The second quarter of 2020 saw an increase in reported humanitarian access incidents, mainly due to a surge in violence and COVID-19 restrictions that impacted humanitarian operations. A total of 163 incidents were recorded between April and June, a 22 per cent increase from the 135 incidents reported over the same period in 2019. A quarter of all reported incidents were in Central Equatoria.

On 5 April, South Sudan confirmed its first COVID-19 patient who was a United Nations staff member. This triggered anti-foreigner sentiments, threats and verbal abuse against humanitarian staff. Staff movement from UN compounds and hubs were restricted to curb the spread of the virus, affecting the continuity of humanitarian operations.

Despite an overall reduction in bureaucratic access impediments, intercommunal violence continued to hamper humanitarian assistance. Fighting between different groups in Jonglei resulted in the relocation of 66 humanitarian staff. The Greater Pibor area witnessed renewed fighting between armed youth groups and the looting of humanitarian assets and supplies. A total of 20 looting incidents were recorded in the second quarter of 2020, compared to three over the same period in 2019.

An increase in insecurity related to intercommunal violence had serious consequences on civilians and aid workers. On 16 May, three humanitarian workers were killed after fighting erupted in and around Pieri town, Jonglei. On 28 June, a clearly marked ambulance transporting an injured person to a hospital following fighting was shot at in Cueibet County, Lakes. The driver, a national staff member of an international NGO that is providing health services in South Sudan, was killed, bringing the number of aid workers killed in South Sudan since the conflict began in 2013 to 120.

Insecurity along the major supply routes negatively affected the delivery of humanitarian aid. Eastern Equatoria experienced frequent robberies along major roads around Torit and Kapoeta, with violence against humanitarian personnel reported.

Humanitarian agencies in Ulang, Upper Nile, received demands for all NGOs to pay land rent fees effective from 1 April 2020 and backdated to August 2019. Organizations that failed to pay the fees experienced threats of expulsion.
While the overall humanitarian access situation improved in the second quarter because of the impending formation of the transitional government, the 21 per cent increase in the number of incidents reported compared to the same period last year (from 135 to 163) was attributed to a rise in intercommunal violence in areas that had not witnessed active armed conflict before. These areas further witnessed the looting of humanitarian supplies and staff relocation.

COVID-19

Once COVID-19 was confirmed in South Sudan, border closures and international flight suspensions were imposed, and quarantine policies and visa restrictions put in place to curb the spread of the virus. 14% of all incidents were COVID-19 related.

Flight clearance taxations

Mandatory COVID-19 free certificates

14-day mandatory quarantine

These restrictions delayed emergency response at a time when intercommunal violence was increasing, and the lack of clarity over the processes and procedures was a growing concern for humanitarian workers.