



Diaspora Humanitarians

How Australia-based migrants help in crises abroad

South Sudan Briefing

- Since February 2022, conflict in the contested Abyei region of South Sudan has caused widespread vulnerability and displacement. The South Sudanese diaspora in Australia has mobilised to provide economic, social and political support.
- In 2021, US\$1.2 billion in remittances was sent to South Sudan, equivalent to 23.9% of the country's GDP. Australia was the sixth largest remittance-sending country to South Sudan that year.
- The South Sudanese diaspora is the third largest North African migrant group living in Australia. As of 2023, approximately 9060 migrants from South Sudan lived in Australia, an increase of more than 5000 since records began in 2011.

Responding to Crisis

The Abyei region is claimed by both Sudan and South Sudan. Ethnic groups residing in and near the region have experienced periodic conflict for centuries. Since 2022, violence between ethnic militia groups has led to increased regional insecurity. Both the Ngok Dink and Twic Dinka ethnic groups claim land ownership over Annet Market and Agok. These areas are hubs for humanitarian organisations operating in the region, and nearby oil and valuable pasture land has increased the perceived significance of controlling these areas. Intense militia fighting has led to significant civilian casualties over the last two years.

Already facing severe developmental pressures, this violence has further reduced communities' standard of living and safety. In the first two months of 2024, more than 136 people were killed as a result of the conflict. Civilian targeting, abductions of women and children, looting and property destruction have become increasingly common.

Diaspora Humanitarians

As a result of humanitarian crises in South Sudan, there are more than 2.3 million refugees from the country across the world. As of 2023, more than 9000 South Sudan-born refugees live in Australia. While the diaspora has faced barriers and racism while integrating into Australian society (Atem 2021), its members consistently mobilise to provide economic, social and political support to those remaining in South Sudan.

The Australia-based diaspora feels more strongly connected to their family and cultural groups rather than to their national affiliation (IOM 2021). As a result, the diaspora tends to provide localised financial support rather than creating national campaigns.

Members of the diaspora provide significant economic support to family members remaining in South Sudan. Most members of the South Sudanese diaspora living in Australia sent between 9.5 and 13.8 percent of their yearly income to family in South Sudan (IOM 2021). Those interviewed by the IOM described this support as a "moral and cultural obligation" and that family members expected this support. Barriers to this means of support include remittance costs and limited banking infrastructure outside of the country's capital Juba (UNCDF 2023).

The diaspora's ability to provide social support to family members living in South Sudan is complicated by the country's underdeveloped telecommunications sector. Across the country, access to phones and the internet is inconsistent. As of 2020, approximately 64% of urban residents and 38% of rural residents owned a mobile phone. Resultingly, some diaspora members either cannot or can only inconsistently contact their family members.

The diaspora also engages with South Sudan through volunteering and advocacy-based engagement, such as fundraising for women’s education, health and economic development initiatives. As of 2020, more than 160 South Sudanese diasporic associations existed in Australia and the vast majority of these associations have ethnic or sub-ethnic affiliations (Atem 2021). Some – such as the Mamaland Hope for Future Foundation – have achieved significant diasporic support, successfully fundraising for projects such as a maternity ward in the Juba Teaching Hospital and a women’s prison.

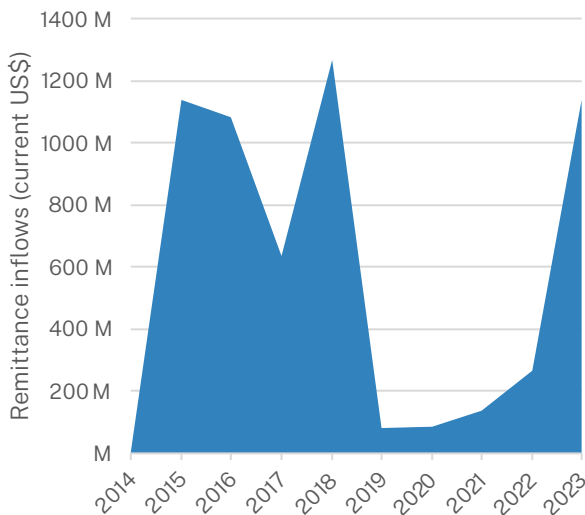
Homeland Connections

Pre-existing connections shape the South Sudanese diaspora’s humanitarian response to ongoing crises in their homeland. These connections include remittance flows and some emerging diasporic institutions.

Remittances

The majority of remittances sent to South Sudan come through informal remittance channels, which has resulted in a range of international estimates about their value to the South Sudanese economy. Reflecting this, estimates of the value of remittances to South Sudan’s economy vary considerably across organisation. In 2019, the IOM estimated that 6.7% of the South Sudan’s GDP was comprised of remittances, while the UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) estimated that 23.9% of the country’s GDP was comprised of remittances that year.

Figure 1: Value of remittances received by South Sudan in current US\$, 2014-2023



In 2021, the Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development (KNOMAD; a World Bank initiative) estimated that US\$1.236 billion was sent to the country through remittances that year. Australia was recorded as sending US\$34 million in remittances, making it the sixth-largest remittance sending country to South Sudan behind Sudan (US\$449 million), Uganda (US\$357 million), Ethiopia (\$135 million), Kenya (\$74 million) and the United Arab Emirates (US\$68 million).

Diaspora Institutions

As a new nation, institutional infrastructure for diaspora engagement is in the early stages of development. While South Sudan’s banking system currently does not engage with the diaspora, regional banks have encouraged diasporic engagement. Equity Bank Kenya encourages diasporas from across the East African region to establish “jijenge accounts,” where they deposit small amounts of money into these accounts over time.

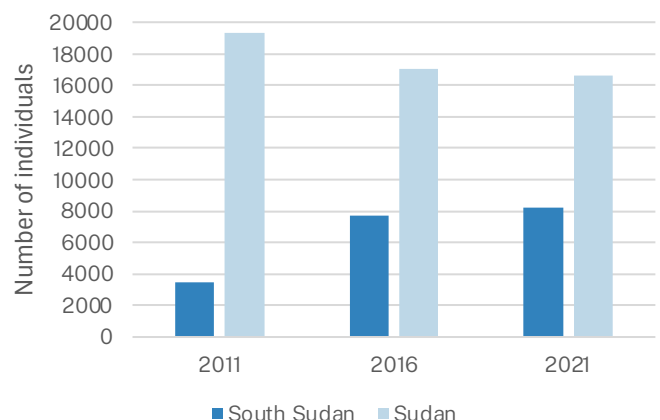
South Sudan’s diaspora feels unable to make genuine investments in their homeland. Members of the diaspora have cited that the lack of “safety, stability and transparency” in South Sudan’s banking system has prevented them from investing in the country (IOM 2021). The country’s recent experience of civil war between 2013 and 2020 further dissuaded investment as individuals who hoped to contribute to the country’s economy following its independence in 2011 lost investments and property during the civil war.

The Australia-Based Diaspora

Australia’s South Sudanese diaspora has responded to South Sudan’s humanitarian needs. These responses have been shaped by their continuing homeland connections, by their dynamics of migration and their experiences of settlement in Australia.

This briefing primarily uses data from the 2021 census to analyse the experiences of the South Sudanese diaspora in Australia. This census was held during the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic, when border closures and low migration flows disrupted dynamics of migration to Australia. Despite this, the census provides valuable information on how the South Sudanese diaspora experiences life in Australia. Analysing the South Sudanese diaspora is complicated by the “newness” of their homeland. Following South Sudan’s independence in 2011, many migrants who previously identified being born in Sudan began to identify as being born in South Sudan. This process took several years. Other global data sources face similar issues, complicating longitudinal analyses of diasporic connections to South Sudan.

Figure 2: Self identification of South Sudan and Sudan as place of birth in the 2011, 2016 and 2021 Australian censuses

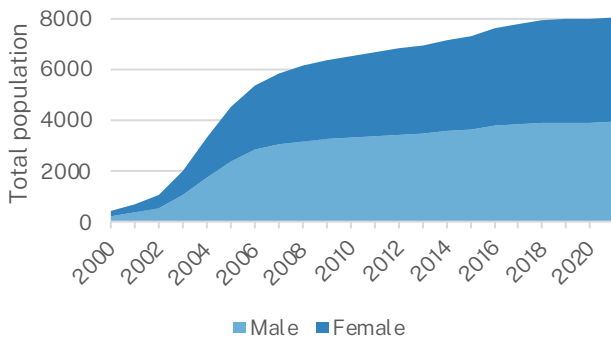


Dynamics of Migration

Australia’s population in 2023 included an estimated 9060 migrants born in South Sudan. Since 2011, when an estimated 3900 South Sudanese born migrants resided in Australia, the population has increased by approximately 132%.

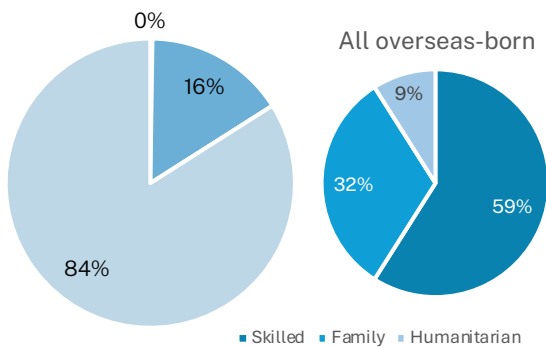
The South Sudanese diaspora in Australia grew rapidly near the end of the Second Sudanese War (1983-2005). Between 2002 and 2007, almost 6000 individuals who now identify as being born in South Sudan arrived in Australia. Since 2007, the population has increased relatively steadily. As of the 2021 census, 79.7% of Australia’s South Sudan-born population were citizens of Australia.

Figure 3: Total South Sudan-born population in Australia, 2000-2021



Reflecting that humanitarian migration is the dominant flow from South Sudan to Australia, the vast majority of the diaspora are permanent migrants to Australia. As of 2021, 8310 individuals born in South Sudan were in Australia’s permanent migration pathways. Of this population, 84% were in the humanitarian stream, 15.8% were in the family stream and just 0.2% were in the skilled stream. Compared to the total overseas-born permanent migrant population, where 59% were in the skilled visa stream, 32% were in the family visa stream and just 9% were in the humanitarian visa stream, the migration flows from South Sudan are unique.

Figure 4: South Sudanese and all overseas-born permanent residents in Australia, 2021



As of February 2024, just 57 South Sudan-born migrants held temporary Australian visas: five individuals held a student visa, five held a skilled visa and 47 held other temporary visas.

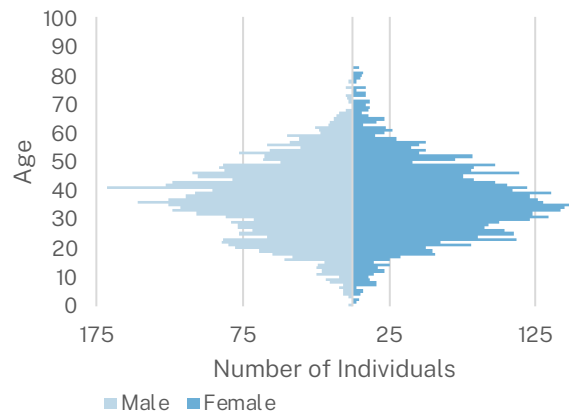
Population Dynamics

The South Sudanese diaspora in Australia is a similar age to the Australia-wide average. The diaspora overwhelmingly lives in Australia’s capital cities and possesses post-secondary qualifications at a higher rate than the Australian average.

Demography

As of 2021, the median age of the South Sudanese diaspora in Australia was 37, one year younger than the nation-wide median of 38. The population was gender-balanced: 50.8% of South Sudan-born migrants were female and 49.2% were male. The diaspora is overwhelmingly of working age: 50% of individuals were between the ages of 20 and 39 and 37% were between the ages of 40 and 59. Approximately 9% of South Sudan-born migrants were below 20, and 5% were above 50.

Figure 5: Population pyramid for the South Sudan-born population in Australia, 2021

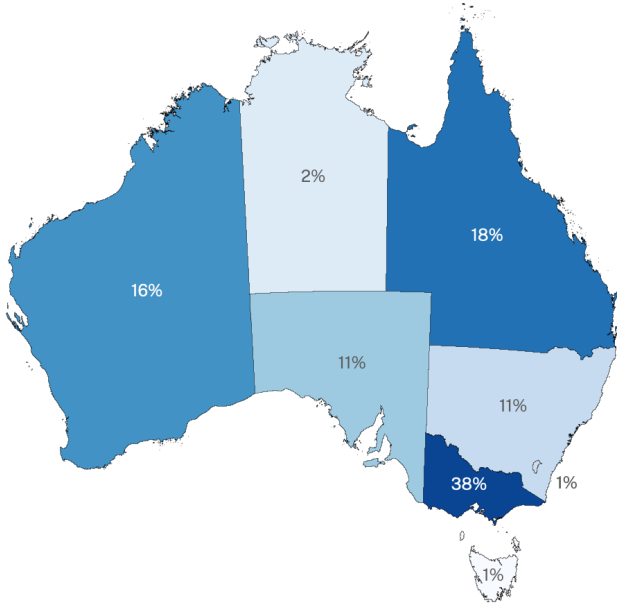


As the South Sudanese diaspora in Australia has consolidated, the number of Australians with South Sudanese heritage has increased. As of the 2021 census, 16,643 Australian-born people had at least one South Sudan-born parent. Additionally, 6460 Australian-born people identified as having South Sudanese ancestry, 6747 identified as having Sudanese ancestry and 789 identified as having Dinka ancestry in the census.

Geography

The South Sudanese diaspora has unique dynamics of settlement. The diaspora overwhelmingly lives in Australia’s capital cities (89%). In 2021, 35% of the diaspora resided in Greater Melbourne, 15% resided in Greater Perth, 14% resided in Greater Brisbane and just 10% resided in Greater Sydney. Comparatively, 19% of Australia’s entire population resided in Greater Melbourne, 8% resided in Greater Perth, 10% resided in Greater Brisbane and 21% resided in Greater Sydney in 2021.

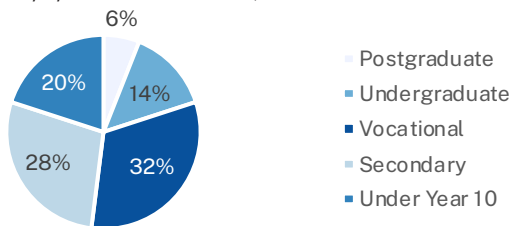
Figure 6: Geographies of residence of the South Sudan-born population in Australia, 2021



Education

In 2021, 80% of the adult South Sudanese diaspora had completed secondary school and 52% of the population had post-secondary qualifications. Within the diaspora, 32% of migrants possessed vocational qualifications (certificate III or IV, advanced diploma) and 20% were tertiary educated (14% undergraduate, 6% postgraduate). Compared to the national average of 29%, a higher proportion of the adult diaspora possesses vocational qualifications to the national average.

Figure 6: Highest level of educational achievement of the South Sudan-born population in Australia, 2021

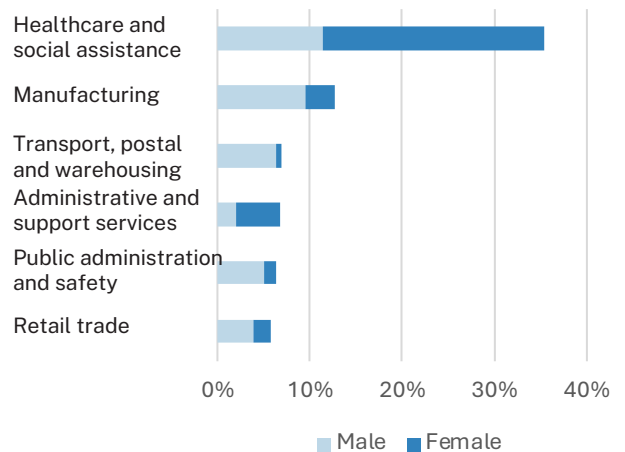


Employment

The South Sudan-born population in Australia is overwhelmingly employed in the healthcare industry, with 35% of all working adults employed in the sector. Other key sectors of employment include manufacturing (13% of the working population), transport, postal and warehousing (7%), administrative and support services (7%) and public administration and safety (6%).

Male and female members of the diaspora are employed at a similar rate (55% of the working diaspora is male) and in similar industries. Employed women overwhelmingly work in healthcare (53%) as well as administrative and support services (10%) and education and training (6%). Employed men predominantly work in the healthcare (21%), manufacturing (17%) and transport, postal and warehousing (11%) industries.

Figure 8: Leading sectors of employment for the South Sudan-born population in Australia, 2021



Sources:

Atem (2021), In Search for the Good Life: settlement experiences of South Sudanese families in Western Sydney; Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022a), Census of Population and Housing, 2021; Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022b), Permanent Migrants in Australia; Australian Department of Home Affairs (2024a), Permanent Migration Program (Skilled & Family) Outcomes Snapshot – Annual Statistics; Australian Department of Home Affairs (2024b), Temporary visa holders in Australia; CSSOMA (2021), Issues facing diaspora communities in Australia -Submission 69; IOM (2021), Remittances and Diaspora Engagement in South Sudan; The World Bank (2023), Personal Remittances, received; The World Bank (2022), Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development (KNOMAD) Remittance Data; UNCDF (2023), South Sudan payment infrastructure assessment report.

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The Diaspora Humanitarians project aims to map the extensive humanitarian activities and contributions of Australia-based migrants to crises abroad. For more information see www.diasporahumanitarians.com