



World Health
Organization



Polio transition in a snapshot: South Sudan



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Background

DEMOGRAPHICS¹



Total population, 2022:
10.9 million



Birth rate (per 1000 people),
2021: **29**



Infant mortality rate (per 1000 live
births), 2021: **64**



Under-5 mortality rate (per 1000
live births), 2021: **99**

FINANCIALS²



GDP per capita, 2022:
US\$ 1071.8



Universal Health Coverage Index,
2021: **34**

KEY RESOURCES

- Republic of South Sudan Addendum for Polio Transition, June 2021
- South Sudan National Transition Plan, 2018
- Africa Regional Strategic Plan for Polio Transition

¹ World Bank Data (<https://data.worldbank.org/>)

² World Bank Data (<https://data.worldbank.org/>)



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History of polio eradication and transition in South Sudan

The Republic of South Sudan has been wild polio-free since 2009. However, the country experiences sporadic outbreaks of cVDPV and is considered vulnerable to further outbreaks or importations. The health system is fragile, with frequent outbreaks of measles and other vaccine-preventable diseases pointing to subnational immunization gaps. The ongoing humanitarian crisis in the country has further impacted access to healthcare.

South Sudan developed a transition plan to cover the period 2018 – 2022, which was superseded by the Republic of South Sudan Addendum for Polio Transition in 2021. The focus of the addendum is to sustain the critical functions currently supported by the Global Polio Eradication Initiative within the national health system, namely essential immunization, disease surveillance and emergency preparedness and response, as well as communications for development.

Polio transition in South Sudan

Objectives

The overall aim of the Government of South Sudan is to successfully transition polio programme knowledge, infrastructure and assets to be part of the national health system. The Republic of South Sudan Addendum for Polio Transition, June 2021, includes commitments to government ownership of polio functions, the full engagement of a broad range of stakeholders including donors and civil society, and balancing polio transition with a focus on interrupting and closing polio outbreaks.

Specifically, the transition plan addendum sets out the intention to transition polio functions under the Boma Health Initiative. The Boma Health Initiative is a nationwide strategy to improve access to essential health services, launched in 2017. It aims to deliver an integrated package of health promotion and disease prevention activities to communities, combining a comprehensive community surveillance system alongside programming related to communicable diseases and maternal and child health.

Journey to transition

Polio eradication personnel have long contributed to broader health systems strengthening in South Sudan. Their contributions include providing initial emergency response to COVID-19³, supporting COVID-19 vaccination⁴, and responding to outbreaks of other vaccine-preventable diseases. The plan to transition under the Boma Health Initiative is intended to enable integration with broader South Sudan health care priorities. In particular, the initiative has a focus on providing healthcare to hard-to-reach and underserved populations, a strength of the polio eradication programme.

To ensure that lessons learned are not lost, the country has identified twelve best practices from the polio eradication programme in South Sudan, including maintaining mobile data management systems, utilizing key community information structures to strengthen community-based surveillance for Acute Flaccid Paralysis, integrated service delivery of polio vaccine alongside interventions such as de-worming medication, use of transit vaccination points, robust monitoring and evaluation, and sustaining strong advocacy and political support. These best practices may have applicability to other health initiatives.

Since the polio transition addendum was developed in 2021, implementation has been challenging due to competing priorities and the ongoing humanitarian crisis. As of 2024, the WHO polio eradication programme continues to manage polio functions to ensure that these are sustained at the necessary sensitivity and quality.

Financial sustainability

Polio functions are currently supported by the Global Polio Eradication Initiative. In the longer term, it is vital that sustainable financing is secured to enable functions to be integrated within WHO, and eventually transitioned to the national health system. This is important to keep South Sudan polio-free and contribute to broader health systems strengthening.

Monitoring and evaluation

The global Polio Transition Monitoring and Evaluation framework consists of two sets of indicators to measure health system performance in relation to the polio essential functions, and the polio transition process. The framework aims to guide decision-making, facilitate progress, and enable the monitoring of the quality of performance of the polio essential functions.

The datasets related to South Sudan can be accessed at <https://www.who.int/teams/polio-transition-programme>.

Risks/challenges

- Complex humanitarian situation exacerbates the risk of outbreaks and pose challenges to effective response.
- Low essential immunization and challenges with geographical access in some areas.
- Challenges to build national capacity to absorb and finance polio essential functions within the national health system.

Next steps

- Mobilizing resources to sustain polio essential functions at quality.
- Continuing efforts to build national health system capacity to enable the ultimate handover of the polio essential functions to the national government.

3 Contributions of the polio network to the COVID-19 response: turning the challenge into an opportunity for polio transition. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2020.

4 Role of the polio network in COVID-19 vaccine delivery and essential immunization: lessons learned for successful transition. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2022.