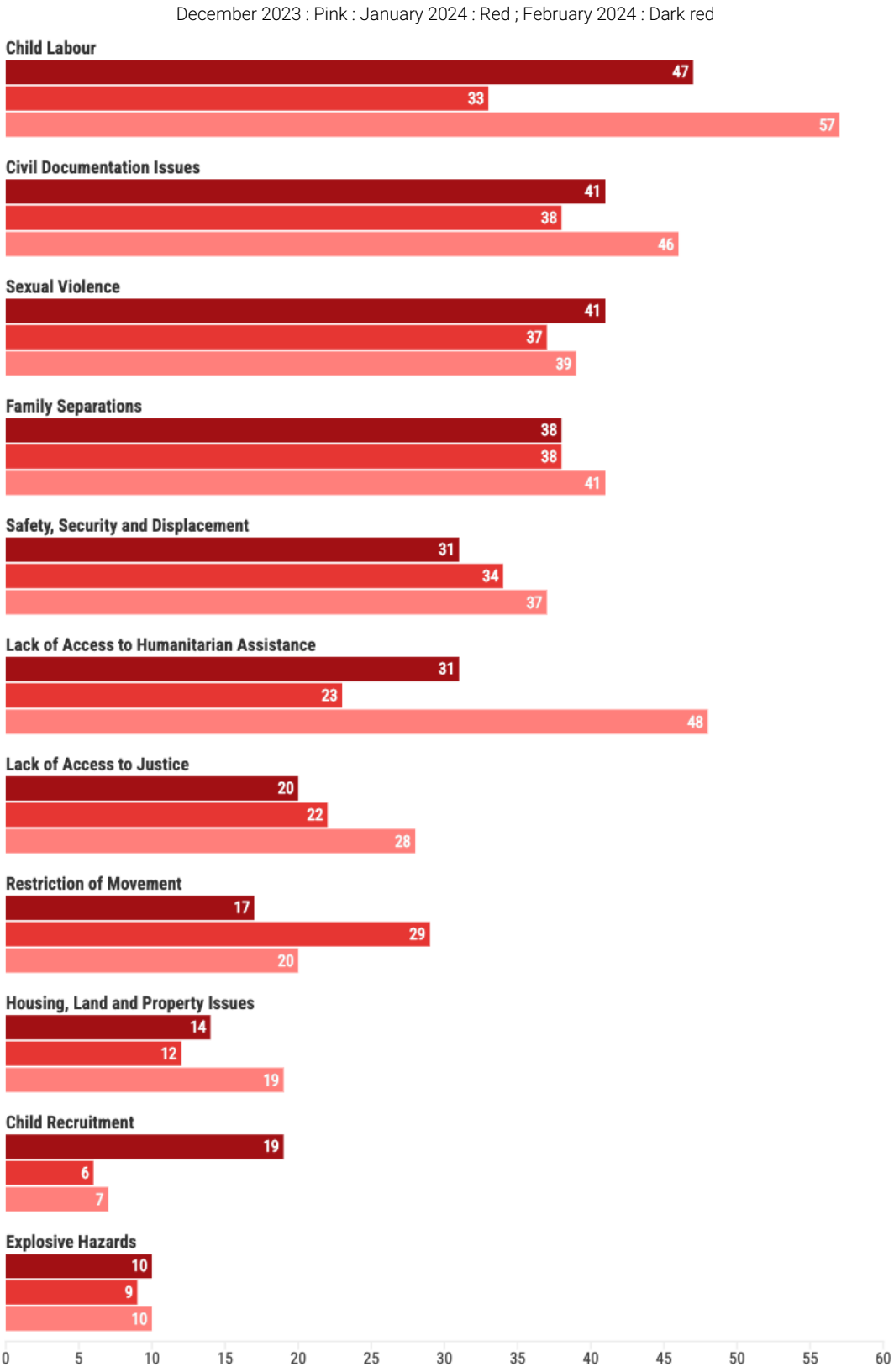
3.1. CHILD LABOUR AS A CRITICAL PROTECTION ISSUE WITH RISING TREND

One of the most recent data collection efforts conducted by the Protection Monitoring System (PMS), managed by the Protection Cluster, collected 320 Key Informant Interviews in 2024 on the topic of child labour revealing that 57% of the respondents identified child labour as a significant protection risk within their communities, with a steep rising trend (see Figure 7).[14] Additionally, 39% observed that most children

[7] US DoL (2023)
[8] OTHERwise/ERICC (2025) *Policy Brief: From Cattle Camps to Classrooms: Strengthening Mobile Education for South Sudans Pastoralist Communities*
[9] OTHERwise/ERICC (2025) *Conflict's Long Shadow: Evidence on Education in Emergencies in South Sudan*
[10] OTHERwise/ERICC (2024) *Towards evidence-driven education in emergencies: ERICC Research Agenda for South Sudan*
[11] UNICEF (2021) *Child labour rises to 160 million – first increase in two decades*
[12] Theirworld.org (2018) *Conflict and hunger pushes South Sudanese children into work and on the streets.*
[13] Theirworld.org (2018)
[14] Protection Cluster South Sudan (2024) South Sudan, Protection Monitoring Spotlight, February 2024,

in their areas are impacted by child labour, and 70% highlighted that child labour predominantly impacts HHs led by children, underscoring the vulnerability of this group.

Figure 7: Protection Risks trends December 2023-February 2024



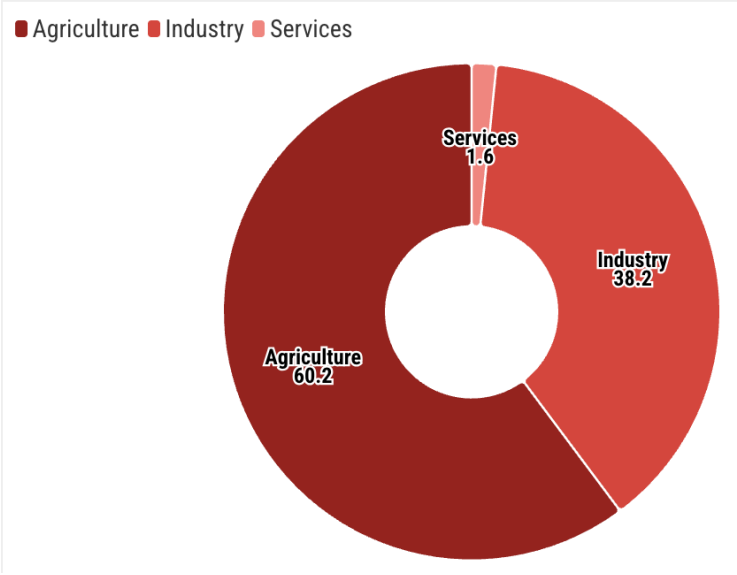
Data source: PMS SS February 2024, adapted by the RT

The lack of opportunities for adults was cited as the most prevalent reason for child labour, with respondents pointing that every family member needs to work to meet basic needs. Reported effects of child labour include school dropouts, exploitation, abuse, and psychosocial impacts, particularly among children in food-insecure or economically precarious HHs, who are also more likely to engage in negative coping mechanisms like early marriage.

3.2. PREVALENCE AND FORMS OF CHILD LABOUR IN SOUTH SUDAN

Children in South Sudan engage in a wide range of labour activities, spanning both rural and urban settings, formal and informal economies, and lawful yet exploitative to explicitly hazardous and illicit tasks. According to the U.S. Department of Labor (USDoL), child labour is most prevalent in the agriculture sector, where children are involved in subsistence farming, fishing, cattle herding, and collecting firewood and water. The same source indicates that in many rural areas, such as in Jonglei, Northern Bahr el Ghazal, and Lakes states, cattle herding is both a traditional and a high-risk activity, with reports indicating children face physical abuse, exposure to cattle raids, and even forced participation in armed conflict under the guise of herding duties.[15]

Figure 8: Working children by sector, ages 5-14



Data source: US DoL (2023) adapted by the RT[16]

Children in South Sudan engage in a wide spectrum of informal urban labour, ranging from relatively less hazardous tasks to deeply exploitative and dangerous forms of work. Many contribute to HH income through activities such as street vending, selling tea or fuel, collecting scrap metal, or assisting in market stalls and auto repair shops, often in unregulated settings with little to no adult oversight. Others, particularly adolescents, are found in more demanding roles such as brickmaking and construction, where they perform physically strenuous tasks without protective gear or legal protections.[17] In the informal mining sector, especially in gold-rich areas like Kapoeta, children are exposed to high-risk

[15] US DoL (2023)
[16] It is important to note that these are the only available official figures, originating from the 2008 MICS, and have not been updated in over 17 years as of the time of writing this report.
[17] US DoL (2023)

environments involving sharp tools, toxic dust, and chemicals. At the most acute end of the spectrum, an estimated 3,000 children in Juba alone live and work on the streets, often without family support. These children face heightened exposure to violence, sexual exploitation, substance abuse, and recruitment by gangs or armed actors, placing them at the intersection of survival labour and severe protection risks. [18]

Children's involvement in work exists along a continuum, from relatively benign productive activities to exploitative and dangerous labour that violates their rights. At the broadest level, some children engage in productive activities, including helping on family farms or small businesses. These activities, if age-appropriate, safe, and compatible with education, are not necessarily harmful and do not need to be eliminated.

However, when children's work becomes exploitative, depriving them of education, exposing them to harm, or placing an adult burden on their development, it is classified as child labour, which the Interlantional Labor Organization (ILO) defines as work *that "deprives children of their childhood, potential and dignity, and is harmful to their physical and mental development."* Within this, hazardous labour stands out as particularly concerning: it includes work that, by its nature or conditions, is likely to harm children's health, safety, or morals. Examples include working in construction, mining, or environments involving exposure to chemicals, sharp tools, or violence.

At the most acute level are the WFCL, which must be eliminated as a matter of urgency under ILO Convention No. 182. This includes children involved in hazardous work, but also those subjected to slavery, trafficking, bonded labour, sexual or economic exploitation, forced recruitment into armed conflict, and illicit activities. As shown in the concentric framework, WFCL is not separate from child labour, it is its most severe expression and affects a large proportion of children already engaged in exploitative work.

Figure 9: Categorisation of forms of child labour

(International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour: IPEC 2019).

3.3. WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOUR

In fragile and emergency contexts like South Sudan, where conflict, displacement, and the breakdown of livelihoods and public services are widespread, the progression between forms of child labour is not theoretical. Children often move from marginal involvement in HH work or market sales into increasingly hazardous or coercive forms of labour, particularly as poverty, displacement, and protection breakdowns escalate. In such environments, children face heightened vulnerability to child labour. This vulnerability is

[18] Humanium (n.d.) *Children of South Sudan : Realizing Children's Rights in South Sudan*

further compounded when families are separated, displaced, or unable to meet basic needs, and when access to quality education is limited or non-existent.

Importantly, not all child work is considered child labour. The ILO distinguishes between acceptable forms of work, such as light HH chores or apprenticeship under safe and regulated conditions, and child labour, which is exploitative and harmful. Within child labour, the ILO defines WFCL under Convention No. 182. These are divided into two main categories:

- The categorical worst forms, which are universally prohibited for all children under 18 and must be eliminated with immediate effect. These include:
  - Slavery and similar practices, including debt bondage and child trafficking
  - Forced or compulsory labour, including forced recruitment of children for armed conflict
  - Use of children in commercial sexual exploitation (prostitution and pornography)
  - Involvement of children in illicit activities, especially drug production and trafficking
- The second category is hazardous work, which is defined as any work that, by its nature or conditions, is likely to harm the health, safety, or morals of children. Unlike the categorical forms, hazardous work is context-specific and determined at the national level. Countries are required to develop and regularly update a national list of such hazardous activities.

Together, these two categories comprise the umbrella term WFCL. All WFCL are prohibited under international law and must be addressed as a matter of priority.

In South Sudan, many children are reported to be trapped in these worst forms. These include conscription by armed forces and militias, forced labour in domestic or market settings, and commercial sexual exploitation, particularly of girls. The prevalence of WFCL in South Sudan is not incidental but deeply rooted in the country's prolonged crisis. Ongoing conflict, displacement, poverty, and weak legal enforcement mechanisms have created a permissive environment in which exploitative child labour practices persist with near-total impunity.

A longitudinal review of USDoL's annual reports from 2012 to 2023 reveals a persistent and unmitigated presence of WFCL in South Sudan, both in it's 'hazardous' and 'categorially worst' forms, with little measurable progress over time. Despite the ratification of key international conventions, the country has been consistently classified as having made no advancement in eliminating WFCL. The reports document sustained incidents of forced labour, hazardous work, commercial sexual exploitation, and the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, often by both government and non-state actors. Institutional mechanisms for enforcement remain largely non-functional, with no active labour inspections, prosecutions, or dedicated social protection systems in place to prevent or respond to these violations. Throughout the decade, legal gaps, including the lack of a finalized hazardous work list for children, a mismatch between minimum work and school-leaving ages, and the absence of a comprehensive anti-trafficking law, have compounded the problem. Critically, the USDoL reports also highlight that data on child labour prevalence has not been updated since 2008, undermining evidence-based planning and obscuring the true scale of WFCL in the country.[19]

[19] US DoL *Findings on the worst forms of child labor : South Sudan* – Reports from 2012-2023

Table 1: Activities in which children in South Sudan are found to be involved

Sector/Industry	Activity
Agriculture	Farming, cattle herding,† gathering firewood, and fetching water.
Industry	Rock breaking† and construction,† including building and transporting materials.
Services	Domestic work, collecting scrap metal and empty bottles, and working in restaurants, auto repair shops, and convenience stores. Street work including vending sandals, sunglasses, and fruits, polishing shoes, delivery cart pulling, car washing, preparing tea, selling black market gasoline, and ticket taking for group transport companies.
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Forced labor in cattle herding, domestic work, and market vending. Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Forcible recruitment by state and non-state armed groups for use in armed conflict.

† Determined by national law or regulation as hazardous and, as such, relevant to Article 3(d) of ILO C. 182.
‡ Child labor understood as the worst forms of child labor *per se* under Article 3(a)–(c) of ILO C. 182.

Data source: US DoL (2023)

Hazardous Work

Children are engaged in forced labour across various informal sectors across the country. In rural areas, they are often compelled to work in cattle herding, gold mining, charcoal production, and domestic work, frequently in hazardous conditions that threaten their health and safety, including exposure to dangerous tools, substances, and physically strenuous tasks. Urban centres see children working on construction sites, collecting scrap metal, vending on the streets, or working long hours in informal markets, often with little or no pay. These activities meet the ILO's criteria for hazardous child labour due to the long hours, exposure to abuse, absence of protective regulation, and interference with education and development.

Commercial Sexual Exploitation

South Sudan also continues to witness incidents of commercial sexual exploitation, disproportionately affecting girls in displacement sites and urban peripheries. According to the U.S. Department of State (TIP Report 2023), girls, particularly those separated from families or living in informal settlements, are trafficked for sex, including by armed actors, criminal networks, and within communities under the guise of marriage or domestic arrangements. Economic desperation, breakdowns in social protection, and gender-based violence further exacerbate these risks, while the same report notes that South Sudan "*did not report investigating or prosecuting any trafficking crimes for the eleventh consecutive year*".[20]

Armed Recruitment

Against this backdrop, the use and recruitment of children by armed forces and armed groups continues to be one of the most severe and internationally condemned forms of child exploitation in the country. During the civil war and its aftermath, tens of thousands of children have been recruited – many by force – by armed forces and militias,[21] and this practice that continues despite the 2018 Peace Agreement due to ongoing ethnic violence and communal clashes that continue to expose children to abduction and affiliation with armed forces.[22]

It is reported that both government forces and non-state armed groups still conscript children to serve as combatants, bodyguards, porters, messengers, cooks, and, in some cases, as objects of sexual violence and coercion.[23,24] UN sources consistently document verified cases of child recruitment each year, with over 19,000 children estimated to have been recruited or used by armed forces and groups since the

[20] U.S. Department of State. (2023). *2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: South Sudan.*
[21] Theirworld.org (2018)
[22] UN Security Council, *"Letter dated 28 April 2020 from the Panel of Experts on South Sudan addressed to the President of the Security Council,"* S/2020/342, April 28, 2020, para. 22.
[23] Human Rights Watch (2015) *'We Can Die Too" Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers in South Sudan'*
[24] Human Rights Watch (2020) *Submission to the Committee on the Rights of the Child's Review of South Sudan*

conflict began.[25] Children that are associated with armed forces are deprived of education and basic services and are often brutalized; reports indicate that some have even been subjected to sexual abuse as a form of in-kind payment to fighters.

While UNICEF has facilitated the release and reintegration of over 3,600 children since 2015 through a comprehensive, three-year support programme, critical funding shortfalls now threaten the continuity of this vital work.[26] In early 2020, 900 children were verified and released but risked being left in limbo due to a lack of resources, highlighting the urgent need for sustained donor support to prevent re-recruitment and ensure their safe return to civilian life.[27]

Human Trafficking

Likewise, human trafficking remains a pervasive and multifaceted issue in South Sudan, deeply rooted in the history of ongoing conflict, displacement, and weakened legal and institutional frameworks, which make children, especially those who are internally displaced, refugees, or separated from their families, prime targets for traffickers.[28,29] Children, especially girls, are trafficked internally or from neighbouring countries for purposes including forced labour, forced marriages, sexual exploitation domestic servitude and labour exploitation in sectors like construction, mining, and agriculture.[30] Cross-border trafficking is notable along the South Sudan-Ethiopia border, where children are abducted during cattle raids and sold in exchange for cattle.[31] The prevalence of trafficking is exacerbated by systemic gender inequality, widespread sexual and gender-based violence, and the normalization of exploitative practices within certain cultural contexts, and was intensified by the effects of COVID 19 and its aftermath.[32, 33]

At the same time, despite efforts by the government and international organizations,[34] which have included the establishment of a Technical Taskforce on Anti-Human Trafficking, and the finalization of the draft Anti-Trafficking in Persons bill in July 2024 (which is yet to be passed), the legal framework in South Sudan remains inadequate. Customary courts are reported to continue to mediate trafficking cases, often resulting in compensation rather than prosecution. No convictions for trafficking were recorded during the reporting period, highlighting persistent legal and institutional gaps.[35]

3.3.1. Structural Drivers and Risk Factors

Decades of conflict and instability have not only normalised child labour but also increased family reliance on it. The civil war (2013–2018) devastated South Sudan's economy, displacing over a third of the population and leaving many families lost livelihoods or breadwinners.[36] Hunger and poverty, both causes and consequences of child labour, create a vicious cycle: impoverished HHs often depend on children's earnings to survive, often prioritizing immediate needs over education.[37] Communities report that crises such as COVID-19, as well as the effects of climate change such as widespread flooding or extended dry spells, and ongoing conflict have significantly increased child labour in recent years.[38]

Save the Children's 2022 rapid assessment, in Maban County (covering Batil, Doro, and Kaya refugee camps and host communities), offers a close-up snapshot of how this phenomenon plays out in displacement-affected settings.[39] The findings highlight the sharp rise in child labour following the COVID-

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[25] UNICEF (n.d) *Children and armed groups In South Sudan*

[26] UNICEF (2020) *Critical support for former child soldiers in South Sudan at risk from lack of funding*

[27] UNICEF (2020) *15 child soldiers released in South Sudan*

[28] IOM (2020) *Trafficking in Persons in South Sudan: Prevalence, Challenges and Responses - Research Brief: Findings and Recommendations*

[29] UNHCR (2023) *Visit to South Sudan - Report of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, Siobhán Mullally* (A/HRC/53/28/Add.2)

[30] Akuni, B.A. (2013) *Child Trafficking: A case of South Sudan*. Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Bradford, School of Social & International Studies.

[31] ISS (2024) South *Sudan-Ethiopia border communities are key to stopping mass abductions*

[32] Enact Africa (2024) *Human trafficking / Cultural practices and state weaknesses drive South Sudan-Ethiopia abductions*

[33] Enact Africa (2024) *Human trafficking / Cultural practices and state weaknesses drive South Sudan-Ethiopia abductions*

[34] UNODC (2024) *UNODC Supports South Sudan in Moving Forward Against Trafficking in Persons*

[35] UNHCR (2023)

[36] Theirworld.org (2018)

[37] Bérenger V. and Verdier-Chouchane A. (2015) Child Labour and Schooling in South Sudan and Sudan: Is There a Gender Preference? African Development Bank Group, Working paper No 230

[38] Save the Children South Sudan (2022) Child Protection Labour Rapid Assessment Report South Sudan

[39] Save the Children South Sudan (2022)

19 pandemic, flooding, and continued conflict. They also confirm that socioeconomic strain, lack of education access, and entrenched gender roles are key structural drivers pushing children into exploitative and hazardous labour.

Displacement further exacerbates vulnerabilities, with 65% of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returnees/refugees, being children,[40] who lack community support or protection.[41] These displaced children, separated from their homes and normal routines, are particularly susceptible to exploitation in unfamiliar towns or crowded camps where survival is precarious and social safety nets are absent.[42] The spill over of conflict from neighbouring Sudan in 2023 has worsened this situation, swelling the population of internally displaced children.

Children over the age of 13, particularly boys, are more likely to be engaged in physically demanding and often hazardous work outside the home, such as construction, mining, or manual labour in informal sectors. Girls, by contrast, are more frequently involved in domestic tasks, often unpaid and hidden from public view, with some also engaging in survival sex as a coping mechanism, underscoring the intersection of gender, poverty, and displacement. Children under 10 are generally less likely to be involved in paid labour, but many still contribute to HH chores. Research consistently highlights these gender-specific protection risks: girls face heightened vulnerability to sexual exploitation and violence, while boys are more commonly exposed to physical harm, including beatings, burns, and mob justice, particularly in high-risk work environments.

The breakdown of social protection systems and education infrastructure compounds this crisis. South Sudan labour laws are weakly enforced, with no comprehensive child labour law effectively protecting children, and the issue "is not taken seriously" in part due to cultural norms and limited government enforcement capacity.[43] Moreover, labour inspections are reportedly rare outside major towns, allowing employers to exploit children with impunity.[44]

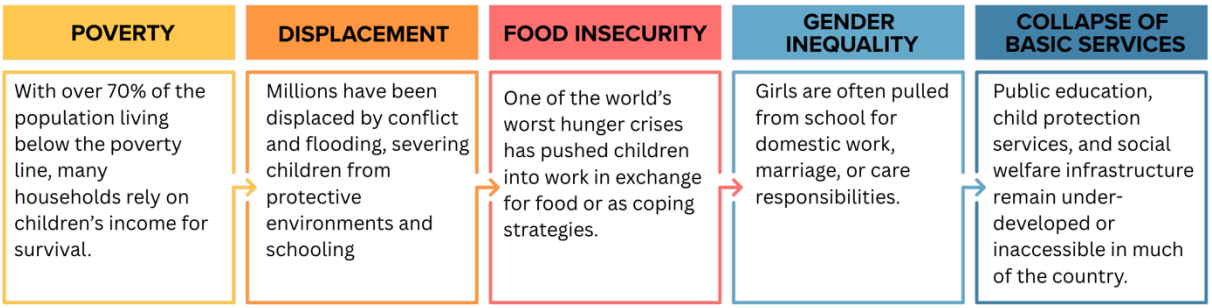
The Maban assessment also found that economic drivers such as unaffordable school fees, lack of supplies, and food insecurity were direct factors in pushing children to work. Parents reported being forced to make trade-offs between survival and schooling, especially for girls.

Conflict has also disrupted schooling, with schools attacked or occupied by fighters, and left public education severely underfunded. Despite official policy of free primary education, many schools charge informal fees rendering schooling unaffordable for the poorest families.[45] Additional barriers to education, such as underfunding, teacher absenteeism, illegal school fees, cultural prioritization of boys' education, and inadequate infrastructure for disabled students, drive children into labour markets. Such gaps in the education system directly contribute to child labour, as children who drop out or never enrol in school often end up working.

Compounding these barriers, the rapid assessment highlights how multiple crises, economic shocks, displacement, environmental shocks, gender norms, and institutional breakdown, converge to expose children, especially those in refugee or host communities, to a range of exploitative labour practices, many of which remain hidden from public view.

[40] USA for UNHCR (2023) *South Sudan Refugee Crisis Explained*
[41] Child Protection in Emergency Response in Upper Nile and Jonglei States, South Sudan, (2024)
[42] US DoL (2023)
[43] Theirworld.org (2018)
[44] Humanium (n.d.)
[45] Save the Children South Sudan (2022)

Figure 10: Root causes of child labour



3.4. INSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL RESPONSE: PROGRESS AND LIMITATIONS

Despite South Sudan's relatively comprehensive legal framework addressing child labour, hazardous work, and recruitment by armed actors, as shown in Table 2 the reality on the ground remains deeply concerning. While many national laws formally align with international standards, including ratified commitments to the CRC, ILO Conventions 138 and 182, and the Optional Protocol on Children in Armed Conflict, implementation and enforcement remain exceptionally weak.

Key protections, such as the prohibition of child trafficking and the guarantee of free public education, still fall short of international benchmarks. Several structural and legal gaps continue to undermine progress:

- The Labour Act (2017) and the Hazardous Work List for Children remain unenacted/pending.
- The minimum age for work (14) conflicts with the compulsory education age (13), creating a legal gap.
- No prosecutions or convictions for child labour violations have been recorded in the past decade.
- The National Steering Committee on Child Labour is inactive for over a decade, and no national action plan exists, nor are there functioning labour inspections or reporting mechanisms.

While efforts led by the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) Commission, along with donor-funded reintegration programmes run by UNICEF, Save the Children, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), remain essential, they are fragmented and chronically underfunded, while legal gaps around child trafficking and compulsory education ages, leaving children vulnerable. [46]

Enforcement is also described as weak due to chronically insufficient funding, affecting the coordination and implementation capacity of stakeholders and leading to the deprioritization of the issue: labour inspections occurred, but no violations were reported, and no criminal investigations or prosecutions took place. In the absence of coordinated enforcement and strategic leadership, existing laws are largely symbolic. Bridging this gap will require more than legal reform; it demands the ratification of outstanding treaties, the activation of dormant institutions, and sustained investment in child protection systems, accountability mechanisms, and public awareness to ensure meaningful change.

[46] US DoL (2023)

Table 2: Laws and regulations on child labour in South Sudan

Standard	Age	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	14	✓	Section 12 of the Labor Act; Article 25(3) of the Child Act
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	18	✓	Sections 12 and 13 of the Labor Act; Articles 22(3), 24(1), and 25(1) of the Child Act
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children		✓	Article 25(2) of the Child Act
Prohibition of Slavery, Debt Bondage, and Forced Labor		✓	Articles 10(1) and 13(2)(a) of the Labor Act; Articles 277–279 of the Penal Code; Article 13 of the Constitution
Prohibition of Child Trafficking		✗	Article 13(2) of the Labor Act; Articles 22(3)(b), 119, and 120 of the Child Act; Articles 276 and 278–282 of the Penal Code
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children		✓	Articles 13 and 126 of the Labor Act; Articles 22(3)(c), 22(3)(d), 22(4), and 25(2)(m) of the Child Act; Article 276 of the Penal Code
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities		✓	Article 13(2)(c) of the Labor Act; Article 24(1) of the Child Act; Article 383(3)(d) of the Penal Code
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	18	✓	Article 31(1) of the Child Act; Section 22 of the Sudan People's Liberation Army Act
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military		✓	Article 31(1) of the Child Act; Sections 20 and 22(2) of the Sudan People's Liberation Army Act
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups		✓	Articles 31(1), 31(2), and 32 of the Child Act
Compulsory Education Age	13	✗	Article 9.1(b) of the General Education Act; Article 14(1) of the Child Act
Free Public Education		✗	Article 6(a) of the General Education Act; Article 13(4)(b) of the Labor Act; Article 29.2 of the Constitution

Data source: US DoL (2023)

3.5. DATA GAPS AND MONITORING LIMITATIONS

A significant constraint in addressing child labour in South Sudan is the absence of reliable, up-to-date data. All government and international reporting continues to rely on the 2008 5th Sudan Population and Housing Census and UNICEF's 2010 4th Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) data, now over 17 and 15 years old respectively.[47, 48, 49] Despite participating in international fora such as the Alliance 8.7 and ILO workshops on child labour statistics, the government of South Sudan has not conducted or published new nationally representative data since independence. Furthermore, there is no centralized national database tracking children released or reintegrated from armed forces or child labour programs. The government lacks a functional child labour inspection system, has not established complaint or referral mechanisms for victims, and does not publish data on worksite inspections or prosecutions related to

[47] MICS are UNICEF-supported, multi-topic household surveys conducted globally to collect comparable data on indicators relating to children and women, including child labour modules that capture economic and hazardous work measures. UNICEF (2025) *Child labor*

[48] National Bureau of Statistics (2020) Southern Sudan Counts : Tables from the 5th Sudan Population and Housing Census, 2008

[49] UNICEF (2010) 4th Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey

minors. These systemic data and institutional gaps significantly hinder evidence-based programming and obscure the true scale and evolving trends of the issue.

3.6. SUMMARY OF PROGRESS AND TRENDS IN CHILD LABOUR IN SOUTH SUDAN

Table 3 in the following page was developed through a review and consolidation of publicly available documentation, including annual reports from the U.S. Department of Labor, UN Secretary-General reports on children and armed conflict (CAAC), and UNICEF materials spanning 2012 to 2023. It provides a, year-by-year synthesis of policy developments, programmatic responses, and recurring protection gaps in relation to child labour in South Sudan. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first time such a longitudinal overview has been compiled in a single table. Its value lies in making visible the stagnation and lack of systemic reform across multiple domains, ranging from legislation and enforcement to education access and reintegration, while also capturing the persistence of violations involving children and armed actors. This evidence base can serve as a vital reference point for policy dialogue and programmatic prioritization moving forward.

3.7. THE TIMELINE OF KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN CHILD LABOUR IN SOUTH SUDAN

The timeline of key developments in child labour in South Sudan presented in the upcoming pages is a consolidated, chronological overview of progress, setbacks, and critical events spanning from 2009 to early 2025. It was created through a systematic review and synthesis of multiple credible sources, including UN reports, government policy statements, DDR updates, and international agency documentation. This timeline offers the first integrated reference of its kind, mapping how child labour, particularly its worst forms, such as recruitment by armed groups, sexual exploitation, trafficking, and bonded labour, has been addressed (or left unaddressed) over time.

It highlights recurring patterns of violations, the slow pace of institutional reform, and the limited implementation of protective legislation. Key milestones include South Sudan's ratification of the CRC and its Optional Protocols in 2015 and its two optional protocols in 2018, repeated UN verifications of grave violations, and intermittent efforts toward reintegration and demobilization. Notably, the timeline also captures critical gaps in enforcement and the lack of national accountability frameworks despite ongoing commitments on paper. As such, it serves as a foundational resource for situating the findings of this study within a broader historical and policy context.

Table 3: Table: Documented Trends in Child Labour in South Sudan (2012–2023)

CATEGORY	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018 [50]	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	TREND
Child Labour Prevalence Estimate	Based on 2008 survey 45.6%	Same	Same	Same	Same	Same	—	Same	Same	Same	Same	Same	—	No update in 17 years
Data Collection Initiatives	None	None	None	None	None	None	—	None	None	None	None	None	—	No update
Association of Children with Armed Forces	Mentioned	Increasing	Documented as widespread	Estimated 15,000+	Estimated 17,000+	UN-verified cases; 'endemic'; no prosecutions	—	Same	36 verified cases	112 verified cases	164 verified cases	No verified cases cited, government listed as complicit.	—	Persistent
USDOL Classification	Not included	Minimal advancement	No advancement	No advancement	No advancement	No advancement	—	No advancement	No advancement	No advancement	No advancement	No advancement	—	Stagnant at lowest tier
Legal Framework Reform	Labour Bill pending; no hazardous list	No new legislation	CRC ratified	No new enforcement provisions	No change	No change	—	No change	No change	No change	No change	No change	—	⚠ Frozen
Minimum Age & Education Alignment	Age 14 for work; compulsory education ends at 13	Same	Same	Same	Same	Same	—	Same	Same	Same	Same	Same	—	No progress
Education Access	Poor	Declining	Collapsing	Minimal	Minimal	Minimal	—	Minimal	Worsened (COVID)	Still weak	Still weak	Still weak	—	No progress
Labour Law Enforcement Mechanism	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	No inspections reported	No inspections reported	No inspections reported	—	No inspections reported	No inspections reported	No inspections reported	No inspections reported	14 labor inspectors performed, only in Juba. 104 worksite inspections, finding 0 child labor violations	—	Nonexistent
Institutional Coordination	National Steering Committee inactive	Inactive	Dysfunctional	Ad hoc	Inactive	Inactive	—	Fragmented	Ineffective	Ineffective	Ineffective	Ineffective	—	No progress
Reintegration Support (Children Released)	Not specified	Not specified	Limited donor-led efforts	Ongoing underfunded programs	Ongoing underfunded	Ongoing, no figures	—	11 children	36 children	5 children	8 children	8 children	—	Lacking capacity
Key International Commitments	CRC signed	CRC ratified	Optional Protocols signed	Ratification of OPAC	No new ratifications	No new ratifications	—	No new ratifications	No new ratifications	No new ratifications	Palermo Protocol still unratified	Same	—	No progress

Source: USDoL TDA Reports (2012–2023) [51]; UN CAAC Reports; UNICEF documentation

[50] No data available for 2018 and 2024

[51] https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/south-sudan (All reports available in the bibliography)

A TIMELINE OF

KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN CHILD LABOUR IN SOUTH SUDAN

2025 (UP TO MARCH 31)

- **UNMISS verified 53 grave violations against 49 children**
- Attacks on three schools and one hospital by armed actors
- 7 boys released by unidentified armed forces in West. Equatoria.
- UNMISS delivers 59 training sessions on child protection to 2,709 participants, including community members, security forces, protection partners, and government officials, and 10 child protection training sessions reached 600 participants,

2024

- **UN verified 236 grave violations** against 221 children, including 13 victims of multiple violations, including 152 children recruited by armed forces
- **Two perpetrators** of grave violations against children sentenced
- **UN requests** the prioritization of explosive ordnance risk education programmes, mine clearance and victim assistance and urges donors to support such efforts.

2023

- **UN Secretary General's fourth report** on Children and armed conflict in South Sudan published
- **UN reports 457 grave violations** against 409 children.
- **18 children formally released** and 11 escaped
- **DDR, UNICEF provided 567 children with interim care**, family tracing, reunification, psychosocial support and livelihood training as part of UNICEF 3-year reintegration program.
- **Reintegration identified as a significant challenge** due to lack of school and vocational training institutions
- **UN reports** increased access to barracks by government
- **UN requests** designation of focal point on children and armed conflict in the Ministry of Justice

2022

- **UN reports 196 grave violations** against 183 children including 25 victims of multiple violations, including 110 children recruited and used by armed forces
- **Impact of climate change is** mentioned in UN SG Annual report and Special Representatiive is requested to analyze the impact of these dynamics on children

2021

- **Throughout 2021:** Armed groups continue recruitment; UN verifies 165 grave violations against 154 children.
- **UNICEF** reports insufficient funding to support 900 children verified for release.
- **South Sudan listed in UN CAAC Annual Report** for grave violations.
- **No prosecutions** or national reforms recorded; enforcement mechanisms remain absent.

2020

- **Feb 2020: Government signs a Comprehensive Action Plan** to end and prevent grave violations against children in armed conflict by parties to the R-ARCSS and establishment of national and state-level committees
- **Feb-Nov 2020:** UNICEF warns that 900 children verified for release could be left without reintegration support due to funding shortages.
- **COVID-19 pandemic** severely disrupts schooling and escalates household vulnerability to child labour.
- **First 6 months of 2020,** the SSPDF and SPLA-IO formally released 54 children (3 girls, 51 boys) from military service - UN reports a total of 110 releases in 2020.
- **CTFMR** conducts 40+ child protection, induction, and mainstreaming and awareness-raising sessions targeting 7,603 participants.
- **UN SG's third report** on children and armed confict in South Sudan published
- **UN reports** verifying 312 children recruited and used and ongoing verification of 510 children; 100 children rescued on their way to cantonment sites in Pibor
- **UN reports** release of 44 children.

2019

- **Government and armed groups reported as continuing to recruit children**; no prosecutions. UN verifies additional cases of child recruitment and abduction in various conflict zones.
- **SSPDF integrates child protection training** into its 2019 civic education curriculum jointly with the UN, indicating symbolic internal uptake.
- **SSPDF appoints child protection focal points** across its divisions, and grants UN access to conduct screenings in Bentiu barracks.
- **Early-Mid 2019:** UNICEF continues reintegration efforts; warns of funding crisis.
- **Greater Equatoria** region reported by UN to remain the epicentre of grave violations with 50 per cent of the total number of incidents of grave violations.
- **UN reports** 102 verified incidents of recruitment and use affecting 453 children
- **Police** reported to continue arresting and imprisoning children involved in commercial sexual exploitation, treating them as offenders rather than victims

2018

- **Accession to UN CRC Optional Protocols on Armed Conflict and on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography**
- **Sep 2018: Government signs R-ARCSS**
- **UN reports** 140 verified cases of recruitment and use affecting 1,221 children; verified re-recruitment of 4 boys in Pibor
- **DDR and partners release 955 children**
- **Armed groups carried out at least 18 attacks on schools**, 26 documented cases of using schools for military purposes, displacing an estimated 32,500 children
- **Conflict and humanitarian crisis led to 4.3 million IDPs**, including over 11,700 unaccompanied minors.
- **UN SG's second report** on children and armed confict in South Sudan published

2017

- **Early 2017:** SPLA and armed groups reported to continue recruiting children.
- **UN documents multiple cases of child abduction** in Eastern Equatoria; 169 incidents of recruitment and use affecting 1,022 children;
- **180 children reported released** in Unity and Jonglei.
- **USDOL confirms South Sudan made no advancement** in addressing child labour.
- **UNICEF and partners reintegrate small numbers of released children**; most remain unreached.
- **No legal reforms** or institutional progress reported.

2016

- **Feb-Aug 2016:** Conflict escalates in Juba, Wau, and Bentiu, resulting in the forcible recruitment of children by SPLA-IO, and affiliated militias.
- **South Sudan described as 'most troubling example'** of children being victims of all six grave violation in UN SG Annual Report.
- **UN SG reports** 1,051 cases affecting 28,788 children; 159 cases of recruitment and use affecting 2,596 children
- **No prosecutions or formal age verification mechanisms implemented** for military recruitment, despite commitments under the SPLA Action Plan and international treaties.
- **Legal and enforcement gaps remain:** Labour Bill is still unpassed; no finalized hazardous work list exists; and no labour inspectorate, inspections, or penalties are recorded.

2015

- **Jan 2015: South Sudan formally ratifies CRC and Optional Protocols** on the involvement of children in armed conflict and on the sale of children.
- **Recruitment and use of children by armed groups continues,** including by government-affiliated militias, in violation of national and international commitments.
- **Labour Bill (2008) still not passed, and the hazardous work list for children remains unadopted**, leaving legal gaps in the protection framework.
- **No enforcement mechanisms established:** South Sudan still lacks a labour inspectorate, complaint mechanisms, or penalties for child labour violations.
- **UNICEF and partners continue to support child demobilization and reintegration,** but efforts remain limited and under-resourced. No national program is led or funded by the government.
- **Release** of 18 boys from SPLM/A-IO in Leer. 1,314 of an expected 3,000 children associated with SSDM/SSDA-Cobra reported released.

2014

- **Jan 2014:** Following the outbreak of conflict in Dec 2013, there are widespread reports of child recruitment by SPLA and opposition forces.
- **Feb-Nov 2014:** UNICEF and UNMISS document hundreds of abductions of children by armed groups, used as fighters, porters, & support staff.
- Action Plan to End and Prevent Child Recruitment and Use recommitted to
- **UNICEF supports limited child releases,** but no prosecutions or legal accountability pursued for child recruitment.
- **Ratification process of the UN CRC and its Optional Protocols continues;** formal ratification completed in January 2015.
- **UN SG's first report** on children and armed conflict in South Sudan published covering 2011-2014.
- **UN reported** 1,243 grave violations reported against 68,776 children: 921 incidents verified; 171 incidents of recruitment; 6000 children reported separated from family, unaccompanied or missing

2013

- **Ratification of ILO Conventions 138 and 182,** establishing South Sudan's formal commitment to international labour standards.
- **Nov 2013: National Legislative Assembly passes bill to ratify the UN CRC and its Optional Protocols** on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the sale of children.
- **Dec 15, 2013: Renewed armed conflict erupts,** with reports of widespread child recruitment by both SPLA and armed opposition groups.
- **Draft hazardous work list for children developed with ILO support**, but not finalized or adopted.
- **SPLA Chief of General Staff issues the Child Protection Punitive Order**, a directive to halt child recruitment; however, implementation and enforcement remain minimal.
- **Legal gaps persist**: The Labour Bill (2008) still not enacted; no formal protections for child domestic or street work; no minimum age for hazardous work set in law.
- **DRR/UNMISS/UNICEF** release and reunite 61 children

2012

- **2008 Child Act in effect,** but with significant gaps: no established minimum age for hazardous work, no explicit protections for children in domestic service or street work.
- **Education Bill enacted,** guaranteeing free and compulsory primary education.
- **Key international instruments not yet ratified,** including the CRC Optional Protocols and the Palermo Protocol on trafficking.
- **Renewed Action Plan signed between SPLA and the UN** to prevent the recruitment and use of child soldiers.
- **392 children released from armed groups in 2012; an estimated 252 remain associated.** UNICEF & partners supported family tracing, repatriation & reintegration.
- **National Steering Committee on Child Labour established,** but inactive.
- **ILO-supported national workshop held** to revise the hazardous work list for children, but no finalized list adopted.
- **Donor-supported programming expanded,** including initiatives by TACKLE, USDOL's GAPCLI, UNICEF, UNDP, USAID, DFID, EU, and Qatar, focusing on child protection, education, and livelihoods.
- **UN reported** 50 boys enlisted in armed forces, 28 of which registered by DRR and released
- **May 2012:** SPLA issues policy directive on halting recruitment and use of children, in the context of a recruitment campaign. As a result of this directive, 450 children (421 boys and 29 girls) who had come for voluntary enlistment were turned away

2009 - 2011

- **Action plan** signed between UN and SPLA on 20 November 2009 lapsed in November 2010. Progress report requests 6-month extension to complete identification and removal of all children remaining within SPLA ranks
- **UN reports:** *"considerable progress made by SPLA in action plan implementation, with support of the DDR and the UN. A child protection unit was established at SPLA general headquarters in Juba and in all SPLA divisions across all 10 States of Southern Sudan. SPLA officers trained on child rights and child protection, and similar trainings targeting SPLA soldiers rolled out throughout the region in December."*

3.8. CHILD LABOUR SECTORS IN TARGETED COUNTIES[52]

3.8.1. Western Equatoria

Subsistence agriculture: The dominant sector in Western Equatoria is subsistence farming, and many children help their families on farms (cultivating crops like maize, cocoa, groundnuts, sorghum, cassava and coffee) and with daily chores. Both boys and girls are reported as starting farm work at a young age (often by 10), using sharp tools and carrying heavy loads and helping with tasks such as sowing weeding and harvesting. Risks include injuries from farm tools, snake bites, exposure to the elements and long hours that keep them out of school.[53] Girls typically also gather firewood and fetch water for the HH, while boys may clear fields or tend to any livestock.[54]

Market and street work: In Western Equatoria trading centres, children are reported to be engaged in informal labour to earn income. Common activities include petty trading, car washing, hawking goods, and restaurant work (like washing plates).[55] Boys are often seen washing vehicles or carrying goods for traders, whereas girls might sell food items or work as helpers in eateries. These jobs are physically demanding – local observers note children *"subjected to hard labour"* in Maridi's markets, often resulting in back pain and chest problems for them.[56] Such work frequently involves long hours in the sun and the weather elements and carrying heavy loads beyond safe limits for their age.

Domestic servitude: Girls in Western Equatoria end up as domestic workers (housemaids) in town, either for relatives or employers, doing cleaning, laundry, and childcare. They can start in their early teens (or younger) if they've dropped out of school. These girls face risks of exploitation and abuse behind closed doors, including excessive working hours and sometimes physical or sexual abuse in domestic settings.[57] Boys are less commonly employed in others' HHs, but orphaned boys may work as errand runners or live-in helpers to support themselves.

3.8.2. Eastern Equatoria

Artisanal gold mining: Kapoeta South (notably around the Kapoeta area) has become a hotspot for child labour in gold mining. An estimated 600 children – many just 8 to 12 years old – work in local mining sites and related jobs in town.[58] Boys typically dig in open pits, crush rocks, and pan for gold alongside adults. They face serious dangers like tunnel collapses, injuries from sharp tools, and dust inhalation. The work is arduous; children carry heavy sacks of soil and stand in water while panning, which can lead to diseases. There are also reports of girls present around mining areas, often selling food or water to miners, and some adolescent girls risk being pulled into commercial sexual exploitation in mining settlements.[59] All mining-site children endure long hours under extreme heat with little protective gear, jeopardizing their health and education.

Pastoralist cattle herding: Eastern Equatoria is home to pastoral communities (primarily Toposa and others), and cattle herding is a major sector involving children. In Kapoeta South's cattle camps, boys start herding as toddlers; children aged 5–13 (even as young as 2–3) help tend goats and cattle, and older adolescents (14–17) take on key herding and camp maintenance duties.[60] Boys spend months in remote camps, grazing livestock and guarding herds. Hazards are high in these settings: children risk injuries

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[52] Assessment is based on the absence of: i) Effective legal enforcement, ii) Resource allocation, iii)Prosecution or sanction of violations.
[53] https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/south-sudan (All reports available in the bibliography)
[54] For details on the selected locations please see section 5.1
[55] UNICEF South Sudan. (2021). *South Sudan: Country Programme Documents & Child Protection Fact Sheets.*
[56] US DoL (2023)
[57] Media Diversity Institute (2011) *Child Labour Menace in Western Equatoria State*
[58] Radio Tamazuj (2019) *Campaign to end child labour kicks off in Maridi*
[59] US DoL (2023)
[60] AP News, *In South Sudan, some children work in mines to survive*, 12 September 2018

from cattle (goring or trampling) and attacks by wildlife; they also face violence during cattle raids by rival groups.[61]

> *"In the cattle camps, boys carry guns to protect the herd. Some are not even teenagers yet. If there is a raid, they must fight."*
>
> *(FGD, Male Youth, Akobo)*

The camps themselves pose health risks – kids sleep in the open near smoky fires and can contract diseases from cattle or contaminated water.[62] Girls in these communities also contribute: typically, **girls handle milking, milk processing, and cooking in the cattle camps**, and they care for younger siblings. While girls do less herding, they may assist with smaller livestock (like goats) and are integral to sustaining camp life. This pastoral work often keeps children out of school, as herding is viewed as essential training (and a cultural rite of passage for boys).

Charcoal production: In more rural pockets of Magwi, children may be involved in charcoal production, which can be dangerous due to manual tree felling and long hours. Charcoal is a widely used HH fuel in South Sudan, and Magwi's proximity to more urban centres, including Juba, has made it a source area for commercial charcoal supply chains. Children's roles in charcoal production often involve: i) **Tree felling and wood collection**, which requires physical strength and can expose children to injuries, snake bites, and respiratory harm from dust; ii) **Monitoring charcoal kilns**, which can last for days and require round-the-clock supervision, leading to school absenteeism and sleep deprivation; iii) **Bagging and transporting charcoal,** sometimes over long distances or with heavy loads, increasing physical strain and risk of musculoskeletal injury.

This form of labour is considered hazardous under international standards, notably the ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour. Despite this, it persists due to poverty, displacement-related livelihood loss, and the absence of enforcement mechanisms at the local level. A 2020 assessment noted the **environmental degradation linked to charcoal production** Eastern Equatoria, highlighting the unsustainable nature of this practice and its **connection to exploitative labour**.[63] While not always disaggregated by age, community-level reports gathered by previous research have confirmed the participation of children in charcoal-related activities in Magwi as part of broader HH survival strategies within the militarized charcoal economy.[64]

Retail and service work in towns: Similar to other areas, in Eastern Equatoria poverty drives children into **small trade and hospitality jobs**. Many children work as market vendors, shop attendants, or helpers in local restaurants/tea shops.[65] Boys commonly hawk goods on the streets or do manual labour for shopkeepers (loading trucks, pushing wheelbarrows), while girls might serve tea, wait tables, or clean in hotels/guest houses. These roles expose children to long working hours and sometimes abusive conditions. Local authorities have labelled the child labour situation *"urgent"* – with **young children (8–12)** working in **shops, markets and hotels** instead of attending school.[66] Risks here include exploitative employers (low or no pay), harassment of girls by male customers, and exhaustion from juggling work and HH duties. The harsh environments (mines and cattle camps) and the lure of quick income contribute to high school dropout rates in this area.

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[61] US DoL (2023)
[62] UNICEF South Sudan. (2021)
[63] UNICEF South Sudan. (2021)
[64] UNICEF South Sudan. (2021)
[65] SSCC/POF (2020) *The Impact of Logging Activities on Local Communities*
[66] Kindersley N., Tiitmamer N. (2024) *The costs and values of life in South Sudan's militarized charcoal economy*

3.8.3. Central Equatoria

Street vending and informal urban work: As the country's capital, Juba has thousands of street children engaged in work. By 2018, up to 3,000 children were reported living and working on Juba's streets – a number that has only grown with ongoing conflict and economic crisis.[67] These children, mostly boys but also girls, survive by doing odd jobs: selling goods (e.g. peanuts, water, phone cards) at markets or bus stops, polishing shoes, washing cars, carrying luggage, and scavenging scrap metal or plastic bottles for resale.[68] For example, boys as young as 6–8 can be seen hawking groundnuts or shining shoes on the roadside.[69] Such street work carries many dangers – children roam unsupervised in traffic, risk theft or assault, and often sleep outdoors. Older street boys sometimes engage in more hazardous tasks like rock breaking for construction gravel or loading trucks, which can cause chronic back injuries and expose them to stone dust.[70] Street girls often sell food items or brewed tea, and some resort to or are forced into begging. With no shelter or protection, street children face violence (including police round-ups) and health risks from poor sanitation and exposure to drugs or crime.

Domestic work and hospitality: Juba's relatively wealthier HHs and businesses create demand for cheap domestic labour, often filled by young girls from poor families. These girls (sometimes only 11–14 years old) work as maids, cooks, or babysitters in private homes, or as cleaners in hotels and restaurants.[71] They typically work long hours (early morning to late night) doing strenuous chores – cleaning, laundry, cooking – with little rest. Many are not enrolled in school. Abuse is a serious risk: there are reports of employers physically or even sexually abusing girl domestics, knowing the children have little legal recourse. In markets and restaurants, it's not uncommon to find teen girls serving food or washing dishes for meagre wages.[72] Boys are occasionally hired as domestic workers or hotel errand-runners, but it's less common; more often, boys in Juba might apprentice in auto-repair garages or as helpers in small workshops.[73] Both boys and girls in service roles can be overworked and exposed to hazards (e.g. cleaning with strong chemicals, carrying heavy water jugs).

Construction and industrial labour: The construction boom in Juba has seen underage labourers on building sites. Adolescent boys (and occasionally girls) transport bricks, mix cement, and assist craftsmen to earn a wage.[74] Some break rocks into gravel by hand in the nearby Jebel Kujur quarry areas – an officially hazardous job for children.[75] These tasks are extremely taxing: children suffer from muscle strain, falls, or injuries from equipment. They often work without any safety gear (no hard hats or gloves) and may be exposed to extreme heat and dust. Industrial jobs are fewer, but some youth work in small factories or mechanics shops doing welding, metalwork, or tire repair, also hazardous if unsupervised. The economic desperation has even pushed children to sell fuel (black-market gasoline) on roadsides and work in informal mining of construction materials,[76] which poses fire and chemical risks.

Commercial sexual exploitation: A grim reality in Juba is the exploitation of some girls (and street-involved boys) in trafficking and sex trade, which is widespread across the country but more pronounced in urban areas.[77] Orphaned or homeless girls, sometimes barely in their mid-teens, may be coerced into prostitution or transactional sex to survive. This often occurs in bars, truck stops, or informal brothels in Juba. These girls face severe dangers: physical abuse, exposure to sexually transmitted infections (STIs)/ Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), and profound psychological trauma. Because prostitution is illegal, they also risk arrest – police have been reported to arrest girls in prostitution rather than treating them as victims.[78] Boys on the streets have also reported sexual abuse and may engage in survival sex, though data focuses more on girls. Gender norms mean girls carry the brunt of this exploitation, often lured with

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[67] UNICEF South Sudan. (2021)
[68] UNICEF South Sudan. (2021)
[69] Glinski, Stephanie (2018) In South Sudan, civil war drives more children onto the streets, into work, Thomson Reuters Foundation.
[70] US DoL (2023)
[71] UNICEF South Sudan. (2021)
[72] US DoL (2023)
[73] US DoL (2023))
[74] Media Diversity Institute (2011)
[75] US DoL (2023)
[76] US DoL (2023)
[77] US DoL (2023)
[78] US DoL (2023)

promises of food or shelter. Efforts by NGOs exist to rehabilitate and protect these children, but resources are limited.

3.8.4. Unity

Pastoral work (cattle herding): In Unity State (particularly around Bentiu), cattle herding is a traditional livelihood and a primary role for children, especially among Nuer communities. Boys begin herding cattle and goats at a very young age – often starting as small boys (5–7 years old) assisting their fathers or older brothers in the cattle camp.[79] They spend weeks to months out in grazing lands, watering and guarding the herds. Daily tasks include driving cattle to pasture, cleaning the kraals, and at times defending the herd from thieves or wild animals. As they enter their teens, boys take on more responsibility, sometimes leading entire herds.[80] The risks are substantial: injuries (being kicked or gored by cattle) are common, and children in Unity's cattle camps have been victims of raids and armed cattle rustling during tribal conflicts.[81] These raids can involve lethal violence; boys may be caught in crossfire or even directly participate in fighting off raiders. Girls in pastoral families also contribute – typically they milk cows, process dairy products, cook, and maintain the camp while the boys are out with the herd. Girls also care for younger children at the camp. The living conditions (exposure to harsh weather, minimal healthcare) affect both boys and girls, and many pastoralist children in Unity grow up illiterate since herding duties keep them from school.

Armed conflict and child soldiers: Unity State has been one of the regions hardest hit by civil war, and Bentiu was a flashpoint for conflict, resulting in egregious child exploitation by armed groups. Throughout the conflicts (2013 onward), boys – and some girls – were forcibly recruited or enlisted as child soldiers by both government forces and rebel groups in Unity.[82] These children have served as front-line fighters, porters, spies, or cooks for military units. Bentiu saw multiple rounds of recruitment; during intense fighting, even very young boys (under 15) were taken from displacement camps or villages and used by militias. The children face life-threatening danger in combat and often witness or commit violence under coercion. Girls abducted or recruited by armed forces typically were subjected to sexual slavery or forced "marriages" to soldiers, as well as duties like cooking and carrying supplies – a double victimization as both child labour and gender-based violence.[83] The psychological trauma and physical harm from these experiences are profound. Even after demobilization, former child soldiers in Bentiu struggle to reintegrate, having missed years of schooling and bearing injuries or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Displacement camp labour (survival tasks): Bentiu hosts a large IDP camp (Protection of Civilians site) where families displaced by conflict take refuge. Within these camps, children often take on adult-like responsibilities essential for family survival. Girls as young as 8 or 9 fetch water from boreholes, collect firewood outside the camp perimeter, clean shelters, and look after infants, because their parents are overwhelmed or absent.[84] Fetching firewood in Unity's insecure environment is dangerous – there have been instances of children facing assault or abduction when they venture out of the camp. Boys in the Bentiu PoC might engage in small trading (selling collected firewood, or running errands for NGOs) or manual labour like digging latrines and building tukuls (huts) for new arrivals. Adolescents in the camp sometimes hire themselves out for day labour in Bentiu town – unloading trucks or brick-making – to earn a little money or food. These tasks carry health risks (e.g. waterborne diseases from swampy areas, respiratory issues from smoke while burning wood) and further trauma, as children shoulder the burden of providing for their families. The camp setting blurs work and survival – for many children, basic chores become full-time labour in the absence of normal life. Girls in particular spend their days doing domestic work and may be pulled out of any camp schooling to help at home.

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[79] US DoS (2021) Trafficking in Persons Report: South Sudan
[80] US DoL (2023)
[81] UNICEF South Sudan. (2021)
[82] ILO/Forcier (2013) Child labour and education in pastoralist communities in South Sudan
[83] UNICEF South Sudan. (2021)
[84] US DoL (2023)

3.8.5. Jonglei

Cattle herding and raiding: Akobo County in Jonglei State is largely inhabited by Nuer communities in a region notorious for cattle raiding between ethnic groups (Nuer, Murle, Dinka). As in other pastoral areas, **boys are engaged in cattle herding from early childhood**. Young Nuer boys in Akobo spend their days moving cattle between grazing areas and watering points, starting around age 5-7 as helpers and taking on full herding duties by their teens. **What sets Jonglei apart is the intensity of cattle raiding** – clashes over cattle are frequent, and children are drawn into this violence. **Many of the estimated 10,000 child cattle herders in South Sudan are used in armed cattle raids, especially as they reach their teen years.**[85] In Akobo, boys as young as 12–14 have been known to join local armed youth (referred to as the "White Army" in Nuer areas) to raid or defend cattle. During these raids, children can become both perpetrators and victims – some are armed with rifles to fight, while others may be **injured, killed, or abducted** in the chaos. The presence of firearms makes herding extremely dangerous; even routine grazing can turn deadly if rival raiders strike. Aside from raids, herding itself has familiar risks: long exposure to extreme heat and rain, attacks by snakes or wild animals in the bush, and no access to medical care if a child falls ill or gets hurt far from home. Girls in Akobo's cattle camps perform supportive roles (milking cows, cooking, caring for infants) similar to those in Lakes and Unity. However, **girls also become targets during cattle raids** – rival groups (notably the Murle) have a practice of abducting women and children during attacks, which has impacted Akobo.

Child abduction and forced labour: Jonglei State (particularly communities like the Murle based south of Akobo) has a troubling pattern of **child abductions**, which is another facet of child labour/exploitation. Children abducted in raids are often forced to work for their captors. For example, **Murle militias are reported to have kidnapped children from Akobo and neighbouring areas**, and the captured boys are made to herd stolen cattle or serve as servants, while abducted girls are forced into domestic slavery or marriage. In one documented case, **a 10-year-old girl from near Malakal was abducted by armed men (suspected Murle raiders) and taken to Pibor, Jonglei, where she was held for nearly a year and forced to work as a HH slave.**[86] She was beaten if she refused to pound grain, fetch water, cook and do other chores. Such incidents illustrate the **gendered nature** of abduction: abducted **girls are assigned "wife" or housemaid roles** and subjected to sexual abuse, while **boys may be coerced into herding or even soldiering**. Although Akobo itself is primarily Nuer, the conflict with Murle insurgents means local children live under threat of these kidnappings. This practice deprives children of their families and childhood, and places them in conditions tantamount to slavery – working constantly under fear.

Fishing and small-scale agriculture: The Akobo area lies along the Sobat River and near the Akobo River, making **fishing a traditional activity**. Nuer boys (and some girls) in riverine villages engage in fishing to supplement their diet. Starting around age 10, boys learn to cast nets or use spears in shallow waters. Often, children fish after school or during weekends, but in times of food shortage, some may fish full-time to support their family. While generally less hazardous than cattle herding, fishing has its own risks: children can drown (especially during the rainy season when rivers flood), or face attacks by crocodiles and hippos in certain river spots. There have been reports of youths disappearing in the river currents. Additionally, **subsistence farming** (growing sorghum, maize, vegetables) occurs on a limited scale in Akobo, and children provide labour for planting and harvesting. Given the insecurity, farming is less reliable, but in relatively peaceful periods, families cultivate crops and rely on children to scare birds from fields or help grind grain. Both boys and girls share farm chores. However, recurring conflict often disrupts the agricultural cycle, and families may flee before harvest, leading to child labour patterns dominated more by herding and foraging than stable farming. At the same time, the presence of landmines and ongoing insecurity have further limited safe access to fishing and farming areas, exacerbating the risks associated with these activities.[87]

Street work: Akobo town is small and isolated, but during humanitarian operations or in the presence of UN/NGO bases, some children seek work in town. Boys might **do porter work** – unloading relief supplies, collecting firewood for NGO staff, or guarding compounds for a little pay. A few children engage **in petty trade, selling kola nuts, cigarettes, or bottled drinks** to soldiers and aid workers. Girls might wash

[85] UNICEF (2024) *Strengthening protection efforts in Unity State*
[86] US DoL (2023)
[87] US DoL (2023)

clothes for soldiers or volunteer at feeding centres (for food rations). These opportunities are sporadic and often tied to the ebb and flow of conflict (for instance, when an aid convoy arrives, many youth gather to earn something). The risks in town work include exploitation (adults refusing to pay children for labour) and exposure to the military environment – for example, some boys working around soldiers might get lured into joining armed groups with promises of money or protection.

3.8.6. Western Bahr el Ghazal

Market vending and service work: Wau, as a regional city, has a busy market where many children (especially girls) work as **vendors or helpers**. It's common to see young girls carrying trays of goods on their heads – for example selling peanuts, boiled eggs, or tea in the market and bus park. These girls are often sent by female relatives or local businesswomen to hawk goods. The work might seem light, but they walk long distances with heavy trays and stay out for hours to make sales, which can cause **exhaustion and injuries** (neck/back strain). Moreover, girl vendors in Wau, as well as elsewhere, face significant risks of sexual harassment and violence. Local authorities have highlighted that "*minor girls face a lot of sexual violence and harassment while working in the market*".[88] There have been reports of men propositioning or touching girl street sellers. **This unsafe environment can lead to abuse or girls going missing**. Boys in Wau's market tend to engage in slightly different jobs: many work as **porters, loading and unloading trucks or carrying shoppers' purchases for a tip.** Others hustle as **wheelbarrow pushers**, transporting goods across the market for small fees. These tasks involve carrying very heavy loads (sacks of grain, jerrycans of cooking oil, etc.), well beyond the safe weight for a child – a clear violation of child labour laws that forbid "*portage of heavy loads*" by minors.[89] The boys risk musculoskeletal injuries and dehydration. Some children, both boys and girls, also work in restaurants and tea stalls in Wau – washing dishes, cleaning floors, or serving customers. This brings its own dangers, as working in restaurants can keep children late at night and expose them to drunken patrons.

Domestic work and hospitality: Wau has a number of small hotels, lodges, and homes of better-off families (including NGO staff or traders). **Child domestic labour is present here too**. Girls from poor families may work as **live-in housemaids in Wau, cooking and caring for employers' children**. In some cases, parents in surrounding villages **send their daughters to town to work in somebody's home in exchange for the child's upkeep or a small remittance**. These girl domestics often toil from pre-dawn to night, and, like elsewhere, are vulnerable to physical or sexual abuse by employers. Wau's hospitality sector (hotels, bars) has also been flagged for using underage workers. In late 2022, Wau authorities filed legal cases against three businesswomen for employing underage girls in their businesses.[90] Typically, these girls were used as waitresses or cleaners in bars and hotels, which is explicitly prohibited by South Sudan's Child Act (bars and places of entertainment are off-limits for child workers).[91] The girls not only were made to work around alcohol (an immoral environment per the law) but also faced harassment from male patrons. The government's action indicates this practice is not uncommon. **Boys might also be employed by hotels or shops in roles like guard work or errand boys**, though in the reported case it was women entrepreneurs using girl labour to increase profits.[92] The crackdown suggests these girls were of school age and should have been in school. The risks in hospitality for children include late hours (unsafe for a child to travel home), possible sexual exploitation (there are fears that some may be pushed into transactional sex with customers), and overwork without proper pay.

Agriculture and charcoal: In the rural parts of Western Bahr el Ghazal around Wau, children also engage in agricultural labour (on family farms growing sorghum, sesame, etc.) and in the production of charcoal and firewood for sale. Charcoal burning is a common income source around Wau – boys help cut trees and tend charcoal kilns, and girls help bag the charcoal or sell it by the roadside. This work exposes them to hazardous smoke and risk of burns. It's largely family-based labour, with children working alongside parents. During farming season, children may spend less time on charcoal and more on field work – planting or bird-scaring in sorghum fields. **While this is traditional help, it becomes child labour when children are kept out of school or made to carry out physically dangerous tasks** (like using

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[88] UNICEF (2021) Ordeals of child abduction: the road back to hopes and dreams
[89] Danish Refugee Council (2024) Land Mines in Akobo County, South Sudan: A Looming Threat to Lives and Livelihoods
[90] Radio Tamazuj (2022) *Wau: 3 businesswomen sued over alleged use of child labour*
[91] Radio Tamazuj (2022)
[92] Radio Tamazuj (2022)

axes or enduring the heat of charcoal pits). These **rural forms of work often go underreported** compared to the visible urban child labour in Wau, but they contribute to children's workload significantly.

Street children and scrap collecting: Wau has had an increase in street children due to conflict displacement (especially after conflicts in 2016–2017 in Wau). Some of these children survive by **scavenging scrap metal, plastic, and other recyclables from garbage** to sell. Boys are commonly seen at the Wau market dump site or around industrial areas collecting scraps and old bottles. They then sell these to recyclers or use them to craft items for sale. This is **dirty and sometimes dangerous work** – kids dig through sharp metal or broken glass and can get cuts or infections, and they are exposed to disease from waste. A number of street boys also resort to **begging** in Wau's main streets or doing spontaneous **shoe shining** for pennies. Girls on the street in Wau often end up as **beggars carrying babies** (their own or siblings), since they have fewer other options; some get taken in by brothels or end up in early marriages just to have shelter. The street children phenomenon in Wau is not as large-scale as Juba, but those who are on the street are extremely vulnerable – they often come from other areas (like Bentiu or Raja) and have no support system. Local NGOs occasionally try to provide shelters or reintegration, but resources are thin. The presence of armed forces in Wau, given that it is a military town, can also put street kids at risk of abuse or forcible recruitment in rare cases.

3.8.7. Upper Nile

Renk County has historically been a nexus of cross-border trade and migration, given its proximity to Sudan. However, the outbreak of conflict in Sudan in April 2023 precipitated a **massive influx of refugees and returnees** into Renk. Reports indicate that by December 2023, over 540,000 individuals had arrived in the area, with children constituting a significant portion of this population. The sudden demographic surge has strained local resources,[93] exacerbating existing vulnerabilities and creating fertile ground for child labour practices to proliferate.[94,95] This **humanitarian crisis compounds pre-existing challenges** from South Sudan's own civil conflicts that heavily impacted the Upper Nile region. Renk and surrounding areas have endured cycles of violence, displacement, and economic hardship over the past decade, creating a difficult environment for children, who, in this context of extreme poverty and displacement, often take on work to help their families survive or to earn money for school fees. Local authorities in Upper Nile note that economic pressures push even young children into jobs to feed their families. [96]

Similarly to the other locations, common sectors and activities where child labour occurs in Renk and the Upper Nile region include **agriculture and livestock herding**, **informal trade and street work, construction and manual labour**, **domestic and service work, as well as manual labour in construction, charcoal burning, etc.** Across these sectors, child labour in Renk ranges from children helping their own families on farms or in markets (often out of necessity) to more exploitative situations where children work for employers or strangers. Community leaders in the region report that when education is disrupted, many idle youth end up working or married off early, as seen in parts of Upper Nile where lack of schools has directly resulted in increased child labour and even forced early marriages.[97]

While any child labour is concerning, the WFCL in Renk are those that involve coercion, grave dangers, or exploitation. These, similarly to other targeted locations, include:

Child soldier recruitment: One of the most alarming worst forms is **the recruitment and use of children by armed groups.** During South Sudan's civil war (2013–2018), Upper Nile was a hotspot for child soldiering. Armed groups are consistently conscripted children forcibly, some as young as 12, to serve as fighters, porters, spies, or cooks on the front lines . In early 2015, for example, at least 89 boys were abducted from their school in Wau Shilluk (near Malakal in Upper Nile) and forced into a militia's ranks.[98] UNICEF and other agencies estimate that over 19,000 children were recruited nationwide since the civil war began , many from conflict-ravaged areas of Greater Upper Nile. **Even after the 2018 peace deal, there have been reports of continued underage recruitment by factions in Upper Nile**. Children conscripted as

[93] Radio Tamazuj (2022)
[94] Radio Tamazuj (2022)
[95] ICRC (2025) ICRC Mobile Surgical Team carries out over 300 surgeries on war wounded injured in the Sudan conflict in Renk town
[96] UNICEF South Sudan (2024)
[97] Al Jazeera (2024) Photos: Inside South Sudan's worsening refugee crisis, in Renk and Maban
[98] VOA News (2024) Child Labour Amidst Economic Crisis in South Sudan

soldiers suffer violent initiation, carry weapons, and are compelled to commit atrocities, inflicting lasting trauma.

Hazardous labour and forced labour: Some children are trapped in extremely hazardous forms of labour that qualify as modern-day slavery. In Upper Nile's rural economy, there have been cases of forced labour in cattle herding and brickmaking – for instance, boys in cattle camps working under threat or bonded to wealthy cattle owners . These children may be physically abused or prevented from leaving, effectively enslaved to perform dangerous tasks. Likewise, any labour that exposes minors to severe harm is among the worst forms: examples include children handling heavy machinery on commercial farms, working in gold mining pits (in other regions), or toiling in slaughterhouses to haul meat. In Renk, where farming and construction are prevalent, the involvement of children in hazardous farm work or building activities (without safety measures) is a serious concern.

Trafficking and child sexual exploitation: The Upper Nile's instability and Renk's position as a border transit point put children at risk of trafficking and sexual exploitation. Unaccompanied minors fleeing conflict or separated from family are especially vulnerable to traffickers. There are reports from South Sudan of children being trafficked for domestic servitude or commercial sex, sometimes lured or transported across borders . In and around Renk, desperate conditions have led some teenage girls into survival sex or prostitution, often coerced by exploiters who prey on their need for food or money. Commercial sexual exploitation of children is known to occur in South Sudan's towns , and in a chaotic setting like Renk's overcrowded transit camps, protection actors have warned of transactional sex and abuse. During armed conflict girls are reported to have been subjected to rape and sexual slavery, forced to become so-called "wives" of commanders or soldiers – essentially a form of trafficking for sexual exploitation. This was documented in Upper Nile during the war, where abducted girls were kept by armed groups. Such abuse ranks among the worst violations of child rights.

Other worst forms: In addition to the above, other grave forms observed include child abduction and forced marriage linked to labour or exploitation. Armed groups or criminal bandits have abducted children in Upper Nile and neighbouring areas, either to force them into labour (such as cattle raiding or domestic servitude) or to demand ransom. Moreover, humanitarian agencies note that in times of turmoil, families may resort to marrying off underage daughters as a coping mechanism, which can amount to trafficking or enslavement. For example, reports indicate some families have exchanged girls in marriage as compensation during inter-ethnic conflicts, effectively subjecting the girls to domestic slavery and sexual abuse by their "husbands". These practices, while rooted in local custom or desperation, are classified as WFCL under international conventions. They rob children of their freedom, inflict physical and emotional harm, and often violate South Sudan's own laws (which forbid marriage under 18 and forced labour).

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. RESEARCH APPROACH

A mixed-methods study will be conducted to deepen the understanding of the WFCL in South Sudan, focusing on sectors such as business, private, military, mining, construction, service, and industrial sectors, including forced labour in cattle herding, domestic work, market vending, commercial sexual exploitation, human trafficking, and forcible recruitment by armed groups. The study will employ a combination of methods to ensure triangulation and comprehensive analysis, including:

i. A desk review to synthesize existing literature and data on child labour in South Sudan;
ii. A HH survey with the heads of 420 HHs with children aged 12–17 years, as well as one child per HH, to explore the prevalence, drivers, and socio-economic factors of child labour;
iii. 26 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with stakeholders such as government actors, NGOs, donors, and local authorities to identify policy gaps and actionable recommendations; and
iv. 9 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with youth to capture their experiences and perspectives on child labour and its drivers at the community level.
v. 31 Observations using a semi- structured observational guide to systematically document working conditions and other relevant contextual factors related to child labour.

Through these methods, the research team aims to gather nuanced insights from a diverse range of stakeholders to provide evidence on the magnitude of the worst forms of child labour, identify family- and community-level drivers, address policy gaps, and develop a holistic approach to eradicate child labour in high-risk locations.

The study was conducted in a culturally sensitive and respectful manner, recognizing the value of indigenous knowledge systems and ensuring that all communication is accessible and relevant to local contexts in South Sudan. In line with ethical research practices, we will emphasize the voluntary nature of participation, clearly communicating that interviewees can withdraw from the project at any time without any negative repercussions. Furthermore, we will ensure and advocate that the benefits of the research are shared equitably with the communities involved, fostering a sense of ownership and mutual respect. Through the integration of these principles, we aim to produce research that is not only academically rigorous but also socially just and beneficial to the communities we engage with.

Lastly, the study follows Save the Children's Position statement on Child Labour,[99] and the ILO Conventions no. 138 and 182. Children should be kept and protected from work that pose the risk of being physically or mentally harmful, or work that interfere with a quality education or in other ways interferes with or negatively impacts their life, survival and development.

4.2. DATA COLLECTION METHODS AND TOOLS

4.2.1. Desk and Literature Review

The desk and literature review was initiated at the outset of the consultancy and systematically informed all phases of the study. The review synthesized a broad range of sources to establish the current landscape of child labour in South Sudan, identify data gaps, and inform the study's methodology and focus.

Key sources included:

- Academic research and international reports: Foundational studies and global assessments, such as ILO's global estimates, UNICEF's child labour reports, and peer-reviewed analyses of child labour and trafficking in South Sudan and comparable contexts.

[99] Protection Cluster Upper Nile/Jonglei (2023) Internal displacement in Gokjak, Piji/Canal county

- **Policy and legal frameworks:** National legislation, child protection policies, and South Sudan's commitments under international conventions (UNCRC, ILO), as well as compliance assessments by the USDoL and the US Department of State.
- **Government and NGO documentation:** Reports and evaluations from ministries, UN agencies, and NGOs (e.g., Save the Children, Danish Refugee Council, Protection Cluster), highlighting policy implementation, sectoral interventions, and gaps in protection efforts.
- **Statistical and sectoral data:** National census data, sector-specific studies (agriculture, mining, services), and socioeconomic indicators provided quantitative insights into child labour prevalence and risk factors.
- **Media reports and case studies:** Investigative journalism and case documentation illuminated emerging trends, lived experiences, and innovative responses to child labour and exploitation.
- **Comparative and regional analyses:** Lessons learned from East Africa and similar humanitarian contexts were reviewed to identify best practices and inform recommendations.

The review was iterative, supporting both the design and interpretation of primary data collection (surveys, key informant interviews, focus group discussions), as well as ensuring that findings were continuously contextualized within the evolving discourse on child labour, enabling robust triangulation of evidence and an evidence-driven analysis tailored to the South Sudanese context.

4.2.2. Household Survey

A Population-Based Survey (PBS) of 418 HHs was conducted to generate reliable and representative data on the prevalence, nature, and drivers of child labour across purposefully selected counties across all 8 targeted locations The study employed a stratified cluster sampling approach, selecting one high-risk county per state based on secondary data. Within each county, probability proportional to size (PPS) sampling as used to select boma-level clusters, including villages in rural areas and neighbourhoods in urban settings, to reflect the population distribution.

The methodology included the following steps:

- **Stratification:** Stratification occurred at the state and county levels, with further stratification based on urban and rural distinctions within the extended vicinity of each county capital, ensuring capturing diverse socio-economic environments.
- **Cluster selection**: Boma-level clusters were identified using the official population data. A fixed number of clusters were randomly selected using PPS sampling, ensuring each cluster's selection probability reflected its population share. Each cluster consisted of 10 HHs.
- **HH selection**: Within each selected cluster, HHs were identified using the most recent administrative records. A skip pattern was applied to systematically select HHs, ensuring an equal probability of selection for each HH. The survey targeted HHs with children aged 12 to 17 years, and in each HH both the hHH , as well as an assenting child 12-17 years old completed the survey.
    - **Call-backs**: If no eligible respondent was present at the time of the first visit (e.g., adults or children not at home), enumerators made **one additional call-back visit** to the same HH at different times of day (e.g., morning, afternoon, or early evening) within the same day or the following day.
    - If, after one call-back attempt, no eligible respondent could be reached, the HH was classified as **non-response**.
    - **Replacement Procedure:** If a HH was found to be **ineligible** (e.g., no children aged 12–17 years), the enumerator **proceeded to the next HH** according to the pre-determined skip pattern.
    - If the HH was eligible but **refused** or was **unavailable** after call-backs, it was replaced using a **pre-listed replacement HH** identified during the cluster listing stage (if feasible), or the enumerator selected the next HH according to the random walk and skip instructions.
- **Respondent Selection Criteria:**
    - The **primary adult respondent** was the **hHH or another adult caregiver** who was most knowledgeable about the HH's children and the HH's overall situation.
    - From each eligible HH , **one child aged 12–17 years** was randomly selected for interview, provided that:
        - **Informed consent** was obtained from the adult caregiver.

- The child was **assessed to be mature enough** to participate.
- The child provided **informed assent**, and it was deemed ethically safe and appropriate to proceed with the interview.

- **Exclusion Criteria:**
  - HH s with no children in the target age group (12–17) were excluded.
  - Any HH where informed consent could not be obtained was not included in the survey.
    - Children in visibly distressed, unsafe, or potentially re-traumatizing circumstances were not to be interviewed, even with consent.

- **Respondent Identification**: The survey was completed by the hHH **or another adult caregiver as explained above**, as well as a randomly selected assenting child per HH aged 12 to 17 regardless of whether it was known at the outset of the survey that the child has ever engaged in high-risk sectors such as agriculture, mining, domestic work, and services.

The survey was designed to address all research questions while remaining sensitive to the fact that caregivers may not openly acknowledge their children's involvement in labour, especially in its worst forms. The survey focused on topics that indirectly or directly provide insights into the prevalence, drivers, and context of child labour within the community, as well as caregivers' perceptions, norms, and knowledge, without explicitly labelling their own children as child labourers.

4.2.3. Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

A total of 26 key informant interviews were conducted (vs. 20 planned), to cover a broad range of insights and perspectives across multiple regions and sectors, ensuring comprehensive coverage of the varied aspects of child labour in South Sudan.

11 KIIs were conducted at the national level with key policymakers, experts, and representatives of national institutions to provide overarching insights into policy frameworks, enforcement mechanisms, and systemic challenges.

15 KIIs were conducted across the selected locations, allowing for an in-depth exploration of regional and community-level dynamics. The purposeful selection of key informants aimed to engage a wide range of stakeholders who had direct experience, expertise, or influence over the issue of child labour. Each interview will be structured to allow respondents to freely share their experiences while guiding the conversation to ensure all relevant topics are covered. The target groups for these interviews included:

- **Government officials:** Representatives from the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare, the National Police, South Sudan People's Defence Forces (SSPDF) and DDR and local government authorities. These interviews helped illustrate policy frameworks, enforcement mechanisms, and government-led initiatives.
- **NGOs and International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs):** Staff involved in child protection, education, and labour-focused organisations, or staff specializing in these fields within larger organizations. Their insights are crucial for understanding the challenges and effectiveness of current interventions and programs.
- **Community leaders and elders:** These interviews provided cultural context and community-level perspectives on child labour, including acceptance, resistance, and local dynamics that influence child labour practices.

4.2.4. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Eight Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted across the selected locations (one in each location) ensuring diverse geographical and demographic representation while maintaining a manageable scope for in-depth qualitative analysis.

The FGDs were conducted with male and female youth (18-24) to cover a spectrum of perspectives related to child labour, and their experiences with work, education, as well as their aspirations, to understanding the impact of child labour on the lives and well-being of young adults.

Each FGD comprised 6-8 participants and was conducted in a gender-mixed manner to encourage reflective insights. The selection of this age group for the FGDs offers two strategic advantages:

1. Ethical and logistical simplicity – Participants over 18 can provide informed consent directly, avoiding the additional layers of parental consent and child safeguarding procedures.
2. Rich reflective insight – Many young persons in this age group have recent first-hand experiences with child labour and can speak retrospectively about their experiences, providing complementary perspectives to those captured through the HH survey of children aged 12–17.

The discussions were conducted in locations familiar and accessible to the participants to ensure a comfortable environment that encourages open discussion. Skilled moderators who are fluent in local languages and trained in sensitive handling of child-related issues facilitated the sessions.

4.2.1. Direct observations

Data collection included 31 direct observations (approximately 4 per study location) using a semi-structured observational guide to systematically document working conditions and other relevant contextual factors related to child labour in the targeted locations. Observations were completed across diverse labour settings, including marketplaces, construction sites, transport corridors, and domestic work contexts. Sites were purposively selected in coordination with community members, based on known or suspected concentrations of child labour. Observations took place in both urban and peri-urban locations in areas with high reported child labour incidence.

The primary aim of the structured observation was to document the physical, environmental, and behavioural indicators associated with child labour across a variety of work settings, including markets, construction sites, informal workshops, transport hubs, and agricultural fields. Observations were non-intrusive, recorded anonymously, and focused on visible characteristics of the work performed, the tools used, signs of distress or fatigue, the presence or absence of adult supervision, and broader safety conditions.

The inclusion of observational data was critical in:

- Capturing dimensions of child labour that are difficult to articulate or quantify through interviews, such as strain, social isolation, or real-time hazards.
- Providing contextual texture and visual verification of hazardous child labour practices.
- Informing a more grounded, spatially aware understanding of where and how children work, insights that are vital for targeting prevention and rehabilitation interventions.

4.2.1.1. Observation Tool and Key Domains

The observation exercise was conducted using a structured checklist instrument specifically tailored for the South Sudanese context, titled the Child Labour Observation Checklist (see Annex 6). The checklist was organised into five interlinked domains, each aimed at capturing a distinct dimension of observed child labour:

- **Demographics and General Context**

  Observers recorded key details such as estimated age and sex of the child, whether the child was working alone or with others, and the time of day the observation occurred. These parameters provided initial profiling data and helped identify patterns around age, gender, and working hours, key indicators for policy targeting.

- **Work Setting and Environment**

  This section documented the location type (e.g. market, construction site, farm), immediate physical environment (e.g. exposure to traffic, noise, fumes), and basic safety conditions (e.g. availability of water, sanitation, shelter). These details were essential for mapping out high-risk sectors and spatial vulnerabilities, especially in urban versus rural settings.

- **Nature of Work and Tools Used**

Observers noted the child's specific activities (e.g. carrying heavy loads, operating tools or machinery, selling goods, herding livestock) and any materials, tools, or substances being used. This domain enabled classification of tasks as hazardous, exploitative, or age-inappropriate, and supported analysis of ergonomic and chemical hazards.

- **Physical and Psychosocial Indicators**

  This domain captured visible signs of physical strain (e.g. fatigue, injuries, illness) and emotional or behavioural cues (e.g. signs of fear, distress, lack of interaction). Observers were trained to recognize subtle signs without direct questioning, enhancing the reliability of inferred well-being indicators.

- **Supervision and Social Conditions**

  This included whether adults were present, whether instructions were being given, and whether the child was interacting with peers or isolated. The presence or absence of adult oversight was noted as a risk factor or possible indicator of coercion, neglect, or informal apprenticeship.

Observers were trained to conduct non-intrusive observations for a minimum of 30–45 minutes per site and to take supplementary notes where possible. Training emphasized ethical vigilance, avoidance of interference or judgment, and respect for the dignity and privacy of child workers.

The tool's design allowed for both quantitative coding (via checkbox responses and categorical fields) and qualitative annotations through open questions, which have been analysed in tandem in this report to provide both breadth and depth of insight into child labour dynamics.

4.2.1.2. Site Types and Selection Criteria

Data collection focused on sites where child labour was expected to be visible and varied in form. These included:

- Urban marketplaces and street corners (e.g. Juba and Aweil towns)
- Rural farming zones and informal settlements
- Construction sites and transportation nodes
- Livestock routes and peri-urban agricultural belts
- Artisanal mining or quarrying locations (where present)

The goal was to ensure both sectoral and spatial representativeness, enabling the team to triangulate patterns of observed child labour by geography, economic activity, and environmental conditions.

Figure 11: Selected study locations (state/county/payam/boma)

State	Targeted County	Payam	Boma
Western Equatoria	Yambio	Yambio	Akorogbodi 2 Kokoro
Eastern Equatoria	Kapoeta South	Pwata	Hai Tarawa Losheler Nagnak
		Longeleya	Kangatuny
	Magwi	Magwi	Amika Central boma
Central Equatoria	Juba	Kator	Jebel Malakia
		Munuki	Mauna
		Rajaf	Lokwilili Checkpoint
Unity	Bentiu	Pakur	UNMISS
		Guit	UNMISS
Jonglei	Akobo	Nyandit	Rial
		Bilkey	Mission Boat Dock River Shore

			Mulukie Akobo Market, Markath Malkia
Upper Nile	Renk	Renk North	Renk town Saraya
		Renk South	Hai Sora

Given the sensitive nature of child labour and the high-risk contexts in which observations took place, the research team applied a set of rigorous ethical safeguards throughout the planning and implementation of this component. Although the observation checklist did not involve direct interaction with children or caregivers, ethical diligence was paramount to ensuring non-intrusiveness, data integrity, and the safety of both researchers and community members.

All observations were conducted in public spaces or work environments where children were visibly engaged in labour activities. Observers were instructed not to intervene, question, or draw attention to specific children during the data collection process. This strategy minimized the risk of social discomfort or stigmatization and avoided compromising children's privacy or inadvertently triggering protection concerns. Observers maintained a respectful physical distance, recorded data discretely, and refrained from taking photographs or video recordings. Observational notes were de-identified and anonymized, with no names, specific locations, or other personally identifiable information collected.

4.2.2. Limitations of Observational Methodology

Several limitations should be acknowledged in interpreting the results of the observational checklist:

- Visibility bias: Observations were restricted to visible or public spaces, excluding forms of child labour that occur in private HH s, hidden worksites (e.g. domestic servitude), or remote agricultural areas.
- Interpretive subjectivity: While training helped standardize checklist use, some elements, such as judging emotional distress or hazardous tasks, rely on observer interpretation and may vary across individuals or contexts.
- Snapshot nature: Observations captured a specific moment in time and cannot infer causality, long-term exposure, or school attendance patterns. As such, the data complements but cannot replace longitudinal or participatory methods.
- Non-random sampling: Although selection of children to be observed was random, site and timing selection were purposive, designed to detect patterns rather than represent a national average. This strengthens contextual understanding but limits statistical generalizability.

Despite these constraints, the observational tool offers a unique lens into the lived realities of children engaged in labour, particularly in sectors and regions that are poorly covered by traditional surveys.

4.3. SAMPLING

4.3.1. Quantitative Sampling

The sample size for the HH survey was calculated based on the expected prevalence of child labour among children aged 12–17 in South Sudan (45.6%.)[100, 101] The calculation followed a standard statistical formula for determining sample size in prevalence studies, adjusted to account for the design effect due to clustering and an expected rate of non-response. The final sample size was determined to ensure statistically valid and representative findings at the national level.

The base sample size was calculated using the following formula for estimating proportions in a population:

[100] Radio Tamazuj (2015) Upper Nile govt restricts NGOs after mass child soldier recruitment
[101] SCI (2019) Save the Children's Position statement on Child Labour

$$n_0 = \frac{Z^2 \cdot p \cdot (1-p)}{e^2}$$

Where:

- n_0 = required sample size without design or response adjustments
- Z = z-score corresponding to the desired confidence level (1.96 for 95%)
- p = estimated prevalence of child labour in the target population (45.6% or 0.456)
- e = desired margin of error (5.9% or 0.059)

This yields a minimum unadjusted sample size of **approximately 274 respondents**.

Because the study uses a **cluster sampling** approach, the initial estimate was adjusted for **design effect (DEFF)** to account for intra-cluster correlation, which reduces statistical efficiency. A conservative design effect of **1.5** was applied:

$$n_1 = n_0 \cdot DEFF = 274 \cdot 1.5 = 411$$

The adjusted sample size accounting for the sampling design is therefore **411 respondents**.

To account for potential non-response and ineligible HHs, the sample was inflated based on an **anticipated response rate of 85%**:

$$n_{final} = \frac{n_1}{\text{Response Rate}} = \frac{411}{0.85} 483$$

This indicates that approximately **483 HHs** should be approached to secure 411 valid responses.

The total sample was distributed across **41 clusters**, resulting in approximately **10 HHs per cluster**. Cluster locations were selected using probability proportional to size (PPS) sampling, ensuring geographic spread and proportionality in line with population density and accessibility. Within each selected cluster, systematic random sampling was used to identify eligible HHs.

Table 4: Quantitative sample

QUANTITATIVE SAMPLE						
State	**Targeted County**	**Sampled Payams**	**Population**	**Population %**	**HH Sample**	**Clusters**
WES	Yambio	Yambio	197,603	11.07	40	4
EES	Kapoeta South	Katiko Payam Kapoeta Town Longeleya Pwata Moruongor	122,651	6.87	30	3
	Magwi	Magwi	260,634	14.61	59	6
CES	Juba	Luri Munuki Kator Rajaf	525,953	29.48	120	12
Unity	Bentiu	Rubkona Pakuur	71,424	8.39	40	4
Jonglei	Akobo	Bilkey	192,937	10.81	39	4
WBG	Wau	Wau North Wau	215,031	12.05	50	5
Upper Nile	Renk	Renk Renk South	198,123	11.1	40	4

		Renk North Saraya Emtidad Jadid Buwum				
TOTAL			1,784,356	100	418	42

The research team oversampled at **496 surveys** to compensate for potential dropped interviews during the final cleaning process, yielding a final achieved sample of **418 surveys after cleaning, including two respondents each** (a caregiver/guardian and a child) for a total of **838 respondents**.

4.3.2. Qualitative Sampling

The qualitative component of the study employed a purposive sampling strategy to select participants for KIIs and FGDs, ensuring that respondents possessed the expertise, roles, and availability to provide substantial insights into the WFCL in South Sudan. This approach targeted stakeholders with direct knowledge or experience relevant to the research objectives, including the prevalence, drivers, policy gaps, and potential solutions for child labour across various sectors and locations. For the final anonymised list of selected respondents see Annex 2.

Table 5: Qualitative Sample

QUALITATIVE SAMPLE					
Method	**Respondents**	**Location**	**Planned Sessions**	**Achieved Sessions**	**Achieved Sample**
Key Informant Interviews	National/State Authorities (MoGEI, MoJ MGCSW) NGOs/INGOs Community Leaders Youth and women Leaders	2 KIIs/county	16	15	26
		Juba	6	11	
Focus Group Discussions	Children/adolescents	1 FGDs/county	8	9	≈ 70
Observations	Working children	5 / county	40	31	31

5. LOGISTICS OF DATA COLLECTION

5.1. STUDY DURATION AND LOCATIONS

The data collection was initiated on May 23 2025 and was completed on June 9th 2025. The final selection of study sites was done in communication with SCI during the Inception phase, and was guided by a strategic aim to ensure geographic and contextual diversity, in line with the study's objectives and the ToR. Data collection was successfully completed across eight counties in seven states of South Sudan, providing a rich national picture of the WFCL in both well-documented and under-researched areas, including those affected by displacement, border dynamics, and prolonged conflict.

Juba (Central Equatoria State) served as the hub for national-level engagement. Key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with representatives from government ministries, UN agencies, NGOs, and civil society organizations. As the capital, Juba offered critical access to actors shaping policy, coordination, and institutional responses to child labour.

In-depth qualitative fieldwork, including FGDs and community-based interviews with caregivers, local leaders, and frontline service providers, was carried out in Kapoeta South and Magwi (Eastern Equatoria), Akobo (Jonglei), Wau (Western Bahr el Ghazal), Bentiu (Unity), Renk (Upper Nile), and Yambio (Western Equatoria). These counties were selected to reflect a range of socio-economic and environmental conditions, spanning rural, peri-urban, and urban settings, and to capture the lived realities of communities most exposed to WFCL, including in remote border zones and displacement-affected areas. The HH survey and structured observations were implemented across all eight field counties, ensuring broad coverage and comparability across diverse regions. The study's sample was predominantly urban, with 62.5% of respondents from urban areas, 21.6% from rural settings, and 15.9% from semi-urban locations.

Figure 12: Data collection counties (Aweil North and Aweil East) on the map of Norther Bahr el Ghazal. Base map source : OCHA

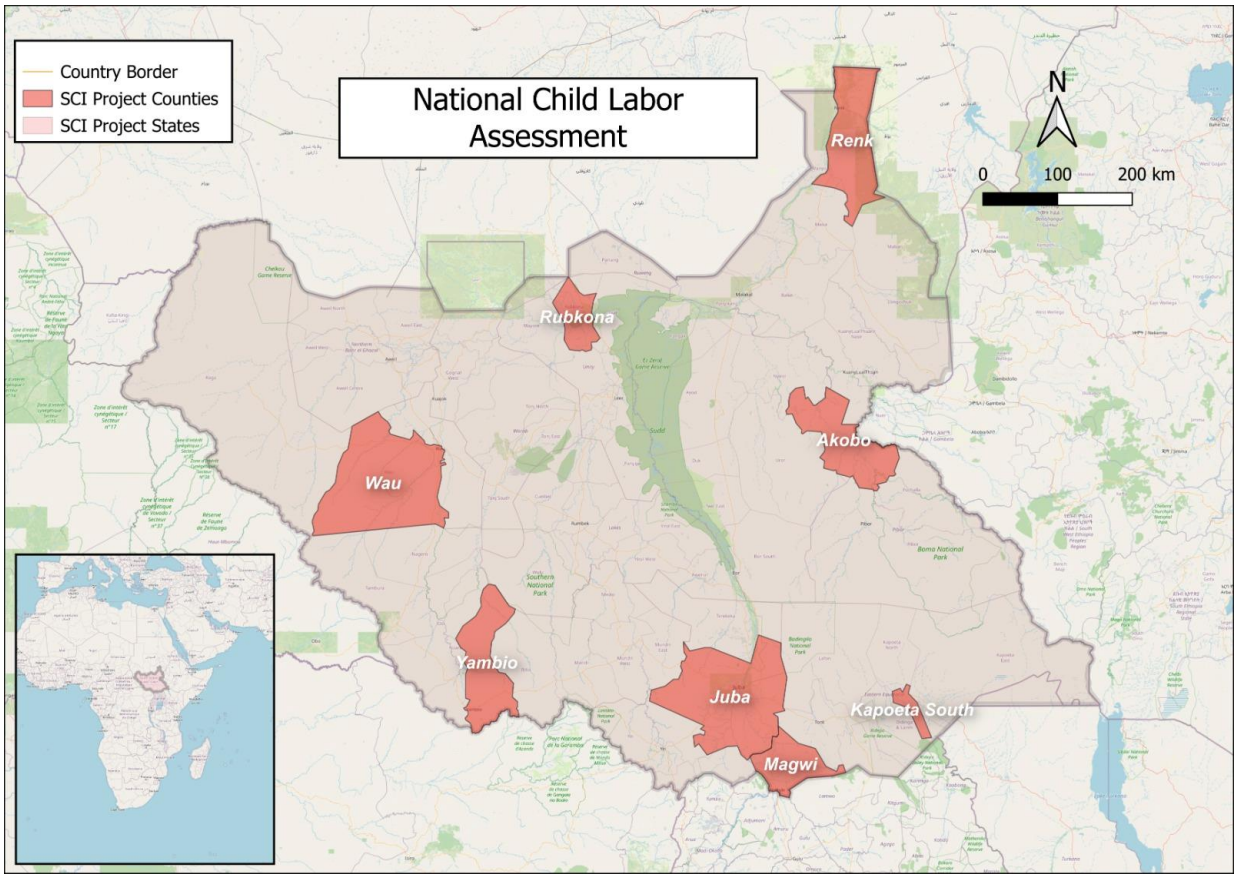


Table 6: Fieldwork counties and selection justification based on the preliminary desk review

State	Targeted County	Prevalent Child Labour Sectors
Western Equatoria	Yambio	Armed Groups, Agriculture, IDP/Refugee Street Children
Eastern Equatoria	Kapoeta South	Gold Mining
	Magwi	Charcoal production
Central Equatoria	Juba	Urban Street Children
Unity	Bentiu	Cattle herding, climate displacement
Jonglei	Akobo	Cattle herding, armed groups
Western Bahr el Ghazal	Wau	Farming, fishing, hunting
Upper Nile	Renk	IDP/Refugee Street Children

5.2. TRAINING AND PILOTING OF DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

All Team Supervisors participated in a three-day in-person training in Juba, led by the Team Leader with support from the Research Assistant. The training covered the study's objectives, tools, ethical considerations, safeguarding protocols, and use of digital data collection equipment. Interview facilitation techniques and risk management procedures were also reinforced. Following the training, both qualitative and quantitative tools were piloted in-house. This allowed Team Supervisors to gain hands-on experience, refine their use of the tools, and identify any issues in the instruments' clarity, relevance, or structure. Feedback from the pilot informed final revisions to the tools, improving their reliability and contextual fit.

The pilot testing also extended into the field, where each Team Supervisor recruited and supervised teams of five enumerators per targeted location to trial the survey instruments. This allowed data collection teams to simulate data collection conditions, troubleshoot device or tool-related issues, and identify context-specific adjustments. It also helped build enumerators' confidence and familiarity with the instruments before formal data collection began. After the pilot, the Research Officer conducted a structured debrief with the team to review challenges, clarify protocols, and finalize adjustments. Personalized feedback was provided to each Field Researcher, strengthening their capacity ahead of full deployment.

5.3. RESEARCH PERMISSIONS AND CONSENT

At the national level, formal approval was sought from the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare, along with an Institutional Review Board (IRB) submission to the Ministry of Health (Research Permission No MOH/RERB /A- 34l2O dated May 8, 2025) (See Annex 9). A complete application package including budget, consent forms, cover letter, fieldwork plan, Inception Report, Information sheet, interview guides, submission forms and CVs of the research team were submitted, and clarifications were offered on the study's purpose, methodology, ethical safeguards, and tools, especially given the involvement of children.

At the county level, letters were sent to inform National Security and county commissioners, followed by meetings, when the team supervisors arrived from Juba to discuss study procedures and secure formal permission to proceed in each location, and receive permission by local chiefs to conduct the study.

All participants were informed of their rights, including confidentiality, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their freedom to skip questions or withdraw at any time. Interviews were conducted in private settings to ensure participant comfort and data protection. All research team members are IRB-certified through the U.S. Office for Human Research Protections.

5.4. QUALITY ASSURANCE AND CONTROL DURING AND AFTER FIELDWORK

All interviews and focus group discussions were recorded where consent was provided; in cases where participants declined recording, researchers either took detailed notes or, where appropriate, identified alternative respondents. Researchers were trained in how to manage technical issues, including failed

recordings, and instructed to immediately flag any problems to the Research Officer while still in the field to determine whether a session needed to be repeated.

Data collection was closely monitored throughout. The Research Officer maintained regular contact with Team Supervisors and enumerators, ensuring adherence to protocols and consistency in survey administration and interviewing techniques. Where possible, the Fieldwork Manager also conducted real-time supervision in the field within Juba. In parallel, the Research Officer cross-checked consistency across researchers, addressed any deviations from the protocol, and ensured that ethical standards, especially around informed consent and confidentiality, were fully upheld. Communication was facilitated through dedicated WhatsApp groups, with daily debriefings used to share updates, address challenges, and reinforce quality standards.

To safeguard against data loss, researchers transferred audio recordings to encrypted laptops and uploaded them to secure, self-hosted cloud storage when internet access allowed. In areas with poor connectivity, additional backups were maintained on physical storage devices such as USBs.

Once the field teams returned to Juba, all audio files, notes, and photos were uploaded to the central server and the field devices were wiped. The Fieldwork Manager then reviewed the data files, standardized naming conventions, and entered them into trackers to support coordinated analysis. A sample of transcripts and audio files was reviewed to ensure interview guides were followed and that responses were captured accurately and completely.

6. DATA ANALYSIS

6.1. TREATMENT OF QUALITATIVE DATA

After the fieldwork concluded, team supervisors returned to Juba and personally transcribed the interviews and focus group discussions they conducted, integrating their notes and observations. Transcripts were anonymized from the outset, with all names and identifying information removed. A rolling review process was used to check for typos, translation accuracy, and completeness.

Translations were spot-checked against the original audio recordings, and any inconsistencies were resolved through consultation with the original field researchers. Edits were made to improve clarity and flow while preserving the integrity of participants' responses. Each transcript was verified against its audio file to ensure completeness before moving on to analysis.

Following qualitative data preparation, a combination of deductive and inductive coding approaches was used: the coding process began with a predefined codebook aligned with the study's framework, while remaining open to emergent themes that arose organically from the data. This dual approach allowed the team to capture both expected and unexpected insights. As coding progressed, new themes were identified and integrated into the codebook. These were then grouped into broader thematic areas, which formed the basis for analysis.

Connections between themes were explored to construct a grounded narrative that reflects the complexity and nuance of the participants' experiences. To strengthen the reliability of the analysis, the team employed triangulation (comparing qualitative insights with available quantitative findings), member checking (soliciting feedback on findings from SCI or participants), and internal peer debriefing within the field research team.

A wordcloud was generated from the interview transcripts of the project, which reveals a multi-layered understanding of the worst forms of child labour, grounded in the direct experiences and perspectives of those involved, as they organically emerged from the discussions. Dominant words such as "CHILD," "CHILDREN," "SCHOOL," "WORK," and "LABOR" highlight the central tension between children's educational needs and their economic demands.

The frequent references to "FAMILIES," "PARENTS," "HOME," "MOTHER," and "COMMUNITY" indicate the vital role that family and local social networks play both as drivers and potential protectors in the child labour landscape. Gender emerges as a critical dimension, with terms like "GIRLS," "BOYS," "WOMEN," and "GENDER," reflecting distinct vulnerabilities and experiences among boys and girls. Economic hardship is a pervasive theme, indicated by words such as "MONEY," "POVERTY," "NEED," "PAY," and "FOOD," underscoring the survival pressures that push children into labour.

Specific references to "CATTLE," "FORCED," "HAZARDOUS," "STREET," "DOMESTIC," and "MARRIAGE" reveal the varied and often harmful forms of labour, including traditional and exploitative practices like early or forced marriage. The prominence of "PROTECTION," "HELP," "SUPPORT," and "VULNERABLE" signals a recognized need for effective safeguarding mechanisms and assistance to affected children.

Additionally, institutional themes appear strongly through words like "GOVERNMENT," "MINISTRY," "POLICIES," "LAW," and "PROGRAM," which indicate both state accountability and the importance of structured interventions, even as challenges in these areas are implied. The presence of "AWARENESS," "TRAINING," "PROGRAMS," and "SUPPORTING" reflects ongoing efforts and the necessity for community mobilization and advocacy to prevent and respond to child labour. Together, these insights point to a complex reality where education, gender, economic survival, family influence, and institutional frameworks intersect, and the need for coordinated, multi-sectoral approaches that are sensitive to local contexts, gender dynamics, and the socio-economic causes of child labour.

Figure 13: Wordcloud based on transcripts.

6.2. TREATMENT OF QUANTITATIVE DATA

All quantitative data was collected using digital HH and child-level surveys developed in XLS Form and deployed via Kobo Collect on company-owned tablets. The surveys were rigorously structured, incorporating validation constraints, skip logic, and linkage between the caregiver and child questionnaires through a unique HH ID. Enumerators received dedicated training on the digital tools, and a pilot exercise was conducted prior to full deployment to validate the instruments and field readiness.

Data collection took place using tablets preloaded with the survey tools. In areas with stable internet connectivity, data was submitted in real time. In more remote areas, data was collected offline and synced daily by the team supervisors from their residences. All interviewers were trained to follow strict protocols for data capture, and supervisors conducted regular spot checks to ensure completeness and accuracy. To maintain quality throughout the data collection process, a customized Stata .do file was developed and used daily to run automated checks on data quality. These included validations for missing values, inconsistencies, and outlier detection. Daily feedback loops between the research team and field supervisors enabled immediate course correction. Where errors or insufficient data were identified, re-visits were conducted, and additional surveys were collected to fill gaps.

After data collection, the raw Kobo data was exported and cleaned using a combination of Stata and Excel. A structured cleaning log was maintained to track all modifications and corrections. The data was anonymized from the point of collection and analysed in its de-identified form to ensure compliance with data protection and ethical standards. Stratification was applied during analysis where appropriate, following standard practice to reflect sampling structure and ensure representativeness of subgroups such as geographic location, gender, and age categories.

All cleaned datasets were securely stored on an encrypted, self-hosted drive accessible only to authorized personnel. The project followed an internal data protection protocol, which includes strict access control, secure file management, and procedures for safe archiving and sharing of data. Informed consent for participation and data use was digitally recorded within the Kobo tool for all respondents.

6.3. ETHICS AND SAFEGUARDING

This study was conducted with a strong commitment to ethical integrity and safeguarding, particularly in relation to children and vulnerable groups. All team supervisors participated in a tailored training on safeguarding delivered by Save the Children prior to the start of fieldwork and also received a refresher on the internal safeguarding policies and procedures of the lead organisation. Field teams received targeted training on ethical research conduct, including identification of high-risk situations, protocols for disengagement, and personal safety measures. All researchers were local to their areas of operation and fluent in local languages and customs, which reduced visibility and enhanced cultural sensitivity during observations. Standard operating procedures were in place for reporting immediate protection concerns to designated focal points at Save the Children or local authorities, though no such interventions were required during this phase of the study (i.e. Annex 7: Safeguarding and Response Protocol). These trainings reinforced the research team's collective understanding of duty of care, and zero-tolerance stance on all forms of harm, abuse, exploitation, or neglect.

Throughout the research process, the team operated under the ethical principles outlined in the Belmont Report—Respect for Persons, Beneficence, and Justice. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, with informed consent obtained from all respondents (and assent where applicable), and participants were free to decline or withdraw at any point without consequence. Researchers adhered to the highest professional standards as defined by the International Code on Market, Opinion and Social Research and Data Analytics (ICC/ESOMAR). Fieldwork was carried out with neutrality and cultural sensitivity, with researchers trained to accept all answers without judgment, refrain from expressing personal views, and ensure fair representation across gender, age, and social background. Special care was taken to ensure inclusive participation of women, children, and socially marginalised groups.

The team remained vigilant to the potential risks of harm, including those arising unintentionally through the design or implementation of research activities. Information collected was securely managed and accessible only to designated research personnel. In cases involving children or disclosures of protection

concerns, the team was prepared to follow agreed referral pathways in coordination with Save the Children and local child protection structures.

7. FINDINGS

7.1. HOUSEHOLD DEMOGRAPHICS

The HH profile of the study population reflects a context of high demographic pressure, gendered educational disparities, and diverse residency statuses shaped by displacement. Over half of the HHs are female headed (55%), and on average consist of 8.7 members, including 2.6 adolescents aged 12–17. Educational attainment is generally low with stark gender disparities, with nearly four in ten female heads having never attended school, compared to 16% of male heads, and 30% of respondents having completed only primary education (39% women). The majority of respondents (79%) are from host communities, but returnees and IDPs face notably lower educational attainment, underscoring the compounded vulnerability of displacement. Disability prevalence is also notable, particularly in Jonglei, where the majority of hHHs report multiple functional difficulties, while other states show lower rates. These findings highlight intersecting structural disadvantages, gender, education, displacement, and disability, that deepen child protection risks, while hHH education emerged as strongly correlated with child labour risk: children in HHs where the head has no formal education were significantly more likely to be involved in the worst forms of child labour, particularly pronounced among female-headed HHs.

7.1.1. Household composition and respondent's profile

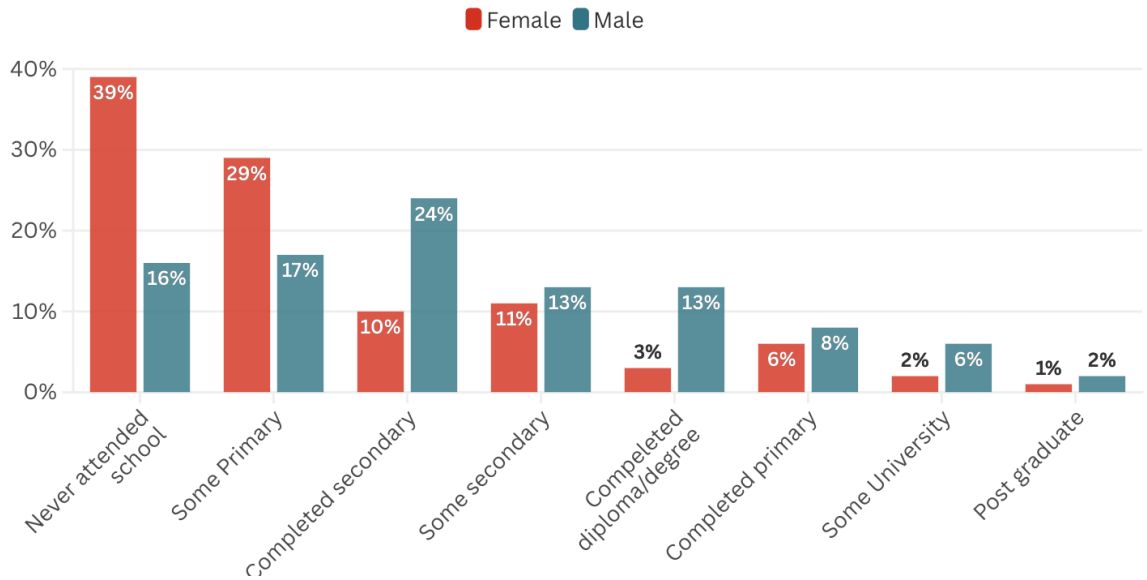
On average, each surveyed HH comprised 8.7 members, with an average of 2.6 children aged 12–17 years. The questionnaire was primarily completed by the head of the household (hHH) (79% of cases). Among the remaining respondents, 64% were spouses of the hHH and 20% were their children. Of all participating HHs, 55% were headed by women and 45% were headed by men, with the average of the hHH age being 41.5 years.

7.1.2. hHH Education

In terms of educational attainment, the majority of hHHs, regardless of gender, reported only completing 'some primary' education (30%). Further to that, as Figure 14 illustrates, the data reveal a stark gender disparity in educational attainment among hHH. Nearly four out of ten female respondents (39%) have never attended school, compared to just 16% of their male counterparts. Moreover, almost seven in ten women (68%) fall into the two lowest education categories ("never attended school" or "some primary"), underlining the significant barriers that women face in accessing education. In contrast, males are much more likely to advance to higher levels: 24% have completed secondary school (versus only 10% of women) and 13% have obtained a diploma or degree, which is more than four times the rate among female hHH.

Across the targeted counties, the gender gap persists but with notable regional variations. In Unity, an overwhelming 70% of female respondents never attended school, compared to 31% of males. Upper Nile shows a similar pattern: 30% of women never attended school (but 38% have some primary). In Jonglei, 64% of women and 59% of men have never attended school, suggesting limited access for both genders, though women remain slightly more disadvantaged. In Central Equatoria, the situation improves for women, with 21% never attending school versus just 3% of males. However, men are much more represented in higher attainment categories such as completed diploma/degree and secondary school (31% of males versus 9% of females at secondary in Central Equatoria).

Figure 14: Proportion of HoH educational attainment by gender



The data indicates that there is a clear inverse relationship between the education level of the hHH and children's involvement in the WFCL, both for male- and female-headed HHs: As the education level of the hHH increases, the likelihood of child labour involvement decreases. At the same time, children in HHs headed by someone with no formal education are more likely to be involved in WFCL, compared to those headed by someone with post-secondary education.

In female-headed HHs, the trend is similarly significant and slightly more pronounced ($\chi^2 = 11.49$, $p = 0.009$).

- Children in HHs where the female head never attended school had the highest reported rate of WFCL across the sample (36.9%).
- This rate declines as education increases: 35.8% of WFCL observed among those with primary, 19.4% with secondary, and just 7.8% among HHs headed by women with post-secondary education.

Among male-headed HHs, there is also a statistically significant relationship between the education level of the hHH and child involvement in the WFCL ($\chi^2 = 10.96$, $p = 0.012$).

- Children living in HHs where the male head never attended school reported the second highest rate of involvement in WFCL, overall (32.1%).
- Children in HHs headed by men with primary (29.5%) and secondary education (29.1%) showed intermediate levels of involvement.
- Children of male heads with post-secondary education reported the lowest rate among male-headed HHs (9.3%).

This trend suggests that education functions as a protective factor, likely due to a combination of better economic opportunities, greater awareness of child rights, and a stronger prioritization of schooling.

7.1.3. HH Residence Status

The vast majority of HHs interviewed (79%) were from the host community, with returnees making up 13%, internally displaced persons (IDPs) 6%, and migrants the remaining 2%. This distribution frames the results: most insights primarily reflect the situation of host communities, but there is important representation of HHs affected by displacement and migration.

There is notable variation in HH status by state. In Central and Eastern Equatoria, hosts make up over 85% of sampled HHs, indicating relative stability or effective reintegration of displaced populations. In Unity state, by contrast, returnees are the largest group (45% of the sample), and IDPs also represent a significant share (28%). A similar mix is seen in Upper Nile and Western Bahr-el-Ghazal, where returnees constitute about a quarter of the sample.

Figure 15: Proportion of HHs by residence status

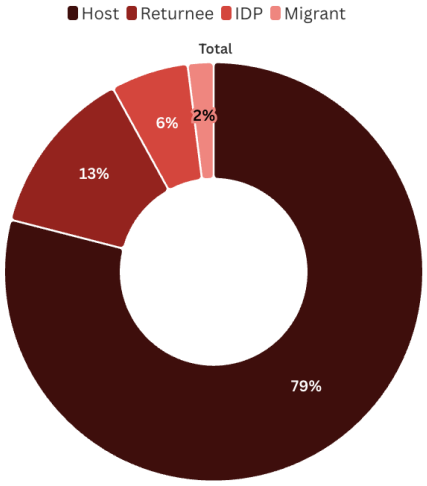
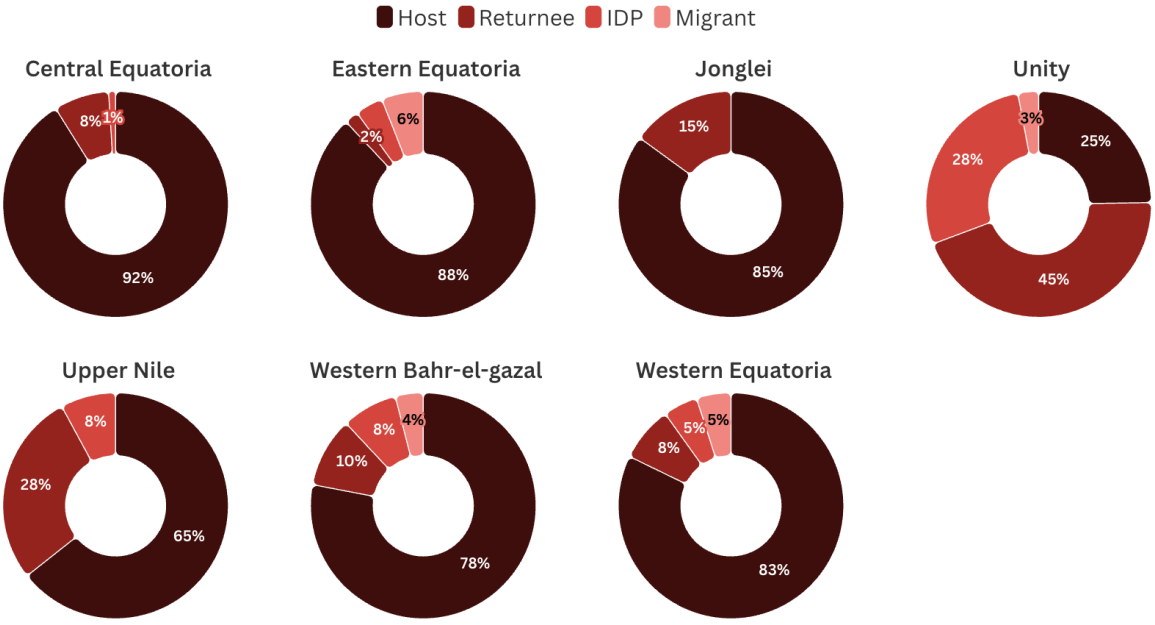


Figure 16: Proportion of residence status by state

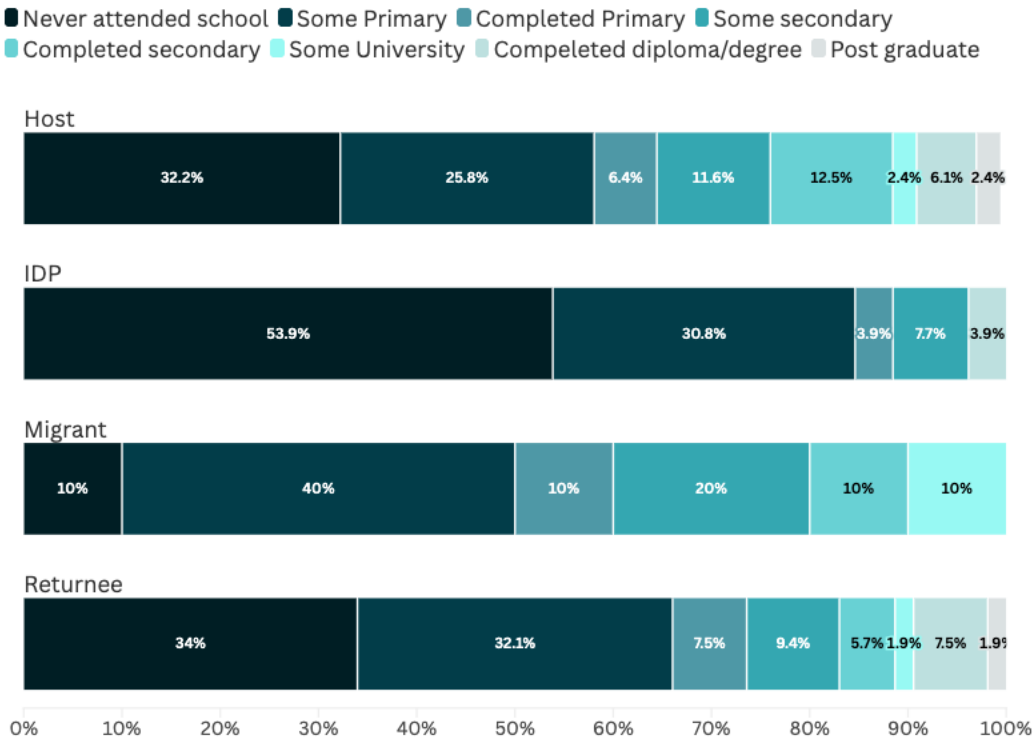


7.1.4. HH Residence Status and Education

With regard to the educational attainment among hHH based on their residence status, the data show considerable differences. Most host community hHH (74%) have some form of education, and only 26% never attended school. In contrast, over half (54%) of internally displaced persons (IDPs) never attended school, and most of the rest have only primary or incomplete education, but the IDP sample is small.

Returnees fall in between, with about a third (34%) having never attended school, and just under 30% having some primary education. Migrants also have a high rate of lower educational attainment, but their group is very small, making percentages less reliable. Overall, host community members are significantly more likely to have completed secondary school or higher compared to IDPs and returnees, highlighting substantial barriers faced by displaced populations in accessing and completing education.

Figure 17: Proportion of residence status and hHH educational attainment



7.1.5. hHH Disability Status

The findings on disability status among adult respondents[102] indicate that the majority of respondents (69%) reported having no disability (see Figure 18). Among those reporting disabilities, the most common challenges relate to vision (17% reporting seeing difficulties, even with glasses), mobility (13% difficulty walking or climbing stairs), hearing (11%), and cognitive functions such as remembering or concentrating (11%). Communication difficulties and challenges with personal care tasks like washing or dressing were less commonly reported, at 7% and 5%, respectively.

Disaggregating by state reveals significant variation, with Jonglei standing out with a high prevalence of reported disabilities. Only 8% of hHHs reported no disability, while large shares reported multiple disabilities: 67% with seeing difficulties, 54% hearing impairments, 54% problems remembering or concentrating, and 46% each for walking and communication difficulties. In contrast, states like Unity and Western Equatoria report much lower disability prevalence, with 85% of hHHs having no disabilities. Central and Eastern Equatoria, Upper Nile, and Western Bahr-el-Ghazal have disability patterns closer to the overall sample, with about 70–75% without disabilities and the remainder reporting mostly vision and mobility-related challenges (see Figure 19).

[102] Central Bureau of Statistics, Southern Sudan (2008) *'Population and Housing Census 2008, Sudan'*,

Figure 18: Proportion of disability status, disaggregated per type of disability.

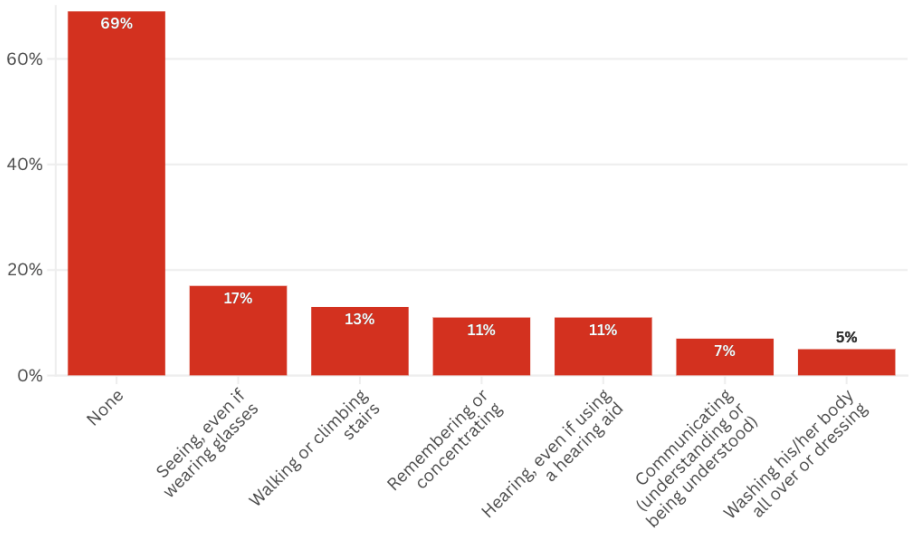
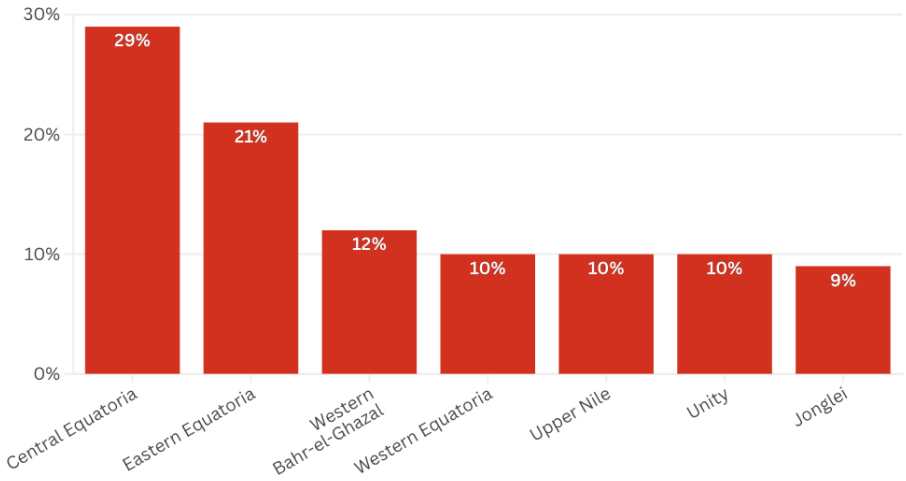


Figure 19: Proportion of reported disability, disaggregated by state



7.2. HOUSEHOLD FOOD CONSUMPTION SCORE

The Food Consumption Score (FCS) analysis reveals that while 64% of surveyed HHs in South Sudan have acceptable dietary diversity and meal frequency, significant food insecurity persists, with 31% classified as borderline and 5% as poor. Rural HHs fare better than semi-urban ones, and counties like Magwi, Bentiu, Renk, and Kapoeta South report stronger food security, while Akobo, Wau, and Juba show greater vulnerability. Gender of the hHH had minimal impact on dietary outcomes, but HHs with poor FCS were 4.4% more likely to have children engaged in the worst forms of child labour, underscoring the link between food insecurity and child labour risk.

To better understand the socioeconomic context that fosters child labour risk, the study assessed HH dietary quality using the Food Consumption Score (FCS), the WFP-endorsed metric that captures both dietary diversity and consumption frequency over a seven-day recall period. The FCS evaluates eight key

food groups,[103] with each group assigned a standard weight, and classifies HHs as having Poor (≤21), Borderline (21.5–35), or Acceptable (>35) consumption patterns.

Findings reveal that while 64% of surveyed HHs achieved an Acceptable FCS, indicative of adequate dietary diversity and meal frequency, there remains significant vulnerability, with 31% categorized as Borderline and 5% as Poor (see Figure 20 and Figure 20). This pattern holds consistently across gender, location types, and most counties, confirming that the majority of HHs are food secure but a substantial minority remain at risk

Figure 20: Proportion of Food Consumption Score

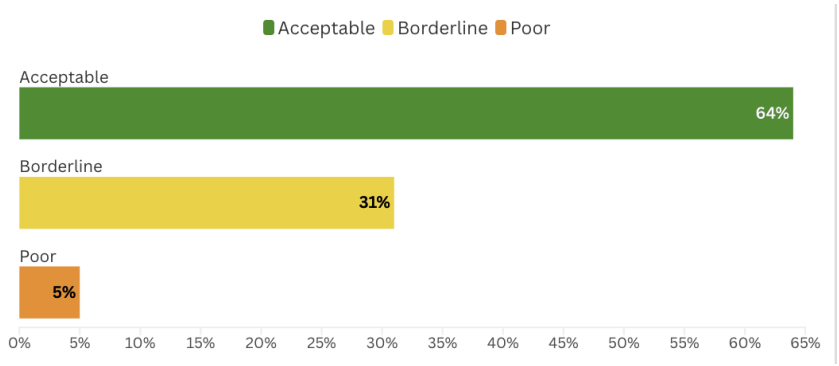
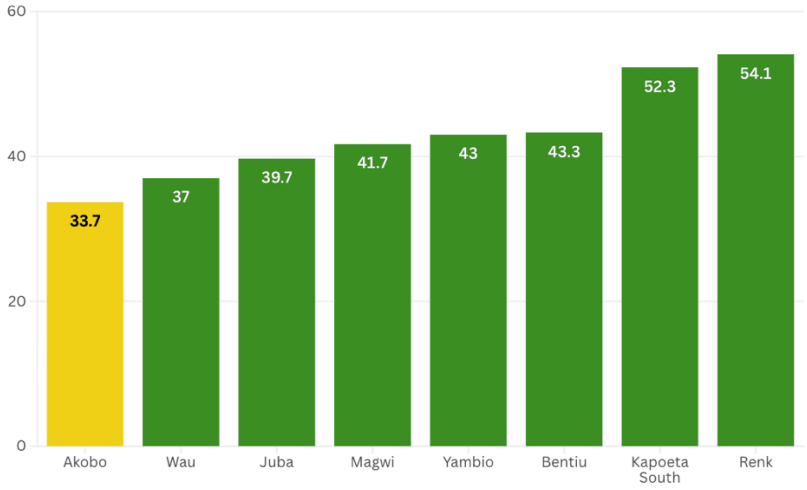


Figure 21: Average FCS per county



Disaggregated analysis paints a nuanced picture: rural areas outperformed semi-urban, with 78% Acceptable FCS compared to only 48% in semi-urban areas, where food insecurity was more prevalent, likely due to market or livelihood constraints.[104] County-level findings highlight particularly acute needs in areas like Akobo and Wau, where only a third and roughly half of HHs, respectively, maintained Acceptable food consumption. In Akobo, the risk was notably higher among female-headed HHs, with Borderline FCS dominating. Conversely, Magwi, Bentiu, and Renk had over 70% of HHs in the Acceptable category, and reports of Poor FCS were minimal. Urban food security remains a concern; in Juba, only 59% attained Acceptable scores, with nearly two in five HHs categorized as Borderline or Poor. Kapoeta South stands out with 83% Acceptable, although small pockets of Poor food consumption persist.

The FCS score showed little difference by the gender of the hHH, Acceptable dietary scores were equal among male- and female-headed HHs. An analysis between the WFCL and the FCS showed that HHs with

[103] US DoL (2023)

[104] This question allowed respondents to select multiple reasons, so the percentages reported for each category represent the proportion of respondents who chose that reason.

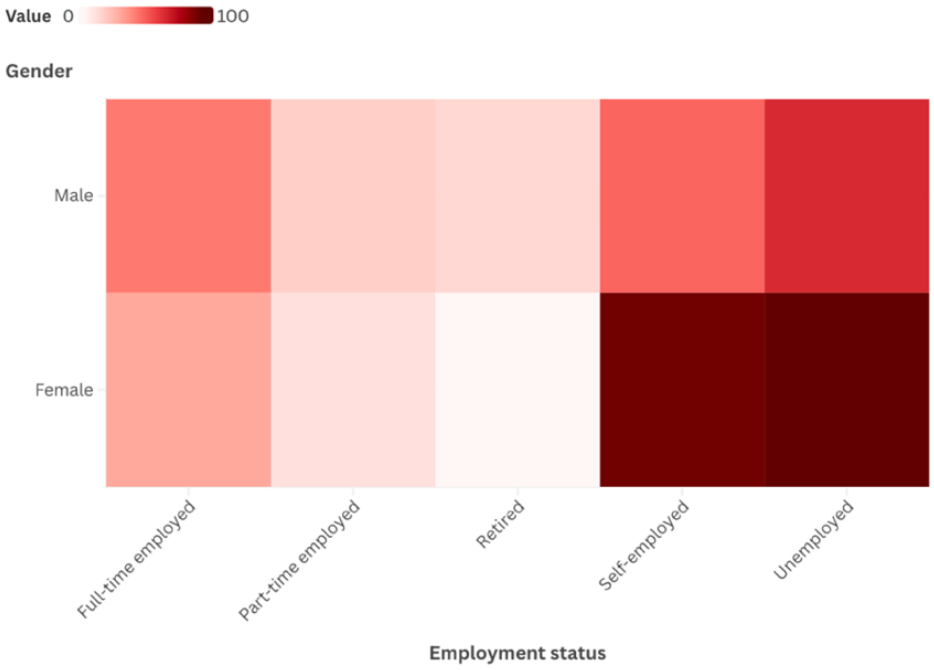
poor FCS are 4.4% more likely to have their children engaged in WFCL compared to HHs with acceptable FCS.

7.3. HOUSEHOLD ECONOMIC AND LIVELIHOOD SITUATION

The analysis indicates a fragile economic environment marked by widespread reliance on informal livelihoods and gendered disparities in access to income and employment. Female-headed HHs are disproportionately clustered in self-employment and unemployment, with significantly lower access to salaried jobs compared to their male counterparts. Most HHs rely on small-scale businesses, agricultural labour, or natural resource exploitation, with few enjoying income diversity or financial stability, only 14% have three or more income earners, and 7% have none at all. While overall median HH income is 200,000 SSP, this often masks deep poverty when adjusted per capita. Income rises with higher education and full-time employment, but many HHs, especially those led by women, remain trapped in low-return informal work. Financial coping strategies are heavily short-term and erosive: 52% of HHs skip meals, 44% borrow, and 28% sell assets, while 13% send children to work in other locations. School attendance is uneven, with just over half of HHs reporting full-time school participation, and many female-headed HHs facing barriers to consistent education. Geographic inequalities also persist, with urban centers like Juba performing better than counties like Akobo, Yambio, or Kapoeta South, where structural access to education and livelihoods is limited.

The data indicates heavy reliance on informal livelihoods, and the gendered economic vulnerabilities facing HHs, particularly those led by women. Across nearly all locations, female respondents overwhelmingly cluster in self-employment and unemployment, with some locations reaching extreme values. For instance, in Yambio, 72% of female heads are self-employed, and none are unemployed-a stark contrast to Akobo, where nearly three-quarters of female heads are unemployed. Full-time employment rates are consistently higher for males than females in most locations, with Wau and Juba standing out: male full-time employment in Wau is over twice that of females (45% vs. 21%), and Juba shows a 30% male rate compared to 21% for females (see Figure 22).

Figure 22: HoH employment status by gender



Retirement is a rare status overall but is noticeably more likely among females in Akobo (18%, all of which are host community members) and among males in Juba (13%), as well as Kapoeta South (8%). Part-time employment also varies: Bentiu sees moderate rates among both genders, but in most other counties, this category remains low, especially for women.

Unemployment stands out as a major challenge for female heads in several locations-exceeding 60% in Akobo (where 83.3% of female- and 16% of male returnees report being unemployed as opposed to 55% of female- and 45% of male host community members) and Magwi, and over 50% in Bentiu. For males, unemployment is most prominent in Akobo and Magwi (both about 60%), while being much lower in Juba, Wau, and Yambio.

The Chi-Square test indicates a statistically significant association between employment status and the gender of the hHH ($\chi^2 = 22$, $p = 0.0002$), meaning employment status differs by gender. Male heads of HH are more likely to be full-time employed, part-time employed, or retired, while female heads are more likely to be self-employed or unemployed.

7.3.1. HH Main Source of Income

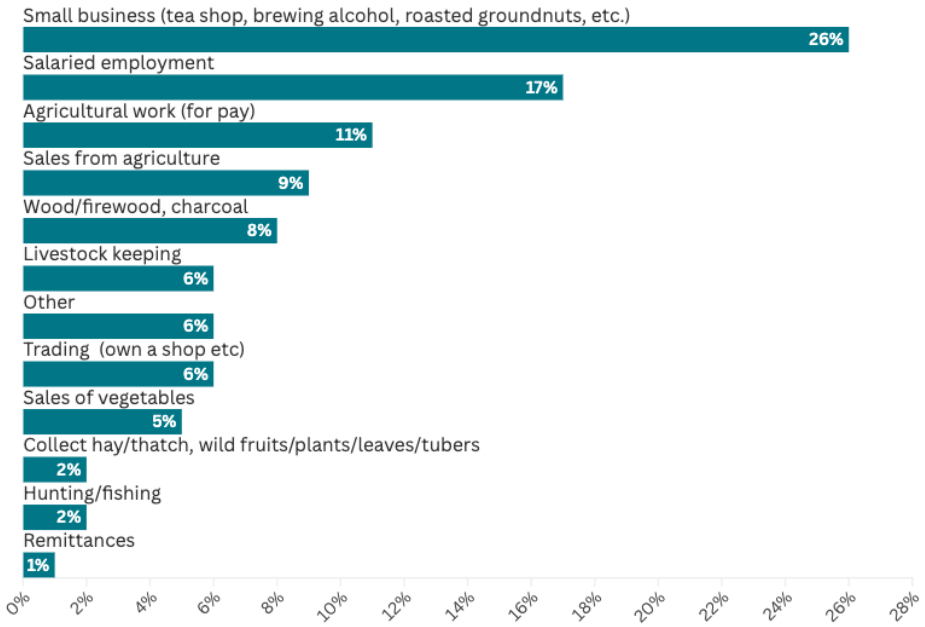
Analysis of HH income sources reveals a diverse economy with a strong reliance on informal activities, petty trade and entrepreneurial activities for sustaining livelihoods (see Figure 23). The most frequently reported primary source of income is small-scale business (including tea shops, brewing alcohol, and roasting groundnuts) drawing on 26% of HHs. Formal salaried employment is reported by 17% of HHs, making it the second most common source, but still trailing far behind informal business.

Agricultural work for pay (11%) and sales from agriculture (9%) together account for a substantial share, highlighting the continued importance of agriculture both as waged labour and as self-driven production. The production and sale of wood, firewood, and charcoal represent another 8% of HHs' main income, signalling heavy dependence on natural resources.

Together, these top five sources, small business, salaried jobs, agricultural work, sales from agriculture, and wood/firewood, account for 71% of all HHs, capturing the bulk of reported livelihoods. Much smaller shares report other activities such as shop trading, livestock keeping, sales of vegetables, wild plant collection, hunting/fishing, and remittances, the latter being the main source for just 1% of HHs. Among

the 'other' responses, participants indicated involvement in small-scale businesses not covered by the standard categories. A handful of respondents reported government employment or humanitarian assistance (i.e., working with NGOs), while several listed mandazi (local bread) and general 'hustling' as their main income strategies. This distribution illustrates a socioeconomic context where most HHs rely on informal, often precarious, sources of income, with only a minority benefiting from stable salaried positions.

Figure 23: HH main source of income



7.3.2. HH Income Distribution

Analysis of HH income-earning patterns reveals that most HHs in the sample are economically dependent on just one or two adult earners. Nearly half of all HHs (48%) reported having only a single adult member bringing in income through formal employment, informal work, or business, while another 31% relied on two earners. Only a small minority, about 14%, had three or more adults earning, indicating few HHs achieve a broad, diversified income base. Notably, 7% of HHs had no members earning at all, indicating a concerning level of economic vulnerability.

When assessed against national poverty lines,[105] the analysis of HH income data highlights the intensity and pervasiveness of poverty among surveyed HHs across the country. The overall median monthly HH income in the survey is 200,000 SSP, substantially higher than the per-person poverty line, but the distinction is critical: this HH median often needs to support numerous HH members, and the poverty line referenced is per person. Given the large average HH sizes in South Sudan, many surveyed HHs likely fall below the poverty threshold on a per capita basis, even if HH-level income seems relatively higher.

7.3.2.1. State-level Patterns

Median monthly incomes exhibit noticeable geographic disparities. Upper Nile records the highest median (700,000 SSP), while Western Equatoria and Jonglei are at the lower end (70,000 SSP and 100,000 SSP, respectively). Central Equatoria (300,000 SSP) and Unity (200,000 SSP) hover around the overall median, but all medians are still dwarfed by the ongoing inflation and high cost of living: factors that have dramatically reduced purchasing power across the country. These disparities also reflect localized shocks, livelihoods, and market access.

[105] These food groups are main staples (cereals, roots, and tubers), pulses, vegetables, fruits, meat/fish, milk, sugar, and oil.

7.3.2.2. Gender and Income

Median HH income shows only modest differences by gender: female-headed HHs report an average of 442,224 SSP, males 427,337 SSP. This narrow gender gap likely masks deeper economic vulnerability for female-headed HHs, as previous findings show their income sources skew toward informal and lower-return activities.

7.3.2.3. Education, Employment, and Income

Median incomes rise with higher education of the hHH: those with post-graduate or some university education report the highest medians (700,000–300,000 SSP), while those who never attended school have a median of just 200,000 SSP. Employment status also matters: full-time and self-employed hHHs report higher median incomes (300,000 SSP), while retired and unemployed report the lowest medians (200,000–100,000 SSP).

Figure 24: HH Average Income per hHH Education Level

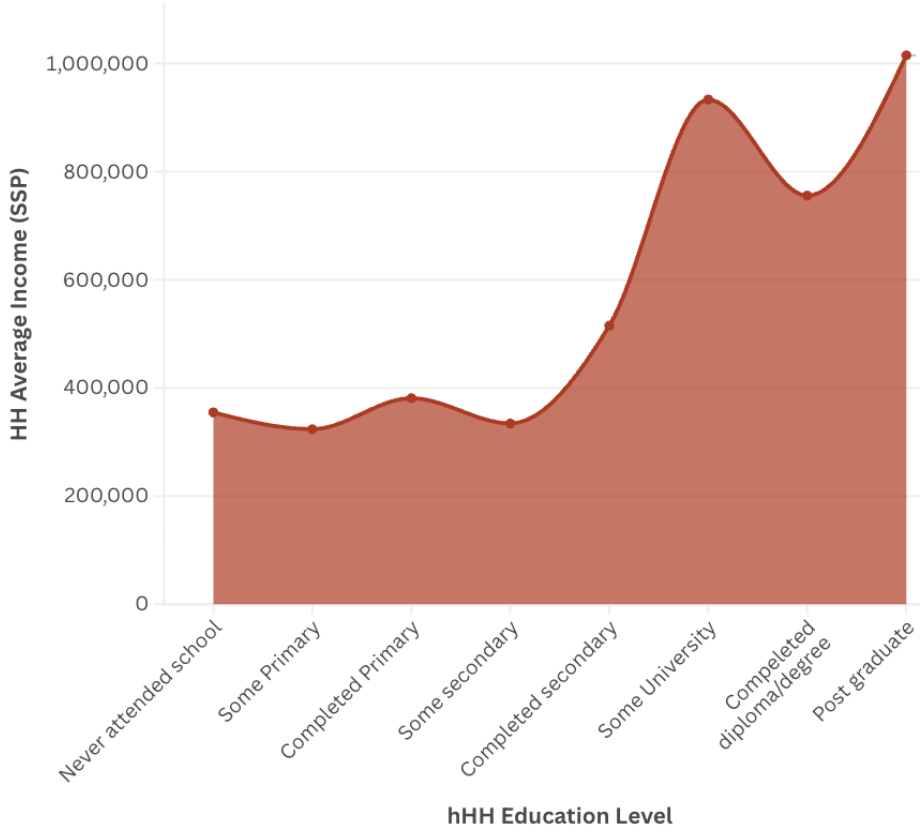
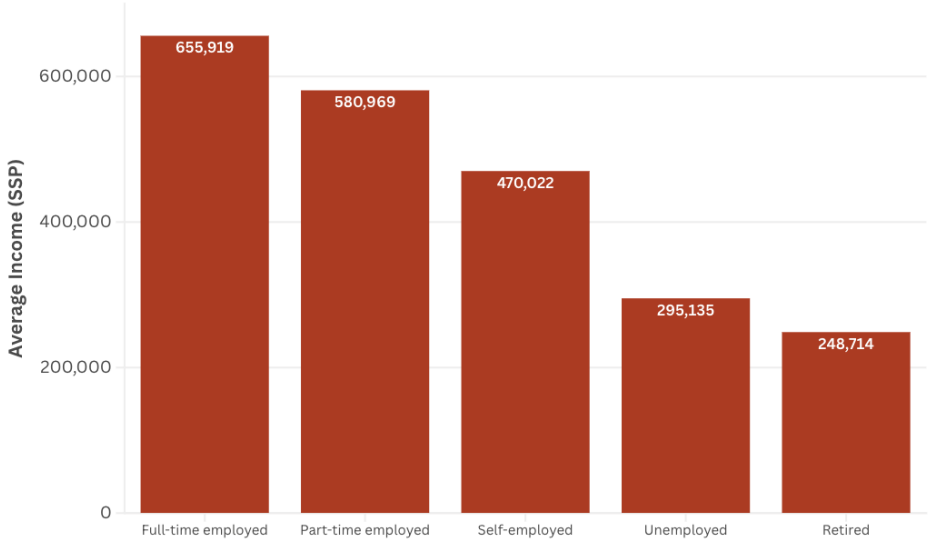


Figure 25: Average monthly income per type of employment



7.3.2.4. Household Financial Decision-Making

Women are the primary decision-makers over HH finances in 40% of cases, compared to men (31%), with joint decision-making at 27%. This also aligns with the growing pattern in conflict-affected and displacement settings, where women often become the main income earners or 'household managers' in the absence or reduced role of male partners.

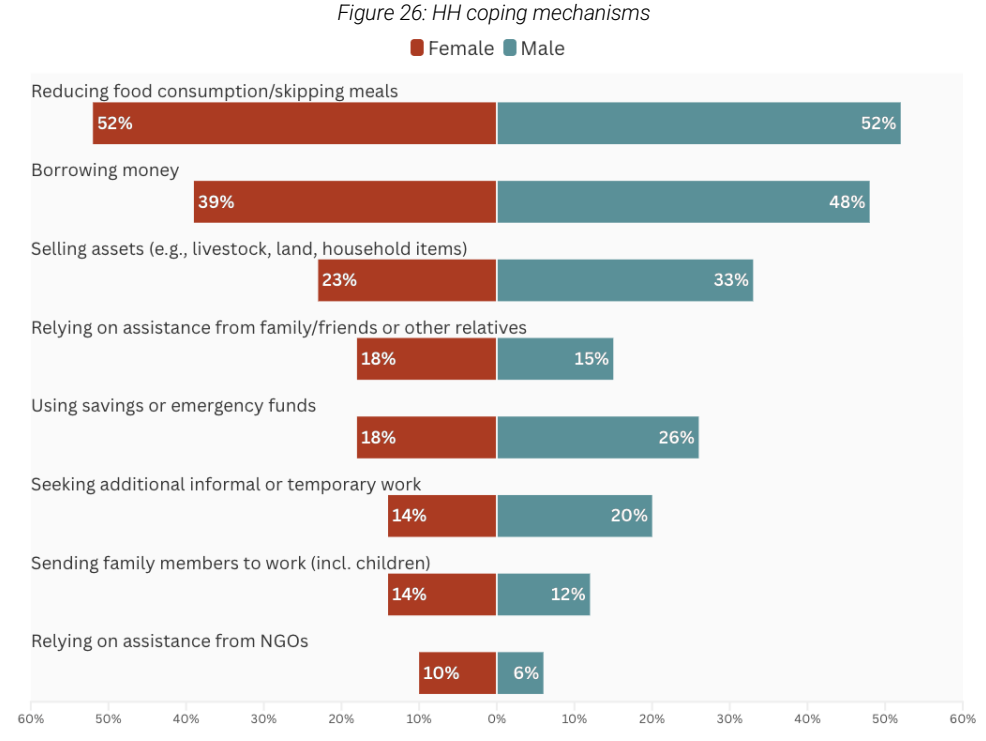
7.3.3. Coping Mechanisms[106]

The range and frequency of coping mechanisms employed by HHs facing financial hardship are reflected in the following figures, disaggregated by the gender of the hHH (Figure 26) and by location (Figure 27), highlighting the substantial economic vulnerability across the surveyed population.[107] The most common strategy, reported by over half (52%) of all HHs, is reducing food consumption or skipping meals, an immediate but unsustainable tactic that directly undermines HH health and well-being. Borrowing money from family, friends, or financial institutions is the next most frequent response (44%), followed by selling productive or essential assets such as livestock, land, or HH items (28%).

[106] In the context of this study, **urban locations** typically refer to state capitals (such as Juba, Wau, or Malakal, major county headquarters, or densely populated towns with substantial infrastructure, public services, and economic activity beyond subsistence agriculture. **Rural areas** include most villages and settlements outside town centers and county headquarters. These areas are characterized by low population density, widespread agricultural or pastoral livelihoods, minimal infrastructure, and limited access to services, such as health centers or schools. Housing is typically dispersed, and transportation networks are often unpaved and poorly maintained. **Semi urban locations** are transitional zones that surround major towns or cities, or are emerging trading centers along main roads. They display a mix of rural and urban features, and may host markets, health posts, and schools, and are often sites of rapid expansion, in-migration, or where displaced populations settle on the edge of town centers.

[107] Recent World Bank and African Development Bank assessments set South Sudan's national poverty line at approximately 358,724 South Sudanese Pounds (SSP) per person per year as of late 2024, which on a monthly basis translates to about 29,894 SSP per person per month (assuming a 12-month year). With inflation and currency depreciation ongoing, this threshold may fluctuate, but it provides a working benchmark for contextualizing income data.

Figure 26: HH coping mechanisms

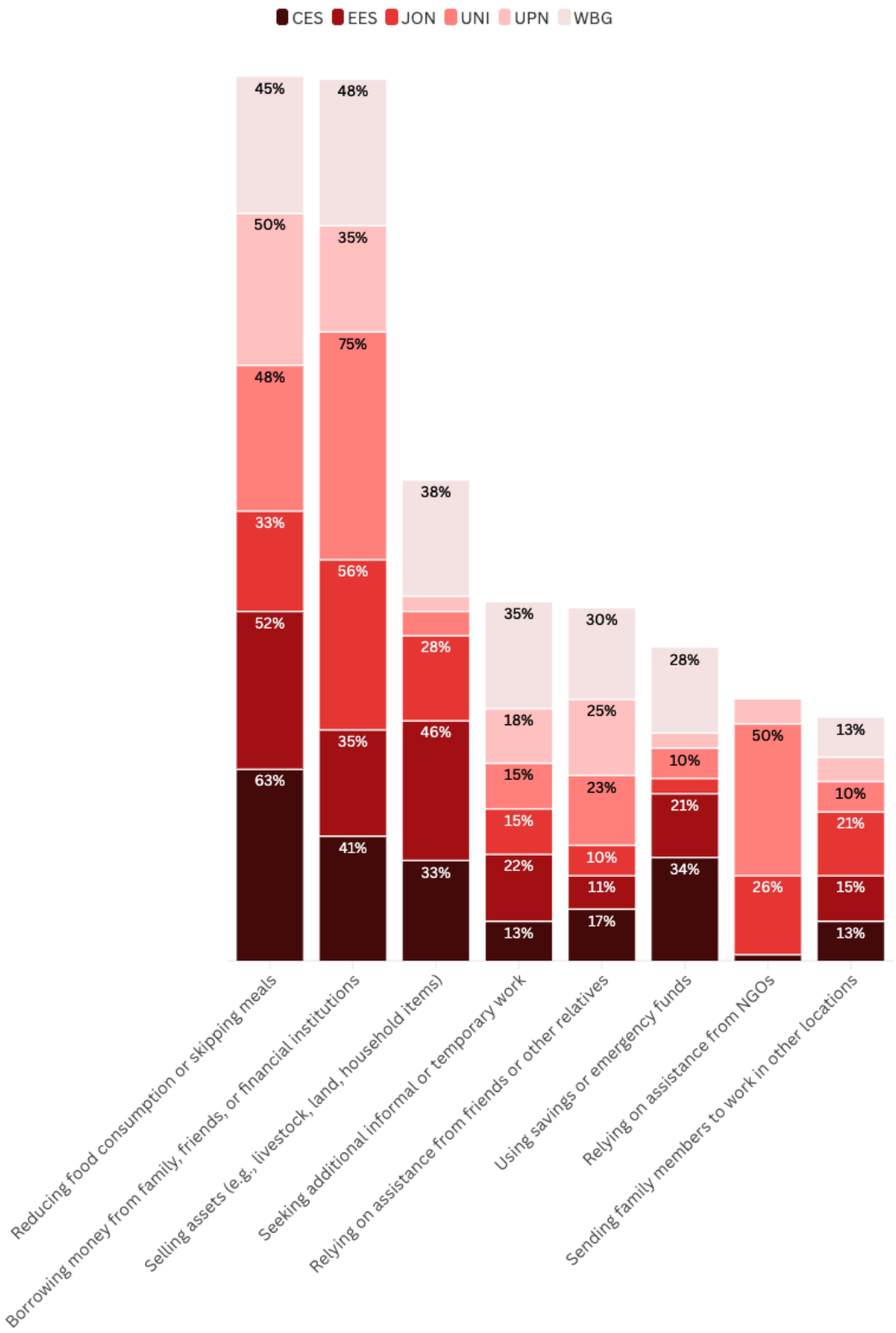


Other frequently adopted measures include using savings or emergency funds (22%) and seeking additional informal or temporary work (17%), while 17% also rely on assistance from friends or relatives, suggesting that social networks continue to play an important but limited role in buffering shocks. Sending family members, including children, to work in other locations was reported by 13% of HHs, underlining the risk of negative coping mechanisms that may impact children's education and well-being. Less common, but still notable, are reliance on assistance from NGOs (8%) and the use of 'other' strategies (2%), such as engaging in casual or subsistence labour (farming, gold mining, firewood collection, or informal commerce).

Collectively, these findings point to a population that relies heavily on immediate, short-term measures to manage financial stress, many of which erode future resilience. The predominance of food-related and asset-based coping strategies is especially concerning, as they have direct implications for both nutritional outcomes and the future productive capacity of affected HHs. A small number of mentioned "other" strategies in open-ended responses, including engaging in casual or subsistence labour such as farming, working in someone's garden or farm for pay, collecting and selling firewood, brewing and selling local alcohol, selling tea, and traveling to gold mining areas to seek income.

As Figure 27 illustrates, most HHs are engaging in multiple, overlapping strategies, often with an emphasis on immediate consumption smoothing at the expense of future security. The relative ranking of responses shifts by state, reflecting variations in local economies, access to social or institutional support, and perhaps exposure to specific shocks (e.g., conflict, displacement, or drought). The prominence of borrowing and reliance on NGOs in Unity and Jonglei signals acute humanitarian need in these regions. Meanwhile, the high rates of reduced consumption and asset sales across several states illustrate the erosion of both short-term well-being and long-term resilience.

Figure 27: Proportion of coping mechanisms reported by state

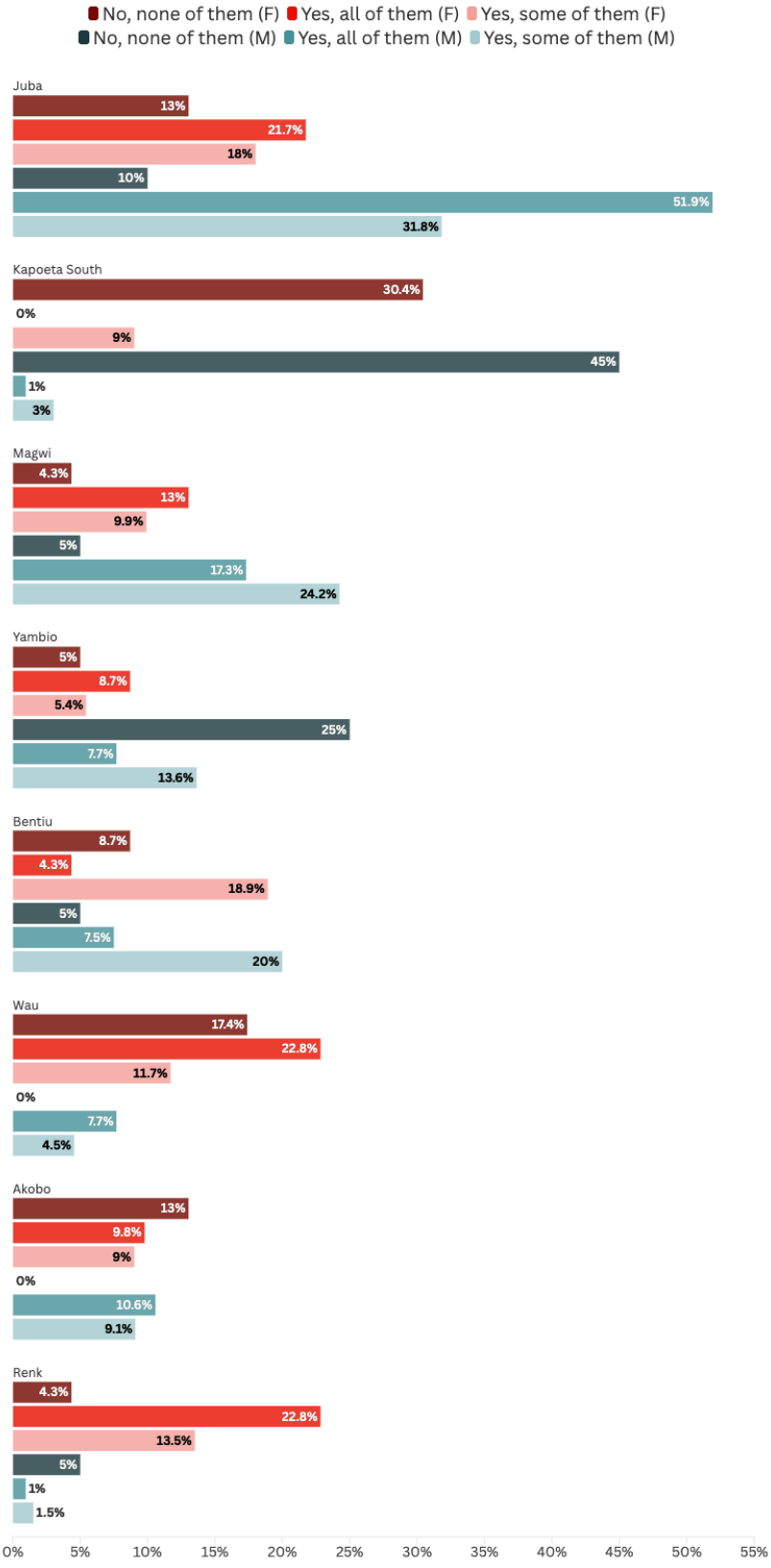


7.3.4. Children's reported school attendance

The data on reported school attendance among children of school-going age within HH, presented in Figure 28 reveal important insights into education access and participation, as well as underlying patterns of vulnerability across the surveyed population. Differences in school attendance patterns are observed across sampled counties, reflecting a combination of local access to education, economic barriers, and

gendered HH dynamics. Across the entire sample, a little over half of all HHs (54.6%) reported that their children are attending school full time, while the rest are divided among those whose children attend only some of the time or not at all.

Figure 28: Reported school attendance of HH children per county and gender of hHH



Disaggregating by gender of the hHH, female-headed HH constitute a slightly higher share among those whose children attend school only part time or not at all, suggesting that female-headed HH may face distinct challenges in ensuring regular school participation for their children. However, when examining the overall sample, both male- and female-headed HHs are substantially represented in all attendance categories, indicating that barriers to education are broad-based and not isolated to a single demographic.

Geographically, the share of HHs with children attending school full time varies widely. Juba stands out, HHs there account for over a fifth (18.9%) of all those surveyed with children in school, and have the highest proportion of HHs whose children are attending full time (21.7%). Conversely, areas such as Akobo, Magwi, Yambio, and Bentiu each contribute less than 12% to the total, reflecting both the distribution of the sample and likely disparities in access to education infrastructure.

Some locations highlight particularly acute barriers to education, as reported by respondents: for example, in Kapoeta South, all non-attendance is attributed to a lack of schools in the area, indicating structural obstacles rather than individual HH decisions. Meanwhile, in other counties, such as Akobo and Yambio, both full and partial attendance rates remain relatively low, and a notable proportion of HH report that none of their children are currently attending school.

7.4. PERCEPTION OF CHILD LABOUR: COMMUNITY-LEVEL FACTORS

Child labour is widely observed and normalized across most counties, with half of respondents reporting that children in their communities "sometimes" work and one in four saying they "always" do. Renk, Bentiu, and Wau showed the highest perceived frequency, while Juba stood out with the highest share of respondents who had never observed child labour. Community acceptability of child work is also high, especially when it helps meet basic needs or doesn't interfere with education or health. Economic hardship was consistently cited as the main justification, with notable regional and gendered differences in views. Perceptions of the impact of child labour are mixed: most respondents believe the effect depends on the type of work, though in some counties, women lean toward its positive contributions to family survival, while others (particularly in Renk and Akobo) view it more negatively. The most commonly cited drivers include financial pressure on HHs, children needing to cover school costs, and the lack of access to quality education. Social norms and expectations, particularly around gender roles and maturity, also play a major role in shaping children's entry into the workforce.

7.4.1. Observation of children working in the community

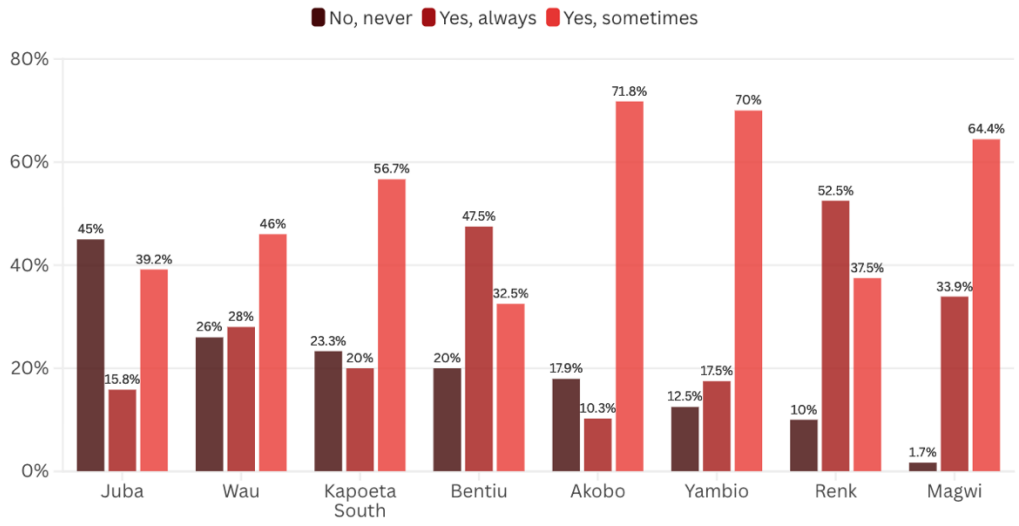
The data presented in Figure 29 on community observations of child labour provide critical insight into the local perceptions and prevalence of children under 18 engaging in work across different locations. When asked *"Have you ever observed or heard of children below the age of 18 years old involving in any work in this community"* overall, half of all respondents (50%) report that children are "sometimes" involved in work within their communities, highlighting that child labour is a common, though not constant, phenomenon. Meanwhile, about a quarter (26%) say that children are "always" involved in labour, suggesting a persistent presence in certain areas, and 24% have never observed or heard of children working.

Disaggregated by location, there is significant variation in these perceptions. In Magwi and Yambio, for example, the majority (64% and 70% respectively) report that children sometimes work, with relatively low reports of constant involvement ("yes, always" at 34% and 18%). Renk stands out with over half (55%) saying children always work, indicating a particularly high and consistent exposure to child labour in that community. Bentiu and Wau also report elevated rates of constant child labour, 45% and 28% respectively, alongside substantial "sometimes" responses, underscoring ongoing challenges. Conversely, Juba shows the highest proportion of respondents (45%) reporting never observing child labour, reflecting either better enforcement, more schooling, or urban differences in economic activities.

Locations such as Akobo and Kapoeta South fall somewhere in between, with 72% and 57% respectively saying children sometimes work, and notable but smaller shares witnessing constant involvement. These findings suggest that child labour is viewed as a widespread issue across much of the surveyed area but varies in intensity and frequency between communities.

These findings suggest that child labour is a highly visible and normalized phenomenon in most parts of the country, but the form, frequency, and framing of such work differ substantially. Counties like Renk and Bentiu show signs of structural dependency on child labour, while in places like Akobo and Yambio, its visibility is high but characterized as more situational.

Figure 29 : Prevalence of observed or heard-of child labour by county (% of respondents)



"Here, it is normal for children to work from a young age. If you don't help your family, people will say you are lazy or spoiled. Even in school, teachers expect us to be working outside class hours."

(FGD, Youth, Wau)

"We start working from when we are small. My first job was to fetch water for the house and then go to the farm. If you refuse, you are called stubborn and beaten. Even now, I help my mother with brewing and my brothers herd the goats. There is no rest."

(FGD, Female Youth, Yambio)

7.4.2. Community acceptability of child labour

The findings on community attitudes toward the acceptability of child work, as visualized in Figure 30, reveal substantial variation across locations and genders, yet common themes emerge around the drivers and acceptability of child labour. Across the full sample, just over a third of respondents (35%) believe it is acceptable for children to work if it helps meet the family's basic needs, while 40% condone it so long as it does not interfere with the child's education and health. Only about 10% restrict acceptability to emergencies or extreme circumstances, while another 10% maintain that child work is never acceptable under any circumstances. Only a handful of respondents provided no opinion or expressed uncertainty.

These quantitative results are revealed in daily realities and layered social expectations, as reflected in participants' own words. Economic hardship stands out as the primary justification for accepting child labour. As a male youth in Akobo described, *"People here believe that a child who does not work will become a thief or useless. Even our parents say that work is good for discipline."* (FGD, Male Youth, Akobo) In this context, survival and social order are deeply interlinked with children's work, and the community sees labour as both an economic imperative and a source of moral standing.

Across locations, however, social norms and thresholds for acceptability differ: In Akobo, a striking 59% of females and 35% of males accept child labour to meet basic needs, and an additional 32% (female) and 41% (male) permit it provided it does not disrupt schooling or health. Here, as echoed in FGD testimony, child labour is embedded in local social identity: *"In our place, if a boy does not know how to take care of cows by the time he is 10, people will laugh at his father. It is shameful. You must prove you are strong. That is how we grow up."* (FGD, Male, Akobo) Another stated, *"Some boys never come back [from cattle raids]. Our fathers say this is how men are made."* These narratives highlight that in Akobo, child labour serves as a rite of passage, not only a coping strategy.

> *"People here believe that a child who does not work will become a thief or useless. Even our parents say that work is good for discipline."*
>
> *(FGD, Male Youth, Akobo)*

In Magwi, while economic necessity justifies child labour for 29% of females, male respondents are more likely to emphasize conditional acceptability (32%), that any work should not interfere with education. FGD participants in Magwi reinforced this dual framing: *"People in my community say that a child who does not work will become useless. Even if you are sick, you must help with something. Only children of rich people can rest." (FGD, Male,, Magwi)* The data and testimony together highlight a moral, as well as material, logic for work, with decisions shaped heavily by caregivers or, for some children without parental care, self-initiation: "*They decide by themselves...nobody takes care of them."* (FGD, Female, Magwi)

In Renk, there is a notably higher proportion compared with other locations who believe child work is never acceptable (38% female, 33% male), marking a more protective community stance.

In Juba, conditionality is the dominant theme: nearly half of both female (44%) and male (51%) respondents accept child labour only if it does not interfere with education or health, while a sizable share (23% female) reject it outright. As one participant from Wau explained, *"Now every work can be done by both [genders], but in our community it is not the case."* (FGD, Female, Wau) This suggests aspirations toward changing norms, but with traditional divisions persisting.

In Kapoeta South and Magwi, the economic justification is again prominent, but a growing minority, especially men in Kapoeta South (27%), favor stricter conditionality or rejection, hinting at changing views amid persistent need. Traditional gender divisions were openly recognized: *"There are certain work boys can do like hard jobs and girls cannot manage"* (FGD, Female, Magwi), but necessity forces some fluidity.

Yambio and Wau are notable for high levels of support for child work only if it doesn't interfere with school or health (78% and 49% of females, respectively). In Yambio, the gendered pattern persists: *"In our community, boys are not allowed to cook and girls are not allowed to offload things."* (FGD, Male, Yambio) Yet as one respondent pointed out, *"At a certain point both genders do the same work, like you can get a male child fetching water and also a female child do the same,"* while another noted, *"It is acceptable if the child is able and willing."* (FGD, Male, Yambio)

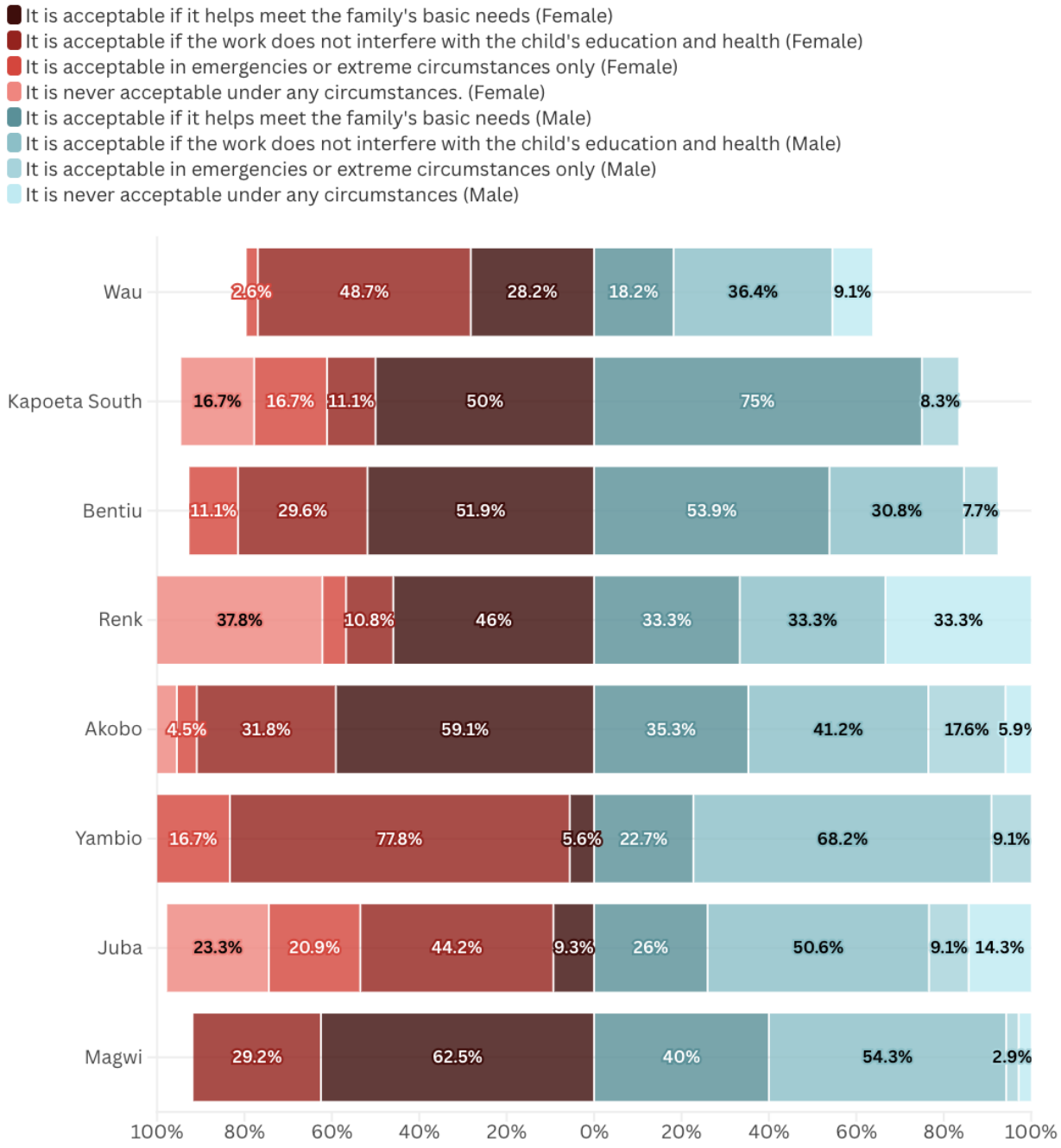
In Bentiu, the rationale of family basic needs is again strong among females (33%), with more diverse opinions among males and recognition of economic pressures: *"Some parents cannot afford basic needs to their children so they decided to send them to look for any kind of job to do and earn money...that is common in our community."* (FGD, Female, Bentiu) Decisions about children's work were sometimes pragmatic, sometimes dictated by economic desperation.

Gendered roles and expectations are evident throughout the study. Female respondents consistently cite economic necessity as justification for child labour, reflecting the acute pressures they navigate as HH caregivers. Male respondents, on the other hand, are more likely to stress schooling, or reject child labour under any circumstances, particularly in more urban or service-rich areas like Juba and Magwi.

Peer influence and family structures also play a role in children's entry into work. For girls, peer pressure was explicitly mentioned: *"If it is a peer group who decides, if you are a girl...they will tell you to come and join them."* (FGD, Female, Yambio) For boys, employment may be the only means to continue education: *"Some parents will say I cannot pay a male child at school, that is when a child will decide to go out searching for a job to pay his school fees."* (FGD, Male, Magwi)

The findings reveal broad tolerance, sometimes necessity, for child work in crisis-affected and impoverished communities, but with strong variations in normative thresholds and an emerging discourse around education and rights. As one community member from Wau succinctly summed up the dynamic tension between local tradition and global standards: *"In this community, there are certain work boys can do but girls cannot do, but according to the International Community any work can be done by both genders."* (FGD, Wau).

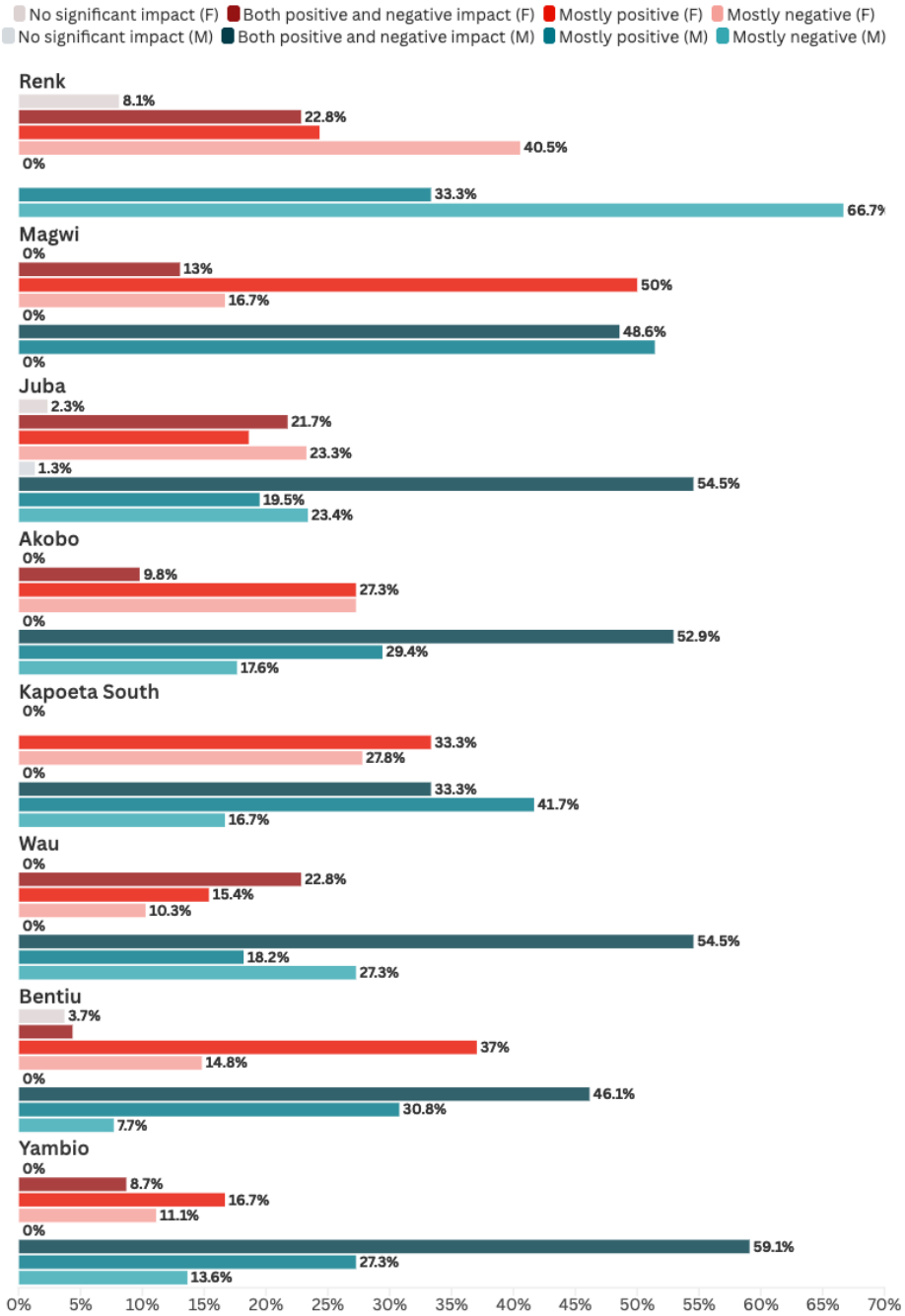
Figure 30: Perceived acceptability of child labour by county and gender (% of respondents within each county)



7.4.3. Perceived impacts of child labour on future prospects

When asked on whether they think that work during childhood might influence a child's prospects, either positively or negatively, most respondents indicated that the effects depend on the type of work involved, suggesting a widespread belief that context, intensity, and purpose matter, as Figure 31 illustrates.

Figure 31: Perceived impacts of child labour on future prospects by gender



The Chi-Square test examining whether perceptions about the effects of child labour differ by the gender of the hHH shows no statistically significant association ($\chi^2 = 3.89$, $p = 0.4214$). Observed counts for both male- and female-headed HHs closely match expected counts across perception categories, indicating that perception is independent of gender.

Among female respondents, a majority in several areas report that child labour has mostly positive impacts, with Magwi (50%) and Bentiu (37%) standing out as locations where this perception is most

prevalent. This suggests a recognition among women of the essential role child work plays in contributing to HH survival or skill development, despite potential downsides. However, a notable share of females in places like Renk (41%) and Akobo (27%) perceive child labour as having mostly negative impacts, reflecting concerns over harm to children's wellbeing.

Male respondents similarly exhibit a strong tendency to see child labour as having both positive and negative impacts, especially in Akobo (53%), Bentiu (46%), and Juba (55%). In Magwi and Kapoeta South, males lean more toward the predominantly positive impacts (51% and 42%, respectively), indicating some acceptance combined with optimism about its benefits. Conversely, in Renk, male respondents overwhelmingly view child labour as mostly negative (67%), mirroring female concerns and highlighting perhaps a more protective or critical stance locally.

Locations such as Yambio and Wau reflect a mixed picture with sizable proportions of males recognizing both positive and negative aspects, while females in these areas tend to split between positive and no significant impact perspectives. This balance underscores ongoing debates within communities about child labour's place in social and economic life.

Overall, the data reveal significant gender and regional variation. Women often emphasize the positive contributions of child labour to family livelihoods, consistent with their critical caregiving roles and economic pressures. Men's responses are more polarized or balanced between benefits and harms, perhaps reflecting broader considerations of social costs or a more cautious outlook. A notable outlier in community attitudes was registered in Upper Nile, where 43% of all respondents indicated that child labour has mostly negative effects, making it the only sampled county where this view prevailed.

These perspectives should be understood within their local socioeconomic contexts where child labour is intertwined with survival strategies, educational opportunity, and evolving norms. The coexistence of positive and negative perceptions signals the challenges in framing child labour simply as abuse or exploitation. It is also tied to complex realities of poverty reduction and social identity across South Sudan.

7.4.4. Perceived drivers of child labour

Responding to the question *"In your view, what are the key factors that might lead children in your community to work outside their homes, either while attending school or instead of attending school",*[108] participants identified a combination of structural, economic, and social pressures as key drivers of child labour in their communities (Figure 32).In all locations, the dominant reason cited is to support the family's financial needs, with remarkably high proportions in Bentiu (98%), Magwi (73%), Renk (93%), and Kapoeta South (73%), reflecting the acute economic pressures faced by HHs, where child labour is an essential coping mechanism to supplement income and meet survival needs.

Closely following this is the necessity for children to cover their own school-related expenses such as fees and uniforms. This reason is especially prominent in Western Equatoria (98%), Magwi (85%), and Juba (79%), indicating that even when children attend school, the financial burden of education often compels them to work. In locations like Yambio and Wau, more than half the respondents also highlight this as a key motivator.

The perceived wish of children to gain work experience or learn useful skills appears in many locations, ranging from 51% in Magwi to 22% in Wau. This points to a recognition of some developmental benefits of child labour, particularly in rural or economically fragile areas where experience may be as valuable as formal education. A personal choice to become more independent or responsible is cited by a notable minority (31–48%) of respondents in many areas, illustrating how some children or families view work as a positive step toward maturity. Challenges related to accessing quality education, including distance, cost, and availability, are significant in places like Western Equatoria (60%) and Yambio (60%), but less so in Bentiu (8%) and Kapoeta South (7%), suggesting geographic disparities in education infrastructure and access. Family or cultural expectations to contribute to HH income are also reported in many locations

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108 The study measured household vulnerability through a self-reported inventory of coping mechanisms used in the previous four weeks to manage hardship, whether related to food, finances, or broader shocks. Respondents were able to select multiple strategies, including: Reducing food consumption or skipping meals, borrowing money, selling assets, using savings or emergency funds, seeking informal work, sending family members to work elsewhere, and relying on NGO or informal support. Unlike standardized tools such as the WFP's Coping Strategies Index (CSI), which assigns severity weights to a fixed list of food-related behaviours and is designed for quantitative scoring, this approach reflects a broader range of coping mechanisms, including financial and labour-related strategies, which were more suited to the scope of the present research.

(ranging from about 25% in Juba to 43% in Yambio), emphasizing the social norms that legitimize child work in some communities.

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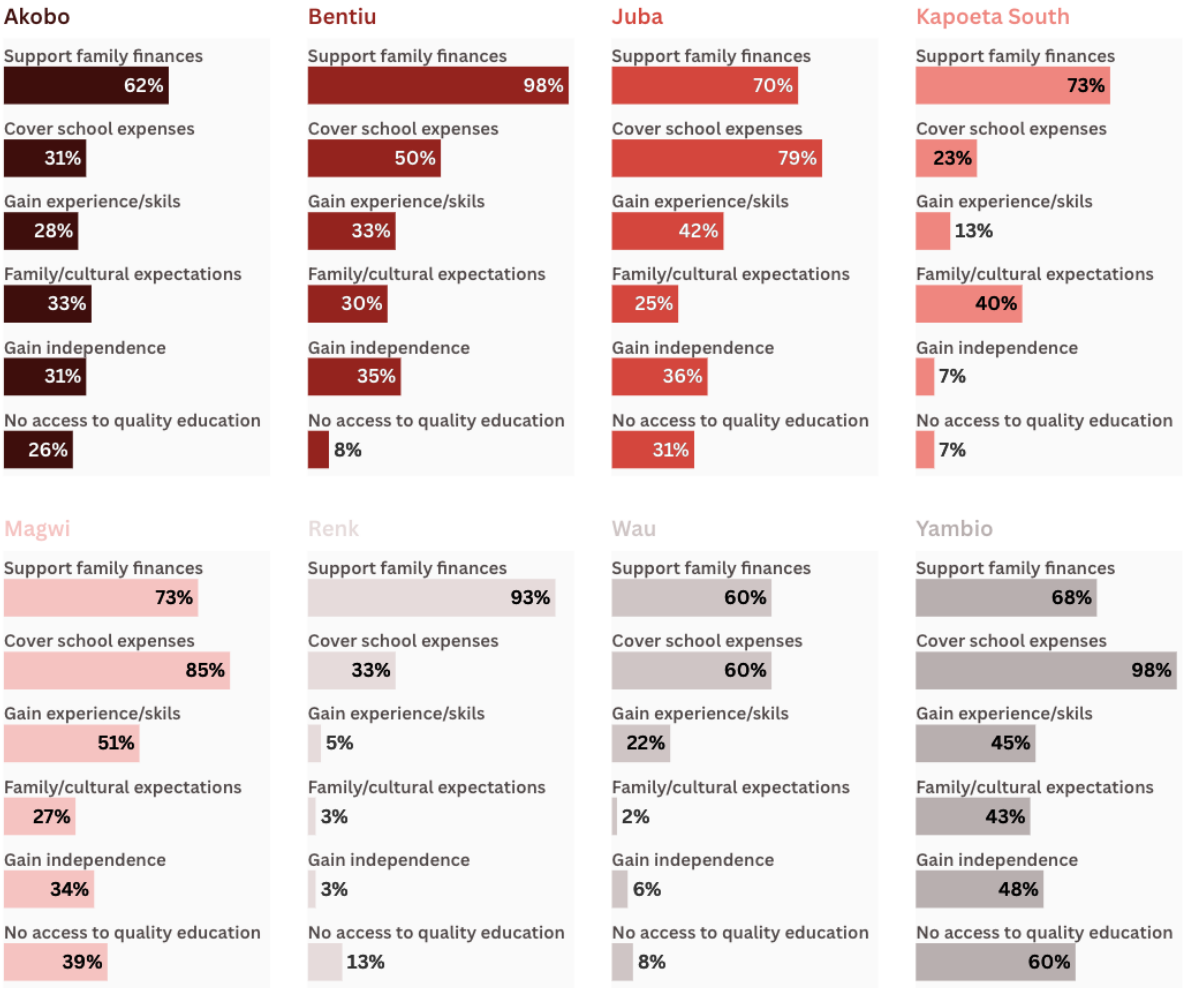
Figure 32: Perceived drivers of child work by county



7.5. CHILDRENS' RIGHTS AND CHILD PROTECTION SERVICES AWARENESS

Key findings from this section reveal substantial regional and gendered variation in both awareness of children's rights and knowledge of available child protection services. Nearly 69% of HHs reported having heard about laws regulating child labour, with the highest levels of awareness observed in Yambio, Akobo, and Magwi. Urban areas accounted for over half of all respondents aware of child rights, and male-headed HHs were slightly more likely to report awareness than female-headed ones, although in some counties women reported higher knowledge. Despite this, only 45% of HHs knew of a place, organization, or person to report mistreatment of working children, exposing significant gaps in service visibility. Awareness of reporting mechanisms was highest in Yambio, Akobo, Magwi, and Kapoeta South, but strikingly low in Renk, Juba, and Wau. Information most often came through radio, community meetings, and NGO programming, with schools and religious leaders also playing important roles. However, low awareness in some

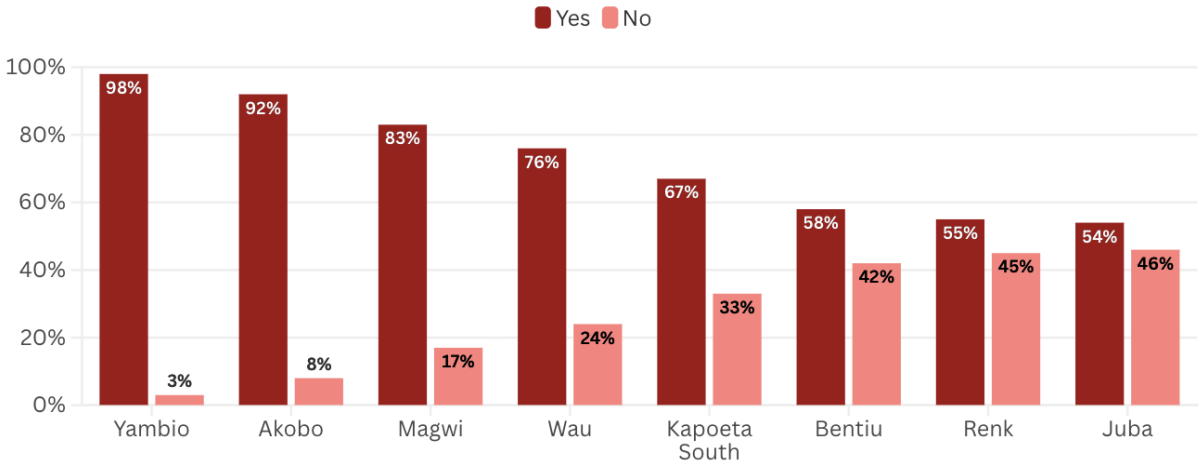
counties, particularly of reporting mechanisms, highlights the need for expanded outreach and strengthened local child protection structures.

7.5.1. Awareness of child rights and legal protections

The findings on hHH awareness of children's rights and laws concerning child labour reveal significant variation across regions and highlight important gender dynamics. Overall, nearly 69% of HHs reported having heard about laws or rights that regulate the types of work children can undertake, indicating a substantial level of community awareness.

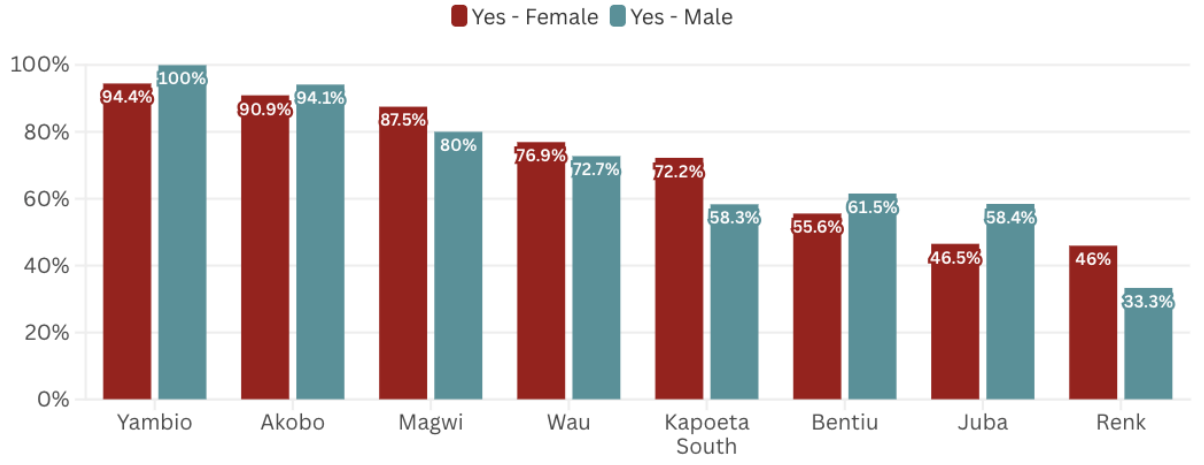
Yambio, Akobo, Magqi and Wau stand out with notably higher awareness levels, suggesting that outreach or education efforts may have been more effective or widespread in these areas. This is underscored by near-universal awareness in Yambio, where 98% of respondents reported familiarity with children's rights related to labour (Figure 33.) Kapoeta South, Bentiu, Renk and Juba show more moderate awareness levels, with about half to two-thirds of hHHs indicating they have heard about child labour laws.

Figure 33: Proportion of awareness of children's rights by location



Gender disaggregation reveals interesting patterns (see Figure 34). In most locations, male-headed HHs report slightly higher awareness of children's labour rights than their female-headed counterparts, although the gap is relatively modest. For example, in Akobo, 94% of male heads reported awareness compared to 91% of females; in Juba, the difference is more pronounced (58% males vs. 47% females). In some counties, such as Magwi and Yambio, awareness among female-headed HHs is particularly high (up to 87–94%), reflecting perhaps targeted sensitization efforts among women caregivers.

Figure 34: Geographic distribution of child rights awareness, by gender and county



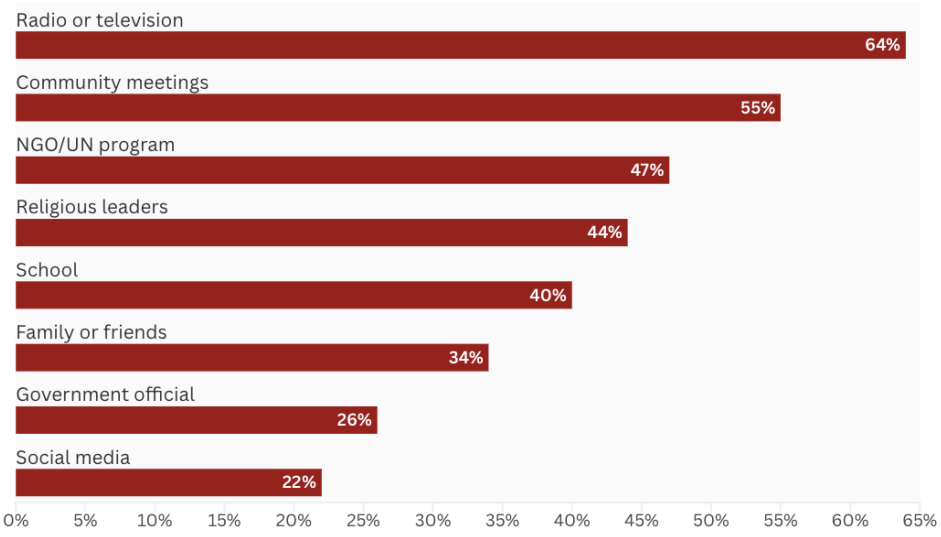
Overall, the data suggest a positive trend in the knowledge of children's rights and labour laws across much of South Sudan, although pockets of lower awareness persist.

By settlement type, urban areas account for the largest share (54%) of those aware of children's rights, reflecting stronger access to media, civil society, or institutional outreach. Notably, awareness in urban areas is fairly balanced across genders (49% female and 51% male) suggesting relatively equal information flows in urban settings.

The data shows a borderline statistically significant association ($\chi^2 = 3.82$, $p = 0.051$) between parental awareness of children's rights and labour laws and whether their children were involved in hazardous work. Among children not engaged in hazardous labour, 63.5% had caregivers who were aware of children's rights and labour laws. Among children who were engaged in hazardous work, this proportion was slightly higher at 72.5%.

When asked where they had heard about children's rights or laws governing child labour, respondents most frequently cited radio or television, with 64% of hHHs reporting these media as a primary channel of information (see Figure 34). Community gatherings are also highly influential: 55% of respondents heard about children's rights through community meetings, demonstrating the role of collective discussion and local leadership in shaping norms and awareness. Nearly half (47%) of hHHs cite NGO or UN programs as an important source, reflecting the impact of humanitarian and development actors in promoting legal knowledge where state outreach may be limited. Religious leaders (44%) and schools (40%) also play a significant part, showing that both spiritual and educational institutions are trusted messengers within their communities. Information from family or friends (34%) and government officials (26%) follows, suggesting that while interpersonal networks and state messaging matter, they are less central than media and community institutions. Finally, social media (22%) is an emerging but still less prominent source.

Figure 35: Caregiver source of knowledge about children's rights' and laws on child labour, by gender.



7.5.2. Awareness of Child Protection Services and Reporting Mechanisms

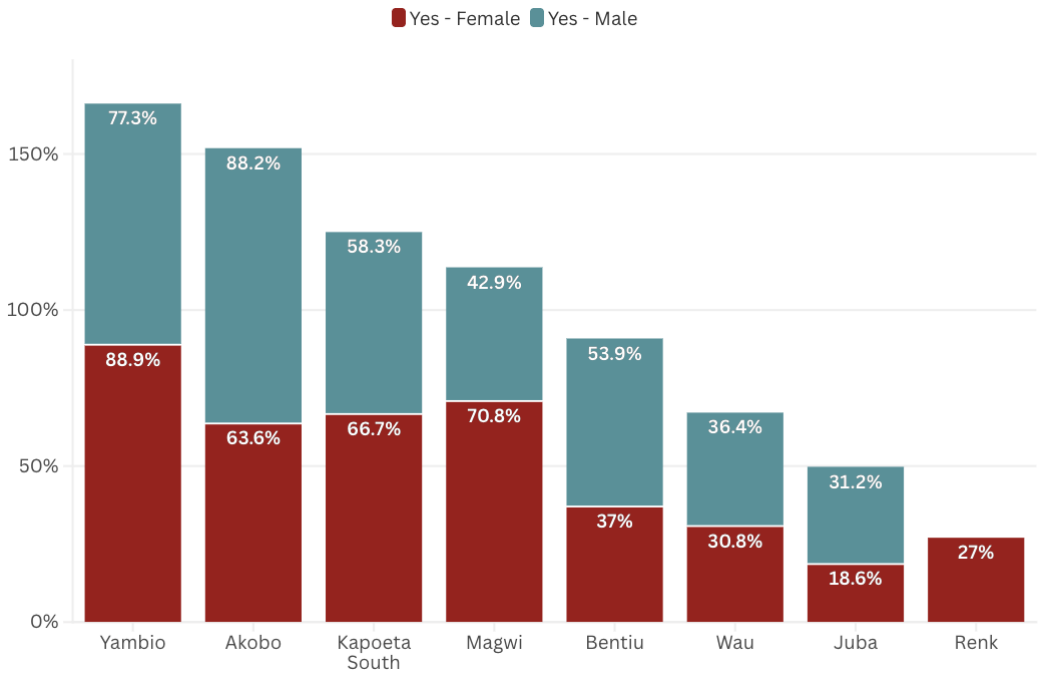
Nationwide, less than half (45%) of hHHs are aware of at least one such service or organization in their area, while a slight majority (55%) report no such awareness, suggesting gaps in service visibility or limited outreach in many communities.

Geographical disparities stand out,with Yambio, Akobo, Magwi, and Kapoeta South report the highest awareness levels, with two-thirds to nearly 90% of respondents in these locations knowing where to report child mistreatment at work (see Figure 36). Conversely, urban centers such as Juba and several other counties like Wau, Bentiu, and especially Renk, where 73% (female) to 100% (male) report not being aware of any reporting services, lag behind, exposing at-risk children to greater vulnerability due to lack of

accessible reporting mechanisms. Gender patterns are minimal overall, with both female- and male-headed HHs exhibiting similar levels of awareness (about 43% and 47%, respectively). This suggests that information on reporting services, when available, reaches both genders relatively equally.

The Chi-Square test results show no statistically significant difference in awareness of reporting mechanisms by the gender of the hHH ($\chi^2 = 0.38$, $p = 0.5353$). Observed and expected counts are closely aligned for both male- and female-headed HHs, indicating independence between gender and awareness.

Figure 36: Awareness of child protection services for reporting mistreatment by gender.



7.6. CHILD DEMOGRAPHICS

The sample consisted of 418 children aged 12–17, with a majority being girls (57%). Most children had both parents alive (72%), but a notable 22% lived with only their mother, pointing to a high prevalence of female-headed or single-mother HHs. While most respondents were biological children of the hHH (76%), others, such as nieces, nephews, or grandchildren, reflected the broader caregiving structures common in South Sudan. First-born children made up the largest birth-order group (31%), which may influence their likelihood of engaging in labour due to added family responsibilities. Focus group findings reveal that children often begin working as early as 7–8 years old, especially in cases of orphanhood or economic hardship. Caregivers typically make the decision based on perceived maturity and financial need, with work framed as both a necessity and a form of early independence. Overall, children's entry into labour is shaped by a complex mix of HH composition, caregiving arrangements, and socioeconomic pressure.

A total of 418 child respondents participated in the survey (57% girls and 43% boys). In terms of age, the sample was well-distributed across the 12–17 age range (see Figure 37), with the highest concentration among 17-year-olds (23.8%) and the fewest at age 13 (11.6%). The mean age was 14.58 years (Figure 38) The majority of children (72%) reported that both their parents are alive, while a significant 22% indicated that only their mother is alive, and a small minority reported having lost both parents (3%) or living with only their father (3%). These data suggest a relatively high rate of single-mother caregiving HHs (see Figure 37).

Figure 37: Children's gender distribution (left) and parental status (right)

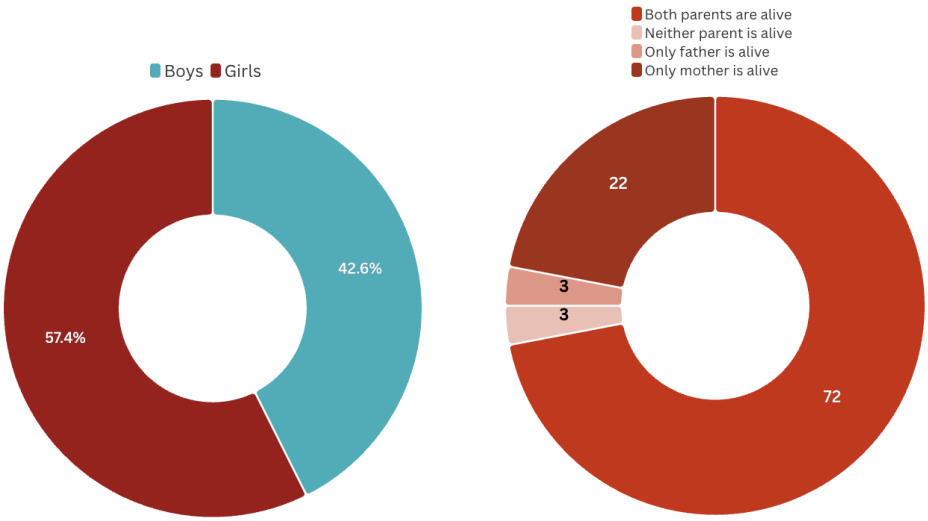
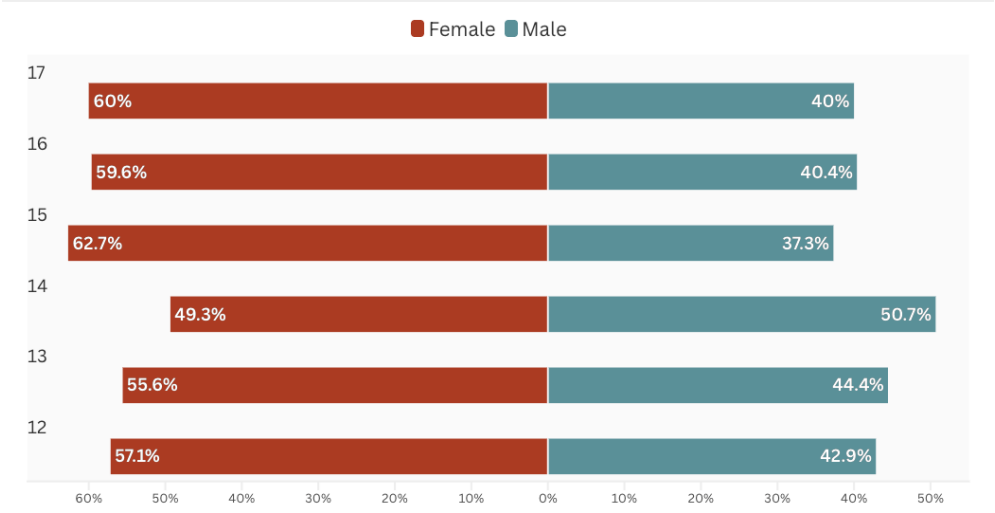
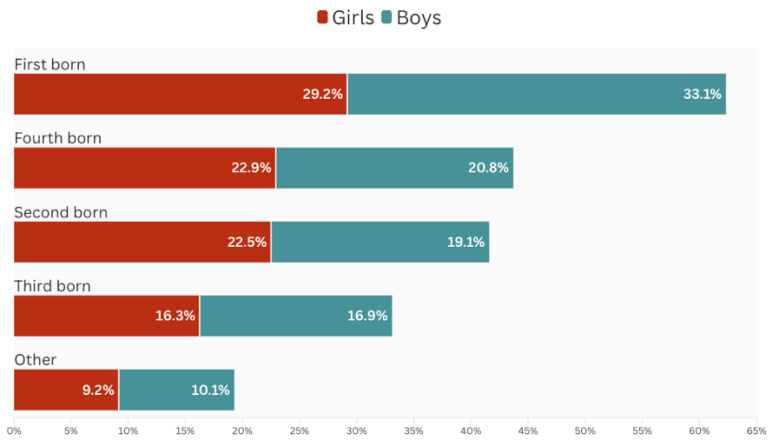


Figure 38: Age distribution of child respondents by gender



Respondents were relatively evenly spread across birth orders, with first-born children (31%) and fourth-born children (22%) comprising the largest groups (see Figure 39). Birth order is often linked to differentiated HH roles, with first-borns (particularly girls) frequently assuming added responsibilities such as caregiving or income-generating tasks. A majority of the child respondents (76%) were the biological children of the hHH, but others held varying positions in the family structure, including nieces/nephews (11%), grandchildren (5%), and siblings (5%). This diversity in caregiving relationships suggests that not all children are under the care of their direct parents, as is common in the context of South Sudan, which may influence protection, decision-making, and exposure to work.

Figure 39: Birth order of child respondents by gender



7.6.1. Labour entry age

The age at which children begin working varies widely across South Sudan, with focus group discussions revealing that entry into labour is shaped by a mix of HH circumstances, parental judgement, and socioeconomic conditions. While there is no uniform age threshold, participants repeatedly referenced a range beginning as early as seven or eight years old. As one youth explained, *"the age starts from 7 to 17 years,"* though they also noted that *"we cannot give the specific age because it differs"* (FGD, Male, Yambio). Children who have lost their parents or lack adequate care are especially vulnerable to starting work early: *"sometimes you can see [children]working… like their parents died when they are still young and there is no one to take good care of them so they might start working at early age."*

For children who do live with their parents or have been left to the custody of other caregivers, decisions about when to begin working are usually determined by the caregivers themselves. *"Their caregivers decide for them when to start working,"* said one participant, while others highlighted that parents often base this decision on both the perceived maturity of the child and the HH's economic situation. As one respondent put it, *"they will see whether the children are matured enough to start working… they will tell them to go out and work, I don't want to give you money, get a job so that you can buy your basic needs like soap, sandals, cloth for yourself"*. This statement reflects how working is frequently framed not just as a practical contribution, but as a form of early independence under constrained circumstances.

The timing of children's entry into work is also shaped by the level of understanding and values held by parents. *"This depends on the parents,"* explained one participant. *"Some of them their children start at an early age and some allow their children to start work at the age of 15 years"*. Such variation indicates how parental attitudes, HH adversity, and broader community norms all play a role in determining when and why children begin to work.

7.7. CHILD RESPONDENTS' EDUCATION

While a majority (81%) of children reported currently attending school, with similar rates among girls (80.4%) and boys (82%), attendance varies significantly by county. Juba and Magwi show the highest attendance, whereas Kapoeta South stands out for alarmingly low school participation (only 26–27%). Economic constraints are the leading barrier to attendance, disproportionately affecting girls, followed by lack of schools and conflict, particularly in Akobo. There is a statistically significant association between school attendance and involvement in WFCL, though counterintuitively, children attending school are more likely to be engaged in WFCL, suggesting that school enrolment does not automatically shield children from exploitation. Qualitative insights underscore how structural pressures, HH roles, and early exposure to income can pull children away from education. Educational attainment remains low overall: while 71% of children had completed some primary education, only 5% had completed primary school, and less than 1% had completed secondary. Nearly 10% of children had never attended school at all, with extreme

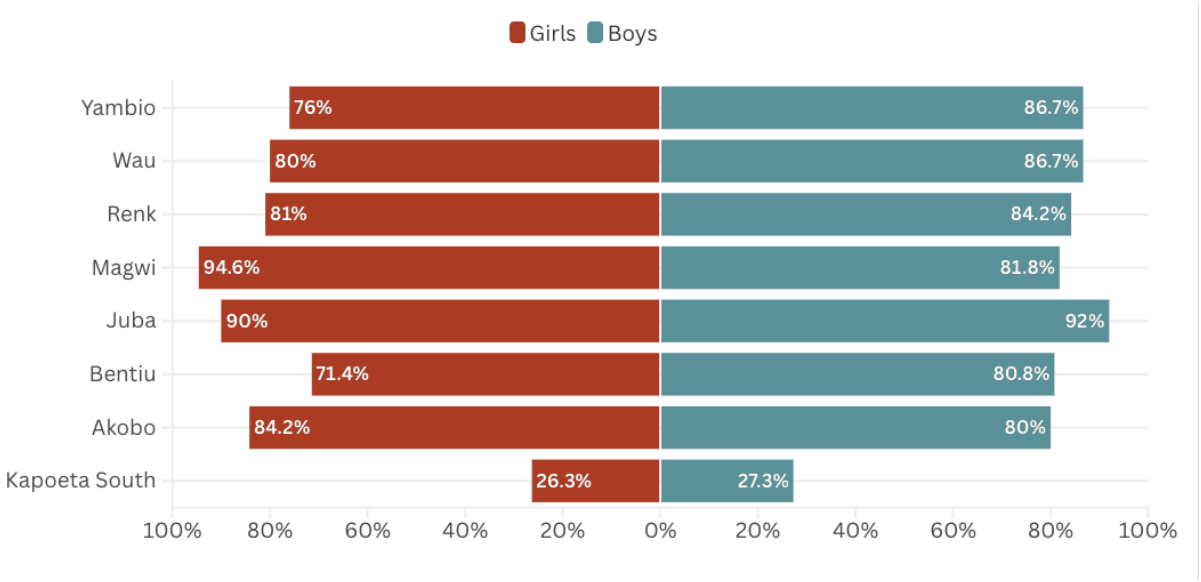
disparities across counties, particularly in Kapoeta South, and visible gendered patterns in both access and achievement.

Among the 418 children who responded to the question about current school attendance, 81% reported that they are currently attending school, with girls (80.4%) and boys (82.0%) exhibiting similar overall attendance rates. This minimal gender gap in the aggregate, however, masks important regional variations and underscores persistent educational challenges faced by children across South Sudan (Figure 40).

Across counties, the highest attendance rates for both girls and boys are observed in Juba and Magwi, where over 90% of respondents reported being in school. This likely reflects better access to schools, educational infrastructure, and targeted programs to support enrolment in urban and peri-urban settings. Conversely, Kapoeta South stands out as an outlier with only 26–27% of children reporting attendance, highlighting significant structural and contextual barriers such as remoteness, insecurity, and economic hardship that limit educational participation there.

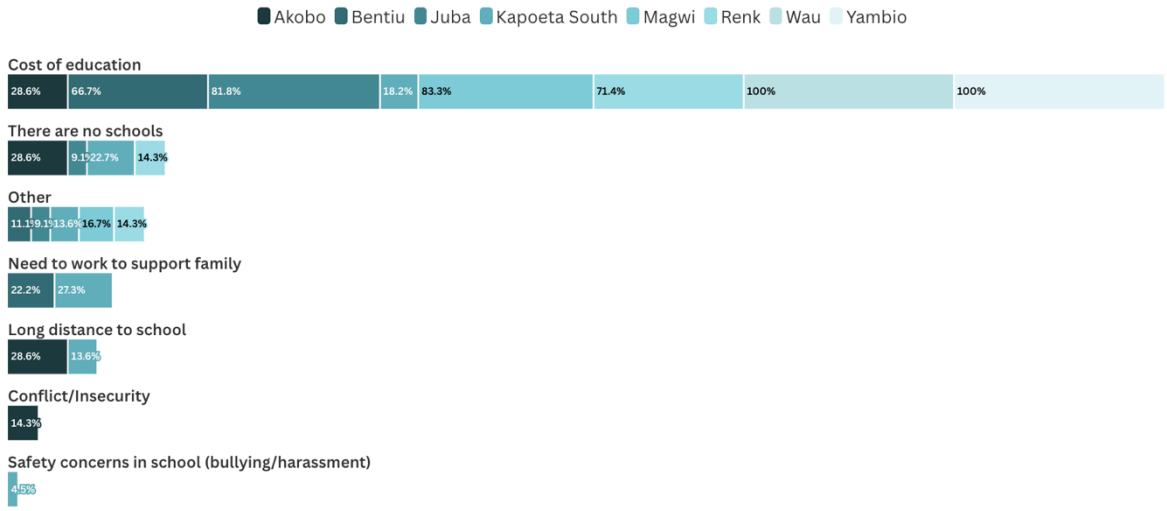
Other regions like Akobo, Bentiu, Renk, Wau, and Yambio show moderately high attendance levels ranging between 76% and 84%, indicating relatively good, but incomplete, enrolment. In these areas, girls and boys generally attend school at similar rates, though subtle differences may point to gender-specific challenges in sustaining attendance. While the overall attendance percentages seem high, self-reported non-attendance averages about 18–19% nationally, with localized spikes in certain regions, such as nearly a quarter of children in Bentiu and Yambio, not attending school.

Figure 40: Percentage of current school attendance by location and gender



Barriers to education are shaped by both structural and gendered constraints in the surveyed locations (see Figure 41). Costs related to education (fees, materials, uniforms) were an overwhelmingly cited reason for school non-attendance, mentioned by 61% of children that reported not attending school at the moment. Girls disproportionately reported this barrier (64% versus 56% of boys), reflecting both economic pressure and possibly lower HH prioritization of girls' education. This result was followed by a reported absence of schools (17%) which was more pronounced in Akobo and Kapoeta South, while conflict was only cited by children in Akobo (33%). Qualitative responses echoed this theme: one girl stated *that "she has never attended school since there is no one to pay her school fees,"* while another noted her parents *"didn't want to take her to school"* despite her desire to go.

Figure 41: Barriers to school attendance by gender in %



> *"I wanted to continue my studies, but after my father died, I had to work in the market. Now, I only go to school sometimes, and my grades are bad because I am always tired."*
>
> *(FGD, Female Youth, Bentiu)*

The data presents a clear and statistically significant relationship between school attendance and involvement in the WFCL ($\chi^2 = 13.97$, $p = 0.000$). Among children currently attending school, 75.8% reported being involved in WFCL, while 24.3% were not. In contrast, among children not attending school, only 9.3% reported involvement in WFCL, while a 90.7% were not involved. The data points to the possibility that school-going children are not necessarily protected from exploitative work, especially in contexts where families rely on children's labour outside of school hours. These findings call for targeted programming that supports school-going children who are at risk of exploitation, rather than assuming that school attendance alone provides adequate protection.

This suggests that children who are out of school are significantly less likely to be engaged in WFCL, which may seem counterintuitive at first glance. A number of qualitative insights reflect the intersection of gender norms and labour expectations. One girl mentioned that *"parents consider them as a source of income through marriage,"* highlighting the embedded cultural norms that divert girls from education in South Sudan. Another child explained that he was *"taking care of the animals"* as the only son in the HH. These narratives reinforce the link between traditional roles and educational exclusion.

Other structural barriers included lack of schools in the area, insecurity, and poor infrastructure, including *"not enough space in classrooms."* While these factors affect both genders, girls were more likely to mention needing permission or support to attend school, pointing to the compounded barriers they face. Additionally, the reasons listed under "Other" include family separation, illness, and responsibilities linked to HH or pastoralist roles.

Attending school while working is widely perceived as uncommon and unsustainable by youth participants, particularly for boys. Respondents emphasized the incompatibility between school schedules and the demands of casual labour, which typically takes place during school hours. As one youth explained, *"school days you can be going to school from Monday to Friday so when will you get that time to go and work… it forces them to drop out."* Others highlighted the full-day nature of many jobs, such as construction or offloading, making it impossible to attend classes and earn income simultaneously.

The consequences of child labour on learning outcomes were also clearly articulated. Participants noted that working children often struggle to follow school rules, lose motivation to return to education, and are tempted by the immediate financial returns of work. *"At tender age when you start earning money, it will be hard to think about education because money is sweet… you forget that education is the key to success,"* one participant remarked. This early exposure to income was seen as diverting attention from long-term educational aspirations.

Gender differences in balancing school and work were acknowledged but framed more in terms of workload and opportunity than innate capacity. Youth noted that both girls and boys face challenges, with boys more visible in physically demanding day jobs. Personal stories reinforced these points. Participants described friends, often orphans or unsupported children, who left school to sustain themselves. One noted, *"some of my friends are orphans… life is hard on them… so they have to quit school searching for odd jobs to survive."* Another recounted the story of a peer who became a boda boda rider to earn income, only to suffer a serious accident and lose both his education and livelihood.

The educational attainment data also reflects respondents' highest completed education level, disaggregated by gender and location (see Figure 42). 71.1% of all children surveyed had completed some primary education, the most common attainment level overall. Girls are more likely than boys to fall into this group (68.8% of girls vs. 74.2% of boys, though your summary mentions a split of 39.5% girls vs. 31.6% boys, likely depending on the proportion within each gender compared to the total sample).

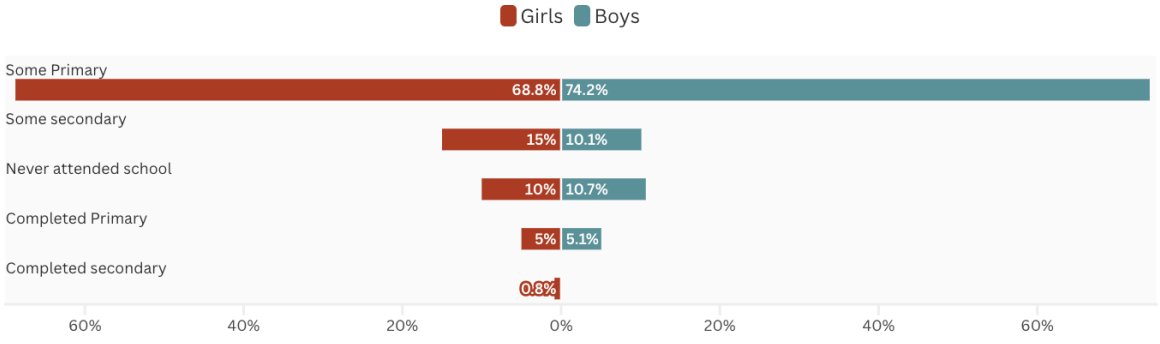
However, only 5% of all children had completed primary school, and less than 1% had completed secondary education, indicating substantial attrition before educational milestones. Moreover, approximately 10.3% of children had never attended school at all, with a slightly higher proportion among girls (10% of girls vs. 10.7% of boys).

Educational attainment varies significantly by location: In Kapoeta South, a staggering 73.7% of girls and 81.8% of boys had never attended school, while in Bentiu and Akobo, the majority have at least some primary education, though completion rates are still low. Juba and Wau see elevated levels of "some secondary" (28.6% girls in Juba, 17.1% in Wau) but few completions of secondary or even primary school. Across all groups, completed secondary education rarely exceeds 1%.

Girls are overrepresented in both extremities: They have a slightly higher share in "never attended school" (5.7%) and also in "some secondary" (15% for girls vs. 10.1% for boys). Boys show slightly higher primary completion: 74.2% of boys had completed some primary schooling, compared to 68.8% of girls.

Overall, both genders lag behind expected grade progression based on age: Given the age range represented (as per earlier age distribution, with most children in mid-adolescence), higher rates of primary completion or higher should be expected, especially since the typically expected age for completing primary school would be 13–14. Children at ages 12–17 would ordinarily be expected to have finished primary and entered, if not completed, early secondary school under normal progression. The low rates of both primary and secondary graduation underscore large gaps between actual educational progression and what would be age-appropriate attainment, while the high proportions in "some primary" suggest that many children are aging out of the education system without completion.

Figure 42: Highest education level attained by gender.



7.8. CHILD LABOUR ENGAGEMENT

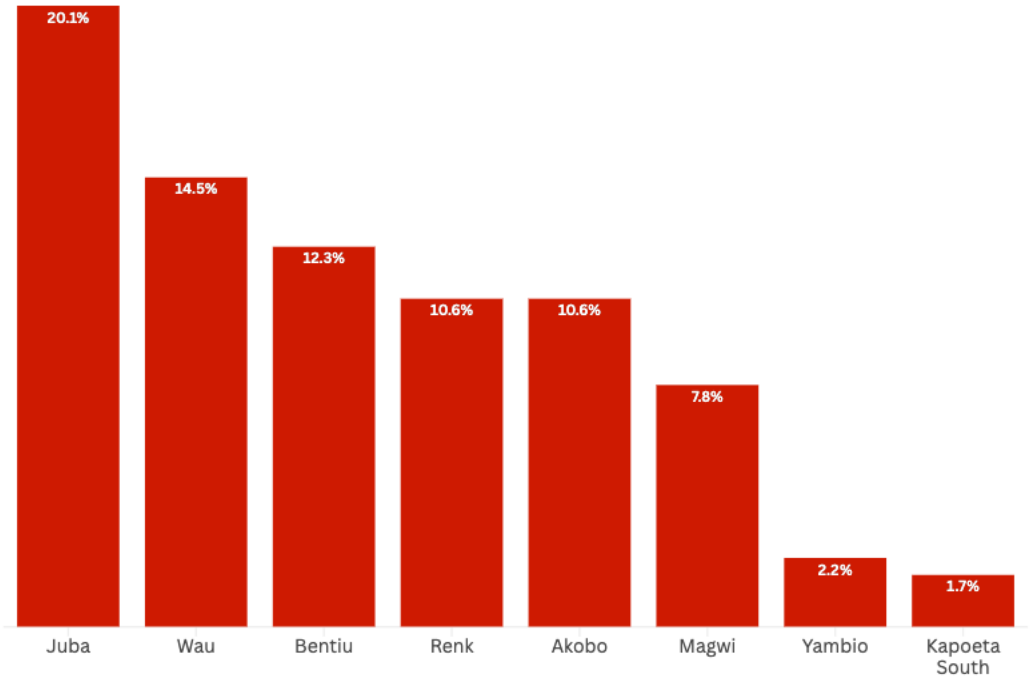
Key findings from this section underscore the near-universal participation of children in work: 98% of surveyed children engage in some form of labour, with 89% meeting the threshold for child labour and 64% exposed to at least one worst form. Over half (57%) reported paid employment, with girls

more likely than boys to be working for pay. The type and prevalence of paid work varied significantly by county, with Juba, Wau, and Bentiu showing the highest rates. Sectoral analysis reveals a predominance of market sales, farming, and domestic work, with girls more concentrated in informal and unpaid roles, while boys more often accessed formal, monetized labour opportunities. One-third of children reported engaging in their own income-generating activities, notably street vending, farming for sale, and charcoal production, often gendered and highly location-specific, such as mining in Kapoeta South and shoe-shining in Bentiu. Nearly half of children (47.8%) worked unpaid in family businesses or farms, with girls more heavily represented, particularly in subsistence-related activities like farming and vending. Girls also bear a significantly heavier load of HH and caregiving tasks, with longer weekly hours across nearly all activity types except HH repairs. A striking share of girls reported 21+ hours per week on caregiving alone, reflecting high time burdens that compromise rest, learning, and well-being. Children also engage in unpaid domestic production activities, with 43% fetching water, 37% farming or fishing, and 32% collecting firewood or charcoal. These findings reveal a complex and gendered labour landscape where girls are overburdened with undervalued and often invisible work, and both boys and girls contribute extensively to family survival, often at the cost of education and childhood.

Answers to the question "*During the past month did you work for someone else for pay for one or more hours?"* indicate that overall, about 57.2% of children reported engaging in paid work. When broken down by gender, girls are more likely to have worked for pay, with 55.2% reporting paid employment, compared to 44.8% of boys.

As Figure 43 illustrates, the proportion of children engaged in paid work across different counties. Juba records the highest percentage, with 20.1% of children involved in paid work, followed by Wau at 14.5% and Bentiu at 12.3%. Both Renk and Akobo each show 10.6%. Magwi falls lower at 7.8%, with Yambio and Kapoeta South showing the lowest figures at 2.2% and 1.7%, respectively. These numbers illustrate a clear variation from county to county, with Juba's proportion nearly ten times that of Kapoeta South. The statistical analysis performed ($\chi^2 = 46.25$, $p < 0.001$)) confirms that these differences are highly significant, and the likelihood of children participating in paid work is strongly dependent on their county of residence.

Figure 43: Child engagement in paid work by location



The analysis of the types of work children engaged in for pay or in exchange for food during the past month reveals that the most common work reported was selling goods in the market or street, which accounted for 42% of the work done. This was followed closely by agriculture or farming (37%), and domestic work including cleaning, laundry, childcare, and cooking (28%). Other notable activities included working in shops (17%), taking care of animals (9%), construction-related work (8%), charcoal production (7%), and casual work in hotels or bars (8%).

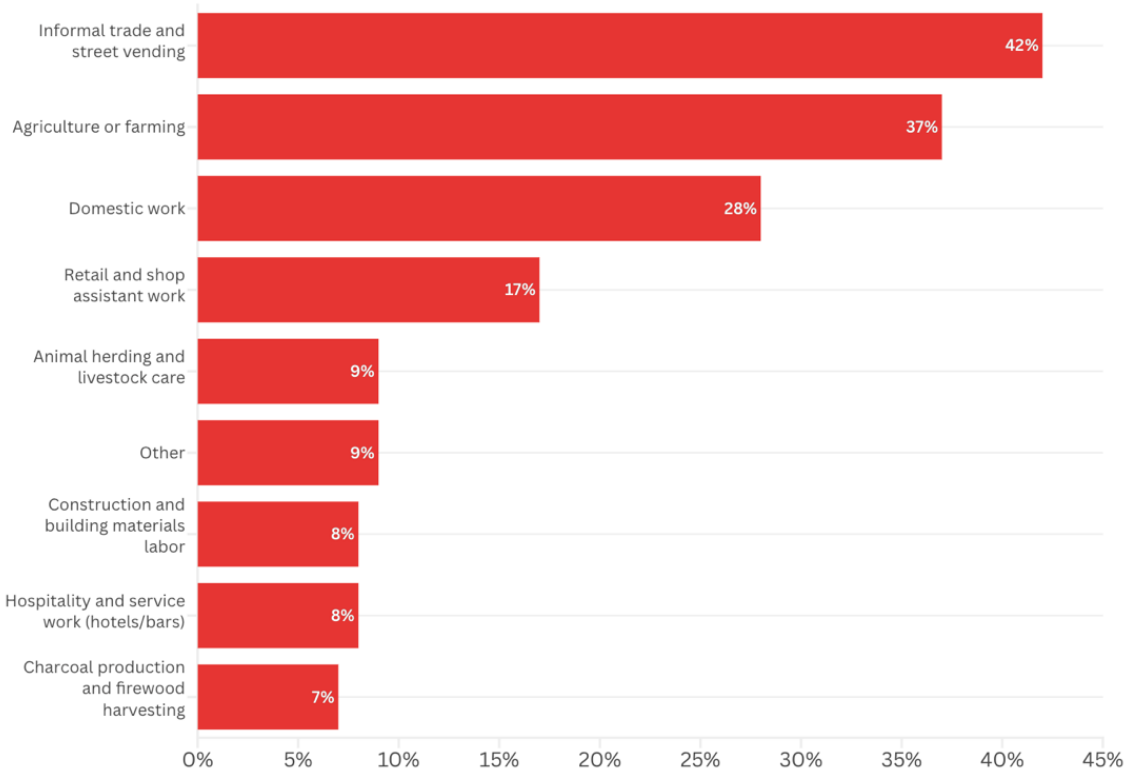
When looking at the distribution across different counties, distinct patterns emerge. In Magwi, agriculture dominates, with 82% of children involved in farming activities, reflecting the county's rural and agrarian economy. A considerable number of children in Magwi also participated in market sales (57%) and domestic work (46%). Similarly, in Yambio, a majority were engaged in selling goods (67%) and farming (60%), with many also doing domestic work (40%).

In contrast, Akobo shows more balanced participation across activities, with 32% engaged in both agriculture and market sales, and a notable 26% taking care of animals. In Bentiu, market sales (58%) and working in shops (50%) were the leading activities, indicating a more urban or commercial work environment. Juba, being the capital and urban center, presents the highest involvement in domestic work (30%) and shop work (26%), alongside market sales (22%) and some construction-related jobs (17%).

Other counties like Kapoeta South and Renk show mixed activities, with agriculture and animal care prominent in Kapoeta South, while market sales and shop work lead in Renk. Wau reports a roughly equal division between selling goods, domestic work, and "other" types of jobs (which includes a mix of tasks such as fetching and selling water, donkey-cart water supply (funtez), transport of goods, mechanic assistance, and tea selling, with boys were twice as likely to fall into this category (5.2%) than girls (2.4%), while charcoal production and work in hotels are more sporadic across several counties.

These patterns reflect how local economies and available opportunities shape the types of work children undertake. Rural areas such as Magwi and Yambio show heavy dependence on agriculture and market-related sales. More urbanized or commercial centers like Bentiu and Juba have greater shares of children working in shops, domestic roles, and casual labour in hospitality.

Figure 44: Sectoral distribution of paid child labour

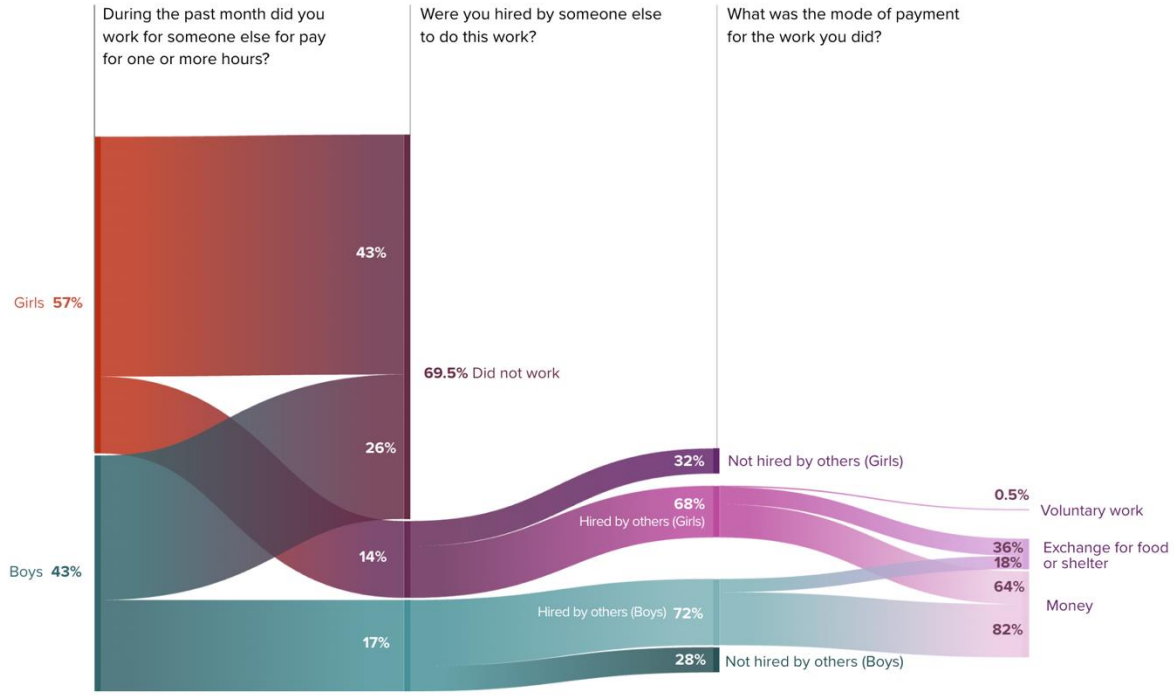


7.8.1. Following the remuneration trajectory

Compensation patterns also highlight a gender divide (Figure 45).Among the children who were not formally hired, voluntary work was reported by 0.5% of girls. For those hired, exchange for food or shelter is roughly equal among girls (2.6%) and boys (2.2%), while monetary payment was received by 5.9% of girls and 9.8% of boys.

Overall, girls' participation in labour is more commonly informal and less monetized. Despite their strong presence in paid work overall, their labour is more frequently compensated in kind or goes unpaid, while boys, are more likely to access structured, monetized opportunities. Girls not only face barriers in accessing formal and better-paid work but are also at heightened risk of undervaluation and informality, which potentially expose them to more exploitative, arrangements. Despite their higher overall numbers in paid work, girls' labour is less likely to be formally defined and more likely to be undervalued or compensated in kind. Boys, while fewer in number, appear to access more structured and monetized opportunities. This aligns with earlier findings that boys are more present in urban economies where market-linked and male-oriented work (e.g., transport, construction, petty trade) may dominate. In contrast, girls may be engaged in less visible, domestic, or socially constrained forms of work, reflected not only in their lower likelihood of monetary compensation but also in the lack of formal hiring, which, in turn, reveals the qualitative divide in labour valuation and exposure to informality.

Figure 45: Following the remuneration trajectory

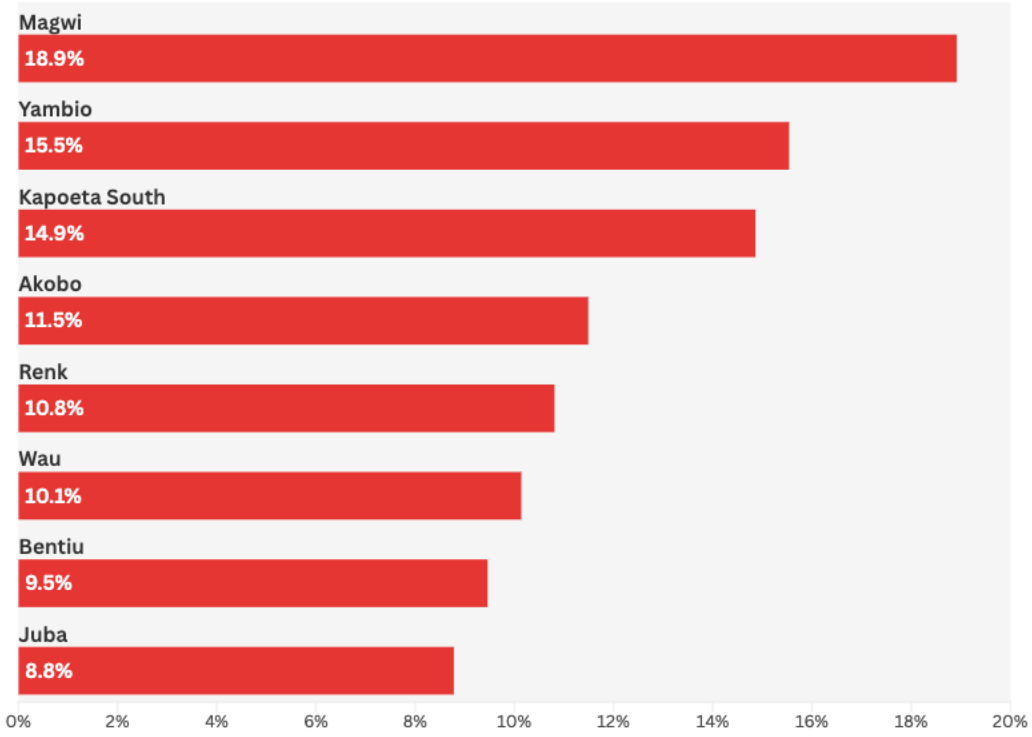


7.8.2. Income-generating activities

Among the sampled children, 35.1% engaged in their own income-generating activities (IGA). Data on specific income-generating activities or work children engaged in during the past month reveals that girls reported higher engagement (51.4%) than boys (48.6%) [but the difference is not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 3.45$, $p = 0.063$).

With regard to localities, across all counties, children own IGAs across at varying frequencies, with Magwi having the highest number of children involved, followed by Yambio, Kapoeta South, Renk, Akobo, Wau, Bentiu, and Juba in descending order. Specifically, Magwi accounts for 28 children (18.92%), while Juba has the lowest frequency with 12 children (8.78%). The difference is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 64.99$, $p < 0.001$).

Figure 46: Prevalence of children owning IGAs per county



The most commonly reported IGAs were selling goods in the street or local markets (25.7%) and farming for sale (22%), with girls predominantly reporting selling goods (32.6%). Charcoal production for sale (12.7%) also features prominently, indicating reliance on natural resource extraction, which is often labour-intensive and potentially environmentally detrimental. This is complemented by smaller yet significant shares working in shops (7.8%) and engaging in mining minerals for sale (7.1%), with mining highly concentrated in Kapoeta South (86% of children locally), marking it as a distinct hotspot of this activity.

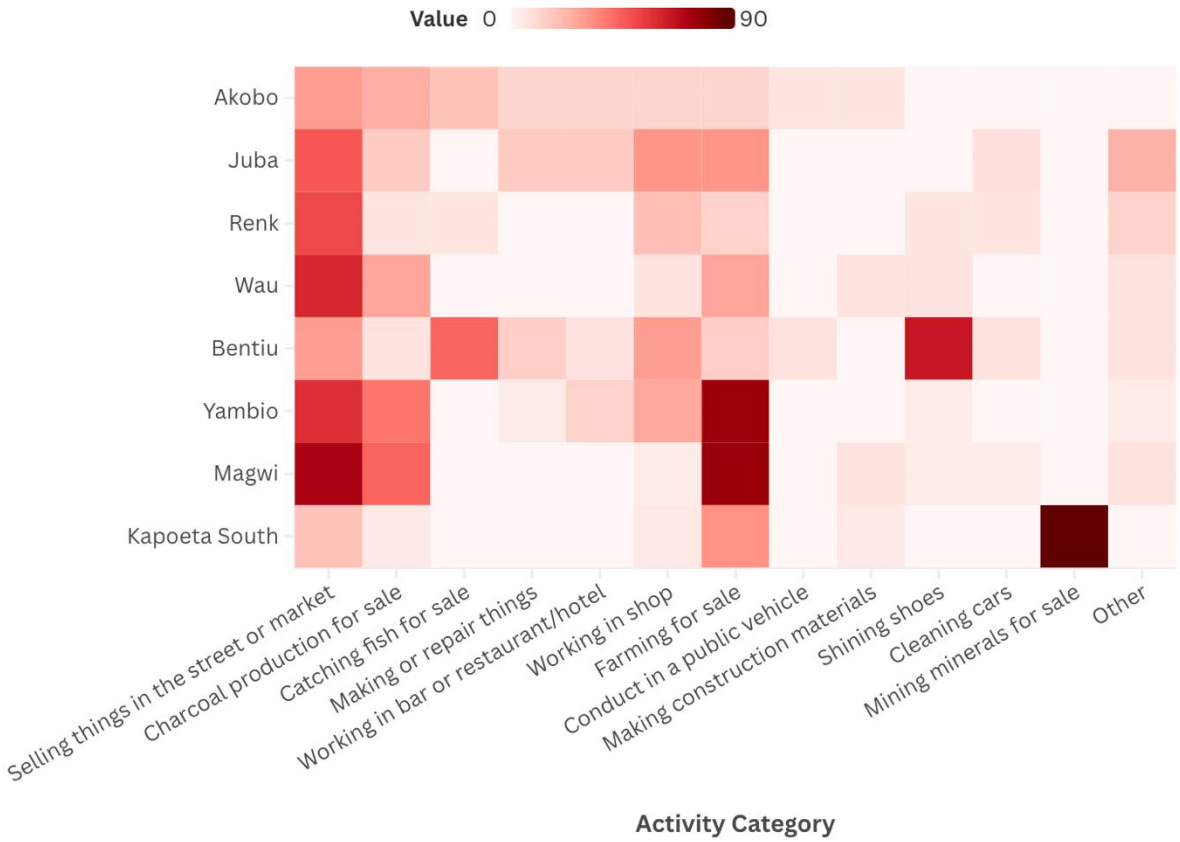
Other occupational categories such as shining shoes (4.9%), fishing (3.7%), and working in hospitality (bars or restaurants) (3%) are reported more sporadically but add to the tapestry of child economic activities. The presence of making or repairing things, making construction materials, and cleaning cars, all ranging between 2-3%, further indicate diversified, often informal skills-based labour.

Spatially, some patterns emerge:

- Magwi and Yambio show dominance of farming and market sales, typical of agrarian economies with complementary market trading.
- Kapoeta South stands out due to its overwhelming prevalence of mineral mining (86%), a sector rarely seen at such scale in other counties.
- Bentiu is characterized by a high prevalence of shoe shining (64%) and fish selling (43%), reflecting a particular urban or peri-urban informal service economy.
- Akobo and Wau present a mix of market selling, charcoal production, and fishing, highlighting a blend of rural resource-based livelihoods.
- Renk and Juba show more balance among market selling, shop work, farming, and miscellaneous activities.

The "other" category captures the diversity of tasks not easily captured in fixed survey options. Activities listed include tea selling, chapatti vending, water delivery via donkey (*'funtez'*), and hair/nail salon work, earning opportunities typical of urban informal economies.

Figure 47: Income-generating activities per sector and county.

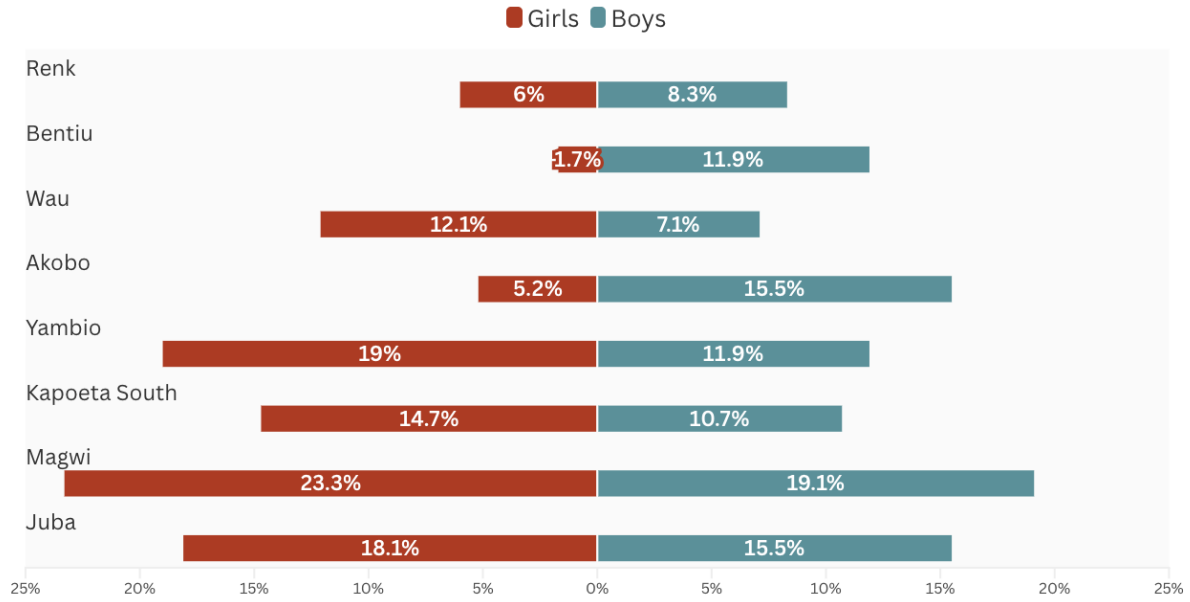


7.8.3. Family assistance and unpaid labour

Among all children, nearly half (47.8%) reported helping in a family business or farm during the past month, without receiving any form of payment. Among the children helping with family businesses and farms, 58% were girls, and 42% were boys. However the difference was not statistically significant.

However, levels of participation vary considerably by county: Magwi reports the highest overall levels of child engagement in family businesses, with 23.3% of girls and 19% of boys involved, with Yambio following closely, with 19% of girls and 12% of boys reporting participation. In Juba 18.1% of girls report involvement, and boys at 15.5%, while Akobo stands out with a strong gender contrast: 15.5% of boys reported helping in a family business, compared to just 5.2% of girls. Kapoeta South also shows elevated participation, especially among girls - 14.7% compared to 10.7% of boys. In Wau, participation is moderate, with 12.1% of girls and 7.1% of boys involved in family business activity. In Renk shows lower levels overall, with 8.3% of boys and 6% of girls engaged. This may reflect a transition toward more formal employment or cash-based livelihoods, where children's contributions to family businesses are less central. Finally, Bentiu reports the lowest female involvement at 1.7%, though 11.9% of boys still report participation.

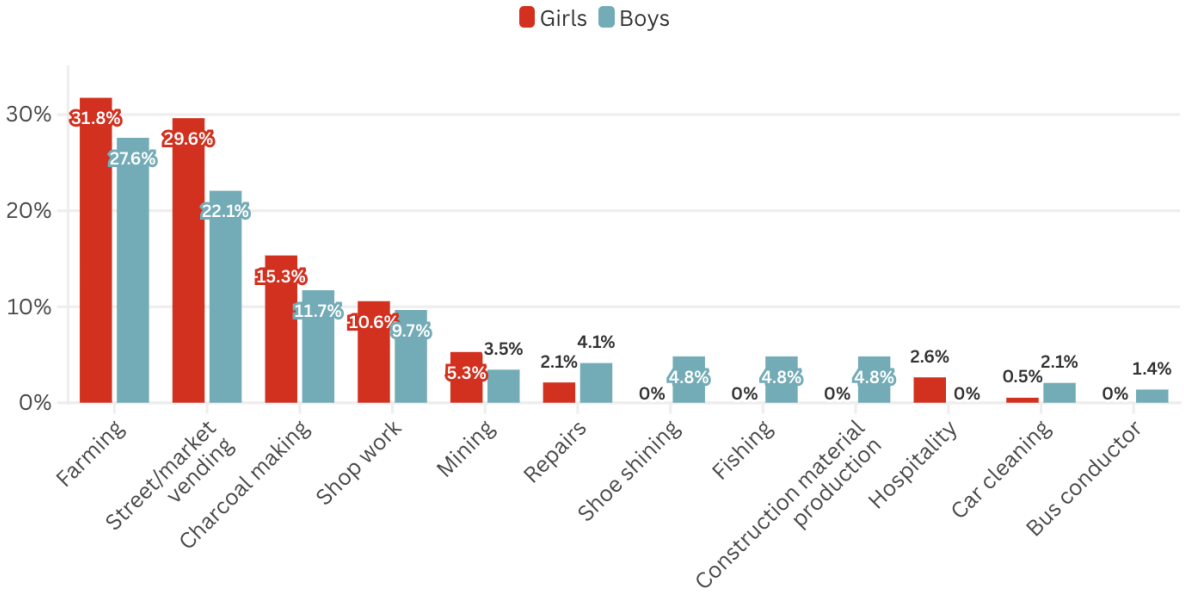
Figure 48: Gender disaggregation of unpaid labour in family businesses or farms.



Girls' participation in unpaid labour was heavily concentrated in farming (32%), street/market vending (29.6%) , and charcoal production (15.3%), which together accounted for nearly 77% of all unpaid girls' labour, indicating their role in subsistence and petty commercial economies. Girls also reported working at bars and restaurants while no boys indicated such work. Hospitality was exclusively reported by girls (2.7%), while technical and mechanical sectors, repairs, car cleaning, making construction materials, were largely occupied by boys. This split mirrors wider gendered divisions of labour in both paid and unpaid sectors as indicated in previous sections.

Boys, on the other hand, although reporting slightly less involvement in unpaid labour overall, displayed greater diversification across work types. While they too were significantly engaged in farming (27.6%) market vending (22%), and charcoal production (11.7%), they were overrepresented in more physically intensive or mobility-demanding tasks such as fishing, making construction materials and shoe shining (each 4.8%), repairs (4.2%), and car cleaning (2%).

Figure 49: Types of unpaid labour in family businesses or farms by gender



"When there is no food, our mothers send us to work in the fields or collect firewood to sell. Sometimes we go days without eating, so we must do anything to help."

(FGD, Female Youth, Yambio)

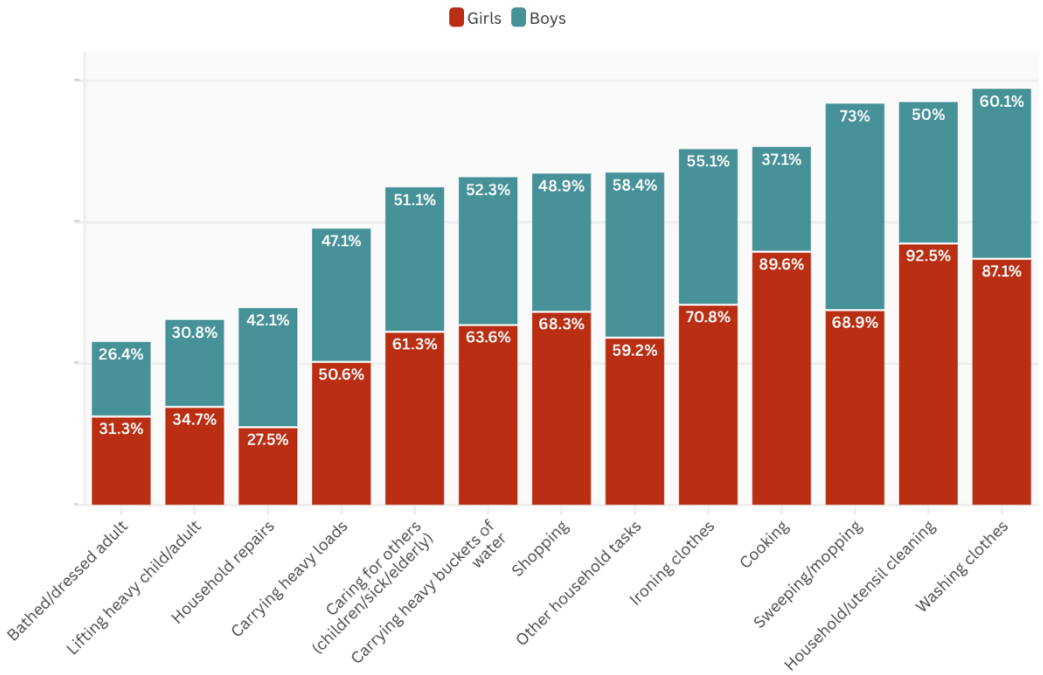
"When I see my friends going to school and I am going to the market, I feel like I am not part of the future. But what can I do? My family needs me."

(FGD, Female Youth, Renk)

The median number of hours worked per week by all children was 9, with an interquartile range (IQR) of 15. Overall, participation in HH labour was widespread, with several tasks showing significant gendered patterns. Tasks ranged from routine chores like cooking and washing clothes to more intensive or potentially hazardous activities such as carrying heavy buckets or caring for ill or elderly HH members.Girls consistently reported higher participation across almost all categories. The most common activities for both boys and girls were cleaning HH utensils (92% of girls / 50% of boys), cooking (89.6% girls / 37% boys), washing clothes (87% girls / 60% boys), ironing (70.8 of girls, 55% of boys) and sweeping floors/mopping (69% of girls / 73% of boys). These tasks also reflect the most traditional gendered division of domestic labour, disproportionately falling on girls. Similarly, more girls than boys reported shopping (164 vs. 87), ironing clothes (68.3% girls / 48.9% boys) and other general HH tasks.

These tasks were reported as physically demanding or time-intensive. For instance, 73% of boys and 69% of girls reported sweeping or mopping floors for long periods of time, and 63% girls versus 52.3% boys reported carrying heavy buckets of water for washing. Although boys reported lower overall involvement in HH duties, they were more represented in tasks traditionally seen as male-associated, such as HH repairs (42.1% boys vs. 27.5% girls). Finally, girls also contribute predominantly in caregiving duties, with 61.2% girls compared to 51.1% boys reporting they cared for others in the HH, such as other children or the elderly, including carrying/lifting them (34.7% girls / 30.7 boys) and bathing them (31.3% girls / 26.4% boys), both of which raise protection concerns due to the physical or emotional demands they may place on children.

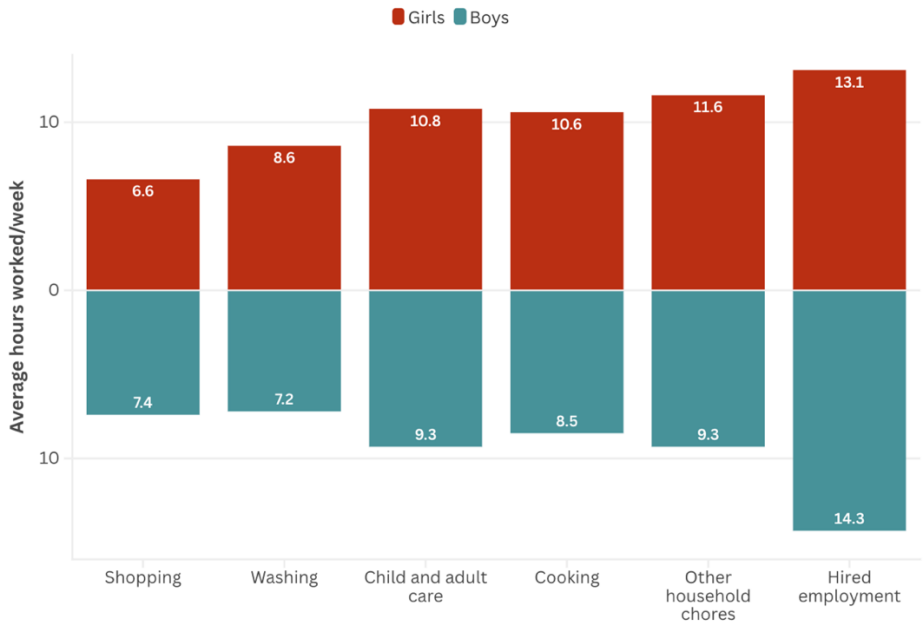
Figure 50: Distribution of HH and caregiving tasks over the past month by gender.



Girls consistently reported higher levels of engagement, and longer hours, than boys in every category, except for HH repairs. Caring for children, sick, or elderly adults followed a similar pattern. While most children (especially girls) reported caregiving for 1–10 hours, 26 girls and 8 boys reported 21+ hours/week, an intensity equivalent to part-time employment. Importantly, the combined time burden, when considering the length of both unpaid HH labour and hired employment, is particularly heavy for girls, who report nearly equal time in hired work and significantly more time across all other unpaid chores. This dual workload may exacerbate fatigue, reduce time for education or rest, and have long-term impacts on well-being and opportunity access.

> *"When my mother is sick, I become the parent. I cook, clean, and go to the farm. Sometimes I feel like I am old already."*
>
> *(FGD, Female Youth, Magwi)*

Figure 51: Weekly hours spent on hired employment and unpaid domestic and caregiving work by activity type and gender.

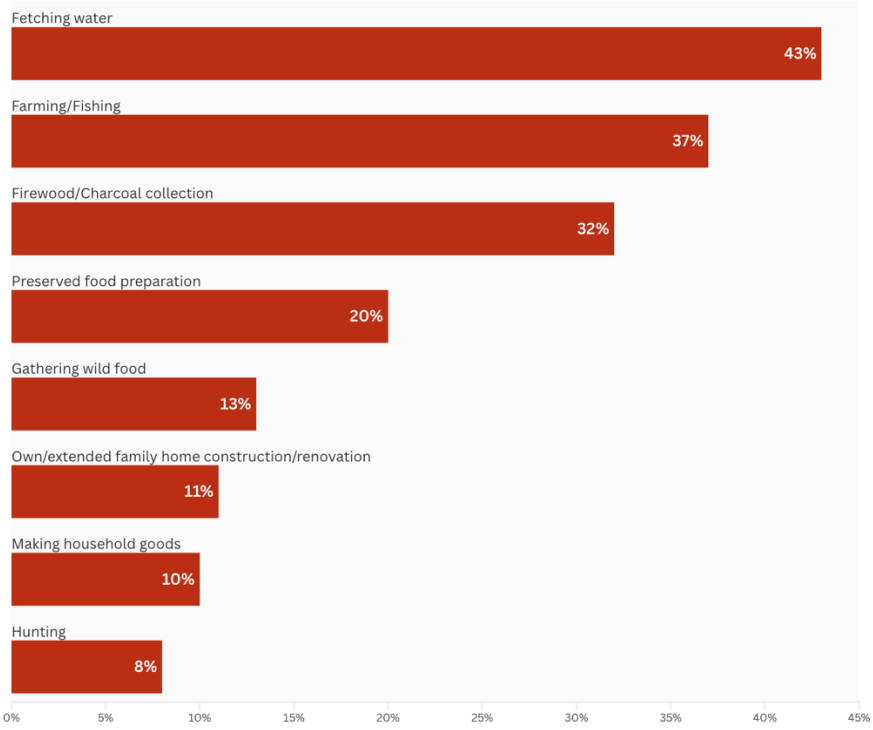


Out of all surveyed children,18.2% reported participating in any form of unpaid apprenticeship, internship, or workplace training during the past month (18.3% girls / 17.9% boys).

Unpaid work for HH consumption is pervasive among children. Fetching water is by far the most common activity, reported by 43% of children, suggesting that this basic necessity continues to rely heavily on children's labour. Farming or fishing comes next at 37%, indicating that many children are regularly helping to produce food for their families. A third of children (32%) also reported collecting firewood or charcoal, another daily task essential for cooking and heating.

Other types of support were reported less frequently but are still notable. One in five children (20%) had been involved in preserved food preparation in the past month, while 13% said they gathered wild food. Just over 1 in 10 participated in building or repairing a family home (11%) or making HH goods (10%). Hunting was the least reported activity, but still noted by 8% of children.

Figure 52: Children's participation in unpaid HH production activities by gender



7.9. WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOUR

The prevalence of WFCL among children surveyed in South Sudan stands at 64.1%, underscoring a widespread protection crisis. Engagement in WFCL varies significantly by county ($\chi^2 = 52.54$, $p = 0.000$), with location emerging as a strong predictor of exposure.

Kapoeta South and Yambio are the most affected counties, each reporting 90% of children engaged in WFCL. Magwi (79.7%) and Akobo (79.5%) also present extremely high levels, suggesting severe gaps in child protection systems, entrenched poverty, and harmful social norms that normalize exploitative labour.

Counties with moderate prevalence include Renk (60%), Bentiu (55%), and Wau (50%), where at least half of children are affected. Juba, while reporting the lowest rate at 46.7%, still indicates a high burden for an urban center, pointing to systemic challenges even in better-served areas.

Hazardous work affects 60% of children, with leading risks including prolonged sun exposure, carrying heavy loads, and handling sharp tools. Gendered patterns show girls face more domestic-related hazards (e.g., fire, heat), while boys are more exposed to construction-related dangers. Magwi, Kapoeta, and Juba account for the bulk of reported hazardous cases.

Armed group recruitment was reported by 10% of children, especially in Kapoeta South, Akobo, and Bentiu. Boys reported higher exposure, and tasks included domestic support, portering, and combat roles. One-quarter of children also knew peers involved in conflict.

Commercial sexual exploitation was acknowledged by 25% of children, with highest awareness in Kapoeta South and Akobo. Girls were more likely to report it, and perpetrators included strangers, family, and armed groups. Rights-aware children were significantly more likely to identify exploitation.

Trafficking indicators showed 16% of children knew peers who had been moved without consent; 9% had experienced it themselves, mostly in Akobo and Kapoeta South. Reported purposes included domestic work, marriage, and sexual exploitation.

Bonded labour was known to 25% of children, and 12.3% had experienced it, most commonly in Kapoeta South and Akobo. Though many viewed it as temporary, a third believed they wouldn't be allowed to stop even after repaying the debt.

7.9.1. Hazardous work

The data indicates that 60% of the children are involved in some sort of hazardous work. Among children reporting having engaged in hazardous forms of child labour, the frequency varied significantly by geographic location ($\chi^2 = 57.88$, $p < 0.001$). The highest proportion was recorded in Eastern Equatoria, representing 29% of all documented cases, with Magwi contributing 18% and Kapoeta 11%. Juba followed with 20%, while Yambio, accounted for 14%. The remaining regions, Akobo, Wau, Bentiu, and Renk, each reported less than 10% of the total caseload.

The most frequently reported hazard is working long hours under the hot sun, affecting 52% of boys and 47% of girls (see Figure 53). Closely following is the strain of carrying or pushing heavy loads, cited by 48% of boys and 46% of girls. These two categories stand out clearly as the most widespread physical demands across both genders.

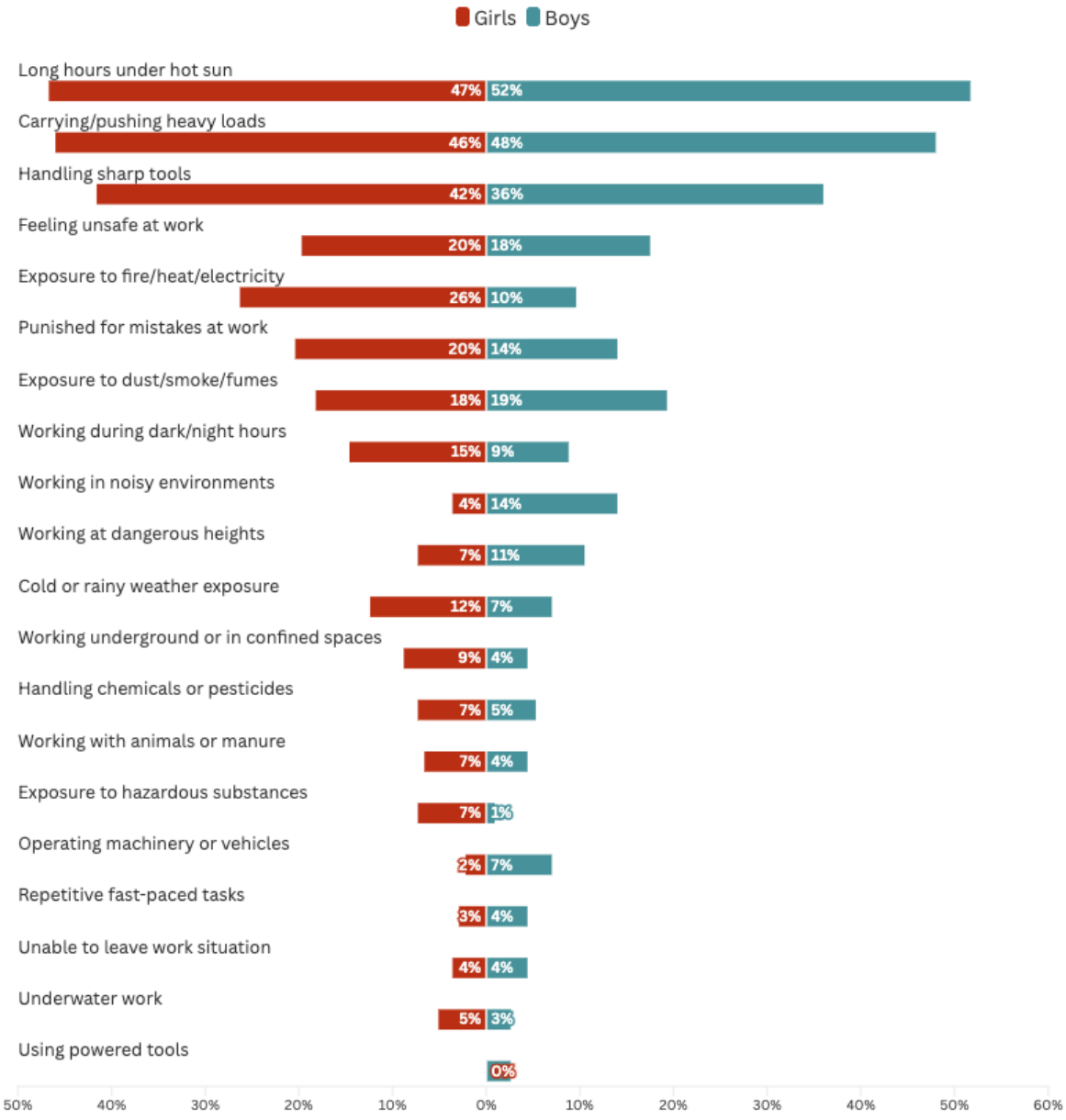
Handling sharp tools is another common risk, with 42% of girls and 36% of boys exposed to this hazard, suggesting that girls may be more involved in tasks like food preparation, farming, or craft-making where such tools are used.

A number of other hazards, while less common, still affect a significant share of working children. About 20% of girls and 18% of boys reported feeling unsafe at work, while similar proportions noted being punished for mistakes (20% girls, 14% boys). These findings point to ongoing issues not only with physical safety but also with children's psychological wellbeing in work settings.

Gender differences begin to show more clearly in the next tier of hazards. Exposure to fire, heat, or electricity was reported by 26% of girls but only 10% of boys, likely reflecting girls' involvement in cooking, food preparation, or domestic tasks. Boys, on the other hand, are more frequently exposed to dust, smoke, or fumes (19% vs. 18%) and noisy environments (14% vs. 4%).

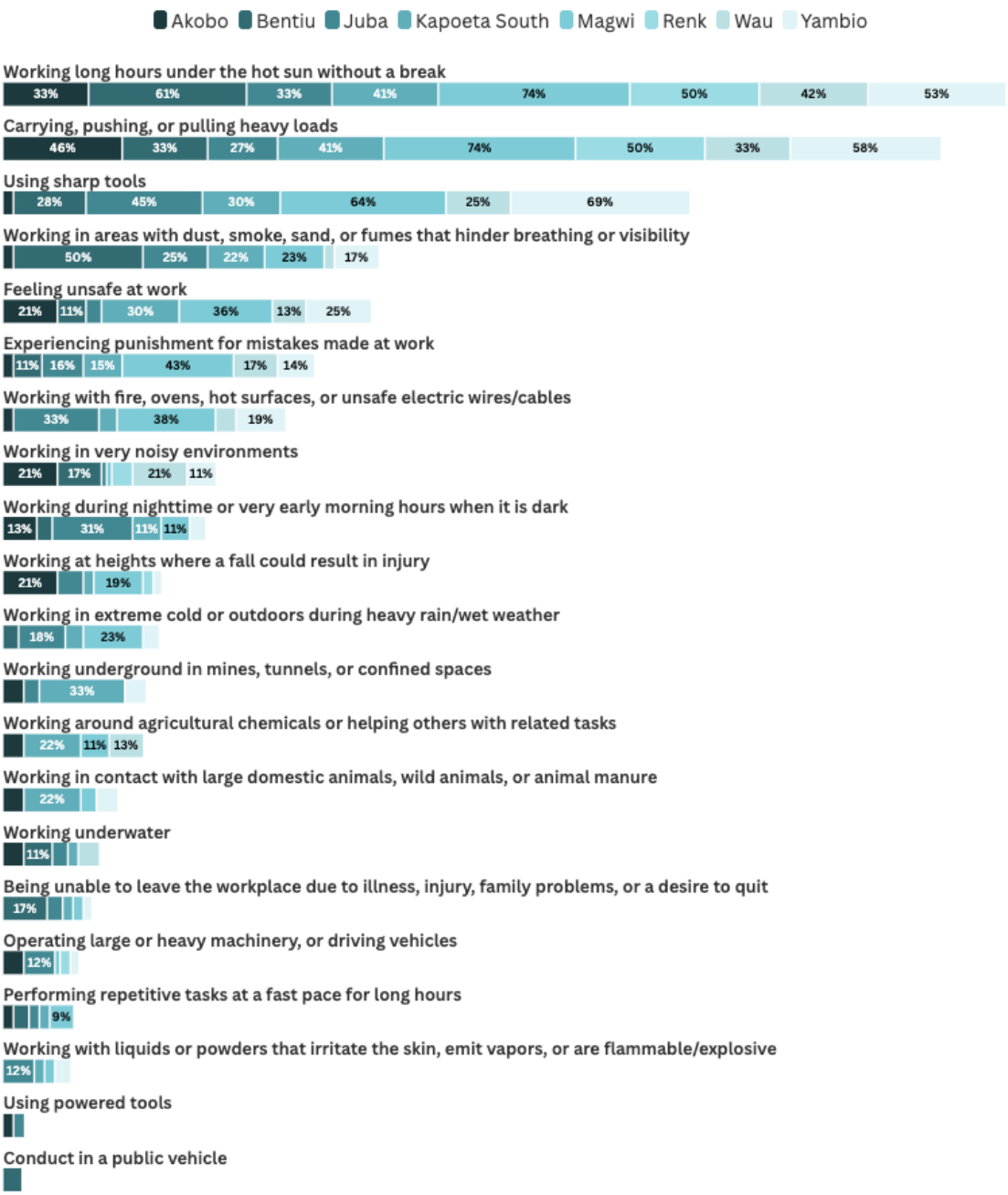
Some risks appear more common for boys: working at dangerous heights (14% boys, 4% girls), exposure to cold or rainy conditions (11% boys, 7% girls), and repetitive, fast-paced tasks (7% boys, 2% girls). These could indicate a gendered division of labour where boys are more involved in construction, transport, or industrial-type settings.A smaller subset of children reported working underground or in confined spaces (9% girls, 4% boys) and handling chemicals or pesticides (7% girls, 5% boys). Meanwhile, underwater work, though rare, was reported by 5% of girls and 3% of boys.Less commonly reported but still notable risks include exposure to hazardous substances, operating machinery, and being unable to leave the work situation, all mentioned by small percentages across both genders.

Figure 53: Exposure to occupational hazards among working children, by gender



Importantly, the types of hazardous exposures correlate with regional labour profiles established elsewhere in the dataset (Figure 54). For example, in Bentiu, Akobo, and Kapoeta South, where child engagement in construction and mobility-based economic activities, or mining was higher, boys' exposure to working at heights, machinery, and noisy environments may reflect localized gender-normed occupational segregation. In contrast, the concentration of girls reporting domestic and heat-related hazards aligns with their reported higher participation in cooking, HH chores, and caregiving.

Figure 54: Exposure to occupational hazards among working children, by location



> *"When I was 13, I worked in the gold mines. We used our hands to dig and sometimes the pit would collapse. One of my friends was buried last year. We don't have gloves or masks, just our bare hands." (FGD, Male Youth, Kapoeta)*
>
> *"There are children who spend the whole day breaking rocks for construction. Their hands are always bleeding." (FGD, Youth, Juba)*

Qualitative narratives also indicate that one of the most commonly cited dangers was construction work, particularly porting heavy materials. As one respondent explained, *"porting is very dangerous for kids… when they are [on] construction you never know what will happen, the bricks might fall on a child and the child might die instantly"*. This is consistent with quantitative findings on the prevalence of children carrying or lifting heavy loads and experiencing long hours in unsafe environments. Similarly, offloading

goods was flagged as particularly damaging to boys' physical development: *"they start lifting heavy loads… it can affect their spine because mostly they carry at the back and their bones are not yet strong enough… they end up getting addicted [to painkillers]".*

Risks associated with agricultural labour were also noted. One participant pointed out that *"cultivation… for very many hours… is more dangerous to [children's] health"* echoing concerns about prolonged exposure to harsh weather conditions and lack of rest. In addition to physical strain, several forms of labour were linked to broader safety and protection risks. Street vending, particularly for girls, was singled out as a context of high vulnerability: *"when a girl is selling on the street, she is vulnerable to anything, she might easily be raped or… lured"*. Working in nightclubs or markets was also viewed *as "very unsafe for children"* exposing them to violence or exploitation in unregulated settings.

Transport-related work such as boda boda (motorcycle taxi) riding was described as acutely hazardous due to high accident risk: *"they can easily involve in accident which can cause a lot of injuries and damage their lives."* Exposure to substances and risky coping mechanisms was also raised, with some children reportedly turning to drugs to manage physical pain or stress: *"they have difficulties in sleeping… and end up getting addicted"*. Participants also pointed to the long-term health implications of such exposure: *"they might damage his/her lungs… it may lead to cancer, kidney problem and complications when they are still very young"*. Boys in construction or transport sectors face physical injury. As one respondent observed, *"if a boy is working at the construction site… a block might fall on [him] and… lead to the death… or fracture at young age"*. These insights underline the urgent need for protection-sensitive programming and enforcement of child labour safeguards across sectors where children are most commonly engaged.

7.9.2. Armed group recruitment

With regard to armed group recruitment, among the overall sample 10% of children reported being asked or pressured to take participate in armed group activities. Across the targeted counties, there was a statistically significant variation in reporting having been approached for forced recruitment ($\chi^2 = 46.25$, $p < 0.001$). Kapoeta South (30%) and Akobo (25.6%) are the counties with the highest self-reported attempts of recruitment, followed by Bentiu (20%) (Figure 55). All other counties reported less than 10%, with Renk and Yambio reporting no cases. In terms of gender disaggregation, boys reported having been approached more frequently than girls (59% vs 41%), but this gender-based difference was also not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 5.4$, $p = 0.067$).

Figure 55: Proportion of children self-reporting being approached by armed groups, by location and gender

From the overall sample, 25% reported having seen or heard about children in their area involved in armed conflict. Akobo recorded the highest frequency, accounting for 51.3%%, followed by Kapoeta South (46.7%), Bentiu (40%), Yambio (22.5%) and Juba (20.8%). The variation across states was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 56.00$, $p < 0.001$).

Within locations with higher overall awareness, boys often report greater knowledge than girls , for example, in Kapoeta South 54.5% of boys reported knowing about children involved in conflict-related activities while in Akobo, 55% of boys versus 10.5% of girls reported knowledge. In most counties, apart from Bentiu and Magwi this pattern holds, suggesting males may have more exposure to these activities.

"During the fighting, soldiers came and took boys from our village. Some never came back. Others were forced to fight or carry things for the soldiers"

(FGD, Male Youth, Akobo)

"My brother was taken by soldiers during the fighting. He was just a child but they gave him a gun. We don't know if he is alive. My mother still waits for him."

(FGD, Male Youth, Akobo)

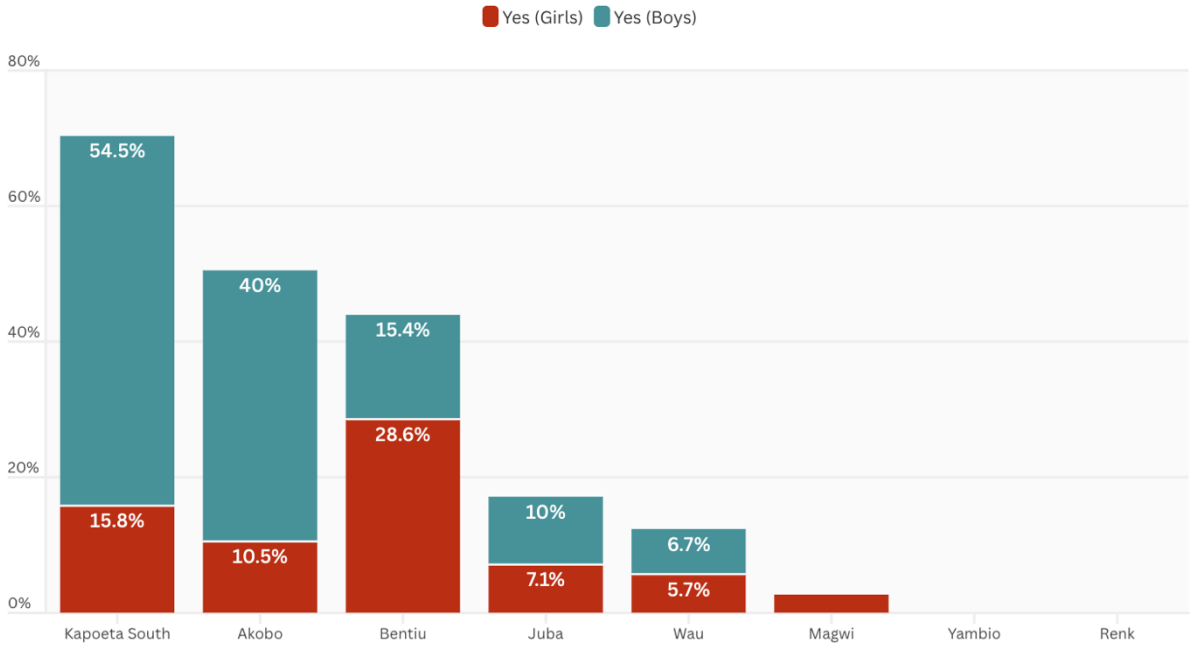
"In the cattle camps, boys carry guns to protect the herd. Some are not even teenagers yet. If there is a raid, they must fight."

(FGD, Male Youth, Akobo)

Figure 56 shows that Kapoeta South and Akobo exhibit the highest incidence of self-reported pressure to participate in armed activities, with 54.5% of boys and 16% of girls in Kapoeta South, and 40% of boys and 11% of girls in Akobo, reporting having been asked to participate in such activities. These figures are significantly above the national average of 10.1%, suggesting heightened vulnerability in these areas, possibly due to proximity to active conflict zones or the presence of armed actors.

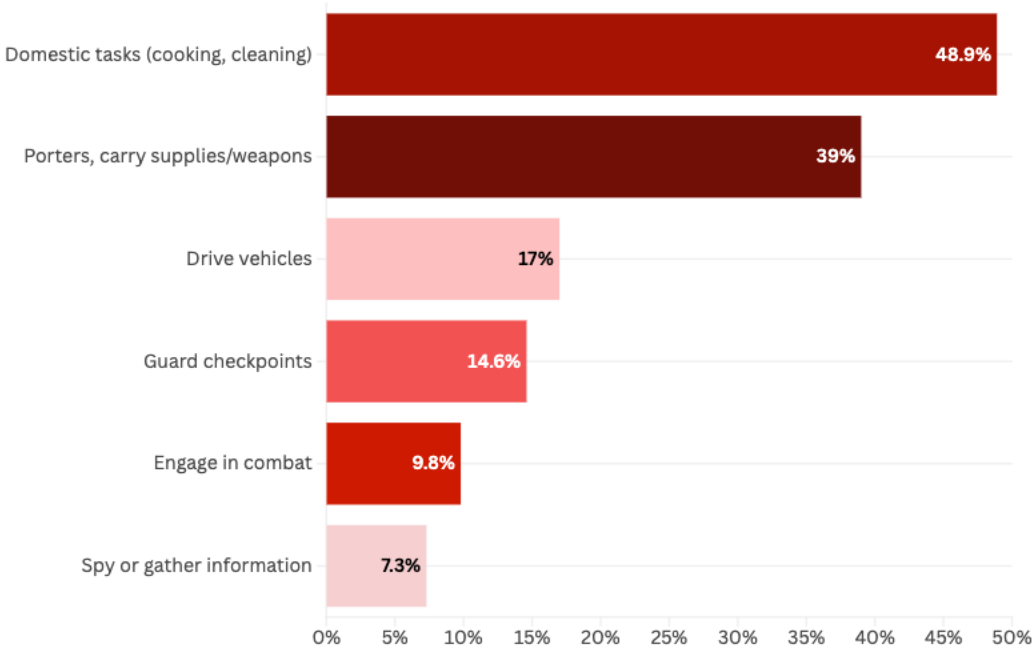
Bentiu also demonstrates a concerning trend, with 29% of girls and 15% of boys self-reporting recruitment-related pressure, with girls in Magwi being the only ones reporting involvement (2.7% of girls, 0% boys). Among the girls in Bentiu that reported being approached, 75% indicated that they were told they would perform domestic tasks, explaining the reversal of the more typical gender dynamic and pointing to a normalization of girls' domestic roles in militarized contexts in this location. In contrast, Renk and Yambio reported no cases among boys, and minimal rates among girls, marking them as outliers in terms of lower exposure.

Figure 56: Proportion of children self-reporting recruitment attempts by armed actors, by county and gender



Among the self-reports of children that had been approached for recruitment across all counties, performing domestic tasks -such as cooking and cleaning - was the most commonly cited activity they were told they would be doing if joining (48.9%) followed by performing portering tasks and carrying supplies or weapons (39%), driving vehicles (17%), guarding checkpoints (14.6%), engaging in combat (9.8%), and spying or gathering information (7.3%). These responses reflect a wide range of functions, from logistical support to direct engagement in conflict. What stands out is that non-combatant roles far outnumber reports of direct combat involvement, suggesting that many children may be recruited under the premise of performing support duties rather than fighting. This may serve as a tactic to make recruitment appear less threatening, or more acceptable, to both children and their families (Figure 57).

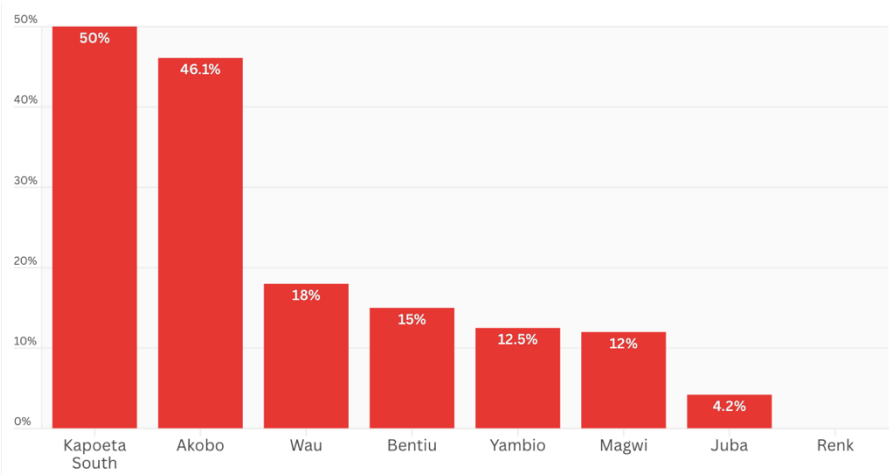
Figure 57: Self-reported types of armed group-related tasks children were told they would perform



7.9.3. Commercial sexual exploitation

To assess the prevalence of commercial sexual exploitation, children were asked a question focused on awareness within their community, rather than personal experience, due to the sensitivity of the topic. The question: "*Do you know any child who was asked, pressured, or forced to engage in sexual activities in exchange for money, gifts, shelter, or favors in the past 12 months?*" was asked. Among the respondents, 25% reported being aware of their peers being approached in such a manner. Across the targeted counties, there was a statistically significant variation in reporting potential commercial sexual exploitation ($\chi^2 = 78.40$, $p < 0.001$). Kapoeta South recorded the highest frequency (46.1%), followed by Akobo (46.1%). Wau (18%), Bentiu (15%) and Yambio. (12.5%) followed, with Juba scoring notably low (4.2%) and Renk documenting zero percent reports (Figure 58).

Figure 58: Proportion of children reporting awareness of commercial sexual exploitation among peers per county

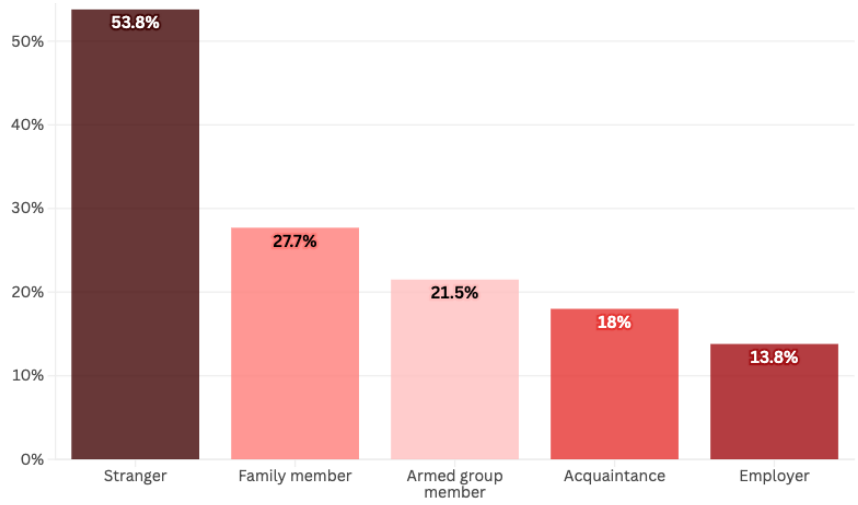


Girls are more likely to report being aware of peers being approached for commercial sexual services (63% versus 37% of boys), however, despite the gap, the difference is not statistically significant, which denotes that boys are equally aware of this context. The data also reveals a statistically significant relationship between children's awareness of their rights and their awareness of commercial sexual exploitation in their community ($\chi^2 = 13.49$, $p = 0.001$).

Among children who reported being aware of their rights, 68% also reported knowing of at least one child who had been asked, pressured, or forced to engage in sexual activities in exchange for money, gifts, shelter, or favors in the past 12 months. In contrast, only 32% of those who were not aware of their rights reported similar knowledge. This finding indicates that rights awareness correlates with increased recognition of exploitation, including forms of sexual abuse that are often hidden or normalized within some communities. Children who are informed about their rights are likely better equipped to identify and label such abuses, even when they are not the victims themselves.

When asked who had pressured or exploited the child, respondents most frequently named strangers (53.8%) and family members (27.7%), followed by armed group members (21.5%) acquaintances (18%) and employers (13.8%) (see Figure 59).

Figure 59: Reported perpetrators of commercial sexual exploitation of children, by county and type



"Some girls in the mining areas are there to sell food or water, but others are forced into things they don't want. They are afraid to speak because the men are powerful."

(FGD, Female Youth, Kapoeta)

"Some girls are forced into sex work because there is no food at home. They do it to survive, but it is very dangerous and shameful."

(FGD, Female Youth, Juba)

7.9.4. Child trafficking

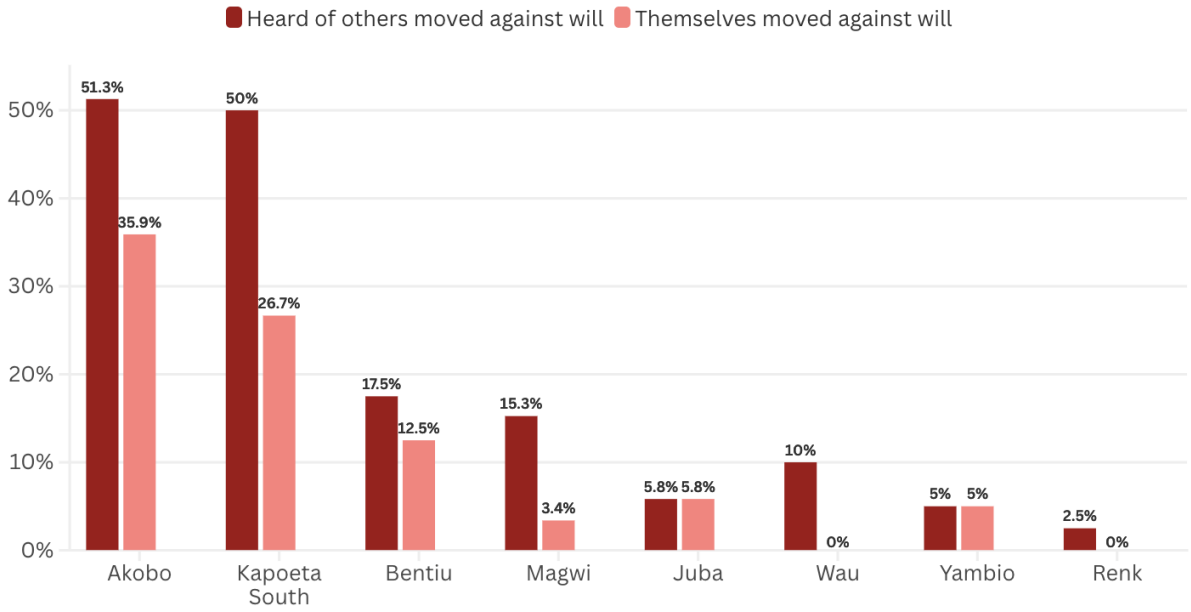
Due to the sensitivity and legal complexity of the issue, the questions relating to involuntary movement for work or other activities, whether based on children's awareness of others or personal experience, were intentionally framed in general terms, rather than as a direct measure of trafficking. The questions asked were: "*Do you know any child who was taken, moved, or transported without full agreement for work or other activities in the past 12 months?*" and "*Have you yourself been taken, moved, or transported away without your agreement for work or activities in the past 12 months*. However, the findings should be interpreted with caution: Some children may have reported experiences involving movement or relocation without full consent, which may not necessarily meet the legal definition of trafficking in persons as outlined in the UN Palermo Protocol. Under this framework, trafficking involves an act (e.g., recruitment, transport), means (e.g., coercion, deception, or abuse of vulnerability), and purpose (e.g., exploitation such as forced labour). That said, it is important to note that for children under the age of 18, *any movement* for exploitative purposes is classified as trafficking, regardless of the means used. [109] Therefore, while the responses likely reflect children's perceptions of risk, pressure, or lack of choice, they may also point to serious protection concerns.

Regarding community awareness of involuntary movement, 15.8% of children responded "yes." Reports varied significantly across counties ($\chi^2 = 102.08$, $p < 0.001$), with the highest levels in Akobo (37%), followed by Kapoeta South (21%), Juba (18%), and Bentiu (13%). Magwi and Yambio reported the lowest

[109] This question allowed respondents to select multiple reasons, so the percentages reported for each category represent the proportion of respondents who chose that reason.

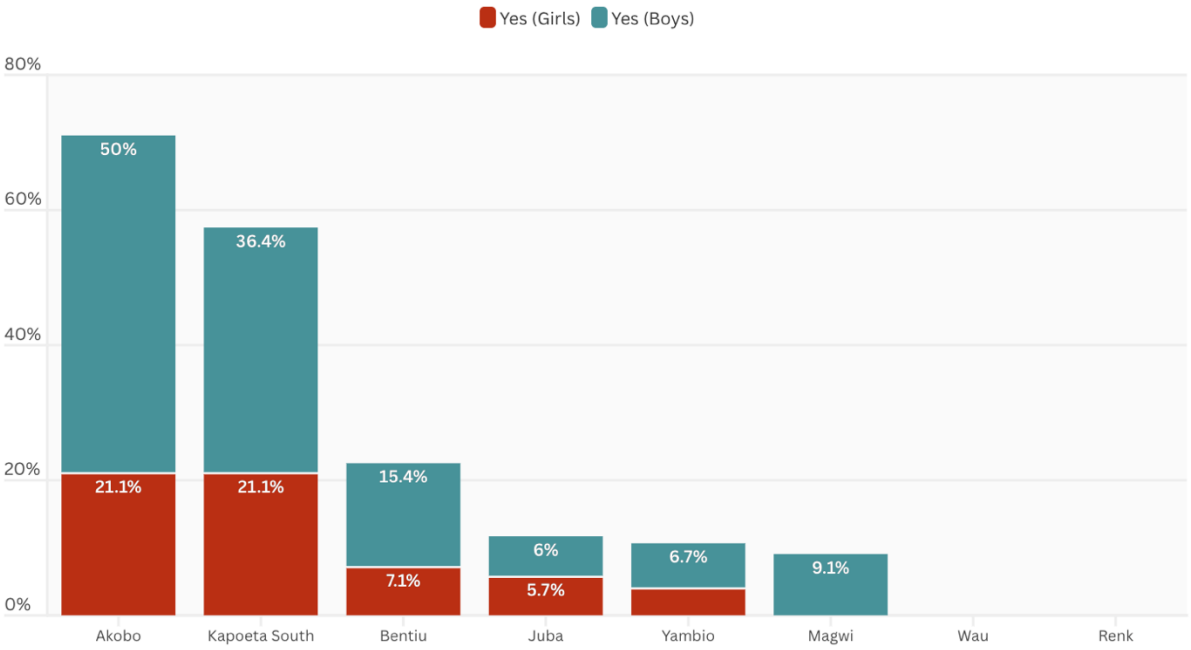
levels, each at 5% (see Figure 60). Boys (18.5%) were more likely than girls (13.75%) to report awareness of such cases ($\chi^2 = 4.517$, $p = 0.211$), however the difference is not statistically significant .

Figure 60: Perceptions vs lived experiences of involuntary movement for work in the past 12 months among children



About 9% of children surveyed across the studied locations self-reported having been taken, moved, or transported without their agreement for work or other activities in the past 12 months (see Figure 60*)*.The results are not evenly distributed: Akobo and Kapoeta South stand out as critical hotspots, with an average of 36% and 27% of children, respectively, reporting such experiences. In these counties, boys are particularly vulnerable, 50% of boys in Akobo and 36% of boys in Kapoeta South reported being moved without consent. Meanwhile, in places like Bentiu, Juba, Yambio, and Magwi the prevalence is considerably lower across both genders (ranging from around 5–13%), and in Renk, and Wau, no children reported experiencing this form of exploitation (Figure 61).

Figure 61: Children who self-reported personal experience of being moved for work against their will in the past 12 months, by county and gender



Children reported their peers and themselves were moved against their will under the pretence of various work or activities, as Figure 62 illustrates. The most frequently cited purposes included domestic work, farming/ fishing/ mining, work in markets or shops, and marriage. A smaller but significant portion of responses indicated sexual services (100% of reported cases in Akobo), and begging (60% and 40% of cases in Juba and Akobo, respectively).

To help interpret these findings, children who reported personal experiences were also asked whether they believed they would have been free to leave the situation if they had wanted to, and 60% among them said yes. This self-reported freedom to exit suggests that many of these cases may not have involved the sustained coercion, control, or inescapability characteristic of trafficking. While the findings still point to important protection risks, including manipulation, blurred consent, and child vulnerability, they should not be assumed to represent confirmed cases of trafficking under international law.

"Girls are mostly sent to work as housemaids. Some of them are beaten by their employers or forced to work until late at night. If they complain, they are sent back home with nothing."

(FGD, Female Youth, Juba)

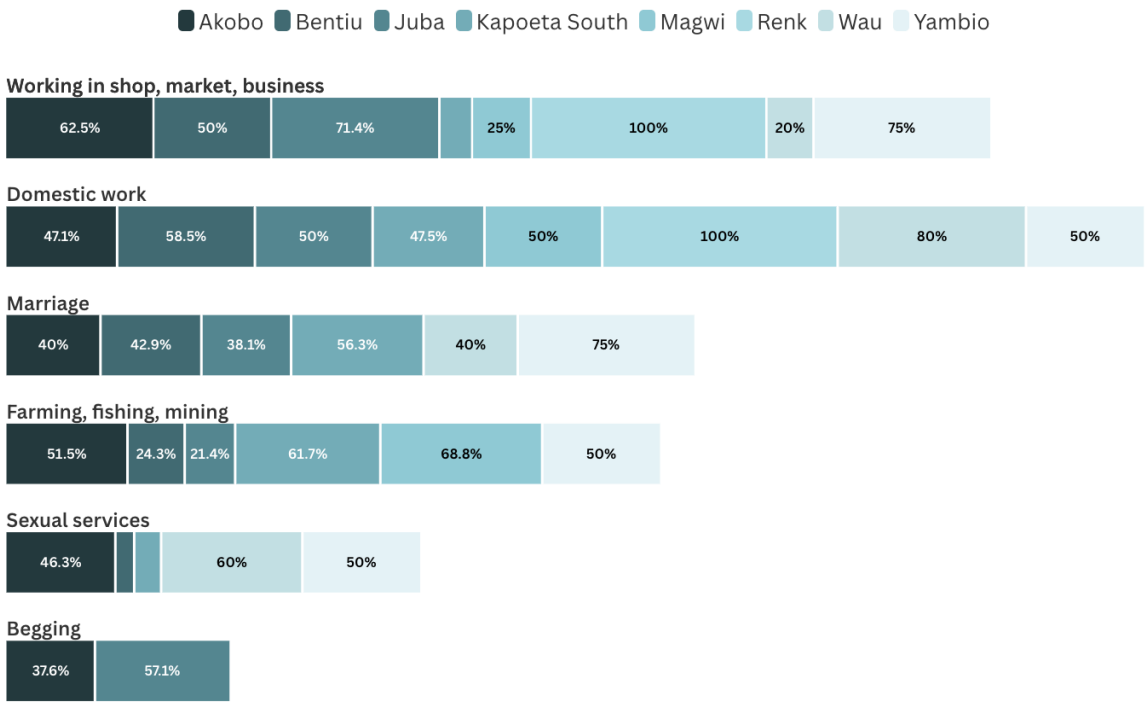
"Girls who work as housemaids are sometimes treated badly. Some are beaten, others are not given food. But they keep quiet because they need the money."

(FGD, Female Youth, Wau)

"If a girl is not in school, many times she will be married off early or forced to do work in people's homes. Some even end up in bad situations because they need money for their families."

(FGD, Female Youth, Wau)

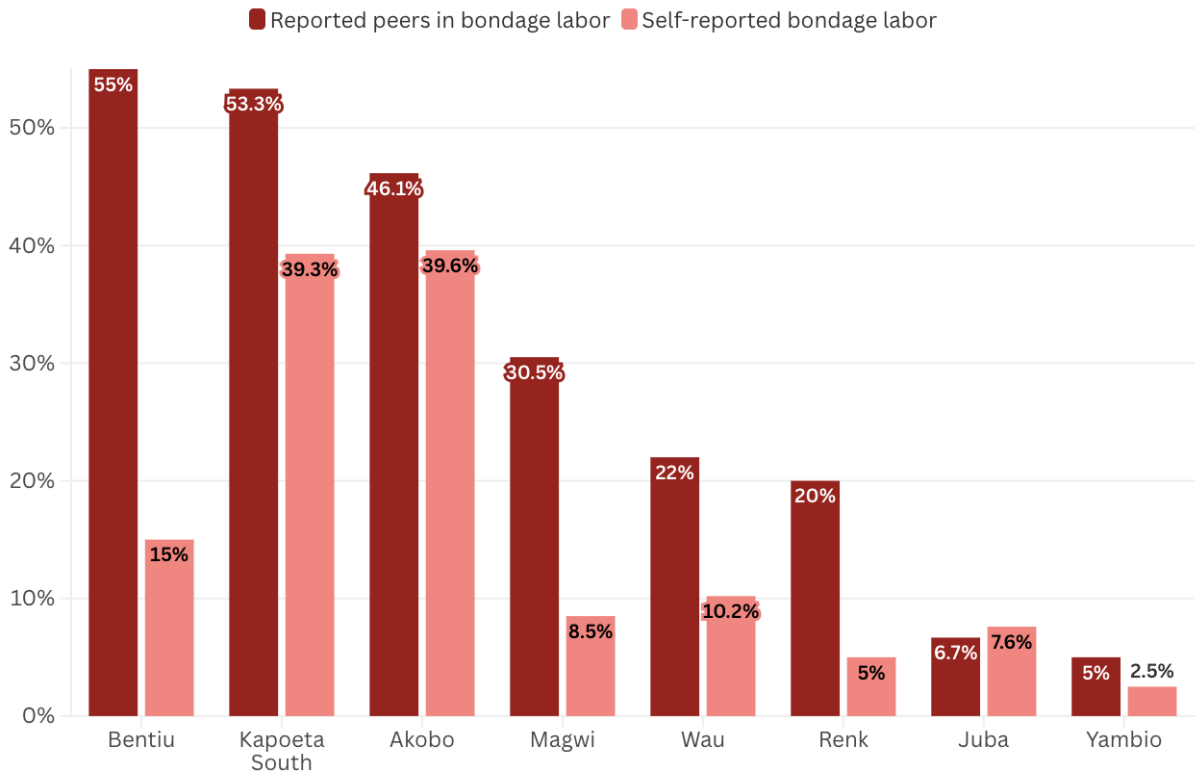
Figure 62 Activities children were told they would perform when trafficked



7.9.5. Bonded labour

When asked *"Do you know any child who had to work to repay a debt or loan for themselves or their family?"* 24.6% of the overall sample of children answered that they did know of a child in this situation (see Figure 63). Disaggregated data provide further insights into the gendered and geographic dimensions of this phenomenon, as there was a statistically significant variation in the frequency of reported bondage across the targeted counties ($\chi^2 = 106.0$, $p < 0.001$). Bentiu recorded the highest frequency, accounting for 55%, followed by Kapoeta South with 53.3%, and Akobo at 46.1&. Magwi (30.5%), Wau (22%) and Renk (20%) follow, with Juba (6.7%) and Yambio (5%) scoring the lowest. Boys reported being aware of bonded labour incidents at an equal rate as girls (50.5% vs 49.5%, $\chi^2 = 66.140$ $p = 0.105$) (Figure 63).

Figure 63: Children engaged in debt repayment through bonded labour—Self and peer, by county



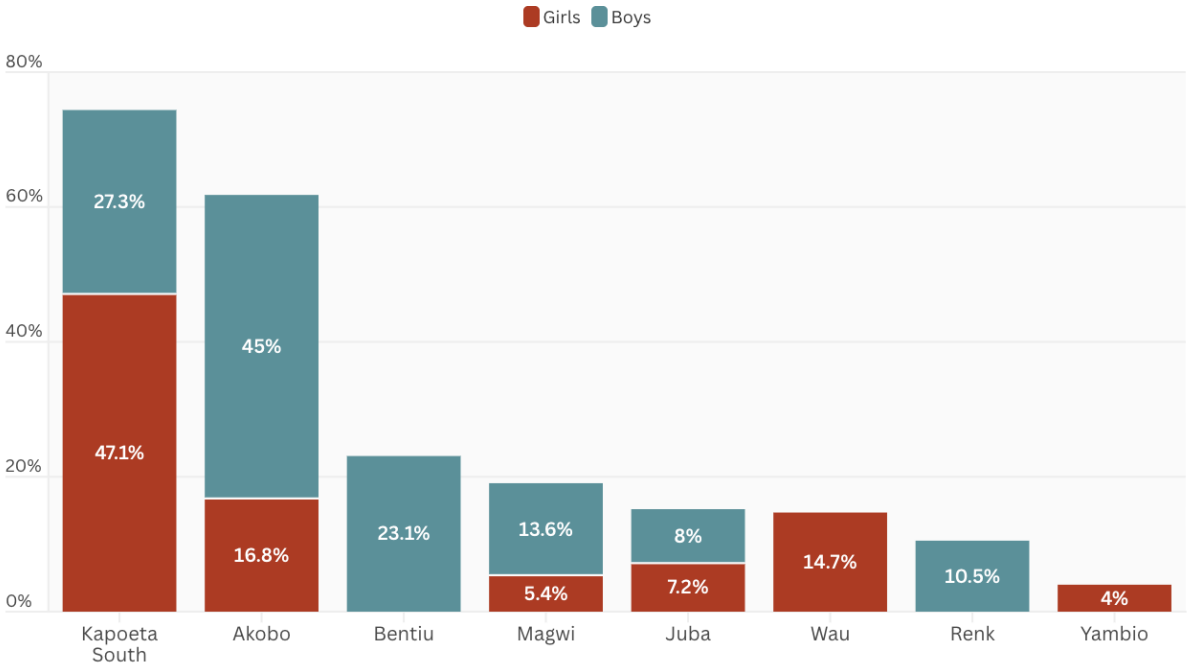
When asked *"Have you yourself, had to work to repay a debt or loan for yourself or your family?",* 12.3% of the total sample answered 'yes'. Disaggregated data indicate that Kapoeta South stands out as a major hotspot, with an exceptionally high 47.1% of girls and 27.3% of boys reporting debt-related labour, the highest rates across the dataset. Akobo also shows a significant gender disparity: 45% of boys compared to 16.8% of girls. Bentiu reveals a sharp contrast: 0% of girls versus 23.1% of boys, while in Wau and Yambio, only girls reported working to repay debt (14.7% and 4%, respectively), and no boys did. Magwi, Renk, and Juba show relatively lower and more balanced rates, with values ranging from 5–14%, suggesting a less pronounced but still present exposure to debt-related child (see Figure 63 and Figure 64). Overall boys reported to have personally engaged in bonded labour more frequently than girls (53% vs 47%). However, this gender-based difference was not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 2.230$ $p = 0.130$).

The analysis also reveals a statistically significant relationship between children's awareness of their rights and reported experience of bonded labour ($\chi^2 = 5.05$, $p = 0.025$). Among children who reported having worked to repay a debt (bonded labour), two-thirds (66.7%) said they were aware of their rights. This is notably higher than the 49.9% of children who had not experienced bonded labour but reported being aware of their rights. This suggests that awareness alone is not enough to prevent exploitation.

While it is encouraging that many children in exploitative situations know their rights, the fact that they still ended up in bonded labour highlights a critical gap between awareness and agency. Children may understand that what is happening to them is wrong, but lack the power, support, or alternatives to resist or exit these situations. This underlines the limited protective impact of awareness when not backed by enabling environments, safe reporting mechanisms, and empowered caregivers.

When asked "*Were you (would you be) allowed to stop working after the debt was repaid "* 68.6% of children responded "yes", suggesting that most children did not perceive their labour situation as one of indefinite or coercive bondage. This finding may indicate that many instances of child involvement in debt repayment are understood, by the children themselves, as temporary and conditional, rather than exploitative in a strict or legal sense. However, 31.4% believed they would not be permitted to leave even after the debt was settled. This suggests that for a significant minority, bonded labour may not be a temporary coping mechanism but a more entrenched form of coercion or servitude, which borders on trafficking or forced labour.

Figure 64: Self reports of children engaged in bonded labour, by county and gender



7.10. PSYCHOSOCIAL WELL-BEING AND MENTAL HEALTH AMONG WORKING CHILDREN

Over half (53.4%) of working children in South Sudan report feeling sad, anxious, or worried due to their work in the past two weeks. Girls consistently report higher rates of emotional distress than boys across nearly all counties, with the problem especially acute in Yambio, Bentiu, and Kapoeta South. In Bentiu, 100% of girls report both emotional distress and sleep difficulties, figures echoed in Yambio and Kapoeta South, where tiredness and exhaustion are also pervasive.

Fatigue is another major concern: all boys in Kapoeta South (100%) and most girls in Yambio (90.9%) report being tired or lacking energy. Boys in several counties, including Magwi, Wau, and Akobo, report emotional and physical distress at rates that nearly match or exceed those of girls, pointing to widespread mental health concerns among both genders.

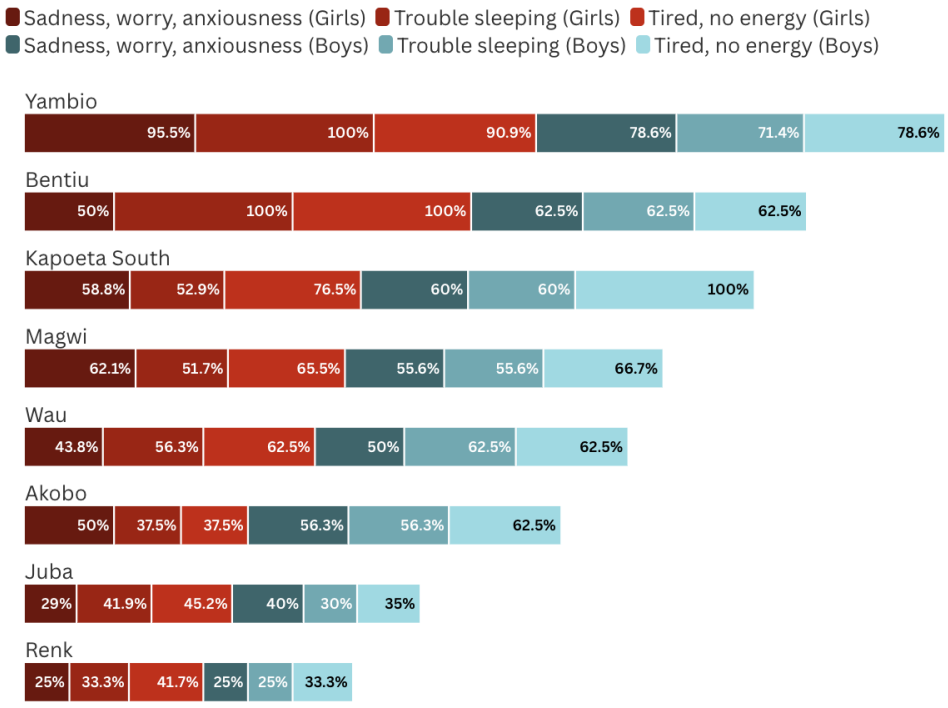
Despite this, only 50% of children say they have someone they trust to talk to about work-related fears or sadness. Access to trusted confidants varies by location and gender: boys are generally more likely to report having support, but this trend reverses in Bentiu where all girls (100%) report access. Juba and Akobo show the highest levels of isolation, with up to 63% of children reporting they have no trusted person to confide in, underscoring a critical gap in psychosocial support systems.

When working children were asked whether they "*had often felt sad, worried, or anxious because of work duties they need to perform in the past two weeks*" 53.4% responded 'yes'. Across nearly all counties, girls consistently report higher rates of sadness, worry, and anxiety compared to boys, with the disparity especially stark in counties such as Yambio and Bentiu. For example, in Yambio, 95.5% of girls versus 90.9% of boys experience these symptoms, while 100% of girls in Bentiu and Yambio report trouble sleeping, rates that outpace even the already high levels among boys in the same regions (Figure 65).

Tiredness and lack of energy are also pronounced, particularly among girls in Yambio (90.9%) and Kapoeta South (76.5%), but boys in Kapoeta South are even more affected, with all boys (100%) reporting fatigue. In several other counties, Magwi, Wau, Akobo, boys' rates of distress, sleep trouble, and tiredness climb close to or even beyond girls' levels, indicating widespread community suffering.

The problem is thus most pronounced for girls across all counties, but particularly acute in Yambio, Bentiu, and Kapoeta South, counties that emerge as epicenters of child mental health difficulties. Boys in these counties are not far behind, experiencing levels of distress that approach those of girls, and in some cases (such as tiredness in Kapoeta South), even exceed them. By contrast, somewhat lower but still significant rates are seen in Juba and Renk, though even here, up to 45% of children report symptoms.

Figure 65 Emotional and physical symptoms reported by children in the past two weeks, by gender and county



"I was sent to live with relatives in town to work as a house girl. I missed my family, but they said it was the only way for us to survive."

(FGD, Female Youth, Wau)

"I used to dream of being a teacher, but after my father died, I had to leave school and start selling tea. Now, every day is just work and more work. Sometimes I cry when I see my old books."

(FGD, Female Youth, Juba)

"We fear going out to collect firewood because sometimes men attack us. But if we don't go, our family cannot cook. My mother says, 'God will protect you.'"

(FGD, Female Youth, Bentiu)

"Some people say child labour is good because it teaches you responsibility. But I think it makes children tired and sad. We want to play sometimes."

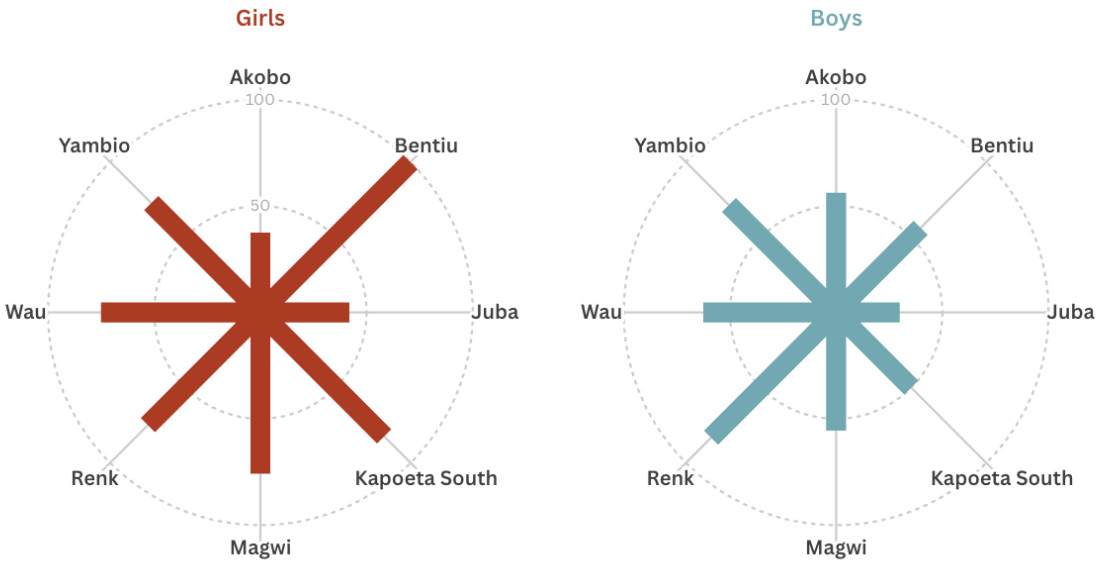
(FGD, Mixed Youth, Yambio)

When asked "*Do you have someone (family, friend, teacher, community member) you trust and can talk to when you are sad or scared about work?*", across all surveyed locations, approximately half of the children (50%) reported having someone they trust and can talk to about work-related sadness or fear, while the remaining half do not. However, this overall average conceals important differences by county and gender.

In most counties, boys are somewhat more likely than girls to report having access to a trusted confidant. In Akobo, for example, 56% of boys said they have someone to talk to, compared to 38% of girls. This gender pattern is especially pronounced in Bentiu (56% boys vs. 100% girls), and less pronounced in Kapoeta South, Renk, Wau, and Yambio, where both boys and girls report relatively high access (typically between 68% and 80%) (Figure 66).

Juba stands out for a different reason: both boys and girls are less likely to report having someone to talk to about their worries (about 38% overall), resulting in the highest proportion of children with no trusted adult in the sample (63%). Magwi registers a more supportive environment, with more than two-thirds (68%) of children reporting access to a trusted person. Akobo and Juba have the highest proportions of children lacking a trusted confidant, indicating potential vulnerability to isolation and greater unmet psychosocial support needs.

Figure 66: Children who report having a trusted person to speak to, by gender and county



7.11. WORKPLACE VIOLENCE AND COERCION

Among working children, 65.3% reported experiencing at least one form of workplace violence or coercion. Specifically, 30.8% had been physically hurt because of work, 30% had been threatened or forced to work when unwilling, and 12.45% had experienced economic coercion, such as withheld pay or being prevented from leaving the workplace.

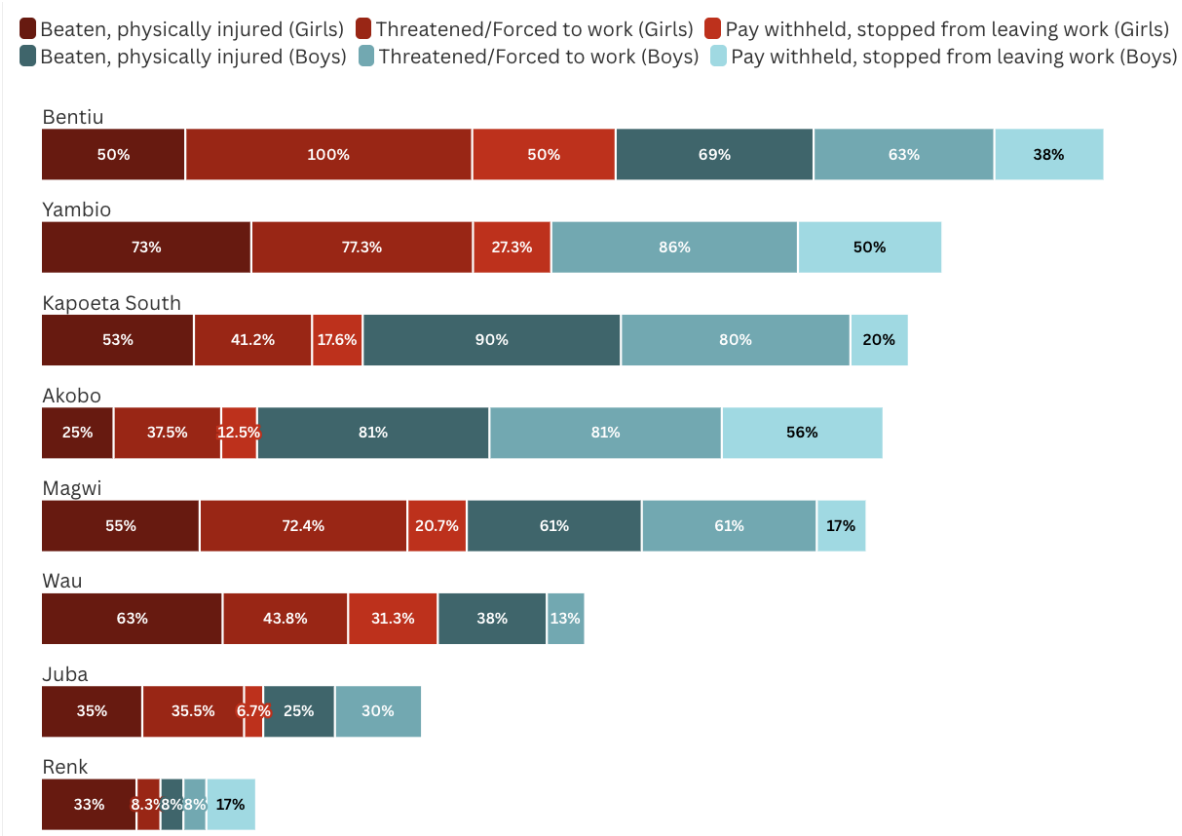
Boys reported particularly high levels of physical violence, especially in Kapoeta South (90%), Yambio (100%), Akobo (81%), and Magwi (61%). Girls also faced substantial risks, with 73% in Yambio, 55% in Magwi, and over half in Kapoeta South reporting being physically hurt due to work.

Threats and forced labour were equally common. Among boys, rates were highest in Akobo (81%), Kapoeta South (80%), and Magwi (62%). Among girls, the highest rates were seen in Magwi (72%) and Yambio (77%), with notable levels also in Kapoeta South and Akobo.

Economic exploitation further compounded children's vulnerability. Reports of denied pay or being unable to leave the workplace were especially high among boys in Yambio (86%), Kapoeta South (80%), and Akobo (56%), and among girls in Yambio (77%), Magwi (72%), and Bentiu (50%).

To measure workplace violence and coercion, children were asked 3 consecutive questions: *"Have you ever been hit, beaten, or physically hurt by someone because of work?"; "Have you ever been threatened or forced to work when you didn't want to?"* and *"Has anyone taken away your pay or stopped you from leaving your workplace?".* Among working children, 65.3% reported having experienced at least one of the three forms of violence and coercion assessed. Among those, 30.8% reported being physically hurt due to work, 30% said they had been threatened or forced to work, and 12.45% stated they had experienced economic coercion, such as being denied pay or prevented from leaving the workplace (see Figure 67).

Figure 67: Forms of abuse reported by working children: physical harm, coercion, and pay withholding, by county and gender



Among boys, reports of being hit, beaten, or physically hurt because of work reach very high levels in several counties: 81% in Akobo, 90% in Kapoeta South, 61% in Magwi, and 100% in Yambio. Girls also face substantial risk, with 55% in Magwi, 73% in Yambio, and over half of the working girls in Kapoeta South (53%) reporting such abuse. Even counties with lower rates, such as Juba, still see 35% of girls and 25% of boys suffering workplace violence.

Coercion into work and threats are common, mirroring the patterns of physical abuse. For boys, being threatened or forced to work when unwilling affects as many as 81% in Akobo, 80% in Kapoeta South, and

62% in Magwi. Girls also report high levels: in Magwi, 72% experienced coercion, with significant rates in Yambio (77%), Kapoeta South (41%), and Akobo (38%).

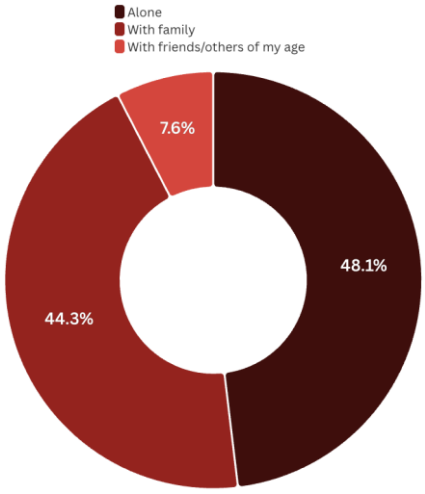
Economic exploitation and restrictions on movement further compound children's vulnerability. Instances of pay being withheld or children being prevented from leaving their workplace are highly prevalent for boys in Akobo (56%), Kapoeta South (80%), and Yambio (86%), while for girls, these rates are highest in Yambio (77%), Magwi (72%), and Bentiu (50%).

7.12. MIGRATION AND MOBILITY

Approximately 31.5% of working children reported having moved from their home to another village, town, or country due to work. Among these, nearly half (48.1%) moved alone, 44.3% moved with their family, and 7.6% moved with peers. These findings highlight significant protection concerns, particularly for children who migrate alone, as they may face increased vulnerability to exploitation, isolation, and abuse.

To assess the protection risks that working children might face, the question "*Have you ever had to move from your home to another village, town, or country because of work?*" was asked, followed by *"Did you move alone or with your family?"* Among the working children surveyed (approx. 31.5%) reported having moved away from their home, either to another village, town, or country, because of work. The data indicates highly divergent patterns depending on whether children moved alone (48.1%), with family (44.3%), or with peers (7.6%) (see Figure 68).

Figure 68: Work-related mobility, all locations, both genders



7.13. CHILDREN'S ASPIRATIONS AND OUTLOOK FOR THE FUTURE

Over 80% of children surveyed expressed a strong aspiration to return to or continue school, reaffirming education as a central source of hope and future opportunity. Another 10.1% hoped to learn a skill or trade, particularly in Magwi, Kapoeta South, and Wau, areas where economic necessity may shape a turn toward vocational goals such as carpentry, tailoring, or mechanics. Business ambitions were reported by 8% of children, especially in Juba, Renk, and Kapoeta South,

reflecting entrepreneurial hopes despite limited means. In contrast, only 9.1% expressed a desire to continue working, signaling that current labour is largely viewed as a burden, not a goal.

When asked what would help them achieve these aspirations, 37.3% of children pointed to family support, underscoring the critical role of caregivers in enabling or constraining children's choices. Another 24.2% cited financial assistance, particularly in urban and displacement-affected areas such as Juba, Bentiu, and Renk. Support from schools or organizations was highlighted by 20.3%, with girls especially relying on external institutions to overcome gendered and structural barriers to opportunity. A smaller number (7.9%) identified safe housing as essential, emphasizing the foundational importance of shelter and stability. Surprisingly, very few children (0.7%) saw stopping work alone as enough to change their future, suggesting that broader social and economic support systems are needed to turn aspirations into reality.

When asked about their aspirations for the future, the vast majority of children (over 80%), expressed a strong desire to go back to- or continue with school, positioning education as a critical marker of hope, stability, and opportunity.

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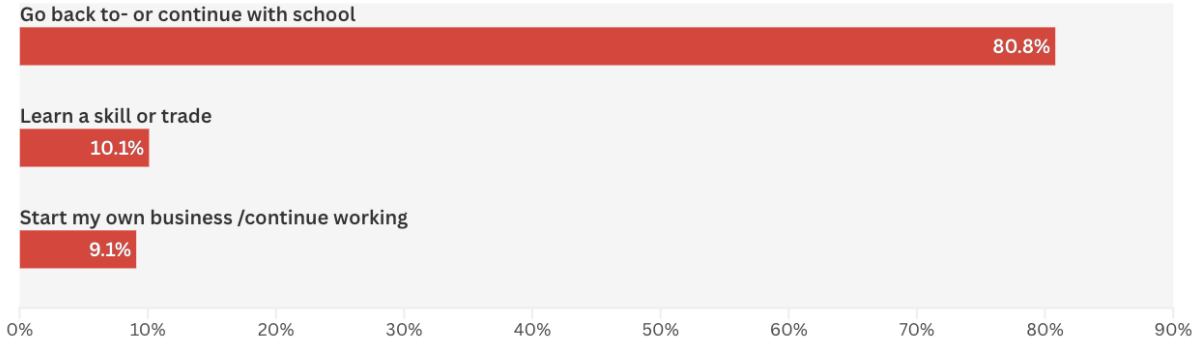
Figure 69: Children's self-reported future aspirations by main category and gender



Beyond formal schooling, a notable share of children hoped to learn a skill or trade (10.1%), suggesting a practical turn toward livelihoods-focused learning, potentially influenced by HH pressures to contribute income or by perceptions that vocational skills are more accessible than formal education. Children in Magwi, Kapoeta South, and Wau most frequently cited this aspiration, and among the examples given were mechanics, carpentry, cooking, and tailoring. One girl in Magwi expressed a desire to *"study and become an engineer,"* highlighting how vocational and academic goals are often deeply intertwined.

The ambition to start a business was reported by 8.0% of respondents, with a roughly even gender split. This was most common among children in Juba, Renk, and Kapoeta South. While only a small number mentioned this specifically, it included goals such *as "cooking local brewery"* and *"I would like to build my house".*

Among the children, 9.1% indicated a wish to continue working. This very low percentage suggests that current work arrangements are generally not seen as aspirational or desirable. The responses came mostly from boys in Kapoeta South and girls in Magwi and Wau, areas where economic pressures or absence of alternatives may condition children to see continued work as the only option.

> *"Sometimes I want to go to school, but my parents say, 'Who will help us in the market?' I see other girls in uniform and I feel pain in my heart. Maybe if things get better, I will go back."*
>
> *(FGD, Female Youth, Wau)*

When asked what would help them achieve their aspirations, whether returning to school, starting a business, or learning a trade, children overwhelmingly identified the family unit and immediate support systems as critical enablers (see

Figure 70).

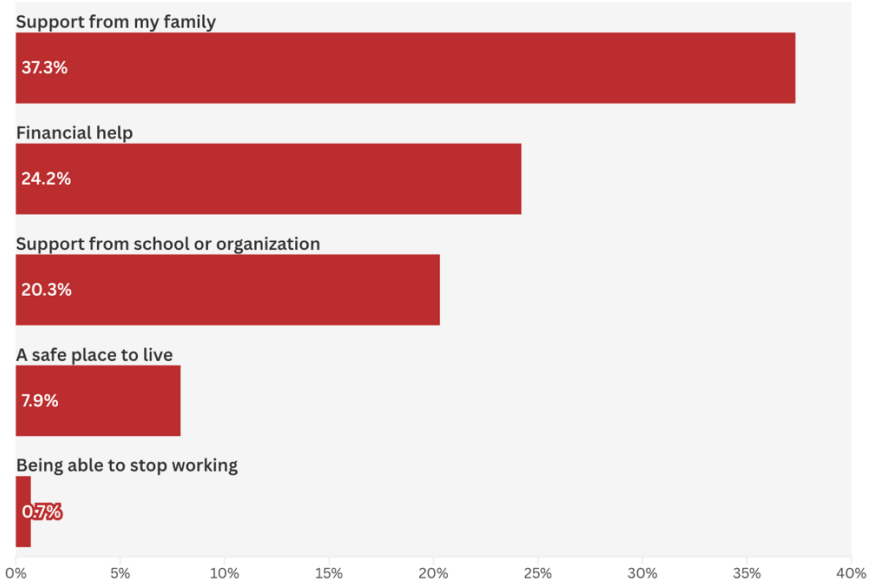
Among all children, 37.3% reported that support from their family would be most helpful, making it the most frequently cited response across genders and locations. This suggests that children continue to view their caregivers and HH networks not only as emotional anchors but also as potential gatekeepers to opportunity, whether by allowing them to stop working, helping with school fees, or encouraging them to pursue their goals.

Close behind, 24.2% of children highlighted the importance of financial support, pointing to the structural economic barriers that constrain their choices. This was especially true in counties like Juba, Bentiu, and Renk, where the combination of poverty, displacement, and disrupted services likely amplifies the need for direct financial assistance. One child expressed it plainly: *"If I find support from well-wishers since my family is already living a vulnerable life."*

> *"My parents told me to leave school because they could not pay for books and uniform. I started selling groundnuts in the market to help buy food for the family."*
>
> *(FGD, Female Youth, Magwi)*
>
> *"Most of us work because our families cannot afford to send us to school. If you don't work, you don't eat. Sometimes we use the money to buy pens or pay school fees if we are lucky."*
>
> *(FGD, Mixed Youth, Renk)*

Almost equally, 20.3% of children emphasized the need for support from schools or organizations, suggesting a growing recognition of external institutional actors, whether NGOs, community-based organizations, or educational institutions, as possible sources of assistance. This is particularly prominent among girls (24.9%), who may face more significant barriers to re-entering education and rely more on structured support to do so.

Figure 70: Children's perceptions of what would help them achieve their future aspirations, by gender and county



A smaller subset, 7.9% of children, believed that having a safe place to live would make a difference in their lives. This points to the continued precarity many working children face, particularly those in displacement settings, child-headed HHs, or insecure shelters. While this percentage may seem low, its importance cannot be overstated; for some children, stability in housing and caretaking is the foundation upon which all other aspirations rest, and is not to be taken for granted in the context of South Sudan.

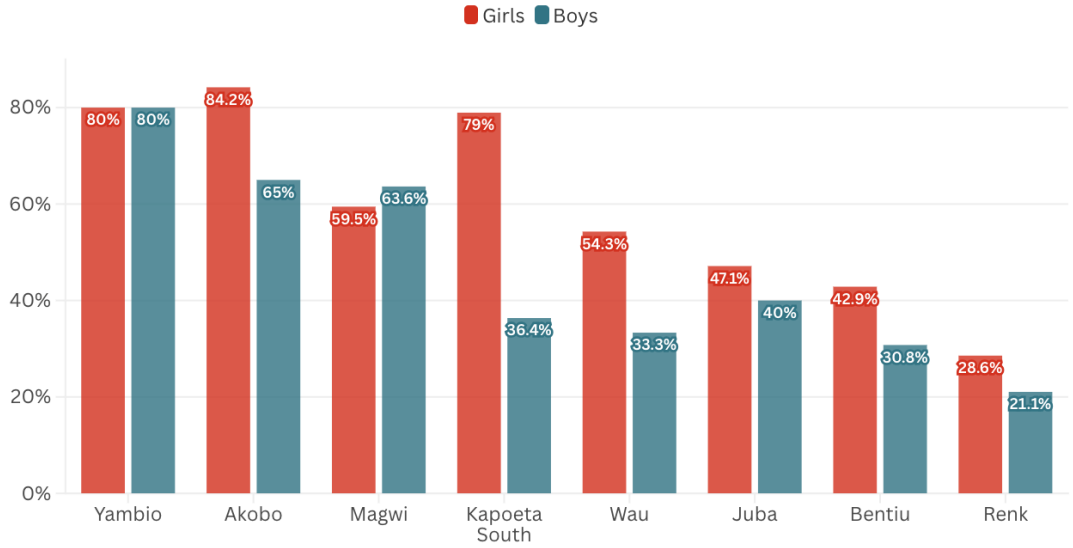
Only 0.7% of children selected "being able to stop working" as a standalone enabler, which could indicate that children do not always see their current labour as the primary barrier, or that stopping work alone is insufficient without accompanying support. Paradoxically, one child listed *"going mining"* as the thing that would help them achieve their aspirations, indicating both the perceived economic promise and the exploitative risks of this sector.

7.14. CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AWARENESS AND CHILD PROTECTION SERVICES

Awareness of children's rights and access to protection services in South Sudan is uneven and often limited, with significant regional and gender disparities. While three-quarters of children reported some awareness of child labour laws, knowledge of where to seek help remains low, only half knew where to turn for protection, and just a third were aware of support actors in their communities. Awareness tends to be higher in counties like Yambio, Akobo, and Kapoeta South, and among girls in certain areas, but is notably lower in urban and displacement-affected settings such as Juba and Renk. Qualitative findings reveal that while some local leaders and youth take protective action, broader community responses are constrained by social norms, fear of retaliation, weak enforcement, and distrust in formal systems. Without strengthened, visible protection services and community sensitization, children remain vulnerable despite awareness of their rights.

Awareness of children's rights and knowledge of protection services remains uneven across the study locations, with noticeable gender disparities and urban-rural divides. When asked about their awareness of children's rights or laws "that say what kind of work children can or cannot do", 74% of children report being aware of such laws (Figure 71). Highest awareness is seen in Akobo (74%), Kapoeta South (63%), Magwi (61%), and Yambio (80%), where a majority of children, both girls and boys, acknowledge knowledge of these rights. Conversely, regions like Juba and Renk have notably lower awareness, with only about 44% and 25% respectively reporting familiarity with children's rights.

Figure 71: Proportion of children aware of children's rights or laws that regulate child labour, by gender and location.



Gender differences are evident but inconsistent: in Akobo and Magwi, girls show higher awareness (84% and 59%) than boys, while in Juba, boys' awareness is somewhat higher (40% girls vs. 44% boys). The persistence of a sizeable minority unaware of these rights, reaching over 50% in several locations, such as Bentiu (62%) and Renk (75%), highlights gaps in child rights education and community outreach.

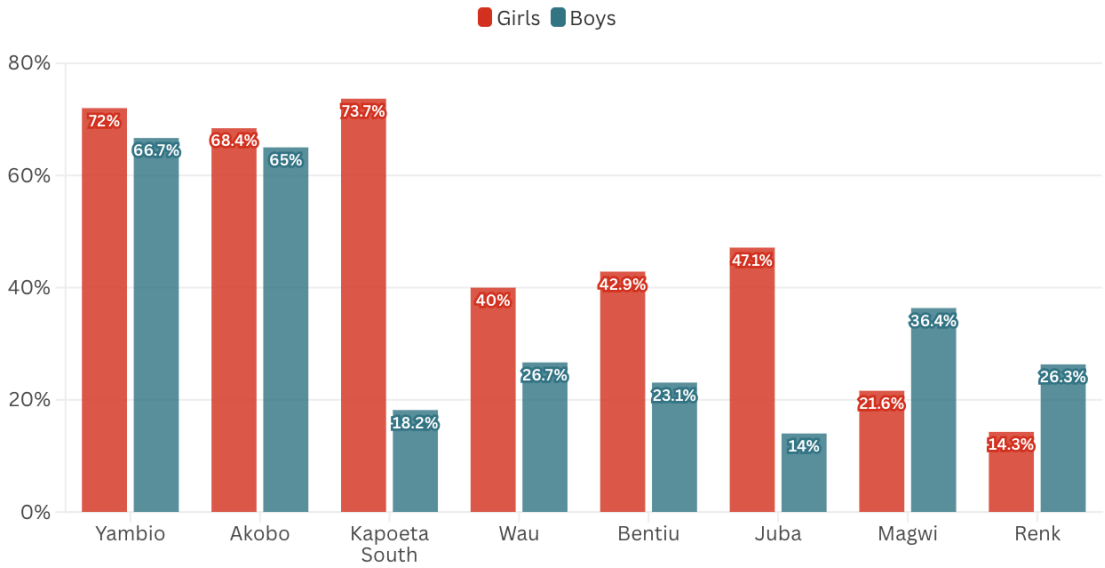
Of all children that reported being approached for armed group recruitment, 13.3 % reported being aware of their rights and of protection services, versus 5.5% that were not ($\chi^2 = 8.26$, $p = 0.016$). The fact that these children were surveyed within their HHs indicates that they had either declined recruitment or had exited such situations. Of the children who reported having seen or heard of other children being approached for recruitment, 68% are aware of children's rights, compared to 32% of those who were not aware of their rights ($\chi^2 = 13.49$, $p = 0.001$). This pattern suggests that awareness of children's rights may serve as a protective factor, either enabling children to resist recruitment or empowering them to leave and return to their families.

When asked whether they knew of any organization, person, or place in their community that supports working or vulnerable children, only 33% of surveyed children responded "yes" (see Figure 72). Given the role that rights awareness can play in protecting children from exploitation as previously indicated, this low level of knowledge of where to turn to in case of need, points to a critical gap, underscoring the need not only to raise awareness among children about available protection services, but also to strengthen and make these services more visible and accessible within communities.

High levels of knowledge are present in Akobo (66%) and Kapoeta South (53%), suggesting stronger community support structures or visibility of assistance in those areas. In contrast, Juba shows low awareness, with only 15% reporting knowledge of support resources, indicating possible gaps in support availability or community information dissemination.

Gender differences again appear, with girls generally more likely to report awareness of such support (e.g., 73% in Kapoeta South) than boys (18%), reflecting possibly different social networks or varying access to information. The combination of "No" and "Not sure" responses remains high in several locations (e.g., Bentiu 70%, Magwi 69%, and Juba 85%), suggesting many children either lack access to help or are unaware of it.

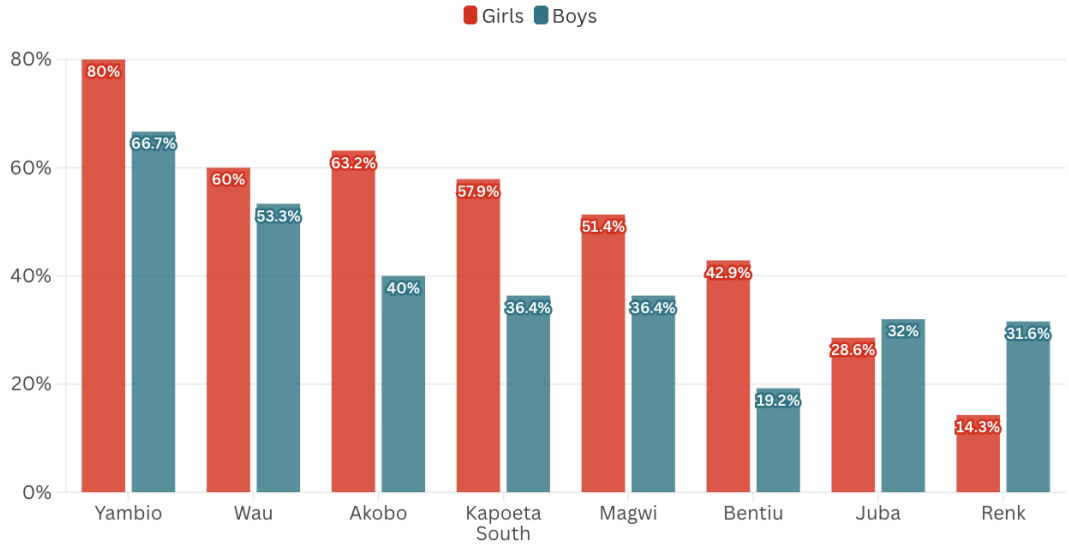
Figure 72: Proportion of children who know of someone helping working children in difficulty, by gender and location.



Among all surveyed children, when they were asked whether they would know where to go if they needed help or protection, just over half (51%) of children said they would, underscoring gaps in actionable awareness, as Figure 73 illustrates. The highest levels of knowledge are in Yambio (75%), Wau (58%), and Magwi (46%), where supportive environments or stronger community linkages may exist. Conversely, Juba (30%), Bentiu (27%), and Renk (23%) stand out for much lower knowledge of where to seek protection.

Notably, gender differences are apparent: In Akobo, for example, 63% of girls but only 40% of boys know where to seek help, an important disparity in access to protective resources. In Bentiu, girls again show better knowledge (43%) than boys (19%), while in most other locations knowledge among girls is higher but variable. The persistent high proportions of "No" responses (up to 70% in Juba and Bentiu) signal that many children remain ill-informed about protective services or lack trust/confidence in available systems.

Figure 73: Proportion of children who reported knowing where to get help or protection, by gender and location.



"If schools were free and there were jobs for parents, children would not have to work so much. We also need people to talk to our parents about the dangers of child labour."

(FGD, Male Youth Magwi)

"When I tried to report mistreatment at work, nobody listened. They said, 'You are just a child, you should obey.' So I stopped complaining."

(FGD, Female Youth, Juba)

7.14.1. The role of local structures

While local structures such as chiefs, elders, and religious leaders are nominally in place to advocate for child wellbeing, their actual influence appears mixed, with meaningful intervention constrained by social norms, limited enforcement, and fear of social repercussions. In some areas, participants acknowledged the proactive role of local leaders in addressing harmful practices. *"Our local chief here… always gives advice to both parents and the young ones,"* one youth explained, referencing repeated community messages discouraging harmful labour and urging parental responsibility. Similarly, another youth noted, *"our headman is trying his level best… sometimes he calls youth for meetings explaining the importance of education,"* and intervenes directly when witnessing abuse. Churches also emerged as important actors, with young people recalling sermons and guidance reinforcing children's duties and parental responsibilities. However, this moral guidance is not always protective: as one youth noted, religious messages on respecting elders can be misused by parents *"as an advantage to give kids heavy work to mistreat the children."*

Some communities reported the presence of child protection officers, individuals who can follow up on abuse cases through local governance structures. *"You can't be there and see a child being beaten… and you don't step in,"* said one young participant who identified as a child protection officer, referencing steps taken via community associations and chairpersons. Nevertheless, such instances appear to be the exception rather than the norm.

Despite the existence of traditional rules against child mistreatment, many respondents expressed skepticism about enforcement. Several youth emphasized that *rules are "interpreted in their own understanding" or "have never been implemented into the right channel."* As one participant put it, *"They have been singing about the rules, but implementation is another disease."* Another added, *"The perpetrators have never faced the law… they are loitering around,"* pointing to a breakdown in accountability and the normalization of impunity.

When children are found engaging in harmful or exploitative work, the response is reported to vary widely. In some communities, cases are referred to local youth leaders or chiefs who are *"supposed"* to enforce consequences. However, in practice, many participants reported a climate of fear or futility around reporting. *"People are fearing to report such a case… causing trouble between the two families,"* one youth stated. Another shared that children themselves hesitate to speak up, fearing retaliation or abandonment: *"If I report, my parent might disown me and tell me to go live with the person I went and reported to."*

The absence of consistent, visible child protection systems on the ground further contributes to the silence surrounding abuse and exploitation. *"If organizations were on the ground, most mistreated children would have reported the case,"* said one respondent, emphasizing the vacuum left by weak institutional presence. Informal mediation is often the only recourse, typically resulting in advice or verbal warnings to parents, rarely any form of penalty. *"They just advise… the parent will still continue doing the same thing,"* one participant lamented. Another added, *"There are no penalties… today if you are caught, tomorrow you are free again."*

Cultural beliefs and fear of retribution compound the problem. In some cases, fear of witchcraft or spiritual retaliation deters community members from intervening: *"If you report a parent, they might bewitch you… close your mouth so no words come out."* Additionally, structural corruption erodes trust in formal systems. *"You can raise your complaints, but once you reach the court, they have already bribed the judge,"* a youth participant explained, expressing deep disillusionment.

7.14.2. Taking a personal stance

Many youth expressed a personal sense of responsibility to intervene where possible, particularly within their own families. This reflects not only a growing awareness of children's rights, but also an emerging belief in their own capacity to shape more protective environments, even in the face of resistance.

Some respondents described concrete steps they take at home. *"I personally set my brothers down,"* one participant explained, describing how he challenges older family members for making young children fetch water from morning until night. *"Even to my own dad, I took my chair, sat next to him, explained the importance of children,"* he added, an act of quiet, persistent advocacy often met with generational misunderstanding and accusations of laziness or foreign influence.

Others shared similar experiences of confronting harmful practices. *"In my family, when I see a child given work they cannot manage, I talk to the person and stop the child from doing that work,"* said one youth, who emphasized the importance of being granted some authority within his HH. However, beyond the family sphere, many acknowledged the social limitations to action: *"You cannot openly come into someone's house and stop a child from working, unless you are looking for trouble."*

While some felt empowered to act within their own circles, several highlighted how attempts to intervene in wider community practices are often met with suspicion or hostility. *"When you try to help others, they say you are bragging, is it because you went to school?"* one participant noted, illustrating the tensions between formal education and traditional authority. Others reported being accused of trying *to "kill our traditional way of living"* when advocating for child rights or attempting to raise awareness about protection.

Despite these barriers, participants repeatedly called for stronger awareness efforts and community education. One suggested a monthly forum for parents, *"especially women, most of whom are uneducated",* to discuss child protection and early marriage in non-threatening, welcoming environments. Another emphasized the symbolic value of accountability: *"Take one parent and teach them a lesson… to show the rest that mistreating a child is bad and has consequences."*

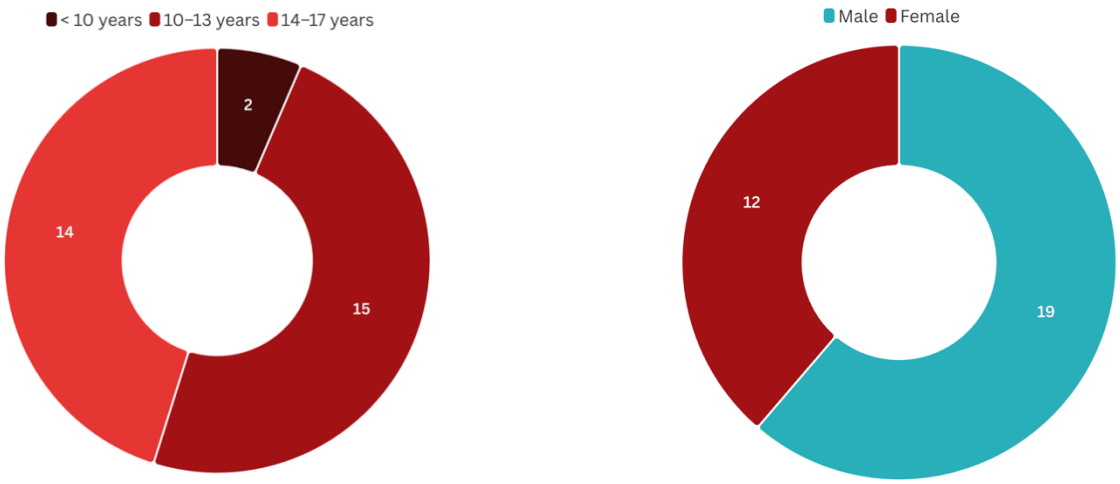
8. DIRECT OBSERVATION FINDINGS

The observational data collected across multiple sites in South Sudan reveals the normalization of child labour across diverse economic sectors, with children frequently observed working in contexts that are hazardous, exploitative, or clearly incompatible with their age and development. Children, mostly aged 10–17, were commonly observed engaging in physically demanding tasks such as vending, domestic work, farming, fishing, and street-based activities, often without any protective gear, supervision, or rest. Over 48% of observed children worked more than 6 hours per day, with three-quarters working every day and two-thirds engaged year-round. Most worked in public spaces like markets or streets, where signs of exhaustion, malnutrition, and emotional distress were common. Employer presence was limited; when observed, it was more often characterized by neglect or indifference than by care or abuse. Emotional distress was reported in more than half of cases, while physical injuries and fear were also widespread. Though some children worked in family contexts, many faced structurally exploitative conditions shaped by poverty, displacement, and the normalization of child labour, reinforcing the urgent need for protective interventions. While the data is not statistically representative, the patterns are consistent with findings from broader studies and reinforce key concerns around the prevalence and nature of child labour in fragile contexts.

8.1.1. Demographics

Out of the 31 observed children, 12 were girls and 19 were boys. The age distribution is heavily skewed toward older children, with only 6.45% of cases involving children below 10 years old (2 out of 31), while nearly half (48.39%, 15 out of 31) are aged 10–13 years, and just under half (45.16%, 14 out of 31) are adolescents aged 14–17 years. This pattern suggests that child labour is most prevalent among children in their early teens, with very young children less commonly observed in work settings. The relatively balanced split between the 10–13 and 14–17 age groups indicates that both early and late adolescence are high-risk periods for engagement in child labour, while the low proportion of children under 10 may reflect either lower participation at very young ages or greater difficulty in observing and identifying the youngest working children (see Figure 74).

Figure 74: Age and gender distribution of observed children



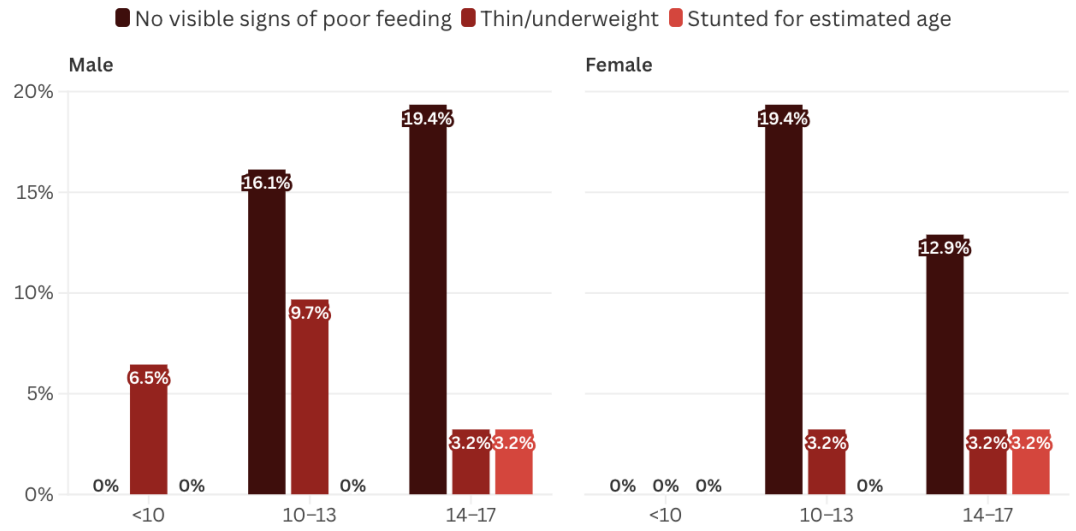
8.1.2. Visible signs of poor feeding

Among the children, 67.7% showed no visible signs of poor feeding, while 19.4% appeared thin or underweight, 3.2% appeared stunted for their assumed age, and 3.2% had other physical concerns (see Figure 75). Disaggregating by age and gender:

- All boys under 10 years were thin or underweight (100%).
- Among boys aged 10–13 (n=9): 55.6% showed no signs of poor feeding, and 33.3% were thin/underweight.
- Among girls aged 10–13: 100% showed no visible signs of poor feeding.
- Among boys aged 14–17: 75% showed no signs of poor feeding, 12.5% were thin/underweight, 12.5% had other concerns.
- Among girls aged 14–17: 66.7% showed no signs of poor feeding, and 16.7% appeared stunted.

The youngest boys are at highest risk of being underweight, while adolescent girls are the only group observed with stunting. Most girls aged 10–13 show no malnutrition, but older children of both genders display a broader range of nutritional challenges

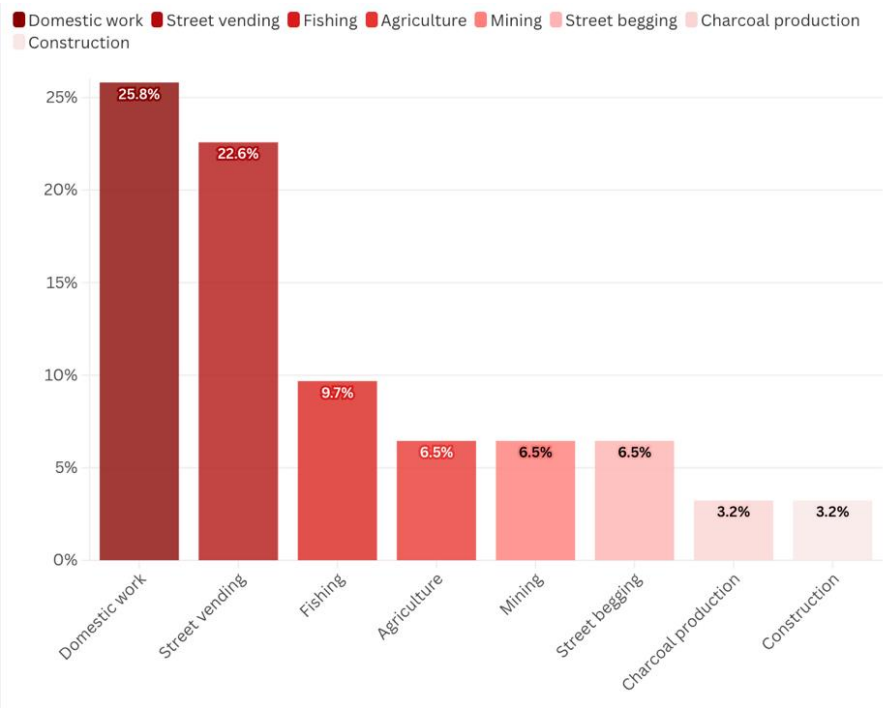
Figure 75: Signs of poor feeding disagreggated by gender and age



8.1.3. Type and place of work

The most common sectors are domestic work (8 cases) and street vending (7 cases). Other sectors such as fishing, agriculture, mining, and street begging are less frequent, each with 2–3 cases (Figure 76). Charcoal production and construction were observed in only 1 case each, while in 5 cases, the sector could not be assessed.

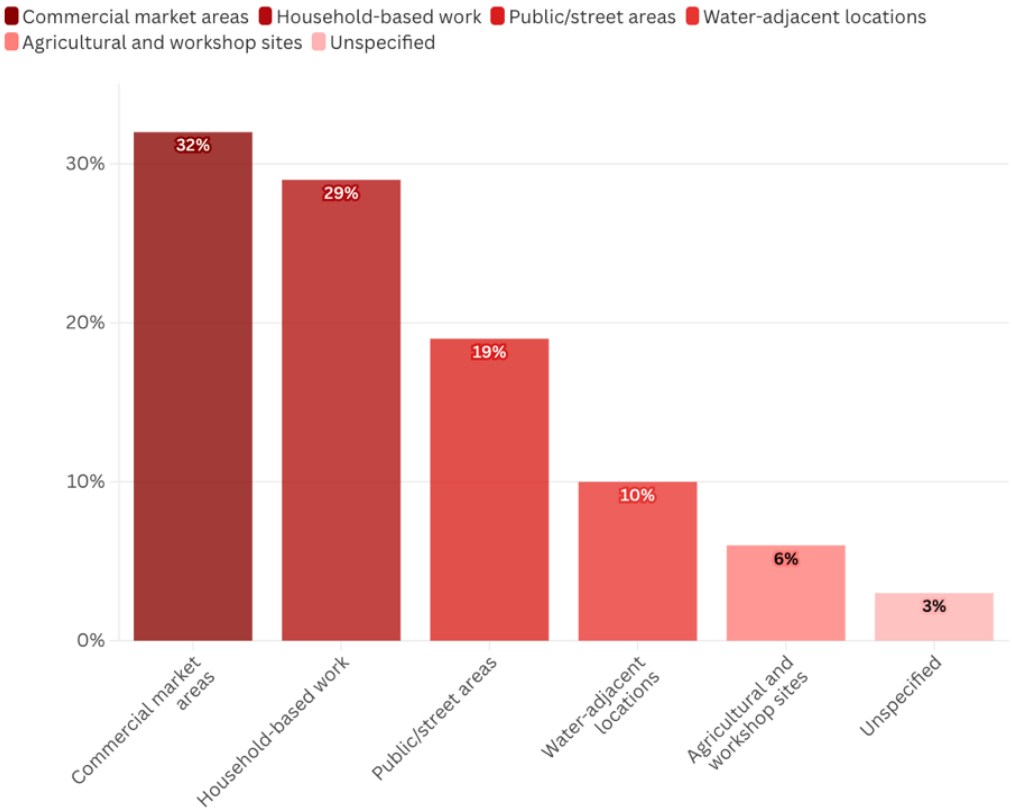
Figure 76: Observed child labour sectors



The distribution of work locations for observed children, illustrated in Figure 77 is as follows:

- The most common work locations are markets (32%) and at home (29%)
- Street-based work is also significant (19%), followed by river-based work (10%) and on-site/farm/workshop (6%).

Figure 77: Location of work



Markets are the single most common site for child labour in the sample. Children here are often engaged in vending, carrying loads, or assisting adults in commercial activities. The environment is described as *"very busy street and harsh,"* with children *"selling sweets barefoot"* or *"pushing 85kg of sorghum using wheelbarrow."* Observers note that *"more children on the streets [are] engaging in several economic activities,"* and that the market is *"noisy in the working place."* The physical risks are evident: *"wounds on the knees, legs," and "the child looks tired."* There is also a sense of exposure and neglect, as many children are *"ignored"* by adults around them. Street vending often involves long hours under the sun and close interaction with unknown adults, conditions that present significant protection risks. Children were noted selling food, plastic goods, and used clothing at roadside stalls, often in high-traffic or hazardous environments

Home-based work is primarily domestic, with children *"washing utensils," "overloading the child with domestic work for long time,"* or *"carrying heavy jerrican 20 liters of water."* Some children are observed *"doing the house chores,"* indicating the blurring of lines between family roles and exploitative labour. While some observers note *"the child was well cared for during the time of work,"* others highlight exhaustion and lack of supervision. The home setting can mask exploitation, as one note states: *"She is not literally employed but I observed her doing the house chores."*

Street-based child labour is characterized by high visibility and vulnerability. Children are observed *"moving barefooted with poor clothes," "begging,"* or *"doing self-employment kind of work."* The street environment exposes children to weather, traffic, and public scrutiny. Observers remark that *"the child wears torn clothes and he is physically thin,"* and that *"he looks rude and harsh if someone doesn't give him what he asked for,"* reflecting both deprivation and the hardening effects of street life.

Children working near rivers are often involved in fishing or water collection. Observations include *"goes to the river every hour to fetch water," "he is going to fish."* The river environment presents unique hazards, such as risk of drowning and prolonged physical exertion with some children expressing fears of *"drowning and long working hours"*. Other children are forced into heavy labour by family members: *"They have been forced by their parent to dig a canal of water."*

The last category includes children working in agriculture or construction, with observers noting children *"mining river sand for construction,"* or *"herding goats and sheep."* The work is physically demanding and often lacks any form of protective equipment.

Regarding work locations, children were most frequently observed in or around HHs and streets/roadsides. These patterns correspond closely with the types of work outlined above, HH-based tasks like water and firewood collection, and public-space work like vending and street hawking. One observation captures this intersection:

> *"Young girl, approx. 10 years old, seen washing clothes and carrying wood just outside her home. Later, same child seen helping older sibling sell snacks near the road."*

8.1.4. Visibility of labour

In over half of the observations, the child labour took place in highly public or semi-public spaces: on streets, at markets, water points, construction sites, or open HH compounds. Observers frequently recorded children working barefoot and in poor physical condition in full public view, fetching water, pushing wheelbarrows, selling snacks, or begging. One observer notes:

> *"More children on the streets engaging in several economic activities."*

Another describes:

> *"The child looks dirty… he is bathing… just begging without a tool. He asks money or food from anyone who comes across him."*

This high visibility raises concerns not only about physical vulnerability but also about the normalization of child labour in the public sphere. It suggests a societal desensitization to children performing adult-like labour roles, particularly in urban and peri-urban areas.

8.1.5. Tools, equipment and protective gear

The data reveal a pervasive absence of both appropriate tools and protective gear among working children. Most are either working with bare hands or using rudimentary objects, and even those in

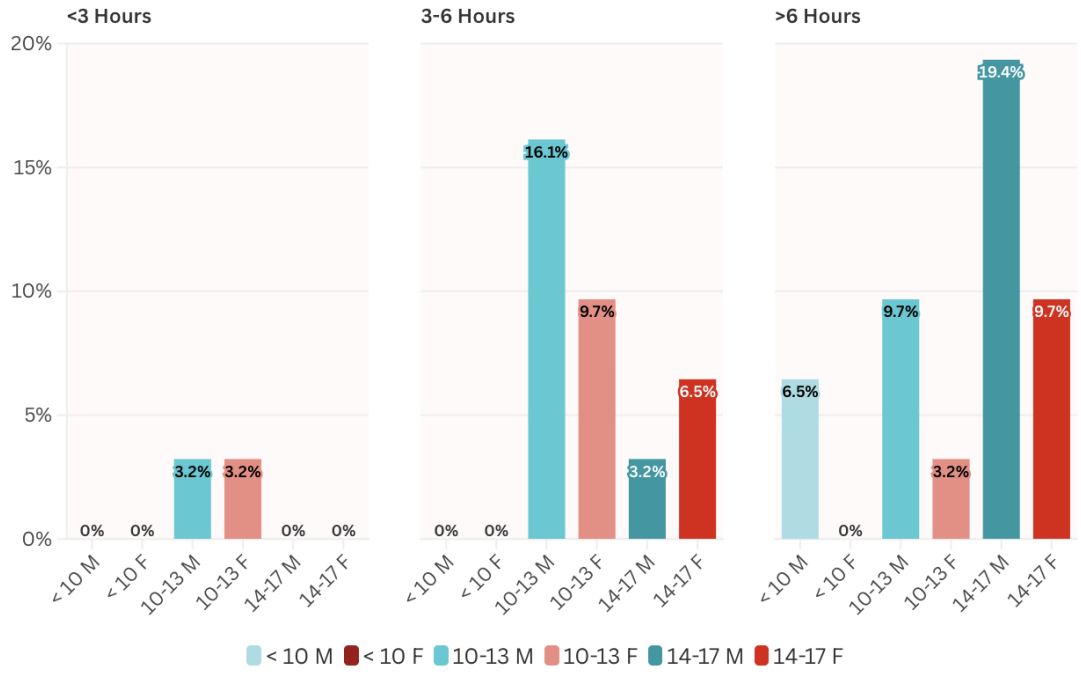
physically demanding or hazardous roles lack any standard safety equipment. The most common scenario is *"No equipment used," or "No tools used"* for 55% of the children, with those who do, mostly using basic or improvised items that not inherently dangerous, such as *"ordinary utensils," "plastic bottle," or "jerry can."* However, there are exceptions: some children use *"spade for mining river sand for construction," "small sharp pieces of wood for breaking charcoal into pieces,"* or *push "wheelbarrows loaded with heavy goods",* tasks that carry significant physical risk.

Protective gear is almost entirely absent, with 97% of children lacking any protective gear. The qualitative notes reinforce this: *"No protective equipment,"* and *"the child doesn't use any protective gear"* appear repeatedly. In one case, *"one open shoe"* is noted as the only form of protection. Even in environments with clear hazards, such as mining, construction, or charcoal production, there is no evidence of gloves, helmets, boots, or any standard safety equipment.

8.1.6. Work duration and intensity

The field observations reveal concerning patterns of work intensity with quantitative results aligning with the qualitative findings (see Figure 78 and Figure 79).

Figure 78: Number of hours of work per day.



- Excessive hours (>6 hours/day - 48.4% of cases): Children working excessive hours are frequently described as showing visible exhaustion. Field notes include *"the child looks so tired," "too exhausted," "Tiresome because he pushes the wheelbarrow every 5min and then has to stop to rest" and "appears exhausted and weak."* These children are often engaged in physically demanding tasks like *"pushing 85kg of sorghum using wheelbarrow," "carrying heavy jerrican 20 liters of water," or "pulling more than 30 jerry cans of water."* The qualitative evidence shows that excessive work hours are accompanied by clear signs of physical strain and fatigue. Nearly one in five children (19.4%) were explicitly coded as involving *"long hours without breaks",* which is the primary indicator for exhaustion and fatigue in the observation checklist, with one observer noting that *"the child is literally tired and overworked"*. Older adolescent males (14-17) show the highest concentration of excessive work hours (86%).
- Moderate hours (3-6 hours/day - 35.5% of cases): Children in this category show mixed conditions, with some appearing relatively stable but others still showing signs of stress. Notes

describe children as "*friendly*" or having *"good appearances"*, but also include concerning observations *like "overloading the child with domestic work for long time"*.

- Minimal hours (<3 hours/day - 6.5% of cases): The very small number of children working minimal hours represents the closest approximation to acceptable child work and was observed within family contexts.

The data indicates that the most hazardous sectors (agriculture, fishing, mining, street vending) are dominated by long working hours (>6 hours/day), with domestic work being more variable but still including cases of excessive hours.

Nearly three-quarters of working children (74.2%) work every single day of the week, representing an extreme violation of child development needs and international labour standards. Only 6.5% work the minimal 1-3 days weekly, indicating that most child labour situations involve intensive, rather than occasional, work exposure.

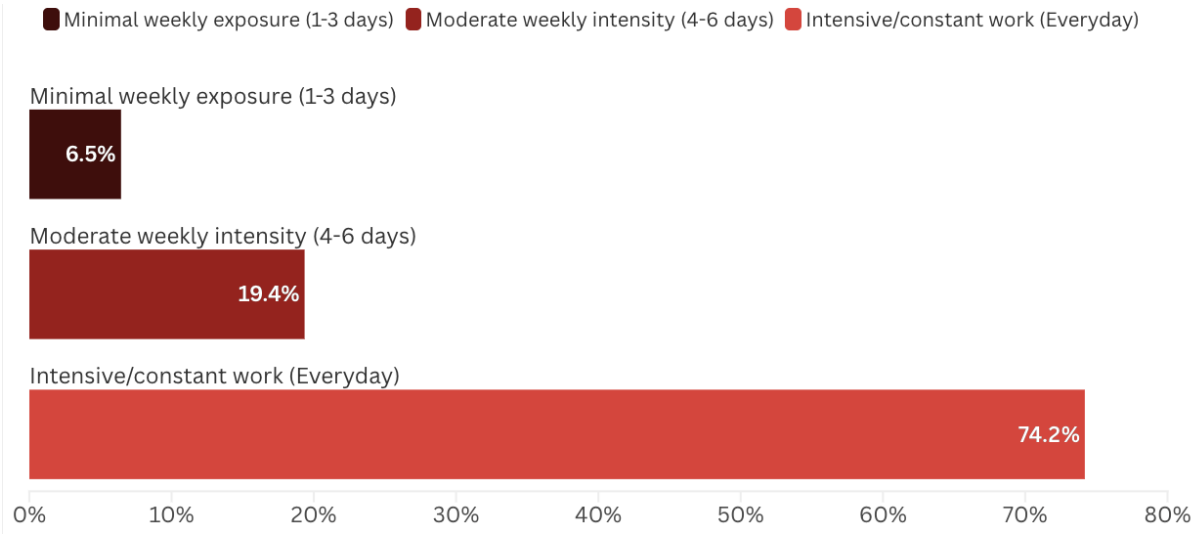
Observers noted signs of visible fatigue in many cases, children sleeping on sacks at the market, sitting listlessly between tasks, or limping under the weight of their loads. These observations support the characterization of child labour in these contexts as not only excessive in frequency but also exploitative in intensity.

Most observed work occurred during standard school hours, with children seen working from mid-morning to late afternoon, time that would otherwise be dedicated to learning or rest. This is particularly problematic in contexts where school attendance is low and dropout rates are high, suggesting a direct competition between child labour and formal education.

In some cases, children were observed working after school hours or combining short school attendance with afternoon labour, but this double burden often leads to fatigue, poor performance, and eventual withdrawal from school altogether. The dataset thus reinforces the cyclical link between poverty, school exclusion, and child labour.

According to enumerator estimates, more than half of the children observed worked more than 6 hours per day, with some noted to be present at their work locations *"from early morning until sunset."* Observations suggest that for many, work is not an occasional necessity but a routine reality. In locations such as marketplaces, children were also noted to start work as early as 6 AM, often without breaks or food. Such conditions increase the risk of exploitation, particularly for children working under non-family employers or in informal sectors

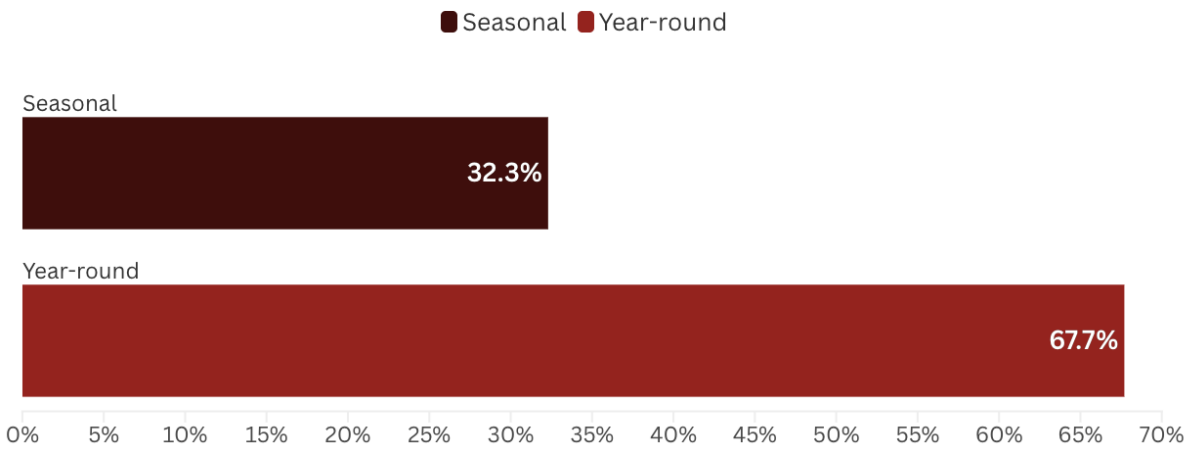
Figure 79: Number of days of work per week



Two-thirds of working children (67.7%) are engaged in year-round work (Figure 80), suggesting that their labour is essential to HH or employer operations rather than supplementary seasonal assistance. This continuous work pattern prevents children from having recovery periods and makes it extremely difficult

to prioritize education. This type of combined daily/year-round work creates chronic exhaustion and developmental harm

Figure 80:Seasonality of work.



8.1.7. Safety, hazards and health

Protective gear was almost entirely absent among observed working children: only one child (3%) was seen with any form of protective equipment, while 97% had none at all. The sole case of protective gear (3%) involved a child using plastic bottles tied around their torso as a life vest while fishing, which does not constitute meaningful safety protection. Most children worked in environments with no safety measures, leaving them exposed to multiple hazards.

Hazards were widespread and varied. Long hours without breaks were observed in 6 cases (19%), and physical injuries in 4 cases (13%). The most common hazard category, however, was "other hazards," recorded in 19 cases (61%). Qualitative notes and observer debriefing clarify that these "other hazards" included exposure to dust, fumes, excessive heat, noise, and environmental dangers such as risk of drowning or carrying heavy loads and working exposed to the sun and weather elements. For example, observers noted: *"it is noisy in the working place"; "this is just bush environment with no safety support",* and *"the child is working at a tea place and doesn't wear any protective gear… she stands on the sun washing utensils and also the heat of the fire when cooking the food is too much."*

> *"We see children carrying heavy loads in the market every day. Sometimes they fall down because the load is too much, but they have to keep working."*
>
> *(FGD, Youth, Wau)*
>
> *"When you work in the mine, you are always tired. The dust makes it hard to breathe. Some boys have wounds that never heal. But if you don't go, there is no food at home."*
>
> *(FGD, Male Youth, Kapoeta)*

Health impacts were significant and often directly linked to these hazards. Outright injuries were documented in 4 cases, with field notes describing *"wounds on the knees and legs," "an injury on the face," "suffered a cut on his leg,"* and *"cataract on the eye."* Signs of exhaustion and fatigue were also common, as well as malnourishment and other signs of poor health as previously described.

8.1.8. Employer behaviour and supervision

The qualitative data on supervision and employer behaviour reveals a landscape dominated by neglect, indifference, and, less frequently, active harshness, with only occasional instances of genuine care (Figure

81 and Figure 82). The majority of children are left unsupervised, as reflected in repeated notations such as *"Ignoring," "None,"* and *"No presence of employer."* Several cases explicitly note *"Self-employment kind of work"* or *"There is no employer present,"* highlighting that many children may be left to navigate hazardous conditions or interactions with the public with no adult oversight or protection.

Among the recorded observations, 10 explicitly mention the absence of any employer, and another 6 describe a situation where the child appears to be self-employed or engaged in unpaid family labour. For example, one observer notes: *"She is literally not employed but I observed her doing the house chores and decided to interact with her."* Another records: *"Self-employment kind of work … self-controlled business,"* in reference to a child fetching and transporting water.

When employer behaviour is observed, indifference is the prevailing theme. Enumerators describe situations where employers are *"Ignoring without proper care," "The child seems to be ignored,"* or simply *"Ignoring"* repeated across multiple entries. This indifference is not benign; it leaves children vulnerable to overwork and unsafe conditions, as in the case where an observer notes, *"Overloading the child with domestic work for long time,"* or *"She forced the child to work on heavy duty."* The lack of engagement is often compounded by the absence of supervision, creating a double layer of vulnerability.

Harsh treatment, while less common, is still present and clearly documented. Several notes mention *"Shouting orders,"* and "*The employer used to shout to the workers, and they feel sad and worried."* These entries suggest environments where verbal abuse is normalised, and children's emotional wellbeing is disregarded.

Amidst this, there are rare but important examples of positive employer behaviour. Some enumerators observed that *"The employer is showing care to his workers based on my observation," "Showing care,"* or *"The child was well cared for during the time of work."* In one case, the observer notes, *"The employer is a caring person even if the other colleagues are insulting themselves, she behaves well",* while in the case of a girl working at home, it is noted that *"The child have good relationship with the parents and they interact friendly among themselves during the time of washing clothes. Based on the observation, the child is doing a normal duty of work at home".*

Figure 81: Level of Supervision

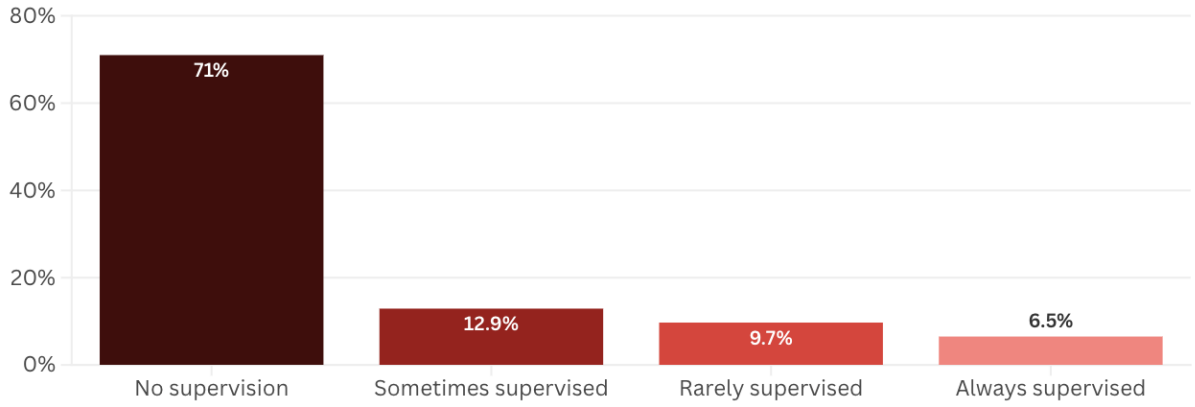
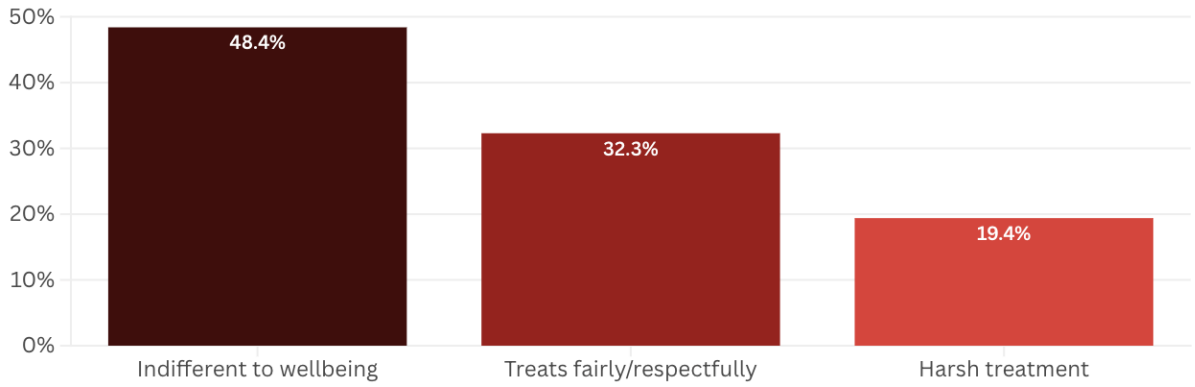


Figure 82: Employer behaviour



8.1.9. Exploitation and distress

Emotional distress dominates the exploitation question, affecting over half of observed children (54.8%). Field notes reveal the pervasive nature of psychological harm through observations like *"The child seems to be ignored," "The child looks so tired,"* and children who appear *"rude and harsh if someone doesn't give him what he asked for,"* suggesting defensive behavioral adaptations to chronic stress and harsh life conditions.

Physical injuries, while less frequent (9.7%), are clearly documented with specific descriptions: "*wounds on the knees, legs," "an injury on the face," "Cut his leg,"* and *"cataract on the eye."* These injuries appear directly linked to work activities, with one note stating a child *"suffered a cut on his leg"* in the context of street vending.

Fear dominates the emotional landscape of working children, with 55% of cases (n=17) demonstrating visible fear, matching the emotional distress prevalence. Tearfulness and withdrawal each affect 23% of children (7 cases each), indicating that fear represents the primary emotional response to their overall living and working environments characterized by unpredictability and threat. In combination with the data revealing the patterns of employer-child relationships, where 48% of employers demonstrate indifference to children's wellbeing, compared to 32% treating children fairly and 19% engaging in harsh treatment, it is indicated that active abuse represents a minority of cases, while systematic neglect and emotional unavailability dominate adult-child interactions in work settings (see section on employer behaviour and supervision). The prevalence of indifference over both care and cruelty suggests that children's welfare is simply not a consideration in most labour arrangements.

8.1.9.1. Structural vs. Individual Exploitation

It is important to distinguish between exploitation as an outcome of structural conditions, poverty, displacement, gender inequality, and direct interpersonal abuse. Most observations describe forms of hardship and exploitation that arise from economic necessity and social expectation, rather than direct coercion. Still, multiple observations, such as forced labour by parents or use of verbal intimidation, point to interpersonal dynamics that cross into exploitative relationships, blurring the line between domestic obligation and exploitative child labour: *"They were forced by their parent to dig canal of water", "She forced the child to work on heavy duty."*

9. EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

Community Sensitization and Awareness-Raising

Across Wau, Magwi, Akobo, and Yambio, participants emphasized that many parents are unaware of children's rights or the consequences of child labour. In Yambio, respondents highlighted the perception that *"a child belongs to the parents and they can do anything with them,"* underscoring the urgency of rights-based education. Another participant explained, *"People beat children because they don't understand it is wrong."*

Participants across all sites called for consistent, participatory education, delivered not only in schools but also in churches, markets, and communal gatherings. In Wau, a youth noted, *"If you explain to them well, they will understand."* In Yambio, people stressed that chiefs, women's groups, and pastors are well-positioned to lead this awareness: *"When the church preaches about children, people begin to reflect."* Ensuring these sensitization efforts are tailored to both literate and illiterate populations increases their reach and effectiveness.

Engagement of Local Leadership and Structures

Chiefs, elders, teachers, and religious leaders are essential gatekeepers in their communities. From Akobo to Yambio, participants cited them as the first resort when a child is mistreated or at risk. In Kapoeta, a youth said, *"If the chief says it is not good for a child to go to the gold mine, parents will listen."* In Yambio, one person noted: *"The local government and chiefs are supposed to help, but sometimes they are not serious."*

This highlights both the potential and the limitations of informal leadership structures. Best practice lies in supporting these leaders with training on child protection, clarifying their roles in reporting and mediation, and linking them to formal service providers. A promising example from Bentiu included community policing led by respected elders and youth, offering a more trusted and less punitive entry point for addressing exploitation.

School-Based Retention and Support Mechanisms

Economic hardship, hunger, and lack of school supplies continue to drive children out of school. In Yambio, a girl explained, *"When there is no food at home, we go and dig or sell water to survive."* Others pointed out that without pens, uniforms, or menstrual pads, girls in particular are likely to miss class or drop out.

Feeding programs and school material support were widely praised as motivators for attendance. In Wau, a participant said, *"If there is food in school, they may stay."* In Yambio, respondents recommended that every child be given school items at the beginning of the year to reduce pressure on parents.

Several youth emphasized the need for more engaging or practical education, with one in Magwi suggesting: *"Make school feel useful, not just reading and writing, let us learn something that helps us earn."* Bridging education and life skills could reduce dropout and improve transitions into safe work in adulthood.

Strengthening HH Livelihoods to Reduce Dependency on Child Labour

In every site, the economic burden on families emerged as a key driver of child labour. In Yambio, widowed or single mothers often rely on their children to sell local brews, water, or charcoal to make ends meet. Alcoholism was also mentioned repeatedly as a factor pushing children into adult roles.

Best practices included livelihood support for caregivers, especially women, through access to microloans, skills training, or farming inputs. In Kapoeta, a respondent explained, *"If the mother can earn something, she will not need to send the child to fetch firewood."* Conditional or unconditional cash transfers, especially when tied to school attendance, were mentioned in Wau and Yambio as highly impactful for reducing child labour without punishing already struggling families.

Referral and Response Mechanisms at Local Level

Participants in Yambio echoed concerns from other sites about the absence of clear, safe pathways for reporting child abuse or exploitation. *"If you talk too much, they say you are spoiling the child,"* one respondent said. Others feared reprisals or being accused of witchcraft if they intervened.

Several respondents called for the establishment of child protection committees made up of trusted community members, youth leaders, elders, and trained volunteers. These individuals could offer quiet mediation, connect families to services, and monitor risks without publicly shaming caregivers. In Akobo, the idea of acting *"like CID officers"* was suggested to describe the kind of discreet, non-confrontational support people were willing to accept.

Protective Safe Spaces and Emergency Support

Yambio added to the chorus of voices across sites noting the total absence of safe havens for children escaping abuse, exploitation, or early marriage. *"There is no place to run,"* said one girl. Some recounted how mistreated children ended up sleeping outside or in market stalls at night.

The suggestion of community-run shelters or child-friendly spaces was common. These could be hosted by churches, NGOs, or even chiefs' compounds, but they must be non-stigmatizing, easily accessible, and equipped with referral links to psychosocial care, health services, and reintegration support. In Yambio, a respondent emphasized that *"girls need a place to go when they refuse early marriage,"* highlighting how safe spaces can directly reduce exposure to WFCL.

Children and Youth as Change Agents

Young people in Yambio described themselves not just as victims but as defenders of their peers and siblings. One girl recounted, *"I told my mother to stop beating my brother and she listened."* Youth across sites voiced a desire to play a more active role in prevention.

The concept of youth-led clubs or peer support groups emerged strongly. These spaces would allow children to learn about their rights, share concerns, and safely report abuse. A youth in Wau said, *"Let us talk to parents in the community meetings, they will listen to us too."* When linked to teachers, chiefs, or NGOs, such groups could act as early warning systems and catalysts for cultural change. Mentorship and support for these emerging leaders is essential to sustain their impact.

10. CONCLUSIONS

10.1. EVIDENCE ON THE EXISTENCE AND MAGNITUDE OF WFCL ACROSS SECTORS AND LOCATIONS

The study establishes that the worst forms of child labour (WFCL) are not only widespread across South Sudan, but have become structurally embedded in the daily lives of children,particularly in contexts of economic precarity, gendered household roles, and weak institutional oversight. Based on the household survey, 64% of children aged 12–17 are currently engaged in WFCL, a rate that points to systemic drivers rather than isolated cases.

Prevalence varies markedly across counties, underscoring the role of geography in shaping exposure and risk. The highest levels were recorded in Kapoeta South and Yambio (90%), followed by Magwi (79.7%) and Akobo (79.5%), with these counties constituting clear hotspots for exploitation. Even in counties with relatively lower prevalence, such as Juba (46.7%), Wau (50%), and Bentiu (55%),rates remain alarmingly high. The findings reveal no location in which children are broadly protected from the worst forms of labour.

Children are concentrated in economic sectors that are informal, low-paid, and physically taxing. The most common sectors include street vending (42%), agriculture (37%), domestic work (28%), and shop work (17%), with additional reports of children engaged in charcoal production, mining, fishing, and construction. These are not marginal activities: they are integral to local economies and are often framed by communities as necessary contributions to household survival. This perception, however, masks the exploitative and often hazardous conditions under which children operate. Sectoral variation is closely tied to geography. For example, mining dominates in Kapoeta South, while agriculture and market work are more common in Magwi and Yambio,indicating that interventions must be location- and sector-specific.

Direct observations and qualitative data further illuminate the intensity and visibility of child labour. Over half of observed children worked more than six hours per day, often without breaks, food, or protective gear. Most work in public or semi-public spaces, suggesting not only a normalization of child labour but also a widespread tolerance, if not complicity, by adult community members and employers. Emotional distress is high: 53% of working children report feeling anxious, worried, or sad due to their work duties, with even higher rates among girls.

Workplace abuse is widespread: 65% of working children report experiencing physical violence, threats, or being forced to work against their will, with some reporting confiscation of wages or restrictions on their freedom of movement. This suggests that coercion is not incidental but an embedded feature of many child labour arrangements, particularly in more remote or unregulated settings.

Critically, involvement in WFCL does not correlate with school exclusion alone. While children who are out of school are statistically less likely to be in WFCL, three-quarters (75.8%) of school-going children still report being engaged in WFCL. This undermines the assumption that school enrollment alone is protective and highlights the need for programming that addresses the overlap of education and economic exploitation, where children may attend school by day and work by night, to the detriment of their wellbeing and learning outcomes.

The evidence points to a national child labour crisis that is underpinned by entrenched poverty, the erosion of protective community structures, gendered expectations, and a labour market that absorbs children in the absence of viable alternatives.

10.2. MAIN DRIVING FACTORS OF CHILD LABOUR AT DIFFERENT LEVELS

The findings of this study underscore that child labour in South Sudan is not the result of isolated decisions or individual failings, but emerges from a complex interplay of structural, household, and community-level drivers. At the household level, the education level of the household head stands out as a consistently significant determinant. There is a clear and statistically significant inverse relationship between the level of education of the head of household and children's involvement in the worst forms of child labour (WFCL). Households where the head has no formal education, particularly among female-headed households, report the highest rates of child labour. In female-headed households, 36.9% of children are involved in WFCL when the head has never attended school, compared to just 7.8% in those headed by women with post-secondary education. A similar gradient is observed in male-headed households: children whose male caregivers have post-secondary education are least likely to be in WFCL (9.3%), while those in households headed by men with no formal schooling show significantly higher engagement. These findings indicate that education functions as a critical protective factor, likely enabling improved economic opportunities, higher awareness of child rights, and stronger emphasis on schooling over work.

The gender of the household head also plays a distinct role. Across all education levels, children in female-headed households are more likely to be involved in WFCL than their counterparts in male-headed households. This reflects both socioeconomic vulnerability and the compounded marginalization faced by women in accessing education, employment, and institutional support in post-conflict and displacement settings.

However, it is not only the education of caregivers that matters. Children's own educational status and school attendance are strong predictors of labour involvement. Children who have never attended school are substantially more likely to be engaged in WFCL, while primary education alone does not appear sufficient unless accompanied by continued attendance. The study found that attending school is a partial protective factor, children who are not in school are at much higher risk, but many children currently attending school (76%) are also engaged in work. This points to widespread dual burden and to the insufficiency of education systems to fully shield children from labour under current economic and social conditions.

Bonded labour and coerced work related to household debt emerged as a prominent form of exploitation in several counties, particularly Kapoeta South and Akobo. In these cases, children are made to work to repay family debts, often under coercion or threat, highlighting household-level indebtedness as a direct driver of WFCL. Although 68.6% of children believed they would be released from work after repayment, the nature of their engagement suggests partial awareness of exploitation but limited agency to exit. Such practices represent a blurred line between survival strategies and forced labour.

Parental and caregiver awareness of child rights and labour laws significantly influences children's exposure to WFCL. Caregivers who are unaware of what constitutes hazardous work or the legal minimum working age are more likely to permit or overlook harmful labour practices. Even when children are aware of their own rights, this knowledge often lacks practical effect without corresponding caregiver support, particularly when decisions about work are made by adults in the household.

Household economic insecurity, as proxied by food security status, shows a strong correlation with WFCL. Children from food-insecure households, those with poor or borderline Food Consumption Scores, are more than four times more likely to be involved in WFCL than those from food-secure households. With 36% of surveyed households categorized as either borderline or poor in their food consumption, the pressure to prioritize immediate survival over long-term development is evident.

At the community level, cultural norms, structural protection gaps, and social silence around exploitation compound household vulnerabilities. In counties such as Akobo, Magwi, and Kapoeta South, the normalization of child labour is deeply entrenched in community life. Children are widely expected to contribute to herding, domestic chores, agricultural work, and informal trade, with gendered expectations that place boys in physically demanding roles and girls in caregiving, selling, or high-risk domestic work. These expectations are not always seen as harmful but are instead framed as part of growing up or helping the family survive.

Gendered labour roles are particularly pronounced, with early marriage and domestic servitude normalised for girls, and informal transport, security tasks, or migration-linked work expected of boys. In many communities, these practices are sustained by tradition and economic necessity, and only rarely challenged.

The availability and visibility of protection services remains limited. Only one-third (33%) of surveyed children knew of any organization, individual, or community structure that supports vulnerable or working children. In Juba this drops to just 15%. This profound lack of access to safety nets means that most children have nowhere to turn when facing abuse or exploitation. While some counties such as Akobo and Kapoeta South report relatively higher awareness of services, these remain the exception.

Collective community awareness of children's rights also plays a significant role. Communities with higher awareness tend to report lower prevalence of WFCL, though awareness alone is not always protective in the absence of enforcement and viable alternatives. Children who are aware of their rights but lack trusted adults, legal recourse, or community support are often unable to act. In some areas, children reported knowing about child labour laws or exploitation but feeling helpless to change their circumstances or fearing retribution if they spoke out.

Risks linked to recruitment into armed groups, sexual exploitation, and coerced migration also intersect with child labour dynamics. Children who were aware of recruitment or sexual exploitation incidents in their communities were significantly more likely to be aware of their rights, but this awareness did not translate into protection, pointing to a major gap between knowledge and power. In areas like Bentiu and Yambio, children reported fear of abduction, transactional survival sex, and being trafficked into domestic servitude or portering.

Finally, community-level response mechanisms remain largely informal and inconsistent. While some areas report engagement from local chiefs, elders, or churches, these interventions are typically non-penal and reliant on moral suasion. In many cases, abuse is met with silence, informal advice, or no action at all. Children frequently expressed fear of reporting mistreatment, citing concerns about being disowned, accused of witchcraft, or causing family shame. Others reported that even when abuse was brought to local leaders, perpetrators faced no consequences*: "today if you are caught, tomorrow you are free again."*

10.3. LEGAL AND POLICY GAPS

1. Child Labour

The legal and policy landscape governing child labour in South Sudan presents a complex set of interrelated gaps that significantly hinder efforts to prevent and respond to the worst forms of child labour (WFCL). While South Sudan has ratified key international instruments, such as the ILO Conventions 138 and 182, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, these commitments have yet to be fully translated into a coherent and enforceable national protection framework. Notably, the country has not ratified the Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons, leaving a critical gap in the legal response to trafficking, forced labour, and sexual exploitation of children, forms of abuse that remain widespread in conflict-affected and high-risk areas.

Although the Labour Act contains some provisions on child labour, it does not constitute a comprehensive, stand-alone legal framework aligned with international standards. The absence of a domesticated law defining, regulating, and prohibiting the full spectrum of WFCL, including sexual exploitation, trafficking, bonded labour, and child soldiering, leaves children unprotected under the law. A domestication bill has reportedly been drafted but not yet passed, delaying the operationalisation of core protections. Existing legislation such as the Penal Code lacks the specificity and breadth to prosecute complex forms of coercion, recruitment, and community-level exploitation. Meanwhile, the 2008 Labour Bill, which would codify many child protection provisions, remains stalled in Parliament.

One of the most problematic inconsistencies lies in the disconnect between the legal minimum age of employment (14 years) and the age of compulsory education (13 years), creating a one-year window where children may legally exit school and immediately enter the labour market, often into informal or hazardous sectors. South Sudan also lacks an officially endorsed hazardous work list, a critical operational requirement under ILO Convention 182. Although a draft list was reportedly developed, its lack

of formal adoption contributes to ambiguity among law enforcement, employers, and protection actors, and hinders clear regulatory action on what constitutes unacceptable work for children.

The implementation and enforcement of existing laws and policies remain limited. There is currently no functioning national labour inspection regime: inspectors are based exclusively in Juba and are unable to operate in rural or high-risk areas due to lack of resources, security escorts, and operational support. As a result, enforcement in the informal sector, where most WFCL occurs, is practically nonexistent. No prosecutions related to child labour have been recorded in over a decade, and no accessible, child-friendly complaint mechanism exists for children to report abuse. Referral pathways for exploited children are fragmented and, outside of humanitarian programmes, largely absent.

Institutional capacity to oversee child protection and legal enforcement is severely constrained. The Directorate for Women and Juvenile Justice within the Ministry of Justice is reportedly staffed by only one officer, lacks budgetary allocation, and holds no formal authority, despite its critical mandate. Similar challenges are evident in the Ministry of Labour, where inspections are hindered by logistical and funding constraints. Officials across multiple ministries expressed strong technical commitment, but lamented the absence of institutional backing, budget allocations, and legal mandates to act effectively.

Policy and coordination gaps exacerbate the legal shortcomings. South Sudan does not currently have a dedicated national strategy or action plan on child labour. The National Steering Committee on Child Labour is no longer active, and no cross-sectoral coordination mechanism exists to guide implementation. Ministries often operate in isolation or are bypassed entirely in programmatic design and delivery, even when they have designated focal points and statutory responsibilities. The Ministry of Labour has voiced concerns that its mandate is frequently overshadowed by others, without formal inter-ministerial protocols to ensure collaboration or task-sharing.

The absence of a centralized and functional data system further limits the ability to track, monitor, and respond to WFCL. South Sudan has not conducted a nationally representative survey on child labour since 2008. Data collection remains fragmented, often paper-based, and siloed within individual ministries or agencies. There is no shared database to monitor children at risk, those withdrawn from labour, or those reintegrated after exploitation, which undermines evidence-based policy, programme design, and accountability.

Social policy frameworks meant to complement legal protections are also under-implemented. While public education is nominally free, in practice, the costs of fees, uniforms, and materials remain prohibitive for many families. This pushes children into the labour force to support household survival. Social protection mechanisms, such as safety nets for vulnerable families, remain limited or non-existent. Awareness-raising campaigns about child rights and community-based protection systems exist in some areas but are typically inconsistent, poorly funded, and fail to reach the most at-risk communities.

Community-level enforcement and protection systems remain weak and often informal. Interviews with officials from the police, military, and social welfare sectors indicate that while there are individuals committed to protecting children, actual cases of child labour, whether in the form of forced migration, debt-bonded labour, or recruitment, often go unreported or unresolved due to fear of retaliation, social stigma, or lack of follow-up. Local protection systems lack both visibility and legitimacy in the eyes of affected populations, and traditional mechanisms are often used to mediate rather than legally resolve cases, limiting the consequences for perpetrators.

2. Worst forms of child labour

Armed group recruitment

With regard to children's recruitment in armed forces, despite South Sudan's commitments under international law, including its ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, significant legal and policy gaps persist in addressing the recruitment and use of children by armed forces and groups. The absence of an operational, enforceable domestic legal framework has resulted in minimal accountability for recruiters and limited protection for children at risk of, or emerging from, military association.

While the Penal Code and Child Act (2008) provide general protections for children, they do not include explicit criminalization of child recruitment or prescribe penalties for those who forcibly conscript, coerce,

or exploit children in armed conflict. There is currently no standalone law or amendment that operationalizes South Sudan's obligations under the Optional Protocol or establishes clear mechanisms for the investigation and prosecution of recruiters, whether state or non-state actors. As several officials noted in interviews, cases of recruitment are often addressed informally or administratively, sometimes through military channels, rather than through the judicial system, weakening both deterrence and redress.

Interviews with the Directorate of Child Protection within the South Sudan People's Defence Forces (SSPDF) underscore a commitment to ending child recruitment, and respondents referenced the existence of policies within the military that prohibit the enlistment of minors. However, these policies lack statutory weight and are not backed by legal mandates that allow for criminal prosecution. The child protection directorate does not have powers of arrest or independent investigative authority; its role is advisory and mediatory, reliant on goodwill and coordination rather than law. This structural limitation constrains the state's ability to pursue cases of child recruitment and undermines broader efforts at prevention.

Coordination between the SSPDF and civilian protection institutions also remains ad hoc. While civil-military coordination has improved since the signing of the Revitalized Agreement, there is no established inter-agency framework for verifying, investigating, or responding to reports of child recruitment, especially in remote or insecure areas. Moreover, there is no legal requirement for the armed forces or associated actors to report suspected cases of child recruitment to civilian justice or social welfare authorities. Without such referral protocols or statutory oversight, enforcement remains discretionary and inconsistent.

From a child protection perspective, there is also a legal vacuum surrounding reintegration. The absence of a national policy or legal framework for disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration tailored to children means that support for children exiting armed groups is heavily reliant on international or NGO-led initiatives. These programmes are often underfunded and disconnected from the formal justice or education systems, and they are not guaranteed continuity or state funding. Several respondents from the Ministry of Defence and DDR Commission acknowledged this gap and emphasized the need for a legally grounded, government-led DDR strategy that embeds reintegration in national systems and ensures long-term follow-up and social protection for affected children.

Finally, weak legal literacy and under-reporting contribute to the normalization of child recruitment in certain contexts. Some community leaders reportedly resolve cases of recruitment informally or through customary structures, often without understanding that such practices constitute violations under both international and South Sudanese law. Without dedicated awareness-raising and a legal framework that criminalizes and deters recruitment, accountability remains elusive.

In summary, South Sudan's legal and policy framework for addressing WFCL is constrained by overlapping legal ambiguities, major implementation shortfalls, weak intersectoral coordination, and chronic underinvestment. Without a comprehensive legal framework, endorsed operational tools such as hazardous work lists, functioning enforcement bodies, and cross-sectoral data systems, the national response remains fragmented and reactive. There is a strong foundation of political commitment and individual leadership within institutions, but translating this into effective child protection will require urgent legislative reform, investment in institutional capacity, especially at the subnational level, and the establishment of robust coordination and data systems. Progress will depend not only on passing laws but also on equipping institutions to act, resourcing enforcement systems, and embedding child protection within both the legal and social fabric of communities.

Commercial Sexual Exploitation

Commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) of children remains one of the least addressed yet most damaging forms of child labour in South Sudan, with major legal, institutional, and protective gaps enabling its persistence. While international frameworks such as ILO Convention 182, the UN CRC, and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child obligate the government to prohibit and prosecute all forms of CSE, including transactional sex, child prostitution, and trafficking for sexual purposes, South Sudan's domestic legislation and institutional systems fall short of these obligations.

The Penal Code (2008) includes provisions on rape and sexual offences, but it lacks specific definitions or penalties targeting commercial sexual exploitation of minors. There is no standalone legislation criminalizing child prostitution, sexual exploitation in exchange for goods or services, or the involvement

of intermediaries such as traffickers or exploitative employers. As a result, law enforcement officers often lack the legal grounds and procedural clarity to investigate or charge perpetrators of CSE. Interviews with police and judicial officials confirmed this legal ambiguity: while some cases are addressed under general sexual violence statutes, they rarely result in prosecution, and child victims are often treated as offenders or ignored altogether.

The situation is further complicated by South Sudan's failure to ratify the Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons, which leaves trafficking for sexual exploitation outside the formal scope of national policy or law. Although the government has signaled intention to develop anti-trafficking legislation, no concrete legal instrument or policy has yet been enacted to define, prevent, or prosecute CSE in line with international standards.

Institutionally, the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare (MoGCSW) and police child protection units are expected to play leading roles in addressing CSE, yet both face chronic under-resourcing and mandate gaps. Interviewees from MoGCSW acknowledged that child sexual exploitation is rarely prioritized, and that existing shelter or psychosocial services for survivors are largely donor-dependent and concentrated in urban centres. There are no clear referral mechanisms or survivor-centered guidelines for responding to CSE cases, and the lack of safe houses or witness protection further discourages reporting.

Community-level responses are also hindered by stigma and denial. Interviews with officials suggest that in many areas, cases of CSE are resolved through informal mediation or ignored altogether, particularly when perpetrators are powerful or known to the victim's family. Children engaged in survival sex or exploited in hotels, truck stops, or mining sites are often blamed rather than protected. In some counties, CSE has been normalized under the guise of "early marriage" or "gifting," masking exploitative practices as culturally sanctioned transactions. Without targeted awareness efforts, these practices go unchallenged.

In sum, the legal and policy vacuum around commercial sexual exploitation of children in South Sudan contributes to impunity for perpetrators, criminalization or neglect of survivors, and weak institutional response.

Trafficking

Despite growing evidence of child trafficking in South Sudan,including movement of children for exploitative labour, commercial sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, and recruitment into armed groups, the country's legal and policy framework remains poorly equipped to prevent, identify, or prosecute trafficking of children. This leaves significant protection gaps and enables impunity for traffickers and intermediaries, especially in informal, cross-border, and post-conflict contexts.

A major legal shortfall is South Sudan's non-ratification of the Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons, the principal international instrument obliging states to prevent trafficking, protect victims, and prosecute perpetrators. While South Sudan has ratified related conventions such as the CRC and ILO Convention 182, there is no dedicated national law on human trafficking, let alone a child-specific provision, nor an operational definition of trafficking that meets international standards. The Penal Code criminalizes abduction and some forms of forced labour and sexual abuse, but it does not define trafficking as involving recruitment, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of persons by means of coercion, fraud, or abuse of vulnerability, which is central to international frameworks.

Interviews with government officials, including from the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Labour, and SSPDF, consistently flagged the absence of legal clarity and procedural guidance as a core obstacle to action. Officials acknowledged that while trafficking is "happening in many forms," including under the guise of domestic employment or debt repayment, there is no standardized way to classify or prosecute it. In practice, suspected cases of trafficking are often addressed, if at all, under general criminal provisions that fail to capture the coercive or exploitative nature of the act, and no disaggregated data on child trafficking is collected or publicly available.

South Sudan's porous borders, weak birth registration systems, and large internally displaced and returnee populations further increase the risk of trafficking, particularly in remote areas where state presence is limited. According to stakeholders from the police and child protection units, children are routinely moved between counties or across borders for exploitative purposes, including to mining sites, agricultural work, and as domestic servants. Yet no formal cross-border referral protocols or inter-agency

anti-trafficking taskforces exist, and law enforcement lacks training and resources to detect trafficking cases at checkpoints or in communities.

At the community level, harmful social norms and low awareness compound the risk. Children are often sent away to relatives, employers, or middlemen with the expectation of education or work, without clear oversight or recourse if the situation turns exploitative. The widespread use of informal debt-repayment arrangements and gifting of children as domestic help or marriage settlement further blurs the lines between social practices and trafficking. These practices are rarely interrogated as exploitative, and families may be reluctant to report violations due to fear, stigma, or perceived complicity.

Institutionally, South Sudan lacks a National Action Plan on Trafficking and has not designated a national anti-trafficking focal point or coordinating body. While some ministries expressed willingness to lead such efforts, there is currently no legal mandate, budget, or policy framework guiding prevention, victim identification, or reintegration support. Even child protection actors in the police or SSPDF noted that trafficking cases fall "through the cracks" due to role ambiguity and lack of inter-agency coordination.

Use of Children in Illicit Activities

South Sudan's legal framework lacks explicit and enforceable provisions addressing the involvement of children in illicit activities such as smuggling, drug trade, or other unlawful enterprises, despite growing anecdotal reports of children being used in cross-border smuggling, informal alcohol production, and contraband trading, particularly in border regions and informal markets. While the Penal Code criminalizes the production and sale of illicit goods, it does not include provisions that acknowledge the distinct vulnerability of children in these activities or offer diversion or protection-oriented alternatives for those coerced or forced into illegal work.

In the absence of a dedicated juvenile justice strategy that incorporates child labour dimensions, children apprehended for involvement in illegal activities risk being treated as offenders rather than victims. Interviews with law enforcement officials suggested that no standardized child-sensitive protocols exist to identify when a child's participation in criminal activity is the result of coercion, debt bondage, or exploitation. There are no national guidelines on child-friendly policing, and most police stations lack trained personnel to manage such cases appropriately. As a result, children are often either detained or informally released back into the same exploitative environments, with no referrals or follow-up.

Stakeholders from the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare acknowledged the difficulty of addressing these cases due to the informal nature of many illicit markets and the normalization of children's roles in informal alcohol brewing or smuggling as "economic contributions" to family income. The absence of clear legislation and intervention protocols allows such activities to continue unchecked and invisibilizes the most vulnerable children within both justice and protection systems.

Hazardous Work and Exploitation in the Informal Sector

One of the most critical gaps in South Sudan's framework to prevent WFCL is the continued lack of an adopted and operational hazardous work list, despite ILO Convention 182's explicit requirement that countries define and prohibit hazardous labour for children. Although a draft hazardous work list has reportedly been developed through tripartite consultations involving government, employers, and workers' organizations, it has not been formally published or disseminated, leaving law enforcement, inspectors, and social workers without a common standard for identification, prevention, or prosecution.

The absence of a hazardous work list also undermines efforts to align labour inspections, community protection interventions, and NGO programming around consistent benchmarks. Interviews with senior staff in the Ministry of Labour and the Directorate of Child Protection confirmed that this legal gap severely constrains inspection activities, limits training of local officials, and contributes to underreporting, particularly in sectors such as agriculture, charcoal production, mining, and portering, where children are exposed to physically dangerous conditions, long hours, and harmful substances.

Even where the Child Act (2008) prohibits children from engaging in work "that is harmful to their health, development, or education," the vagueness of this language makes enforcement weak. No child labour-specific monitoring system or regulatory framework exists to monitor compliance, nor are there penalties or accountability mechanisms in place for employers or guardians who expose children to hazardous tasks. In many of the worst-affected areas, the informal nature of labour arrangements, often family-based or community-controlled, further limits the reach of any enforcement action.

Multiple key informants also pointed to the invisibility of home-based and gendered hazardous work, such as domestic labour and water/firewood collection, which disproportionately affects girls and often goes unrecognized as exploitative. Without a functional inspection regime outside of Juba and no community-based reportizg mechanism, children engaged in hazardous work remain effectively unprotected.

10.4. HOLISTIC APPROACH TO ERADICATING CHILD LABOUR IN TARGETED LOCATIONS IN SOUTH SUDAN

To develop a holistic approach to eradicating child labour in the targeted locations of South Sudan, each county's risk profile based on:

- Prevalence of child labour and WFCL
- Nature and severity of WFCL (e.g. sexual exploitation, armed recruitment, hazardous labour)
- Vulnerability indicators (e.g. school attendance, food insecurity, caregiver education)
- Awareness and access to protection services
- Observational data and qualitative evidence
- Presence or absence of coordination/enforcement structures

Based on this categorization, comprehensive analysis of county-level data reveals stark disparities in both the prevalence and severity of WFCL across South Sudan. To maximize the impact of programming and ensure resources are deployed where needs are most acute, the following tiered prioritization is proposed. It integrates quantitative prevalence data, qualitative risk indicators (e.g., exposure to armed recruitment, bonded labour, sexual exploitation), food security, and protective infrastructure gaps.

Tier 1: Critical Intervention Zones

These counties exhibit extreme WFCL prevalence, high exposure to multiple risk factors, weak service infrastructure, and urgent child protection needs.

Kapoeta South (Eastern Equatoria)

- 90% of children are engaged in WFCL
- Highest reported awareness of commercial sexual exploitation, trafficking, and bonded labour
- 80–90% of working children report violence, coercion, and economic exploitation
- Strong food security (83%) masks deeper structural protection gaps

Yambio (Western Equatoria)

- 90% WFCL prevalence and widespread workplace violence (100% of boys, 73% of girls)
- Reported absence of safe spaces or referral mechanisms, despite strong youth agency and awareness
- High levels of bonded labour and economic coercion.
- Food security is moderate but highly unequal, with vulnerable subgroups like widows depending on child labour for survival

Akobo (Jonglei)

- 79.5% WFCL prevalence and second-highest exposure to trafficking, recruitment, and debt bondage
- Severe food insecurity, particularly in female-headed households
- 81% of boys and 38% of girls report forced work; 56% of boys report withheld pay
- Weak education and social services infrastructure.

Magwi (Eastern Equatoria)

- 79.7% WFCL, significant hazardous labour risks, and high rates of workplace violence (61% boys, 55% girls) and coercion (up to 72% of girls)
- Stronger food security (70%+) but low levels of protective community systems.
- Overburdened girls report caregiving roles equivalent to part-time jobs

Tier 2: High-Need, Emerging Risk Zones

These counties show moderate but significant prevalence and/or specific vulnerabilities tied to conflict, displacement, or urban fragility.

Renk (Upper Nile)

- 60% WFCL prevalence amid mass displacement (over 540,000 arrivals post-2023), putting strain on services
- Documented child soldier recruitment, hazardous rural labour, and trafficking in transit settings
- Good food security (70%) but overwhelmed by humanitarian influx

Bentiu (Unity)

- 55% WFCL, with high presence of armed groups and conflict-related vulnerabilities
- Economic exploitation and coercion (50% of girls face withheld pay) suggest growing urban risks

Wau (Western Bahr el Ghazal)

- 50% WFCL, visible child labour in agriculture, charcoal production, and scrap collection
- Street children at risk of forced labour and sexual abuse. Emerging hub of internal migration
- Education access remains tenuous and seasonal.

Tier 3: Urban fragility and residual risk zones

These counties show comparatively lower WFCL prevalence but present complex urban vulnerabilities that require tailored interventions.

Juba (Central Equatoria)

- Lowest WFCL prevalence (46.7%) yet still alarmingly high for a capital city
- Reports of hazardous work, coercion, and school dropout linked to poverty and informal work in hospitality, retail, and construction
- Urban food insecurity is a major concern, with only 59% of HHs scoring “Acceptable” on the Food Consumption Score
- Inadequate enforcement of child protection laws despite proximity to central institutions.

This tiered prioritization could inform the rollout of integrated intervention packages combining:

i. School enrolment incentives and re-entry pathways
ii. Cash or voucher assistance for vulnerable families
iii. Child protection systems strengthening
iv. Community awareness and youth-led initiatives
v. Law enforcement and legal support for WFCL cases

Lastly, each county should undergo rapid operational assessments to tailor intervention designs to their specific risks and social norms.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

Addressing the widespread presence of WFCL in South Sudan requires a response grounded in legal reform, institutional strengthening, improved coordination, and robust social protection systems. Drawing on international guidance from the desk review and field realities captured in the primary data, the following recommendations are proposed, divided into policy-oriented, and programmatic ones.

11.1. POLICY-ORIENTED RECOMMENDATIONS

Aimed at strengthening systems, laws and institutions to protect children from the worst forms of labour

South Sudan's policy and legal framework offers some protection for children, but too often, enforcement is weak, coordination is lacking, and critical gaps remain. To create the enabling environment needed to prevent and respond to child labour, several key reforms are essential:

Close Legal Gaps and Align with International Standards

Despite some progress, South Sudan's child labour laws remain incomplete or inconsistently applied. To bring its legal framework in line with international standards, the government should:

- Ratify the Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons, a crucial international instrument for addressing child trafficking and forced labour.
- Finalize and formally adopt the national list of hazardous work prohibited for children, in consultation with employers' and workers' organisations.
- Harmonize the minimum age for employment (14 years) with the end of compulsory education (currently 13 years) to close a significant legal loophole that enables early entry into labour markets.
- Fully prohibit the WFCLfor all children under 18 years, with clearly defined penalties.

Lead actors: Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Labour, Transitional National Legislative Assembly.

Move from Law to Enforcement and Accountability Mechanisms

Legal provisions remain largely symbolic in the absence of enforcement. To improve implementation:

- Increase the number of trained and resourced labour inspectors, ensuring routine and unannounced inspections even in rural and informal sectors
- Guarantee that violations of child labour laws are investigated, prosecuted, and sanctioned, with publicly available enforcement data to ensure transparency.
- Enforce the Child Act's minimum age for military recruitment (18 years) by halting the recruitment and use of children by all armed forces and affiliated militias.
- Establish clear and functional referral pathways between labour inspectors, police, and social services, to support victims of WFCL and ensure appropriate follow-up.

Lead actors: Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Interior, Judiciary, SSPDF, DDR Commission.

Reactivate National Coordination Mechanisms

- Reactivate the National Steering Committee on Child Labour, intended to oversee coordinated action, , which has been dormant for over a decade, to guide inter-sectoral efforts and monitor progress.
- Ensure adequate funding and implementation of key child protection policies, including the Joint Action Plan to End the Use of Child Soldiers, the General Education Strategic Plan, and provisions of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan that relate to child protection.

Lead actors: Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare; Ministry of General Education and Instruction; Office of the President; international donors.

Expand and Resource Social Protection and Reintegration Services

Too many children face abuse and exploitation with nowhere to turn. The state must commit to the following:

- Invest in safe, child-friendly shelters and reintegration centres that offer care, psychosocial support, family mediation, and pathways back into school or training.
- Improve access to education by prioritizing the payment of teacher salaries, subsidizing school costs, withdrawing armed forces from school premises, and addressing barriers faced by girls, children with disabilities, and those in pastoralist or conflict-affected communities.
- Cooperate with child protection actors to release all children associated with armed forces or groups, and ensure reintegration programmes are holistic and well-funded, including access to psychosocial support, family reunification, and education or vocational training.

Lead actors: Ministry of General Education and Instruction; Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs; Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare; UNICEF; Save the Children; IOM; local child protection partners.

Close the Data Gap: Improve Research, Coordination, and Use of Existing Information

Despite the presence of various data sources on child labour, these remain fragmented, under-utilised, and siloed across agencies:

- Conduct a national child labour survey to generate reliable prevalence data disaggregated by age, gender, geography, and type of labour.
- Establish inter-agency mechanisms to consolidate and analyse existing child protection databases, including those held by government, UN agencies, and NGOs.
- Develop a shared information management platform or data-sharing protocol that enables protection actors, labour authorities, education stakeholders, and humanitarian actors to triangulate information and track trends over time.
- Commission targeted studies on under-researched areas, such as commercial sexual exploitation, informal mining, and WFCL among pastoralist children.

Lead Actors: National Bureau of Statistics; Ministry of Labour; Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare; Save the Children; UNICEF; ILO; NRC; research and academic partners.

11.2. PROGRAMMATIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Aimed at delivering community-driven interventions to reduce child labour and strengthen protective environments

Preventing and addressing the WFCLin South Sudan requires immediate, grounded action within families, schools, and communities. Alongside legal and institutional reforms, targeted programming is essential to disrupt the economic, social, and cultural drivers of exploitation. The following programmatic priorities are recommended for Save the Children and partners:

Strengthen Community-Based Child Protection Structures

Community-level protection mechanisms remain weak or absent in many areas. To improve early detection, prevention, and response to child labour and exploitation:

- Establish or strengthen child protection focal points in each community, trusted individuals (e.g., elders, teachers, youth leaders) trained to monitor risks, refer cases confidentially, and liaise with formal services.
- Promote youth-led and peer-based advocacy, enabling adolescents to challenge harmful norms and influence positive change within HHs and communities.

- Engage traditional leaders (e.g., chiefs, religious figures) to support and publicly endorse child protection practices.

Lead actors: Local government, Save the Children, community-based organizations, Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare.

Expand Awareness and Behaviour Change Initiatives

Harmful social norms, misinformation, and generational attitudes continue to normalize child labour. Targeted awareness efforts should:

- Deliver culturally appropriate campaigns on the dangers of child labour and the value of education, using multiple formats, community theatre, radio, parent dialogues, and child-led forums.
- Address myths that associate hardship with good parenting or view education as a luxury, not a right.
- Ensure messages are accessible to parents with low literacy and adapted for various audiences, including men, caregivers, and teachers.

Lead actors: Save the Children, local media partners, Ministry of Information, civil society networks.

Improve Educational Access and Retention for At-Risk Children

Many children drop out of school or never enroll due to financial hardship or lack of relevance. To reduce dropout and increase retention:

- Provide targeted material and financial support for orphans, children from ultra-poor HHs, and child-headed families.
- Expand access to flexible learning opportunities, such as accelerated learning, evening classes, or mobile schools, to accommodate working children.
- Integrate life skills, vocational content, and protection messaging into school curricula to improve relevance and motivation to attend.

Lead actors: Ministry of General Education and Instruction, Save the Children, education partners.

Reduce Economic Pressures Through Household Support

Poverty is a key, though not exclusive, driver of child labour. Programmes should seek to reduce the need for child income through direct support to families:

- Introduce conditional or unconditional cash assistance schemes for households that commit to keeping children in school.
- Support income-generating activities and savings groups, especially for women, to strengthen family resilience and reduce dependency on children's labour.
- Link families with existing social protection or livelihood programmes, prioritizing those with high-risk children.

Lead actors: Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare; Save the Children, WFP, FAO.

Improve Case Detection, Referral, and Individualized Support

A robust response system is needed when cases of child exploitation arise. To operationalize protection pathways:

- Develop and disseminate simple reporting mechanisms for communities, hotlines, help desks, or safe points in schools.
- Train local service providers and focal points on basic case management, confidentiality, and psychosocial first aid.

- Ensure referred children receive appropriate follow-up, including psychosocial support, reintegration into school or training, and family mediation if needed.

Lead actors: Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare; Save the Children; child protection actors.

Foster Positive Norms and Community Accountability

Many caregivers lack awareness of the long-term harm caused by child labour. To promote shifts in community attitudes:

- Identify and support local "change agents", parents, religious leaders, teachers, who model positive parenting and non-exploitative practices.
- Create public forums or community scorecards to hold local leaders accountable for protecting children and reducing harmful practices.
- Support peer-to-peer learning exchanges between communities to share successful strategies and local innovations.

Lead actors: Local councils, CSOs, youth groups, Save the Children.

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ANNEX 1: TERMS OF REFERENCE

Terms of Reference (TOR)

National Child Labour Study in South Sudan

"Empowering Futures: A national and grassroots initiative to end the worst forms of child labour through targeted interventions that focus on prevention, protection, and rehabilitation of affected children in South Sudan."

BACKGROUND

The prevalence of serious violations of children's rights, particularly child labour in South Sudan, has been heavily influenced by conflict, economic instability, and inadequate social protection systems. In the years leading up to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005, prolonged civil war, widespread displacement, and extreme poverty worsened conditions, leading to the employment of children in agriculture, mining, domestic work, hazardous activities, and even recruitment into military and paramilitary groups. According to the World Bank and UNICEF, during the civil war, over 40% of South Sudanese families experienced extreme poverty, creating conditions where children had to work to support their households, despite significant physical and developmental risks (World Bank, 2018; UNICEF, 2019).

Research indicates that boys and girls face distinct vulnerabilities in this context. Boys are more likely to be involved in hazardous labor sectors, including agriculture and mining, and face increased risks of recruitment into armed groups (ILO, 2021). Girls, meanwhile, are more frequently employed in domestic work and are at higher risk of sexual exploitation, including in forced domestic labor and commercial sex work (UNICEF, 2022). In cases of forced early marriage, girls are also more likely to face child labour conditions within the household, which often goes unreported due to cultural norms and lack of awareness of child labour definitions (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

Since the independence of South Sudan, limited resources and weak institutions have made meaningful advancement in child protection difficult. The effects of 2013 and 2016 conflicts and current economic crisis increases children vulnerability and as a result, many children are exposed and engage in worst form of child labour such as (mining, shops, restaurants, work as child soldiers, industries, sex works and domestic works at home). Reports from the ILO indicate that, despite the government's participation in regional workshops to improve child labour data collection, the lack of robust child protection systems and poor law enforcement left children—particularly girls in domestic settings and boys in hazardous labour—vulnerable to exploitation even during relatively stable periods (ILO, 2019). Following independence in 2011, South Sudan's government pledged to uphold the rights of children under national and international frameworks. However, economic hardships, underdeveloped institutional capacity, and insufficient law enforcement allowed child labour to persist. The International Labour Organization reports that South Sudan's early national policies did not establish comprehensive protections against child labour due to limited resources and capacity (ILO, 2021). Furthermore, the police continue to arrest and imprison children involved in commercial sex work, often failing to recognize girls in this context as victims, thereby compounding the vulnerabilities faced by girls in child labour (UNICEF, 2023).

The Overall Objective of the Action: To contribute to combating the worst forms of child labor in South Sudan through targeted gender responsive interventions that focus on prevention, response and systems strengthening. This will be achieved through the following three interrelated outcomes.

- **Outcome 1:** Enhanced advocacy for policy reforms and greater accountability in addressing child labor issues in South Sudan, with a focus on the unique vulnerabilities of both girls and boys.
- **Outcome 2:** Strengthened capacity for key child labor stakeholders and child structures to contribute towards prevention and response to the worst forms of child labor.
- **Outcome 3:** Improved child labor case management strategies, including gender-sensitive identification, referral, protection, and rehabilitation processes for all child labor cases.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

3.1 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study will be to strengthen evidence based on the worst form of child labour in the business community, private, army, mining, construction, service and industries sectors in South Sudan and to be able to provide guidance for policy and action that will help in eliminating the worst form of child labour. The study is expected to provide estimates of the worst forms of child labour in the above-mentioned sectors at different levels and in different states of the country. Save the Children would like this study to provide credible evidence on whether the worst forms of child labour exist beyond isolated cases and provide initial insight into the magnitude of the phenomenon in the areas targeted by the study.

3.2 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1. Provide evidence on the existence and possible magnitude of the worst forms of child labour (including forced labor in cattle herding, domestic work, and market vending, commercial sexual exploitation, human trafficking, forcible recruitment by state and non-state armed groups for use in armed conflict) across sectors and different locations of South Sudan
2. Identify the main driving factors leading to child labor at the different levels including family and community
3. Identify specific policy gaps and recommendations on how to eliminate and prevent child labour in the different sectors.
4. Develop a holistic approach to eradicating child labour, particularly its worst forms, in the identified locations in South Sudan.

The study should intend to target children aged between 12 to 17 especially children engaged in the worst form of child labour, business community/private companies, CSOs, NGO, Line Ministries of Education, Gender, Labour, Interior, Local authority officials and community leaders.

The study will be undertaken for a period of 3 months to complete data collection, data analysis, data validation and final report.

The study focus will provide evidence on the existence and possible magnitude of the worst forms of child labour across sectors and different locations of South Sudan, identify the main driving factors leading to child labor at the different levels including family and community, identify specific policy gaps and recommendations on how to eliminate and prevent child labour in the different sectors and develop a holistic approach to eradicating child labour, particularly its worst forms, in the identified locations in South Sudan.

This is a countrywide study; however, consideration will be given to a sample plan covering 75% of the states in South Sudan, with much emphasis given to locations where worst forms of child labor are expected.

3.3. INTENDED AUDIENCE AND USE OF THE STUDY

Primary intended audience of the study are:

Stakeholder	Further information
Project donor	EU
Primary implementing organisation	Save the Children [(Operations team); Program Development and Quality team; Senior Leadership team)], Line ministry,

Government stakeholders	Ministry of General Education and Instruction, Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare, Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Interior
States governments	Gender, Child and Social Welfare, Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Interior
Community groups	Host community and IDPs
Beneficiaries	Crisis-affected girls and boys, including adolescents and those with disabilities involved in the study

The study team will be required to propose how the primary audience will be involved throughout the study undertaking process and how the findings will be shared with each of the different stakeholders named in the table above, particularly outlining how reporting back to communities and children will be conducted in an accessible and child friendly manner.

METHODOLOGY

The study will employ a mixed methods of both quantitative and qualitative design which will be collected using primary and secondary data sources. For the quantitative approach, a Population-Based Survey (PBS) will be employed, and for the qualitative design, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), In-depth interviews (IDIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), will be conducted with relevant stakeholders such as relevant line ministries, CSOs, INGOs, and UN Agencies among others. Observations may also be considered to collect additional data on the existing characteristics and the environment.

The consultant has the discretion to propose alternative methods with the aim to meet the stated objectives in this TOR. The overall methodology will consider that differences between boys and girls may exist. The study questions, data collection tools, analysis, and presentation of results will accordingly consider, at minimum, binary analysis especially between gender.

The study should involve a review of the existing literature on the worst form of child labour in all the sectors mentioned in this TOR. Secondary data should also include reviewing the policies, programs, and legislation with a bearing on the following, but not limited to: Education, social protection, active labor market policies, awareness raising, protection and remedies. Moreso, the study should consider the implications of the economic crisis, particularly on access to education and social protection. The institutional framework will also be looked at to map the stakeholders and identify the role of key institutions and their coordination.

CONSULTANT RESPONSIBILITIES

The selected consultant will have the overall responsibility for the design and implementation of the study including the recruitment of the enumerators, development of data collection tools, data analysis, conducting a validation workshop, elaboration, and sharing of the report. The study lead will carry out the primary data collection and processing under the guidance and supervision of Save the Children International sector lead.

5.1 DELIVERABLES

- Literature and secondary data review.
- Inception report including the study design, study questions, methodology, work plan
- Training protocol
- Data sets from the quantitative and qualitative data collection
- Summary of the key findings study
- Draft report.
- A brief PowerPoint Presentation of preliminary Findings
- Consolidate comments and share the find report with the County Office
- Final report (not more than 30 pages excluding annexes)

THE TIME FRAME OR DURATION OF STUDY

Activity	Planned Schedule
Inception Meeting	3rd February 2025
Inception Report (Including final)	14th February 2025
Travel to the field for enumerator training and data collection	17th – 28th February 2025
Data analysis and presentation of findings	3rd – 21st March 2025
Final Report	30th March 2025

The final report should be submitted to SCI by 30th March 2025. Any delivery delays should be communicated with SCI as soon as possible, given SCI has obligations to meet in terms of timely programming and donor reporting.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION AND OTHER CLEARANCES

Ethical principles critical for safeguarding the study participants will be given due consideration. Save the Children may communicate with the relevant authorities and facilitate clearance (support letter) to conduct the study in the target project sites. Study participants will be informed about the purpose and intentions of the study and how the results will be used. Participants will be clearly informed about their right to refuse to take part, terminate the interview or discussion at any point, or choose not to answer any questions.

Verbal consent will be obtained and recorded from each selected study participant before interviews are conducted. Interviews and discussions will be conducted in settings that ensure privacy and openness. All information gathered will be kept strictly confidential. The study will be conducted adhering to the basic ethical principles of respect for humans, beneficence, and justice.

The following ethical principles will be maintained during the study:

- **Right to KNOW what the study is about:** Data collectors will explain what topics will be covered, what benefits to expect, what risks are involved, and what will be done with the information to each participant. Verbal consent will be received from each participant before interviews or discussions. •
- **Right to freely CHOOSE whether to participate or not:** Participation in the study is entirely voluntary, and participants have the right to stop interviews or discussions at any time or to say they do not want to answer any questions. •
- **Right to PRIVACY:** No names or other personal identifying information will be recorded in the questionnaires, and data collectors will not discuss respondents' answers with others.

APPLICATION PROCESS AND REQUIREMENTS

8.1 QUALIFICATIONS, EXPERIENCE AND SKILLS

SCI South Sudan invites competent and experienced individuals/firms to submit their technical and financial proposals. Interested individuals/firms must possess the following qualifications as a minimum.

- The team leader and associates should have, at least, a master's degree in social sciences, Economic Policy, gender and labor, Law, Development studies, M&E and research, International Development Studies, Monitoring & Evaluation, … or a related field
- Demonstrated knowledge on gender and child labor and experience in carrying out studies/research on child labor.
- Demonstrated experience of leading studies in child labor, or closely related field.
- Demonstrated experience with quantitative and qualitative research, data management and statistical data analysis.
- Previous experience working in humanitarian or emergency context (including South Sudan)
- Proven track record of data analyses and presentation
- Experience of assessing humanitarian or emergency response programs
- Experience of participatory action research that involves the target group.
- Good communication and reporting skills.

8.2 INTERESTED CANDIDATES SHOULD SUBMIT AN EXPRESSION OF INTEREST INCLUDING

i. **A technical proposal:** The technical proposal should briefly and clearly describe the following aspects; Understanding of the task, technical aspect of the proposal, Methodology (Assessment strategy, Sampling design, Data collection tools, Data Processing & Analysis, Data quality control measures and timelines or operational plan)

ii. **A detailed curriculum vitae (CV) of assigned staff (A well balanced team by gender):** detailed profile of the consultancy firm with contact details (the CV should include at least two traceable references)

iii. **Company Profile:**

iv. **Financial proposal**: A signed financial proposal/ budget of the tasks should be broken down into modules, detailing the following: Consultancy fees, tools development cost, Data processing & analysis, Communication, and Reporting costs and other Miscellaneous (stationeries, printing, etc.) inclusive of the Mandatory 20% withholding tax as per the laws of South Sudan.

v. **Sample of previous work:** The consultant must be willing and ready to share a sample of his or her previous work upon request.

8.2 SCHEDULE OF PAYMENT AND APPLICATION

The consultancy fees shall be made in two instalments according to the following schedule:

a) The first payment of 30% advance of the total agreed contractual amount will be made immediately after the presentation and finalization of the inception report
b) The second payment of 70% of the total contractual amount shall be made to the consultant upon approval and acceptance of the final study report.

Submission of application

Qualified and Interested individual consultants/firms should submit their technical and financial proposal, a fully filled out evaluation criteria form annexed to the TOR to **SouthSudanTenders@savethechildren.org** no later than 27th January 2025.

Annex 1:

Evaluation Criteria:

SECTION 1 - ESSENTIAL CRITERIA			
INSTRUCTIONS – Bidders are required to complete all sections of the below table.			
Item	**Question**	**Bidder Response**	
1	**MANDATORY CRITERIA**: Supplier accepts Save the Children's 'Terms and Conditions of Purchase' included in the next sheet of this evaluation criteria, and that any work awarded from this tender process will be completed under the same 'Terms and Conditions of Purchase'	**Yes / No**	**Comments / Attachments**
2	**MANDATORY CRITERIA**: The Supplier and its staff (and any sub-contractors used) agree to comply with SCI and the IAPG's policies and code of conducts listed below.	**Yes / No**	**Comments / Attachments**
	1) Child Safeguarding Policy		
	2) Anti-Bribery & Corruption Policy		
	3) Human Trafficking & Modern Slavery Policy		
	4) Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Policy		

	5) Anti-Harassment, Intimidation & Bullying Policy		
	6) IAPG Code of Conduct		
	7) Conditions of Tendering		
3	**MANDATORY CRITERIA**: The Supplier confirms it is not linked directly or indirectly to any terrorism related activity, and does not sell any Dual-Purpose goods / services that may be used in a terror related activity.	**Yes / No**	**Comments / Attachments**
4	**MANDATORY CRITERIA**: The bidder confirms they are not a prohibited party under applicable sanctions laws or anti-terrorism laws or provide goods under sanction by the United States of America or the European Union and accepts that SCI will undertake independent checks to validate this.	**Yes / No**	**Comments**
5	**MANDATORY CRITERIA**: The Supplier confirms it is fully qualified, licensed and registered to trade with Save the Children	**Yes / No**	**Comments**
	This includes the Supplier submitting the following requirements (where applicable):		
	- Legitimate business address		
	- Valid Tax registration number & certificate		
	Valid tax clearance/compliance Certificate		
	Valid Operating/Trading License		
	Valid certificate of incorporation(Include the renewals if applicable)		
6	**For Individual Consultants, applicants must submit the following documents:** **- Copy of Passport 'data page' or National ID** **- Individual tax registration** **- Curriculum Vitae(CV)**		

SECTION 2 - CAPABILITY/TECHNICAL EVALUATION CRITERIA			
Demonstrated experience			
1	Experience of the lead and technical proficiency relevant to the study processes and professional training including demonstrated appropriate expertise.	PhD or Master's Degree in social science or related fields relevant to the study, and demonstrated experience (at least 5 years) conducting similar studies (evaluations, assessments and research) relevant to child labor.	
2	Technical submissions and general understanding of the TOR.	The consultant should demonstrate in their technical proposal a clear comprehension of the expected tasks in TOR	
3	Experience in fragile Context	Robust experience in conducting evaluations' and research in complex humanitarian settings. Evidence of such works in South Sudan is highly preferred.	
4	Experience in conducting similar studies related to child labor.	Previous experience in conducting multi-state evaluations and /or research preferably related to child labor. A track record of conducting similar research in similar contexts.	
5	Research methodology (Accepted/rejected)	Quality of the technical proposal should at minimum demonstrate how the research is going to be conducted using qualitative methods (FGDs, KIIs, IDIs and observation) as well as use of secondary data. The methodology should be able to answer the objectives and the research questions.	
SECTION 3- SUSTAINABILITY CRITERIA			
1	The bidder demonstrates experience and understanding of local context and community. This can be evidenced by the previous assignments carried out	The assessment team showcase their understanding and experience in undertaking similar assessment in the targeted locations, or is	

		similar setting denoting how they were able to address any challenges faced.	

ANNEX 2: OVERVIEW OF KII AND FGD PARTICIPANTS

LIST OF KII PARTICIPANTS

Code	Position/Role	Location
KII 1	Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare	Juba
KII 2	NNGO specializing in Street Children – Program Officer	Juba
KII 3	DRR	Juba
KII 4	National Police Service	Juba
KII 5	SSPDF Child Protection Unit	Juba
KII 6	Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs	Juba
KII 7	INGO (IRC) Child Protection Officer	Juba
KII 8	Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare	Juba
KII 9	Ministry of Labour	Juba
KII 10	NNGO	Juba
KII 11	Save the Children	Online
KII 12	Community Leader	Akobo
KII 13	INGO (DRC)	Akobo
KII 14	State Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare	Bentiu
KII 15	Youth and Women Leader	Bentiu
KII 16	Education Director	Kapoeta South
KII 17	Youth Leader	Kapoeta South
KII 18	State Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare	Magwi
KII 19	Boma Chief	Magwi
KII 20	Women's leader	Magwi
KII 21	State Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare	Wau
KII 22	NGO	Wau
KII 23	NGO	Renk
KII 24	Youth NGO	Renk
KII 25	Community Leaders	Yambio
KII 26	State Ministry of Education	Yambio

LIST OF FGD GROUPS

Position/Role	Location
1 FGD in each location, except for Wau, where two FGDs took place Young men and women (17-24 years old)	Juba
	Magwi
	Renk
	Bentiu
	Wau
	Yambio
	Kapoeta South
	Akobo

ANNEX 3: CONSENT/ASSENT FORMS

KII CONSENT FORM

Respondent Details	
Fill out respondent details before or after the interview	
Geographical Area *(State, county, city)*	
Role *(e.g. Ministry of Health)*	
Organisation *(e.g. name of NGO, type of authority, community group, etc.)*	

Consent Form	5 mins

Introduce yourself and Explain the project

[READ/SHARE WITH RESPONDENT TO READ] Good day, my name is [Name], and I am part of a research team conducting a national study on the Worst Forms of Child Labour in South Sudan. This study is commissioned by Save the Children and funded by the European Union.

The purpose of the research is to understand the prevalence, causes, and consequences of child labour in South Sudan, and to identify strategies to better prevent and address these issues through policies and programming. We are speaking with a wide range of individuals, including children, caregivers, community leaders, teachers, and government representatives to gather diverse perspectives and experiences.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. Any information you share will be treated with confidentiality and used only for the purposes of this research. Your name will not be included in any report or publication, and there are no right or wrong answers—we are simply interested in your honest views and experiences.

The insights you provide will help Save the Children and other partners advocate for better support and protection for children across South Sudan. We greatly appreciate your time and willingness to speak with us today.

Obtain written consent
[READ/SHARE WITH RESPONDENT TO READ] Now I would like to discuss with you the important topic of your rights as a participant in our research, and how these will be protected.

- Before we start, I would like to let you know that, if it is okay with you I would like to audio record our conversation. Having a recording would help me accurately write up the notes after the discussion.
- Notes from the discussion will not include any of the information that can identify you. Key takeaways from this discussion will be combined with the themes that emerge from other interviews and written up in a summary report. No one will know how you responded in the final report as none of the comments you make during today's discussion will be linked with your name in any way. Your participation in this session is voluntary, and there will be no direct

or indirect individual benefit from your participation. There will not be any negative effects if you decide you do not want to participate.

- I would like to hear your honest opinions about the topics we discuss. There are no right or wrong answers to any of our questions.
- You can choose not to respond to a question at any time. You can also end the discussion at any time. If one of my questions is unclear, please stop me and I'll ask it in a different way.
- All information collected from these sessions will be stored securely and kept confidential. The notes will be deleted after 6 months of us writing up the final report.
- The discussion should take between 60-70 minutes. If you have any questions, you can please ask now or at any time during the discussion. You can also contact the Fieldwork Manager of this project [Kur Kur Dut] at <kur.kur@otherwiseresearch.org>.

Ask for consent

[READ/SHARE WITH RESPONDENT TO READ] *At this point, I would like to confirm your willingness to engage in our research, as previously outlined, and kindly ask for your consent to proceed.*

- Do you have any questions about the research project or the interview?
  [Address questions or concerns]
- Can I check that you are still happy to take part in this research?
  ☐ Yes ☐ No Signed _____
- Would be it okay to make an audio recording of our discussion?
  ☐ Yes ☐ No Signed _____

Thank you, we can now proceed to the interview

PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

Details	
Fill out details before or after the interview	
Geographical Area *(State, county, city)*	
Code of child to which the form refers to:	

Consent Form	5 mins

Introduce yourself and Explain the project

Dear Parent or Guardian,

We are inviting your child to take part in a research study as part of a national assessment on the Worst Forms of Child Labour in South Sudan. This study is being carried out by OTHERwise Research on behalf of Save the Children, with support from the European Union.

The purpose of the study is to better understand the experiences of children who may have been involved in different types of work and to find out how we can improve support and protection for children across South Sudan. Your child is invited to participate in a creative group activity where they will have the chance to draw, write, or speak about their experiences. These activities will be facilitated in a child-friendly and safe space by trained staff.

The workshop will take place on [date] at [location], and will last around [60] minutes. The session will be run by [researcher's name] in collaboration with the Save the Children team.

Participation is completely voluntary. Your child can choose not to answer any question or not to participate in any activity. They may also stop participating at any time without any negative consequences. The information your child shares will be anonymous and treated with strict confidentiality. We would like to audio record the session to help us capture everything accurately, but this is also optional.

If you agree to allow your child to participate in this research activity, please sign below. If you have any questions or concerns, you can contact the Fieldwork Manager of this project [Kur Kur Dut] at <kur.kur@otherwiseresearch.org>.

Ask for consent

- Do you have any questions about the research project or the interview?
  [Address questions or concerns]
- Can I check that you are still happy for your child to take part in this research?
  ☐ Yes ☐ No Signed _____
- Would be it okay to make an audio recording of that discussion?
  ☐ Yes ☐ No Signed _____

CHILD ASSENT FORM

Details	
Fill out details before or after the interview	
Geographical Area *(State, county, city)*	
Number of FGD	
Code of child to which the form refers to:	

Assent Form	5 mins

Introduce yourself and Explain the project

[READ OUT LOUD] Hello! I'm really happy to see you all here today. My name is [your first name], and I work with a research team from [Research Organization]. We are working with Save the Children to learn more about the types of work children do in different parts of South Sudan.

We know that sometimes children have to work to help their families. Today, we want to hear your thoughts and experiences. This will help us understand what children in South Sudan are going through and how we can make things better for them.

We are inviting you to take part in a fun activity where you can draw, write, or talk about your experiences. You can share what you've seen or experienced, what kind of work children do, and how it makes you feel. You can also share any ideas you have to make things better for children like you.

This activity will last about one hour. You do not have to talk if you don't want to, and you can stop at any time. If we talk, we may use a recorder so we don't miss anything you say. But we will not tell anyone your name, and everything you share will be kept private.

You are free to say yes or no to joining this activity. Nothing bad will happen if you choose not to participate. If you join and then want to stop, that is okay too.

Ask and obtain verbal consent

[READ OUT LOUD]

- Do you have any questions about all this for me?
  [Address questions or concerns]
- Can I check that you are still happy to take part in this research?
  ☐ Yes ☐ No
- Would be it okay to make an audio recording of our discussion?
  ☐ Yes ☐ No

Thank you, we can now proceed with our discussion

ANNEX 4: DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR COMMUNITY LEADERS & TRADITIONAL AUTHORITIES

Focus: Understanding, identifying, and addressing the worst forms of child labour (WFCL) in the community

Respondent Code:
Location:
Date:
Interviewer Name:

Section 1: Understanding Child Labour and WFCL in the Community

1. **What types of work are children in this community most commonly involved in?**
    - Are these types of work considered normal or acceptable in the community?
    - Are there specific jobs that are dangerous, exploitative, or involve long hours?
    - Which children (e.g., age, gender, background) are most likely to be involved in these activities?
2. **Are there any types of work involving children that concern you or others in the community?**
    - For example, work that exposes them to physical danger, health risks, or exploitation.
    - Have there been cases involving children in work that could be considered hazardous, abusive, or exploitative (e.g., in cattle camps, gold mining, or street work)?
    - Are there known cases involving girls in domestic work or situations of early marriage that may hide unpaid or forced labour?
3. **Do you think there are situations here where children are forced or pressured to work against their will?**
    - For instance, by employers, family members, or due to extreme poverty or displacement.
    - Are there children involved in armed groups, prostitution, or other illegal activities?

Section 2: Drivers of Child Labour and WFCL

4. **What are the main reasons families in this community ask or allow children to work?**
    - Economic pressures, absence of parents, displacement, cultural expectations?
    - Are boys and girls affected differently by these pressures?
5. **Have any recent changes—such as conflict, displacement, or natural disasters—increased child labour in your community?**
    - Have children in IDP communities been more at risk?
    - Have school closures or the loss of family income played a role?

6. **How do social norms and traditions influence decisions about whether or not children should work?**
    - Are there specific beliefs around gender roles, obedience, or learning through work?
    - How do these traditions affect whether the community views certain child work as acceptable or not?

Section 3: Protection Mechanisms and Responses to WFCL

7. **Are there local structures—such as elders, chiefs, or religious leaders—that help prevent or respond to harmful child labour?**
    - Can you give examples of how these structures have intervened?
    - Are there traditional rules or penalties related to the mistreatment of children?
8. **What happens in the community when a child is found doing harmful or exploitative work?**
    - Are cases reported to anyone?
    - Are there informal systems or mediations that take place?
9. **What role do you personally play in protecting children from exploitation or dangerous work?**
    - Have you ever taken action or resolved a case?
    - Are you approached by families or youth about these issues?

Section 4: Awareness, Gaps and Suggested Solutions

10. **Are people in your community aware of any laws or programs that aim to prevent child labour or support children's rights?**
    - How do people usually learn about these?
    - Have local authorities or NGOs provided any awareness sessions?
11. **What do you think stops families from reporting cases of harmful child work or seeking help?**
    - Fear, stigma, lack of trust, or not knowing where to go?
    - Is help or support usually available nearby?
12. **What groups of children do you think are most vulnerable to exploitation or abuse through work?**
    - For example: girls, children with disabilities, orphans, children from displaced families.
    - What specific risks do these children face?
13. **What support or programs do you believe would help reduce the worst forms of child labour in this community?**
    - Income-generating alternatives for families?
    - Flexible schooling, vocational training, child protection services?
    - What role should traditional leaders play?

Optional Closing Question

16. **Is there anything else you'd like to add about child labour risks or promising practices we should be aware of in this study?**

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDE: NGOS & CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS (CSOS) WORKING ON CHILD LABOUR AND CHILD RIGHTS

Respondent Name:
Position & Organization:
Location / Area of Operation:
Date:
Interviewer Name:

Section 1: Organizational Mandate and Experience

1. **Can you briefly describe your organization's work related to child protection and child labour in South Sudan?**
    - What is your main focus—service delivery, advocacy, capacity building, research, or other?
    - Which regions or counties does your organization operate in?
    - Are you directly involved in addressing child labour or the worst forms of child labour (WFCL)?

2. **What types of child labour issues have you encountered through your work?**
    - Are there specific sectors (e.g. agriculture, domestic work, markets, cattle herding) or environments (e.g. IDP camps, border areas, urban informal settlements) where you've seen increased risk?
    - Are there emerging forms of exploitation or hidden child labour (e.g., early marriage, transactional sex, child recruitment)?

Section 2: Evidence and Prevalence of WFCL

3. **In your experience, what are the most common types of worst forms of child labour (WFCL) currently observed in your areas of operation?**
    - Do these differ by gender, age, or background (e.g. IDPs, children with disabilities, orphans)?
    - Are these activities seasonal or persistent year-round?

4. **Do you have any internal assessments, reports, or program data that document the scale or characteristics of WFCL in your intervention areas?**
    - What are your data collection methods or indicators used?
    - Are there regional differences in prevalence?

Section 3: Drivers and Risk Factors

5. **What do you see as the main drivers behind child labour and WFCL in South Sudan today?**

- Household poverty, loss of caregivers, insecurity, displacement, social norms, gaps in education systems?
- Are these drivers changing or intensifying?

6. **How do gender, disability, orphanhood, or displacement status affect children's risk of ending up in WFCL?**

   - Are girls or boys disproportionately affected in specific sectors?
   - Have you noted differences in risk or support needs?

7. **What role do social norms or traditional practices play in perpetuating or preventing child labour in the communities you work with?**

   - Are certain forms of child work considered acceptable despite being harmful?
   - Are there positive norms that can be built upon?

Section 4: Responses, Mechanisms and Program Effectiveness

8. **What types of programs or interventions have you implemented to prevent or respond to child labour or WFCL?**

   - Community sensitization, education support, vocational training, cash/in-kind assistance, case management, legal aid?
   - What have been the key achievements or challenges?

9. **How effective are the existing referral systems and child protection mechanisms in responding to cases of child labour or exploitation?**

   - Do community members report cases?
   - Are child protection committees active and trusted?
   - How well do formal mechanisms function?

10. **What informal systems (e.g., traditional leadership, women's groups, religious institutions) have you collaborated with or observed working well?**

- Are they effective in resolving cases or supporting vulnerable children?
- What risks or limitations exist?

Section 5: Education, Reintegration and Systemic Barriers

11. **How do your interventions link with or support children's access to education, particularly for those already involved in labour?**

- Do you provide bridging, catch-up, or flexible education options?
- Have education-focused approaches helped reduce WFCL?
- What barriers persist (e.g., school costs, distance, safety)?

12. **What are the biggest gaps or barriers in current efforts to reduce child labour and WFCL in South Sudan?**

- Legal and policy implementation?
- Coordination?

- Funding and capacity?
- Lack of disaggregated data?

Section 6: Policy, Coordination and Recommendations

13. **How do you assess the alignment between South Sudan's national frameworks on child labour and international standards (e.g. ILO Conventions, CRC)?**

- Are there areas where the national legal framework is strong but implementation is weak?
- What role does your organization play in policy advocacy?

14. **How well do NGOs, government agencies, and UN actors coordinate on child labour prevention and response?**

- Are there effective coordination platforms?
- What are the main gaps or overlaps in roles?

15. **Based on your experience, what are the most promising or scalable strategies for reducing the worst forms of child labour in South Sudan?**

- What role should be played by education, livelihoods support, enforcement, and social services?
- What enabling conditions are needed (e.g., political will, funding, partnerships)?

Optional Closing Question

17. Is there anything else you'd like to add about child labour risks or promising practices we should be aware of in this study?

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDE: MINISTRY OF LABOR (NATIONAL/STATE)

Respondent Name:
Position / Department:
Ministry of Labor – National / State Level
Location:
Date:
Interviewer Name:

Section 1: Mandate, Enforcement, and Legal Frameworks

1. **Can you describe the Ministry of Labor's current mandate and responsibilities regarding child labour regulation and enforcement?**
    - How does the Ministry define and track the worst forms of child labour (WFCL)?
    - What specific units or focal points are responsible?
2. **To what extent do South Sudan's labour laws align with international frameworks (ILO Conventions 138 & 182)?**
    - Are there gaps in age definitions, sector exemptions, or enforcement powers?
    - Have recent legislative efforts addressed WFCL specifically?
3. **What sectors or types of labour are currently exempt from regulation or are most difficult to monitor for WFCL?**
    - Agriculture, domestic work, informal markets?
    - What is the Ministry's approach to informal labour settings?

Section 2: Inspection, Enforcement, and Capacity

4. **What mechanisms are in place for inspecting workplaces and enforcing child labour laws?**
    - Are there functioning labour inspectorates at national or state levels?
    - How often are inspections conducted and in which sectors?
5. **What are the major barriers to enforcement of child labour regulations?**
    - Staffing, budget, access to remote areas, lack of formal economy structures?
    - Are employers generally cooperative or resistant?
6. **Are there any known cases where employers were sanctioned for child labour violations?**
    - Can you describe what happened?
    - Were the sanctions enforced, and did they lead to changes?

Section 3: Inter-Ministerial Coordination and Data Use

7. **How does the Ministry of Labour coordinate with other Ministries (e.g., Education, Social Welfare, Justice) to address child labour?**
    - Are there joint task forces or referral mechanisms?
    - What coordination gaps exist?

8. **Does the Ministry collect or use data on child labour prevalence, types, and trends?**
    - Are there sectoral, geographic, or demographic breakdowns?
    - How is data shared with other institutions or the public?

Section 4: Private Sector Engagement and Program Strategies

9. **What steps are being taken to raise awareness among employers about child labour laws and their responsibilities?**
    - Are there outreach programs targeting specific sectors?
    - Do employers have access to clear guidance on legal minimum ages and acceptable work types?

10. **Are there any Ministry-led or supported initiatives providing alternatives to child labour, such as youth apprenticeships or vocational training?**
    - Have these been piloted or scaled?
    - What challenges or success factors have been observed?

11. **Does the Ministry engage with informal sector actors (e.g., traders' associations, traditional employers)?**
    - Are there challenges in reaching these groups?
    - Has any regulation or soft engagement been successful?

Section 5: Planning, Resources, and Recommendations

12. **What is the current budget or resource allocation for child labour prevention and enforcement within the Ministry?**
    - Are funds sufficient and predictable?
    - Do you rely on donor support?

13. **What would you identify as the most urgent capacity-building needs for the Ministry to more effectively regulate WFCL?**
    - Inspector training, transport/logistics, legal reform, community-level presence?

14. **What are the top three recommendations your Ministry would make to improve prevention, regulation, and response to WFCL across South Sudan?**
    - Legal, institutional, and operational priorities?
    - Recommendations for engaging other sectors?

Optional Final Prompt

15. **Is there anything you'd like to add about how labour regulation can be strengthened to prevent and respond to child labour in your context?**

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDE: MINISTRY OF EDUCATION (NATIONAL / STATE LEVEL)

Respondent Name:
Title / Department:
Ministry of General Education and Instruction – National / State Level
Location:
Date:
Interviewer Name:

Section 1: Role of Education in Child Labour Prevention

1. Can you describe the Ministry's role in preventing and responding to child labour, particularly in ensuring children's access to quality education?
    - Are there specific education policies or plans that target at-risk or working children?
    - How is WFCL (Worst Forms of Child Labour) addressed in the education sector strategy?
2. In your experience, how does child labour affect school enrolment, attendance, and completion rates?
    - Are there observable differences by gender or location (urban vs rural)?
    - Which groups of children are most affected?

Section 2: Education Access and Barriers

3. What are the most common barriers preventing children engaged in labour from attending or staying in school?
    - School fees, distance, safety, hunger, discrimination?
    - How do these vary across counties or population groups?
4. Does the Ministry have any mechanisms in place to identify and support children at risk of dropping out due to labour?
    - Are there school-based referral systems or attendance tracking protocols?
    - Are teachers trained to recognize signs of exploitation or abuse?
5. Are there any education policies or programs targeting vulnerable groups such as displaced children, orphans, or children with disabilities?
    - How are these linked to child labour prevention?
    - Are special measures taken in emergencies or high-risk areas?

Section 3: Alternative and Flexible Education Models

6. Are there flexible or non-formal education initiatives that accommodate children who are working or at risk of labour?
    - Examples: accelerated learning, mobile schools, community-based learning?
    - How effective have these been in your view?
7. Does the Ministry provide or support school feeding, cash transfers, or other incentives that might reduce reliance on child labour?
    - Where are these programs operational?
    - Are they reaching families most affected by poverty and labour exploitation?
    -

Section 4: Coordination, Data, and Policy Integration

8. How does the Ministry coordinate with other actors (e.g., Labour, Social Welfare, NGOs) to address child labour through education?
    - Are there joint programs, shared protocols, or formal inter-ministerial working groups?
    - What challenges or successes have emerged?
9. Does the Ministry collect or use data that helps track the impact of child labour on education?
    - EMIS data, dropout rates, vulnerability mapping?
    - Is data disaggregated by age, gender, location, or special needs?
10. Are education inspectors or administrators involved in identifying or responding to child protection concerns, including WFCL?

- Are there reporting responsibilities or links to protection services?
- How equipped are school-level staff to manage these cases?

Section 5: Institutional Gaps and Recommendations

11. What are the main constraints the education system faces in addressing child labour through schooling?

- Infrastructure, human resources, curricula, coordination, community engagement?

12. What support is needed to strengthen the role of schools and education systems in preventing WFCL?

- Teacher training, materials, funding, policy reform, partnerships?

13. What are the Ministry's key recommendations for leveraging education to reduce child labour, especially in high-risk areas?

- Should education be integrated more directly with child protection, cash programming, or labour enforcement?

Optional Final Prompt

14. Is there anything else you'd like to add about the role of education in addressing child labour in your region or portfolio?

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDE: MINISTRY OF GENDER, CHILD AND SOCIAL WELFARE

(National / State Level)

Respondent Name:
Title / Department:
Location:
Date:
Interviewer Name:

Section 1: Mandate and Institutional Responsibilities

1. **Can you describe your Ministry's role in protecting children from labour, exploitation, and abuse?**
    - What are your key responsibilities related to child labour or children in high-risk situations?
    - Which units or directorates lead on child protection or children's rights?
2. **To what extent are child labour and its worst forms (WFCL) integrated into your Ministry's policies, strategic plans, or operational frameworks?**
    - Are there specific objectives or indicators?
    - Are vulnerable groups (e.g. girls, orphans, children with disabilities) explicitly addressed?

Section 2: Services and Child Protection Mechanisms

3. **What types of services does the Ministry provide to prevent or respond to cases of child labour and exploitation?**
    - Case management, psychosocial support, reunification, alternative care, referrals?
    - What level of service coverage exists at the state/county level?
4. **How are cases of WFCL typically identified and referred?**
    - Through child protection committees, police, schools, health facilities?
    - Are there clear referral pathways and protocols in place?
5. **Are there government social workers or child protection officers at county or payam level?**
    - How are they supervised, trained, and supported?
    - Are they equipped to handle WFCL cases?

Section 3: Community Engagement and Informal Mechanisms

6. **How does your Ministry work with community-based structures to address child labour and child protection?**
    - Child protection committees, traditional leaders, religious groups, women's associations?
    - How effective are these systems in identifying and responding to WFCL?
7. **What community-level awareness or prevention activities have been conducted on child labour and children's rights?**
    - Are families aware of the dangers of WFCL and available support systems?
    - What forms of communication have been most effective?

Section 4: Coordination, Data and Monitoring

8. **How does your Ministry coordinate with others (e.g., Labour, Education, Justice, NGOs) to address child labour?**
    - Are there inter-ministerial task forces or child protection working groups?
    - What coordination successes or challenges have you experienced?
9. **What types of data does your Ministry collect or use regarding child labour or vulnerable children?**
    - Administrative data, NGO reports, case documentation?
    - Is data disaggregated (by age, gender, disability, displacement status)?
10. **Are there challenges in monitoring WFCL or tracking service outcomes for affected children?**

- Gaps in tools, staffing, IT systems, or reporting channels?

Section 5: Resources and Institutional Capacity

11. **What level of resources—financial, human, logistical—are available to support child protection and child labour prevention activities?**

- Is funding predictable and allocated from the national/state budget?
- To what extent does the Ministry rely on external support?

12. **What are the main institutional or capacity gaps that need to be addressed to strengthen the Ministry's role in preventing WFCL?**

- Training, staffing, transport, coordination, policy tools?

Section 6: Strategic Recommendations

13. **What changes would your Ministry recommend to reduce child labour and protect vulnerable children more effectively?**

- Legal reform, program integration, workforce strengthening, funding?
- How should national and local efforts be better aligned?

14. **What role can civil society, donors, and international partners play to support your Ministry's efforts?**

- What kind of partnerships are most useful—technical, financial, operational?

Optional Closing Question

15. **Is there anything else you would like to share about how the child protection and social welfare systems can better prevent or respond to the worst forms of child labour in South Sudan?**

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDE: ACADEMIC AND TECHNICAL EXPERTS ON CHILD LABOUR AND CHILD PROTECTION

Respondent Name:
Affiliation / Institution / Role:
Field of Expertise (e.g., Law, Education, Child Protection, Social Policy):
Location:
Date:
Interviewer Name:

Section 1: Background and Area of Expertise

1. **Can you briefly describe your academic or professional background and how it relates to child labour or child protection in South Sudan or the region?**
    - What thematic or geographic areas have you focused on?
    - Have you conducted fieldwork, policy reviews, or evaluations related to WFCL?
2. **What aspects of child labour or children's rights do you consider most under-researched or misunderstood in the South Sudanese context?**
    - Are there critical data or evidence gaps?
    - What misconceptions exist in programming or policy narratives?

Section 2: Trends, Prevalence, and Risk Patterns

3. **Based on your knowledge or research, what are the most common forms of child labour and WFCL currently seen in South Sudan?**
    - Which sectors or environments are most high-risk?
    - Are there emerging forms of exploitation (e.g., hidden domestic work, sexual exploitation, armed recruitment)?
4. **Which groups of children are most vulnerable to WFCL, and what drives their involvement?**
    - How do factors such as poverty, displacement, gender, or disability intersect?
    - Are there specific rural/urban dynamics worth noting?

Section 3: Policy, Systems and Institutional Analysis

5. **How well do South Sudan's laws and policies on child labour align with international standards?**
    - Are there strengths or gaps in legal definitions, enforcement mechanisms, or age thresholds?
    - Is the Child Act being implemented effectively?

6. **What do you see as the main limitations in the current child protection or labour regulation systems when it comes to addressing WFCL?**
    - Institutional coordination, inspection capacity, referral systems, legal enforcement?
7. **Are there good examples of integrated programming—linking education, livelihoods, and protection—that you think should be scaled or studied further?**
    - Have any pilot projects or regional examples stood out?
    - What makes them promising?

Section 4: Data, Research, and Evidence Use

8. **How robust is the available data on child labour in South Sudan? What are the major evidence gaps?**
    - Are national surveys or administrative datasets adequate and accessible?
    - What types of data are most urgently needed (e.g., gender-disaggregated, sector-specific, longitudinal)?
9. **How is research and evidence being used (or not used) in informing child labour programming or policy decisions?**
    - Are there examples of research influencing donor funding, NGO strategy, or legal reform?
    - What barriers exist to better knowledge uptake?

Section 5: Strategic Recommendations and Reflections

10. **What policy or programmatic shifts do you think are most critical to addressing the worst forms of child labour in South Sudan?**

- Legal reform, community engagement, education reform, cash transfers, employer regulation?
- Should prevention be prioritized over response?

11. **What is your assessment of the coordination among government, academia, civil society, and international agencies on child labour research and action?**

- Is there a role for research consortia or national observatories?
- What partnerships are most needed?

12. **What role can academia and research institutions play in advancing child labour prevention efforts in fragile and post-conflict contexts like South Sudan?**

- Curriculum development, participatory research, knowledge translation, capacity building?

Optional Final Prompt

13. **Is there anything else you would like to share—based on your experience—that would help us better understand or address the issue of child labour and WFCL in South Sudan?**

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE – ADOLESCENT GIRLS & BOYS (12–17 YEARS)

Separate sessions for girls and boys are recommended.

Location:
Facilitator:
Note-taker:
Date:
Group (tick one): ☐ Girls ☐ Boys
Age Range of Participants: 12–17
Language of Facilitation:
Number of Participants:

Opening Script (to be read aloud by facilitator):

Hello and thank you for being here today. We're talking to young people in different places to better understand the kinds of work children do, what challenges they face, and how we can improve things for the future. This is not a test. There are no right or wrong answers. What you share here will be kept private — we won't use your name and nothing you say will get you in trouble.

If you feel uncomfortable or don't want to answer something, that's okay. You can take a break at any time.

We want to hear your honest thoughts and experiences, especially about how things might be different for boys and girls. Do you have any questions before we begin?

SECTION 1: TYPES OF WORK CHILDREN DO

1. **What kinds of work do children your age do in this community?**
    - Where do they work (home, farm, market, cattle camp, other homes)?
    - Do some children also travel to work?
    - What's different between what boys do and what girls do?

2. **At what age do children usually start working around here?**
    - Is this age different for boys and girls? Why?
    - Who decides when they start?

3. **Are there types of work that are dangerous or difficult for children?**
    - What makes them dangerous (tools, hours, distance, people involved)?
    - Are boys and girls exposed to different kinds of risks?

SECTION 2: GENDER ROLES AND EXPECTATIONS

4. **What are boys expected to do to support their families? What about girls?**
    - Are girls expected to help at home or in others' homes?
    - Are boys expected to herd cattle or work in the fields?

5. **Do you feel that girls and boys have the same opportunities or freedom when it comes to work or school?**
    - Who faces more pressure to leave school to work?
    - Are girls expected to marry early or take care of others?

SECTION 3: EDUCATION AND WORK

6. **Do children who work also go to school?**
    - How does work affect their learning or attendance?
    - Is it harder for girls or boys to keep up with school when working?

7. **Have you or someone you know had to stop going to school because of work?**
    - What were the reasons?
    - Was it seen as a choice or something they had to do?

SECTION 4: RISKS, PRESSURE, AND PROTECTION

8. **Have you or your friends ever been in a situation where the work felt unsafe or unfair?**
    - What made it feel wrong?
    - Did anyone help or intervene?

9. **Do you know where a child can go or who they can talk to if they're being forced to do something unsafe or abusive?**
    - Have you seen cases where a girl or boy was helped?

10. **What makes it harder for girls to speak up about bad experiences at work? What about boys?**
    - Are there differences in how girls and boys are treated when they ask for help?

SECTION 5: COPING AND CHANGE

11. **What helps children manage both school and work?**

- Support from teachers, family, neighbours?

12. **What should be done to make things better for children who are working or at risk of dropping out of school?**

- Are there changes needed in your community? At school? At home?

13. **If you had the power to make one big change to help children your age, especially those working too much or in bad conditions, what would you change?**

Closing Script:

Thank you for sharing your thoughts today. Your ideas are very important and will help us understand how to better support children like you. If anything we discussed today made you feel uncomfortable or reminded you of something difficult, and you'd like to speak to someone privately, please let me or Kur Kur Dut know.

We really appreciate your time and voice.

ANNEX 6 : CHILD LABOUR OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

This observation is to be completed by the enumerator for any child or children found actively engaged in work during the time of the interview.

Ethical Considerations for Enumerators
Quick checklist:

- If signs of abuse, injury, or exploitation are observed, immediately report to field supervisor following safeguarding protocol.
- Avoid confronting child or employer directly.
- Ensure no harm results from your observation.

State:_____
County:_____
Payam:_____
Boma:_____
Researcher ID:_____
Time:_____

Section 1: About the child (Demographics)

- **Estimated age of the child:**
  - [ ] Below 10 years
  - [ ] 10–13 years
  - [ ] 14–17 years

- **Gender (based on observation):**
  - [ ] Male
  - [ ] Female

- **Signs of malnourishment (based on general appearance):**
  - [ ] No visible signs of malnourishment
  - [ ] Appears thin or underweight
  - [ ] Appears small or stunted for estimated age
  - [ ] Other physical concerns (please specify): _____
  - [ ] Cannot assess

- Notes on the child's appearance (e.g., clothing, physical condition): _____

Section 2: Type and Place of Work

- **Type of work observed:**
  - [ ] Agriculture
  - [ ] Domestic work
  - [ ] Construction
  - [ ] Charcoal production
  - [ ] Fishing
  - [ ] Mining
  - [ ] Street vending
  - [ ] Hospitality or restaurant service

- [ ] Street begging
- [ ] Sex work
- [ ] Other (specify): _____

- **Location of work:**
  - [ ] At home
  - [ ] On-site (e.g., farm, workshop, etc.)
  - [ ] On the streets
  - [ ] Rivers
  - [ ] Markets
  - [ ] Garages
  - [ ] Other (specify): _____

- **Tools/equipment used:**
  - [ ] Sharp tools
  - [ ] Machinery
  - [ ] Chemicals
  - [ ] Other (specify): _____

- **Protective gear**
  - [ ] Gloves
  - [ ] Helmets
  - [ ] Boots
  - Other (specify):_____

Section 3: Interactions and Relationships

- **Observed interactions between children and adults:**
  - [ ] Friendly and respectful (e.g guided kindly)
  - [ ] Neutral
  - [ ] Ignored
  - [ ] Dismissive or harsh (e.g. being shouted at)
  - [ ] Working alone unsupervised
  - [ ] Other (describe): _____

- **Observed working group composition:**
  - [ ] Only children
  - [ ] Mixed (adults and children)
  -

- **Notes on behavior and dynamics in the workplace: _____**

Section 4: Safety, Hazards and Health

- **Safety measures present:**
  - [ ] Protective gear
  - [ ] First aid kit
  - [ ] Proper ventilation
  - [ ] None
  - [ ] Other (specify): _____

- **Hazards observed:**
  - [ ] Physical injuries (cuts, bruises, etc.)
  - [ ] Exposure to harmful chemicals
  - [ ] Excessive noise

- [ ] Long hours without breaks
- [ ] Other (specify): _____

- **Signs of injury or illness:**
  - [ ] Visible injuries (describe): _____
  - [ ] Malnourishment
  - [ ] Visible exhaustion/fatigue
  - [ ] Other (specify): _____

Section 5: Work Duration and Intensity

- **Hours worked per day (ONLY if verifiable through observation or safe inquiry of the child or community input (bystanders, passers-by):**
  - [ ] Less than 3 hours
  - [ ] 3–6 hours
  - [ ] More than 6 hours
  - [ ] Don't know
  - [ ] Refuse to Answer

- **Days worked per week (ONLY if verifiable through observation or safe inquiry of the child or community input (bystanders, passers-by):**
  - [ ] 1–3 days
  - [ ] 4–6 days
  - [ ] Everyday

- **Nature of work:**
  - [ ] Seasonal
  - [ ] Year-round

Section 6: Supervision and Employer Behaviour

- **Level of supervision observed:**
  - [ ] Always supervised
  - [ ] Sometimes supervised
  - [ ] Rarely supervised
  - [ ] No supervision

- **Notes on employer behavior:**
  - [ ] Treats child fairly/respectfully
  - [ ] Indifferent to the child's wellbeing
  - [ ] Harsh treatment observed
  - [ ] Other (describe): _____

Notes on employer behavior (describe *specific examples*: scolding, ignoring, shouting orders, showing care): _____

Section 7: Signs of Exploitation and Distress

- **Emotional distress**
  - [ ] Tearfulness
  - [ ] Visible fear

- [ ] Withdrawal
- Does distress seem to be related to:
    - [ ] Work
    - [ ] Adults present
    - [ ] General living/working conditions

ANNEX 7: SAFEGUARDING REPORTING AND RESPONSE PROTOCOL FOR CHILD LABOUR, ABUSE, OR EXPLOITATION INCIDENTS

1. Identification and Initial Concern

Who: *Enumerator or staff member*

Action:

- Observe signs of potential child abuse, labour, exploitation, or neglect.
- Do not confront the child or suspected perpetrator.
- Immediately report the concern to the field supervisor, using verbal communication and secure channels.
- Complete internal notes discreetly for memory support but do not begin your own investigation.

▶ *Source: HR–005, Sec. 3.2; HR–005.3, p. 1*

2. Supervisor Receives Report

Who: *Supervisor on duty (Field Coordinator, Team Leader)*

Action:

- Log and acknowledge the concern (date, time, person reporting).
- Guide the enumerator to complete the Child Safeguarding Reporting Form (HR–005.2).
- Do not interview the child or try to gather further facts yourself.
- Ensure the enumerator is supported, not retraumatized, and aware of next steps.

▶ *Source: HR–005.2 (Reporting Form); HR–005–v1, Sec. 3.3*

3. Supervisor Actions After a Safeguarding Report

(To be undertaken after an enumerator reports suspected child labour, abuse, or exploitation)

3.1. Acknowledge and log the report

- Thank the enumerator and confirm receipt of the concern.
- Record the incident using the **Child Safeguarding Reporting Form (HR–005.2)**.

▶ *Source: HR–005.2 Child Safeguarding Reporting Form*

3.2. Ensure the child's immediate safety (if applicable)

- If the child is in **immediate danger**, alert local protection actors (social services, police, or child welfare committees).

▶ *Source: HR–005–v1 Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy, Sec. 3.3 & 3.4*

3.3. Forward the report to the Safeguarding Focal Point

- Submit the completed form to the **Designated Safeguarding Lead** (e.g., Director of Security and Compliance or Research Operations Manager).

▶ *Source: HR–005.2 Reporting Form; HR–005.3 Reporting Mechanism*

3.4. Do not investigate independently

- Avoid asking additional questions or confronting the child or alleged perpetrator.

▶ *Source: HR–005–v1, Section 3.6 "Responding to Concerns"*

3.5. Maintain strict confidentiality

- Share the report only with designated safeguarding staff.
- Store all related documents securely.

▶ *Source: HR–005–v1, Sec. 3.8 Data Protection & Confidentiality*

3.6. Provide support to the enumerator

- Reassure the enumerator and remind them they have followed proper procedure.
- Offer emotional support or referral to staff care services if needed.

▶ *Source: HR–005.1 Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy Agreement*

3.7. Cooperate with safeguarding follow-up

- Be available for clarification or support if further steps are required by the Safeguarding Lead.

▶ *Source: HR–005.2 Reporting Form Follow-Up Section*

3.8. Participate in learning and prevention

- Reflect on the case with the safeguarding team to strengthen future response processes.

▶ *Source: HR–005–v1, Sec. 4 "Monitoring and Learning"*

4. Safeguarding Lead or Focal Point Review

Who: *Designated Safeguarding Officer / Research Operations Manager / Director of Security & Compliance*

Action:

- Receive and review the reporting form and initial facts.
- Decide whether the case:
    - Requires escalation (to child protection services, law enforcement, or CPWG)
    - Can be resolved internally through referral or partner support
- Begin documentation and assign a case number.

▶ ***Source:*** *HR–005.2, Section: "Referral & Follow-Up"; HR–005.3, Step 2 & 3*

5. Case Management and Referral

Who: Safeguarding Lead + Management + External Actor (as needed)

Action:

- If serious: Refer the case to police, child protection partners, or a CPWG focal point.
- If not immediate: Refer to a local child welfare officer or protective services partner.
- Maintain continuous documentation and follow-up log.
- Feedback to supervisor on the outcome (within limits of confidentiality).

▶ *Source: HR–005.3 Steps 3–5; HR–005.2 Referral Tracking*

6. Resolution and Learning

Who: *Safeguarding Lead + Supervisor + Enumerators (if needed)*

Action:

- Confirm safety of the child and appropriate resolution of the case.
- Debrief enumerator, clarify learning points, and adjust protocols if gaps identified.
- Report anonymized summary to the Child Protection Focal Point or Board if required.
- Update safeguarding tracker, training materials, and field protocols.

▶ *Source*: *HR–005–v1, Sec. 4 "Monitoring & Learning"; HR–005.1, agreement clause on accountability*

ANNEX 8 : DATA ANALYSIS PLAN

The following data analysis plan guided the research planning, tool development and analysis process right from its inception, aligning with SCI's goal to comprehensively understand the topic of child labour in South Sudan.

Table 7: Data Analysis Plan

Research questions	Research Subquestions	Data Collection Methods	Measures/ Indicators	Primary Analysis Methods	Comparison/ Triangulation	Expected Outputs
Research Objective 1: Provide evidence on the existence and possible magnitude of the worst forms of child labour across sectors and locations.						
1. What is the current prevalence and distribution of the worst forms of child labour among children aged 12–17 in South Sudan?	1.1. How does prevalence vary by state, county, and urban/rural location?	- Survey - KIIs with child protection officers, teachers, CSO actors; - FGDs with adolescents	- % of households reporting at least one child engaged in each sector - % of children involved in WFCL per sector- - Sector-specific risks and tasks (as reported by caregivers and youth) - Reports of hidden/seasonal/hazardous labour	- Descriptive statistics (frequencies, proportions by sector) - Cross-tabulation by state, sector, gender, and age - Thematic coding from KIIs/FGDs on type and nature of work	- Triangulate caregiver responses with youth accounts and stakeholder interviews - Compare self-reported vs observed data - Check consistency across geographic regions and sectors	- Prevalence matrix by sector and location - Summary table of sector-specific WFCL - Infographic/chart on distribution of WFCL by region, gender, and age group - Qualitative narratives illustrating work types and risks
	1.2. What are the most common types of worst forms of work children are engaged in (e.g. forced recruitment, hazardous labour, commercial sexual exploitation) and in which sectors are these concentrated?	- Survey with caregivers (geo-referenced), - KIIs with local officials and education/labour focal points, - FGDs with adolescents (urban/rural stratified)	- % of children involved in WFCL per location (state, county)- Urban vs. rural breakdown of child labour cases- Geographic hotspots of sector-specific WFCL-Mobility/displacement-linked WFCL cases	- Disaggregated descriptive statistics by geographic unit- Cross-tabulation of WFCL type by urban/rural - Geo-mapping (where feasible) of hotspots - Thematic analysis of regional context from KIIs	- Compare caregiver-reported prevalence across sampled locations - Triangulate with stakeholder perceptions of regional trends - Contrast reported trends with known humanitarian or economic pressure zones	- Regional WFCL prevalence tables - Visual charts comparing rural vs. urban data - Qualitative summaries of location-specific factors (e.g., cattle camps, mining zones, IDP settlements) - Identification of priority states/counties for targeted interventions
	1.3. What are the demographic profiles (e.g., age, gender) of children engaged in these forms of labour?	- Survey with caregivers - FGDs with adolescents - KIIs with stakeholders	- Age and gender distribution of children in each type of WFCL - Education status of working children (enrolled, dropped out, never attended) - Disability or orphanhood status (where available)	- Frequency and cross-tabulation analysis (by age, gender, disability, education status) - Descriptive profiling of children across WFCL types - Qualitative coding of	- Compare caregiver-reported data with youth narratives - Gender analysis across sectors (e.g., domestic vs cattle herding) - Cross-check with key	- Demographic profile of children in WFCL - Tables/graphs disaggregated by age and gender - Brief on vulnerable subgroups (e.g., younger boys in herding, adolescent girls in domestic/sexual exploitation)

			- Average age of entry into labour	perceived roles and gendered experiences from FGDs	informants on age/role trends	- Case-based insights from FGDs and KIIs
Research Objective 2: Identify the main driving factors behind child labour at different levels, particularly at the family and community levels.						
2. 2. What are the main socio-economic, environmental, and security-related factors driving children into child labour/WFCL?	2.1. How do household level factors (such as poverty, food insecurity, parental education, displacement, armed conflict, and breakdown of social protection systems) contribute to increasing child labour/WFCL risks?	- Survey with caregivers, - KIIs with social workers and child protection actors	- HH income level and livelihood type - Food security status (e.g., coping strategies, food consumption) - Parental education level - Number of income earners vs. dependents - Reported reasons for sending children to work	- Cross-tabulation: child labour prevalence vs. poverty, food insecurity, parental education - Regression analysis: predicting likelihood of child labour by HH characteristics - Thematic coding of caregiver justifications	- Compare caregiver survey data with KII insights- Identify trends across socioeconomic strata- Examine overlap between HH drivers and education dropout	- Analytical report on HH drivers - Tables/graphs linking poverty indicators to child labour - Integrated case examples with quotes from caregivers and social workers
	2.2. What role do community-level issues, including displacement and conflict, play in increasing child labour risks?	- Survey with caregivers - KIIs with local authorities, NGOs, and community leaders, - FGDs with youth (including displaced groups)	- Exposure to displacement, conflict, or climate shocks - Number of IDPs in area - Availability of social services/safety nets - Reported link between loss of assets and child labour - Descriptions of risk escalation post-conflict/displacement	- Thematic analysis of displacement/conflict narratives - Frequency analysis of exposure indicators - Pattern analysis linking crisis events to labour onset	- Compare experiences of displaced vs. host communities - Triangulate community perception with NGO response data - Cross-link with HH and educational data	- Narrative synthesis of conflict-related drivers- Briefing note on displacement and child labour - Highlighted risk maps (if spatial data available)
	2.3. How do cultural practices and social norms influence the acceptance of child labour in different communities?	- Survey with caregivers, - KIIs with community leaders, - FGDs with youth, - KIIs with local authorities and CSO staff	- Reported perceptions of what constitutes "acceptable" child work - Beliefs about roles of children in the HH - Norms around early marriage, child obedience, gender roles - Seasonal or initiation-linked labour practices	- Content and discourse analysis of beliefs and language - Thematic coding across regions/ethnic groups - Narrative comparison between stakeholder groups	- Contrast caregiver and youth perspectives - Identify regional or ethnic differences - Map consistency with observed behaviours and attitudes	- Social norms and beliefs report - Matrix of cultural drivers by region or ethnic group - Case study vignettes with illustrative quotes
3. What are the barriers to education for children engaged in labour, and how does this perpetuate the cycle of child labour?	3.1. How does involvement in child labour impact school enrolment, attendance, and completion rates?	Survey with caregivers, KIIs with teachers and school administrators, FGDs with adolescents (both in and out of school)	- School enrollment status of working children - Attendance regularity (as perceived by caregivers and teachers) - Dropout rates among working vs. non-working children - Age of school entry and highest grade completed	- Descriptive and comparative statistics (school participation vs. child labour status) - Cross-tabulations: dropout vs. WFCL involvement - Thematic analysis of perceived impacts from FGDs and KIIs	- Compare across gender, age groups, and type of labour - Triangulate survey data with school-level and teacher reports - Cross-reference with education-related policy gaps	- Education and labour interaction analysis - Summary table of education indicators among working children - Narrative insights into the tension between schooling and labour demands
	3.2. What are the main barriers (e.g., cost, distance, safety) preventing working children from accessing education?	Survey with caregivers, FGDs with youth, KIIs with school staff	- Reported reasons for school non-attendance - Distance to school and transportation means	- Frequency and ranking analysis of reported barriers	- Cross-compare caregiver and youth perceptions- Urban vs. rural contrasts	- Summary of education access barriers - Prioritised list of most common deterrents to schooling

		and community leaders	- Costs of education (fees, materials, uniforms)- Safety concerns (e.g., harassment, conflict zones)	- Thematic clustering of responses from FGDs and KIIs - Comparative analysis by location and gender	- Comparison of dropout reasons among labouring vs. non-labouring children	- Case illustrations of compounded risks (e.g., girls, IDPs)
	3.3. How can education initiatives be leveraged to reduce child labour in high-risk areas?	- KIIs with education officers, NGO staff, and community leaders, - FGDs with adolescents	- Awareness and reach of existing education initiatives - Incentives or adaptations that help retain working children (e.g., school feeding, flexible schedules) - Community perceptions of education as a protective factor	- Thematic analysis of education responses and innovations - Narrative synthesis of successful practices - Comparative insights from high vs. low prevalence areas	- Compare perceived effectiveness across stakeholders - Cross-reference promising practices with child labour data - Triangulate programmatic examples with community feedback	- Programmatic recommendations linking education to prevention - Examples of promising education-based interventions - Stakeholder-validated strategies to scale or adapt locally
Research Objective 3: Identify specific policy gaps and provide actionable recommendations on how to eliminate & prevent child labour across sectors.						
4. How do employers and private sector actors contribute to the persistence of child labour in South Sudan?	4.1. What are the practices and motivations of employers in sectors like agriculture, domestic work, and informal markets for hiring children?	- KIIs with employers, traders, hHHs, - FGDs with youth engaged in labour	- Tasks typically assigned to children in different sectors- Perceived economic or practical value of child labour - Employer justifications for hiring minors (e.g., affordability, obedience) - Seasonal variations in labour demand	- Thematic coding of employer narratives - Sectoral comparison of rationales and practices - Frequency tabulation of reported motivations	- Compare employer vs. child/youth perspectives - Cross-check sectoral differences (agriculture vs. domestic vs. vending) - Triangulate with HH survey data	- Practice profile by sector - Typology of employer motivations - Case examples highlighting ethical vs exploitative patterns
	4.2. How aware are employers of child labour laws, and what accountability measures are in place?	- KIIs with employers, labour inspectors, legal aid actors, community leaders	- Awareness of legal minimum working age- Awareness of what constitutes WFCL - Existence and use of inspections or reporting mechanisms - Employer perceptions of risk or impunity	- Descriptive analysis of awareness levels - Thematic analysis of perceptions around enforcement - Gap identification in legal knowledge and practice	- Cross-check employer responses with perspectives from inspectors/local officials - Compare reported knowledge to actual law - Triangulate with policy and NGO reports	- Employer legal literacy summary - Accountability gap map - Recommendations on regulatory awareness raising
	4.3. What incentives or regulations could encourage employers to eliminate child labour in their operations?	- KIIs with employers, chambers of commerce, local authorities, community leaders	- Attitudes towards alternatives to child labour (e.g., apprenticeships) - Receptiveness to incentives like tax breaks, certification - Perceived effectiveness of penalties or monitoring	- Thematic synthesis of proposed solutions - Stakeholder clustering of preferred strategies - Narrative scenario testing (what would work, where)	- Compare incentives preferred by employers vs. regulators - Cross-reference successful approaches from past NGO programming - Geographic comparison where relevant	- List of employer-backed solutions - Feasibility ranking of regulatory tools - Policy input brief for labour and trade ministries
5. What are the strengths and weaknesses of current policies and programs aimed at reducing child labour?	5.1. How well do national laws and policies on child labour align with international standards, and where are the gaps in enforcement?	- Desk review of national legal and policy frameworks, - KIIs with ministry officials and legal experts	- Legal minimum age and sectoral exemptions- Definition of WFCL in national law - Alignment with ILO Conventions 138 and 182, UNCRC - Existence of enforcement mandates and mechanisms	- Legal framework analysis vs. international standards- Comparative matrix of policy provisions- Gap mapping (content and implementation)	- Compare policy text with actual field practices - Triangulate gaps with stakeholder perceptions - Reference to similar frameworks in neighbouring countries	- Legal alignment scorecard - Enforcement gaps brief - Recommendations for legislative harmonisation

	5.2. What are the challenges faced by government and humanitarian actors in implementing child labour interventions?	- KIIs with government staff, NGO project leads, child protection coordinators	- Resource availability (staffing, funding) - Coordination barriers - Monitoring and reporting infrastructure - Perceptions of success and failure	- Thematic analysis of implementation challenges - SWOT-style synthesis - Pattern mapping across agencies	- Compare across different actor types (state, NGO, UN) - Triangulate findings with field-level service coverage - Contrast stated mandates with real capacities	- Systems implementation barriers report - Institutional mapping of actor responsibilities - Actionable recommendations on capacity and coordination gaps
	5.3. How can coordination between stakeholders (e.g., government, NGOs, UN agencies) be improved to address child labour more effectively?	- KIIs with coordination bodies (e.g. child protection sub-cluster), government leads, INGOs	- Existing coordination platforms - Role clarity and duplication issues - Information sharing practices - Preferred models for collaborationtion	- Stakeholder mapping and network analysis - Narrative synthesis of coordination experiences - Scenario modelling for improved systems	- Compare models from different states/regions - Triangulate with policy documents and previous research - Identify coordination lessons from other sectors (e.g., GBV, education)	- Coordination assessment brief - Stakeholder roles matrix - Practical roadmap for improved collaborationtion
Research Objective 4: Develop a holistic approach to eradicating child labour especially in its worst forms, in high-risk locations across South Sudan.						
6. How do gender and vulnerability factors shape children's experiences of child labour/WFCL?	**6.1.** What are the differences in the types of labour and associated risks faced by boys versus girls in high-risk sectors?	- KIIs with teachers, child protection actors, health staff - FGDs with youth	- Sector of engagement by gender - Nature of tasks and exposure to harm - Gendered experiences of coercion, abuse, exploitation - Risk perception and coping strategies	- Gender-disaggregated analysis of FGD responses - Content analysis of risk narratives - Cross-tabulations by gender and sector from survey data	- Compare male/female youth accounts - Contrast caregiver vs child perceptions of gendered labour - Triangulate with NGO protection data where possible	- Gendered risk and labour profile - Sector-by-gender risk typology - Case-based insights on vulnerabilities and coping responses
	6.2. How do vulnerabilities such as disability, orphanhood, or displacement increase the likelihood of exploitation in child labour?	- Survey with caregivers, FGDs with vulnerable youth (incl. IDPs, orphans, children with disabilities), - KIIs with humanitarian actors	- % of working children with disability, orphanhood, or displacement status - Types of labour and exploitation patterns linked to vulnerability - Barriers to protection and service access	- Descriptive and disaggregated analysis of vulnerable subgroups - Thematic analysis of exploitation patterns - Comparative statistics: vulnerable vs. general child population	- Compare experiences across vulnerability types - Contrast community vs. institutional accounts - Triangulate with targeting criteria of existing child protection programs	- Profile of high-risk vulnerable groups - Analytical note on intersection of vulnerability and labour - Inputs for targeted prevention strategies
	6.3. What is the relationship between early marriage and unpaid or hidden labour, particularly for girls?	- FGDs with adolescent girls, - KIIs with women's rights actors, teachers, and child protection staff	- Age at marriage and cessation/start of work - Domestic labour load before and after marriage - Narratives of control, restriction, or dependency - Perceived link between marriage and exit from school	- Narrative analysis from girls' FGDs- Comparative insights between married and unmarried girls - Content coding of unpaid/hidden work descriptions	- Compare girls' narratives with caregiver and stakeholder perspectives - Contrast different regions or ethnic groups - Triangulate with school records where possible	- Evidence brief on early marriage and hidden child labour - Case illustrations of invisible labour dynamics - Gender-justice-oriented recommendations
7. What are the existing community-based mechanisms for preventing and addressing child labour?	**7.1.** How is child labour/WFCL understood, accepted or challenged at the HH and community level?	- HH survey - KIIs with local, authorities	- Definitions and perceptions of child labour and WFCL - Social acceptance or rejection of specific WFCL (e.g. child marriage, child soldiering) - Norms influencing family decisions (e.g. poverty, gender roles, customary expectations)	- Thematic analysis of qualitative data - Frequency and cross-tabulation from survey on attitudes - Comparative analysis by region, gender, or socio-economic status	- Compare community and HH responses - Cross-validate normative claims with qualitative evidence- Integrate perceptions with data from KIIs on system responses	- Socio-cultural norms profile influencing child labour - Evidence of resistance or reinforcement of WFCL - Entry points for attitudinal change and community sensitisation

			- Shifts in attitudes over time or due to interventions			
	7.2. What informal systems (e.g., community networks, traditional leaders) exist to protect children from labour exploitation?	- KIIs with leaders, traditional authorities and local NGOs	- Types of informal mechanisms (e.g., chief intervention, customary sanctions)- Reported effectiveness in child protection- Inclusion of vulnerable children or families	- Thematic mapping of informal practices - Narrative comparison across communities - Typology development of local protective strategies	- Cross-check informal system descriptions with KII insights - Compare regions with and without active informal systems - Triangulate with formal system reach	- Landscape of community protection structures - Strengths and risks of informal responses - Entry points for local collaborationtion in prevention efforts
	7.3. How effective are formal mechanisms like child protection committees or local authorities in responding to child labour cases?	- KIIs with child protection committees, government staff, - FGDs with youth	- Coverage of child protection committees - Functionality (e.g., case tracking, referral, response) - Community awareness and trust in mechanisms- Documented case outcomes	- Capacity and performance analysis- Narrative review of cases managed by committees- Comparison across localities with differing capacities	- Compare committee reports with HH perceptions- Cross-analyse service coverage and trust- Triangulate with NGO reports and assessments	- Functional assessment of formal mechanisms - Gaps and opportunities in committee structures - Recommendations for strengthening formal responses
	7.4. What are the gaps in awareness and trust that prevent families from using available support systems?	- Survey with caregivers, - KIIs with local leaders and service providers	- Awareness of reporting pathways & support options - Experiences of accessing (or failing to access) help - Perceptions of fairness, confidentiality, and follow-through	- Barrier analysis from participant responses - Thematic clustering of reasons for distrust or disengagement - Comparative mapping by location or group	- Compare trusted vs. distrusted actors - Cross-check service gaps with protection actor accounts - Triangulate with child protection response data	- Community trust and access gap report - Recommendations on outreach and referral system improvement - Qualitative evidence for community engagement strategies
8. What are the most effective strategies and recommendations for eradicating child labour/WFCL in South Sudan's high-risk areas?	8.1. What community-led initiatives or alternatives to child labour (e.g., vocational training, income support) show promise in reducing child labour?	- KIIs with NGO and CSO staff, community members, - FGDs with youth	- Existence and awareness of local initiatives - Perceived success and challenges - Youth and parent participation levels - Reported outcomes or changes	- Inventory and typology analysis - Thematic synthesis of perceived impact - Comparative case study of high-potential models	- Compare community vs. implementer perceptions - Identify factors in success/failure - Triangulate with child labour prevalence data	- Catalogue of promising community responses - Good practice briefings - Practical guidance for scaling locally grounded solutions
	8.2. How can education, economic empowerment, and legal enforcement be integrated into a comprehensive approach to eliminate child labour?	- KIIs with multi-sector actors (education officers, legal aid providers, NGOs), - FGDs with youth	- Awareness & accessibility of integrated programs - Community and institutional perceptions of multi-pronged strategies - Evidence of cross-sector coordination (education + cash + law enforcement) - Barriers to implementation of combined approaches	- Thematic analysis using integration lens (education, livelihoods, protection) - Narrative case mapping of multisector models - SWOT synthesis of coordination & delivery	- Compare integrated vs. siloed efforts in high-risk areas - Triangulate community demand with institutional readiness - Map how risks and resilience shift under integrated support	- Integration roadmap for child labour prevention - Multi-sector case studies or program profiles - Evidence-based recommendations for scaling integrated responses
	8.3. What are the specific needs of high-risk locations in terms of resources, infrastructure, and capacity building to prevent child labour?	- KIIs with frontline staff, local officials, and NGOs, with community leaders and affected families	- Service and resource gaps (schools, clinics, vocational training, child protection services) - Staffing levels and capacities	- Gap and capacity analysis per location - Thematic clustering of needs across states	- Triangulate service gaps with reported child labour prevalence - Compare across states/counties with different exposure levels	- High-risk location needs profile - State- or county-level gap analysis

	- Infrastructure deficits and transport barriers - Priority capacity building needs	- Comparative assessment between high-risk and low-risk areas	- Validate perceived needs with existing secondary assessments	- Prioritised investment and capacity-building recommendations

ANNEX 9 : IRB RESEARCH PERMISSION

REPUBLIC OF SOUTH SUDAN

Ministry of Health, Research Ethics Review Board (MOH-RERB), Juba.

Protocol No: RERB-P NO:34/04/2025 Approval No: MOH/RERB /A- 34/2025 Date:8th May,2025

To: Principal Investigator: Dr.Ianna Wagner-Tsoni **(OTHERwise Research-South Sudan.)**

Title of the Project: "National Child Labor Study in South Sudan".

Dear Wagner,

The Ministry of Health Research Ethics and Review Board at its regular meeting held on 28/04/2025 reviewed your research proposal and has given a favorable ethical opinion for implementation

The approval was based on the quality of your application form, protocol and supporting documents that complied with the conditions and principles established by the international and national Guidelines for carryout out research involving humans as research participant. This approval shall be valid until 30th July 2025

In this regard, you are expected to commence implementation of this research. Please note that the annual report and the request for renewal (if applicable), should be submitted to the MOH-RERB one month before the expiry of the approval time.

The progress report should not exceed five pages. In addition, any serious problem related to implementation of this research protocol should be promptly reported to the MOH-RERB, and any changes to the protocol should not be implemented without the MOH-RERB approval except in instances where such a change is necessary to eliminate or prevent an immediate hazard to the research participants. Note that any information generated from the study should not be published without the consents of the MOH-RERB. We wish you all the best in implementing this research.

MOH-RERB
08 MAY 2025
JUBA - SOUTH SUDAN

Mr. Amanya Jacob Kasio Iboyi, MPH-SMU

D/ Director for Research & Survey, D/Chairperson, MOH-RERB, RSS-Jub

Cc: Director General International Health Services, MOH-RSS/Juba

Cc: D/G State Ministries of Health, A Cross Republic of South Sudan

Cc: Counties Health Department and Others/relevant Health Partners in State

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THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH SUDAN

Social Dialogue and Decent Work

MINISTRY OF LABOUR

NATIONAL STUDY: CHILD LABOUR IN SOUTH SUDAN

Empowering Futures: A national and grassroots initiative to end the worst forms of **child labour** through targeted interventions that focus on **prevention, protection,** and **rehabilitation** of **affected children** in South Sudan

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