

South Sudan



May 2026, update from May 2022

Country – capital	Republic of South Sudan - Juba
Population	Dinka/Jieng (35-40%), Nuer/Naath (15%), Shilluk (Chollo), Azande, Bari, and many smaller groups. ¹ Total population 12.4 million (estimation 2026). ²
Geography	South of Sudan, north of Uganda/Kenya, west of Ethiopia ³
Languages – official / lingua franca	English (official), Arabic (includes Juba and Sudanese variants), ethnic languages include Dinka, Nuer, Bari, Zande, Shilluk. ⁴
Writing system	Latin, Arabic ⁵
Education and literacy	Literacy rate is about 35% ⁶ (2018), an increase from 27% in 2008 ⁷ - for women only 29%, and about 70% of children are out of school. ⁸ Many girls drop out because of cultural pressures, to marry at a young age. Literacy rate is higher in urban areas, where roughly 50% of the adult population is able to read. ⁹ The educational system was greatly disrupted by the civil war that began in 2013. About 50% of school-age children have access to education, and 35% of boys and 19% of girls complete primary school. ¹⁰ School enrolment has expanded from 300,000 in 2005 to 2.2 million today. ¹¹ South Sudan's official system consists of two educational tracks. The formal track includes 8 years of primary education, followed by 4 years of secondary education and then postsecondary training or 4 years of tertiary education. An alternative track, in which 8 years of primary education are condensed into 4 years, exists for students of all ages who have or have had limited access to schooling. ¹²
Religions	Christian (60%), 'traditional' religion (33%), Muslim (6%), other/unaffiliated (1%). ¹³
Conflict history and overview	2011 Independence from Sudan after long and bloody civil wars (1955-1972 and 1983-2005); 2.5 million died. Since independence, the country has seen political conflicts, widespread corruption, communal violence, criminality. ¹⁴ In December 2013 tensions erupted into civil war, following a political struggle between President Salva Kiir, and Vice President Riek Machar. The conflict unfolded along ethnic lines, killing tens of thousands and creating a dire humanitarian crisis, with millions of displaced and food insecure people. Cease-fire was reached in September 2018. ¹⁵ Situation worsened in April 2023 when fighting erupted in neighbouring Sudan, sending an exodus of refugees, incl. many South Sudanese, to South Sudan. In March 2025 Machar was arrested and charged with murder and treason. Hostilities and tensions intensified in Dec. 2025 between government and opposition forces, leading to increasing violence, killings and displacements. ¹⁶
Humanitarian situation	Life expectancy at birth: 55 yrs for men, 61 for women. ¹⁷ In 2022, 8.3 million were in need of humanitarian / food aid. ¹⁸ In 2025, the humanitarian crisis worsened: approx. 70% of the population needing food assistance amid conflict, food insecurity, the impacts of extreme climate events and USAID aid cuts. ¹⁹
Human rights situation	Human rights organisations report violence against civilians, extrajudicial killings, torture, kidnappings, sexual violence, arbitrary arrests and detention, looting, impunity by security forces, opposition forces, armed militias affiliated with government and opposition, and ethnically based groups. The government has arbitrarily detained critics, civil society members, journalists and politicians often holding them for extended periods. ²⁰
Situation of women FGM – early marriages	Maternal mortality rate has improved from 3,845 in 2000 to 692 in 2023. ²¹ 52% of girls marry before the age of 18 and 9% before the age of 15 (2010 est.) Current rates of child marriages could be higher due to ongoing conflict, displacement, and food shortages. ²² FGM prevalence is 1%. ²³ Gender-based violence is pervasive, mainly female victims. ²⁴
Situation of LGBTI	Same-sex activities illegal, punishable by max. 10 yrs prison. In 2022 one extrajudicial killing by security forces of an LGBTI person was reported. No information since 2023. ²⁵
Asylum / migration / internally displaced persons (IDPs)	IDPs total 1.9 million (Oct. 2025); 55% are women and girls. ²⁶ South Sudan also hosts 600,000 refugees from Sudan and 800,000 South Sudanese returnees who fled the conflict in Sudan since April 2023. ²⁷ 2.3 million refugees, 63% of them minors, fled to neighbouring countries. ²⁸ Malta sea arrivals are unknown. ²⁹ Nr of asylum seekers in Malta decreased from 106 (2020) to 5 (2024-25). ³⁰

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¹ <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/south-sudan/>

² <https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/indicator/sp-pop?age=All+ages&gender=total> ; <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/south-sudan-population/>

³ <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/south-sudan/>

⁴ <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/south-sudan/>

⁵ <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/south-sudan/>

⁶ https://moge.gov.ss/news_details?title=38

⁷ <https://www.macrotrends.net/global-metrics/countries/ssd/south-sudan/literacy-rate>

⁸ <https://www.unicef.org/southsudan/reports/unicef-south-sudan-briefing-notes>

⁹ <https://www.britannica.com/place/South-Sudan/Education>

¹⁰ <https://www.iicba.unesco.org/en/south-sudan>

¹¹ https://moge.gov.ss/news_details?title=38

¹² <https://www.britannica.com/place/South-Sudan/Education>

¹³ <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/south-sudan/> ; <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/feature/religious-composition-by-country-2010-2020/>

¹⁴ <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/south-sudan/>

¹⁵ <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/south-sudan/> ; <https://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/south-sudan>

¹⁶ <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/civil-war-south-sudan> ; <https://www.globalr2p.org/countries/south-sudan/> ; <https://www.ictj.org/latest-news/south-sudan-charges-vp-machar-treason-murder-over-military-attack> ; <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/9/11/south-sudan-charges-vp-machar-with-treason-murder-over-military-attack>

¹⁷ <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.LE00.FE.IN?locations=SS>

¹⁸ <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/south-sudan/document/south-sudan-humanitarian-needs-overview-2022> ; <https://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/south-sudan#displacement-data>

¹⁹ <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2026/country-chapters/south-sudan>

²⁰ <https://www.hrw.org/africa/south-sudan> ; <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/south-sudan/>

²¹ <https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/economies/south-sudan>

²² <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/en/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/south-sudan/>

²³ <https://www.fgmcri.org/country/south-sudan/>

²⁴ <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2026/country-chapters/south-sudan>

²⁵ <https://database.ilga.org/criminalisation-consensual-same-sex-sexual-acts>

²⁶ <https://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/south-sudan> ; <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2026/country-chapters/south-sudan>

²⁷ <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2026/country-chapters/south-sudan>

²⁸ <https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/south-sudan/> ; <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/southsudan> ; <https://www.globalr2p.org/countries/south-sudan/>

²⁹ <https://www.unhcr.org/mt/figures-at-a-glance>

²⁹ https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/download?data_finder%5BdataGroup%5D=displacement&data_finder%5Bdataset%5D=population&data_finder%5BdisplayType%5D=totals&data_finder%5BpopulationType%5D%5B%5D=REF&data_finder%5BpopulationType%5D%5B%5D=ASY&data_finder%5BpopulationType%5D%5B%5D=IDP&data_finder%5BpopulationType%5D%5B%5D=OIP&data_finder%5BpopulationType%5D%5B%5D=STA&data_finder%5BpopulationType%5D%5B%5D=HST&data_finder%5BpopulationType%5D%5B%5D=OOC&data_finder%5Byear_filterType%5D=range&data_finder%5Byear_rangeFrom%5D=2020&data_finder%5Byear_rangeTo%5D=2026&data_finder=on&data_finder%5Bcoa_displayType%5D=custom&data_finder%5Bcoa_country%5D%5B%5D=179&data_finder%5Bcoa_displayType%5D=custom&data_finder%5Bcoa_country%5D%5B%5D=132&data_finder%5Byear_%5D=&data_finder%5Bcoa_%5D=&data_finder%5Badvanced_%5D=&data_finder%5Bsubmit%5D=

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This factsheet was compiled by Adri van den Berg for BDE. Adri worked for many years as a Country of Origin Information (COI) researcher, her final post before retiring being with the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) in Malta.

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