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UNHCR – UN High Commissioner for Refugees (Author)

UNHCR calls for continued protection and assistance for Congolese fleeing escalating conflict in eastern DR Congo

This is a summary of what was said by Patrick Eba, Deputy Director of UNHCR's Division of International Protection – to whom quoted text may be attributed – at today's press briefing at the Palais des Nations in Geneva.

4 March 2025

GENEVA – UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, today issued a [new position on returns to the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo \(DRC\)](#), advising that Congolese nationals fleeing the conflict, as well as those outside the country who originate from the area affected by the conflict, may need refugee protection under international and regional legal frameworks.

The security and humanitarian situation in the DRC continues to deteriorate with hundreds of thousands of people on the move in North and South Kivu provinces. [Close to 80,000 people have fled armed clashes into neighbouring countries](#), including around 61,000 who have arrived in Burundi since January this year.

Significant population movements continue inside these provinces. Today, only around 17,000 people remain in displacement sites, schools and churches around Goma, while 414,000 others have been on the move for the last four weeks, encouraged by the de facto authorities to return to their villages of origin.

At least 209,000 individuals from these sites have arrived spontaneously in Masisi, Nyiragongo, and Rutshuru territories, where basic services are not equipped for the sudden surge in population.

Eastern DRC remains one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. Near the frontlines, sexual violence and human rights abuses remain rampant, as is the looting and destruction of civilian homes and businesses. In the first two weeks of February, 895 rapes, an average of 60 a day, were reported and referred to humanitarian actors for assistance. Explosive remnants of war pose risks to children and farmers trying to tend their fields. Humanitarian access to those on the move has been impeded by continued clashes, leaving many vulnerable people without access to life-saving aid.

Given the widespread insecurity in these provinces and surrounding areas, many more may need to cross borders to find protection and assistance. UNHCR calls on States to register all asylum-seekers from the DRC and provide them with documentation. Asylum claims should be processed through fair, transparent and efficient procedures, including the use of a prima facie approach to recognition where relevant, in accordance with international and regional refugee law and other relevant legal standards.

For Congolese nationals outside the country who are considering voluntary return to eastern DRC, UNHCR emphasizes the importance of informed decision-making. Individuals should have access to up-to-date and detailed information on security, governance, and livelihoods in their places of origin to make fully informed choices regarding return.

There are more than 1 million Congolese refugees across Africa, mainly in neighbouring countries that have a long history of providing protection and assistance. We encourage them to continue upholding their refugee law obligation and humanitarian commitment and call on the international community to step up support for host countries in providing protection and assistance to refugees from the DRC.

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