While humanitarian access has improved since the revitalized peace agreement was signed in September 2018, the number of incidents recorded in 2020 rose from 2019. Aid organizations faced continued and widespread access challenges in 2020. The adaptations in humanitarian activities given COVID-19 restrictions were critical. Humanitarians’ attempts to serve people were repeatedly constrained by COVID-19 mitigation measures. An increase in sub-national and localized violence, including the resumption of politicised conflict in parts of the country, impacted humanitarian operations and impeded humanitarian assistance to vulnerable people. Based on available information, compromised of humanitarian access in 2020 was mainly as a result of active hostilities and violence against humanitarian workers and assets.

In 2020, a moderate increase in humanitarian access incidents was reported, from 535 incidents in 2019 to 580 in 2020. Despite strong advocacy, access constraints remained under-reported. The surge in sub-national violence, gaps in leadership structures and COVID-19 related movement restrictions contributed to the overall rise in access constraints. Of the incidents reported, 44 per cent were significant in severity, compared to 24 per cent in 2019.

Central Equatoria had the highest concentration of incidents reported, 149, primarily due to active hostilities in parts of Lainya, Morobo and Kajo-keji counties. Twenty-two of these incidents were severe access impediments at Juba International Airport. Thirty COVID-19 related access constraints amplified pre-existing difficulties in reaching people, especially during the first half of the year. These included movement restrictions for goods and personnel within and into the country, violence and threats against humanitarian personnel and assets, bureaucratic impediments and operational interference.

Bureaucratic impediments, access denials and operational interference accounted for 196 of the reported incidents, 20 incidents less than in 2019. The slight decrease may be attributed to the decrease in humanitarian staff footprint due to COVID-19. Some incidents, such as demands by organized youth groups for local hiring, particularly in Renk and Bentiu, led to the suspension of humanitarian activities, substantially disrupting multi-sectoral assistance.

Safety of humanitarian workers worsened in 2020 with nine aid workers killed, bringing the total to 124 since 2013. The increase in aid worker deaths was attributed to intensified sub-national violence in Jonglei. A total of 267 humanitarians were relocated in 2020 due to insecurity and flooding, compared to 129 in 2019.
The safety and security of humanitarians deteriorated in 2020 as a result of sub-national violence, compounded by the intensity of ambushes against aid workers. Some 354 violent incidents were reported, an increase from 319 in 2019. The number of aid workers killed increased threefold from 2019 to nine and brought the number of humanitarians killed since 2013 to 124. Of the nine aid workers killed in 2020, eight lost their lives while delivering lifesaving assistance to people in Jonglei, and one in Lakes. Active hostilities and violence against personnel continued to impact humanitarian operations, with 245 aid workers relocated in 26 incidents from multiple locations across the country. Some 70 per cent of relocations took place in Jonglei, halting essential activities for communities in need, many of which were facilitated through OCHA.

Looting and theft of humanitarian supplies from warehouses and convoys in transit significantly increased in 2020, with 50 incidents reported across the country compared to 14 incidents in 2019. Over half of the looting incidents were recorded in Jonglei where key humanitarian facilities and infrastructure were damaged or destroyed in Pibor and Bor South during sub-national violence, leading to a loss of over 635 metric tons of food and nutrition items. Insecurity along the major supply routes remained fluid and negatively impacted on reaching people in need. The number of ambushes reported increased from 70 in 2019 to 88 in 2020, leading to the death and injury of aid workers and loss of supplies. The majority occurred in Eastern Equatoria and Lakes states. There was an increase in reported injuries, from 17 people injured in 2019 to 32 in 2020. Most injuries happened during ambushes and some during attacks on humanitarian facilities. Four aid workers were abducted in 2020 after none were reported in 2019. The number of staff arbitrarily detained for extended periods reduced from 47 in 2019 to 16 in 2020.

Active hostilities in Central Equatoria between the South Sudan People’s Defense Forces/Sudan People’s Liberation Army in Opposition and the National Salvation Front hindered the delivery of assistance to people in Kajo-keji, Lainya and Morobo counties.

OCHA flagged such trends, especially in relation to vulnerable access routes. Ahead of the dry season, these flags informed senior level discussions and the Humanitarian Coordinator shared guidance for dissemination to all humanitarian organizations on a risk management approach, ensuring duty of care for humanitarian staff, when considering any humanitarian movements. OCHA amplified this guidance through the Access Working Group, the ICCG and other engagement opportunities.
In 2020, bureaucratic impediments, operational interference and access denials remained challenges for humanitarian organizations across the country. The overall number of non-violent incidents reported declined slightly, attributed to COVID-19 and the limitations it posed on field presence. Due to the COVID-19 measures, the humanitarian footprint reduced in some locations throughout the year. Access denials, operational interference and bureaucratic impediments accounted for 196 of all incidents, 20 less than 2019. Reports grew of authorities and organized youth groups pressuring aid organizations to influence recruitment processes based on ethnicities in Aweil West, Bentiu, Ezo, Fashoda, Malakal, Melut, Pibor, Renk and Twic counties. In Renk, the youth association demanded jobs to be reallocated to local people. Subsequently, there was violence against humanitarian assets, destruction of humanitarian supplies and threats against humanitarian staff, prompting the relocation of 30 aid workers and suspension of operations. At the time of publication, humanitarian services in the area remain suspended, pending negotiation and safety assurances for staff. This is affecting the delivery of humanitarian services to over 60,000 people in need. OCHA participated in repeated rounds of negotiation attempts with the various youth groups, and participated in two visits to Renk and continues to support the negotiation and advocacy interventions. In Bentiu, threats by the youth against Equatorian staff and other nationalities disrupted activities since September, impacting services for some 97,000 people.

Local authorities reportedly exerted pressure on partners operating in Ulang to comply with locally introduced initiatives, such as land rental fees and to register for operation licenses. Partners who did not complying were threatened with expulsion and some had assets confiscated. Such local interventions are costly with time spent negotiating with the authorities and costs needed for continuation of operations. Partners working in Ayod, Fashoda, Juba, Malakal, Rubkon, Wau and Yei counties were most affected with 65 per cent of access denials, interferences and bureaucratic impediments incidents reported. Illegal taxation and extortion, particularly at checkpoints, hampered the delivery of aid in both government and opposition-controlled areas, with demands for up to 100,000 South Sudanese Pound per vehicle, making humanitarian cargo transport costly and time consuming. Local authorities in Fashoda attempted to control aid through demands for distribution lists. Such lists are not negotiated with authorities to preserve a principled humanitarian response.

The already strained access environment was negatively impacted by abnormal flooding and poor road conditions. Physical access was compromised with logistical challenges and infrastructure damage. Some remote locations, particularly in Jonglei, were accessible only by air or riverine transport. Twenty-two humanitarian staff were relocated from Ayod and Twic East in Jonglei due to flooding. OCHA advised humanitarian teams in areas vulnerable to flooding to monitor the water levels and to relocate ahead of time if possible. Some teams chose to wait, then requested relocation.

**NON-VIOLENT INCIDENTS BY MONTH**

- **January**: 21 incidents
- **February**: 21 incidents
- **March**: 17 incidents
- **April**: 20 incidents
- **May**: 19 incidents
- **June**: 17 incidents
- **July**: 14 incidents
- **August**: 18 incidents
- **September**: 14 incidents
- **October**: 19 incidents
- **November**: 15 incidents
- **December**: 14 incidents

**INCIDENT TYPE**

- **Restriction of movement**: 22%
- **Operational interference**: 36%
- **Bureaucratic access impediments**: 42%
**COVID-19 INCIDENTS REPORTED**

The necessary measures to prevent and mitigate the onward spread of the COVID-19 virus led to additional restrictions in 2020. On 24 March, Juba International Airport suspended all international flights, with exceptions to a limited number of cargo and internal flights. Some 30 COVID-19 related access challenges were reported. Approximately half of the COVID-19 related incidents were administrative in nature. Threats and fears of the spread of the virus led to entry denials for humanitarian personnel from listed countries, affecting 60 staff members from the UN and international and national NGOs. Authorities suspended visa issuance which affected the deployment of new staff, which limited the necessary staffing turn over. The restrictions prevented staff turn over. Necessary surge response to critical life-saving needs was particularly challenged by the measures. In May, restrictions were eased and some commercial and UNHAS flights were granted permission to move passengers, which significantly improved the operating environment. Humanitarian access was further constrained by flight clearance taxations and mandatory COVID-19 free certificates prior to travel. While these measures were key contributors to curbing the spread of COVID-19, they impacted the deployment and rotation of humanitarian staff, delaying emergency response at a period when sub-national violence escalated and impacted vulnerable people, particularly in Jonglei. Threats, intimidation and harassment of staff constituted 23 per cent of all the incidents.

OCHA, guided by its Access Unit and the dedicated COVID-19 Secretariat, gathered information and ensured it was shared with the relevant senior authorities to enable a smooth and safe movement by all humanitarians, including sharing onwards the guidance to allow for predictable measures.

The first positive case of COVID-19 identified in South Sudan on 5 April 2020 was a member of the international health (32 per cent), nutrition (23 per cent) and food security and livelihoods (19 per cent).

**COVID-19 INCIDENT SEVERITY**

Forty-four per cent of incidents reported were significant in severity and seriously impacted humanitarian personnel, assets or response. Another 37 per cent were moderate in severity while 19 per cent were minor. Similar to 2019, violence against humanitarian personnel was the most prevalent access issue in 2020. Of the 256 reported significant incidents, 41 per cent involved violence, abduction, killings and detentions of staff, and ambushed including looting and theft. Moderate and minor incidents accounted for 37 and 19 per cent of all incidents respectively. These reported incidents largely involved unnecessary administrative procedures, illegal taxation and fees, interference with operations, threats and intimidation of staff, theft and compound intrusions. Some 107 incidents directly impacted sectors of humanitarian action, primarily health (32 per cent), nutrition (23 per cent) and food security and livelihoods (19 per cent).

**TOP 10 MODERATE INCIDENTS**

- Suspension of humanitarian operation 7%
- Other operational interference at field level 7%
- Robbery, theft, ambush 6%
- Heavy and changing requirements 5%
- Other bureaucratic, administrative impediment 4%

**TOP 10 MINOR INCIDENTS**

- Other bureaucratic, administrative impediment 7%
- Threat, intimidation, harassment, extortion 7%
- Inference in HR, staffing, admin 7%
- Damage, destruction, theft of humanitarian equipment 5%
- Interference in response location 5%

**TOP 3 COVID-19 INCIDENT TYPES**

- Administrative restrictions 53%
- Physical restrictions 23%
- Threat, intimidation, harassment, extortion 13%

**TOP 10 SIGNIFICANT INCIDENTS**

- Robbery, theft, ambush 25%
- Looting 16%
- Confiscation, hijacking 12%
- Physical assault, injury, compound burglary 8%
- Humanitarian interference at location 8%

**Severity of access constraints**

- Significant
- Moderate
- Minor