

# Health assessment and surveillance in refugee camps in Northern Uganda

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Denis Ardiet, Epicentre, France

## Context

Following escalation of violence in South Sudan in July 2016, thousands of refugees crossed the border with Uganda and were settled into the Bidibidi, then Imvepi, settlements by the Ugandan government. Because they were highly dependent on humanitarian aid and because their health status needed to be assessed, a baseline health and mortality survey was performed. This intervention was followed by the implementation of two different health surveillance systems, allowing weekly reporting of most basic health indicators.

## Methods

Households were randomly selected by spatial sampling, and household structures were assessed. Nutritional status for children < 5 years was evaluated using MUAC and edema assessment. Retrospective mortality used a 5-month recall period. Two different weekly surveillance systems were implemented, the first following the Ugandan community health system and the second one, “lighter”, focusing on mortality and most epidemic diseases. A second survey was performed to collect more information about mortality in South Sudan and during the journey for new arrivals.

## Results

1018 heads of household accepted to participate in the baseline survey. The population was found to be very young and split households were frequent, with 20% of household members missing; 32% of households were headed by women. Many gaps in non-food item (NFI) ownership were also found. In the settlements, malnutrition and mortality appeared to be below emergency thresholds but delays in food distributions were frequent. On the other hand, CMR was found to be high in South Sudan, with many violent deaths recorded. Surveillance systems revealed small clusters of bloody diarrhea and pockets of malnutrition in both settlements.

## Conclusions

Our assessments reflected high levels of violence in South Sudan; in Ugandan settlements, health indicators were under control at the time but need to be closely monitored

Health assessment and surveillance among South Sudanese refugees are essential activities, as access of the population to food, water and health services remains fragile.