

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

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Urgent support needed as 33,000 Congolese refugees return home from Burundi in a month

GOMA – More than 33,000 Congolese refugees have spontaneously returned from Burundi to eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) within a month, following the reopening of the Burundi–DRC border on 23 February. UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is calling for urgent international support to ensure that returns take place in conditions of safety, dignity and sustainability.

Most returnees are crossing through the Kavimvira border point, near Uvira in South Kivu Province. They fled to Burundi in December 2025, when fighting between the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) and the M23 armed group forced thousands to flee Uvira and surrounding areas. Following recent stability in Uvira and the reopening of the border, some refugees expressed a wish to return home. Returns were also accelerated by the severe underfunding for the response in Burundi, which has reduced assistance levels and led many refugees to return home amid continued uncertainty.

Around 30 per cent of returnees had been living in Burundi's Busuma refugee site, where funding shortfalls mean overcrowding and limited water, sanitation, medicine and shelter, despite the best efforts of authorities, UNHCR and partners. Nearly 4,500 people remain in transit centres awaiting relocation to Busuma. As of 23 March 2026, Burundi continues to host about 109,000 Congolese refugees, including around 67,000 in Busuma.

Conditions in many areas of return in the DRC remain fragile, with acute humanitarian needs. Initial UNHCR assessments in Uvira and Fizi show families arriving with few belongings, in urgent need of shelter, basic household items, health care, and access to water and sanitation. Many returned to find their homes destroyed and belongings looted, leaving them in deep despair and unable to resume normal life without substantial support.

UNHCR and partners are increasing protection monitoring and urgent humanitarian assistance, in close coordination with national and provincial authorities. Teams are deployed at border points and in return areas to monitor risks and identify vulnerable individuals. In Uvira and Fizi, we are providing emergency tarpaulins, blankets, soap and protection services. We are also delivering hot meals to returnees, alongside registration and screening, in close collaboration with government counterparts.

UNHCR reiterates that refugee decisions to return must be respected, and all returns must remain voluntary, safe and dignified. While recent return movements reflect hope for stability as well as the impact of underfunding, they should not expose families to renewed risks. Strengthening security, basic services and support for host communities in return areas is essential.

UNHCR's response to the needs of refugees, returnees and internally displaced people in the DRC is currently 34 per cent funded, against total requirements of \$145 million, and UNHCR's support for Congolese refugees in Burundi is only 20 per cent funded. Additional funding is urgently needed to support the life-saving needs of these families, both those who have returned and those who remain displaced.

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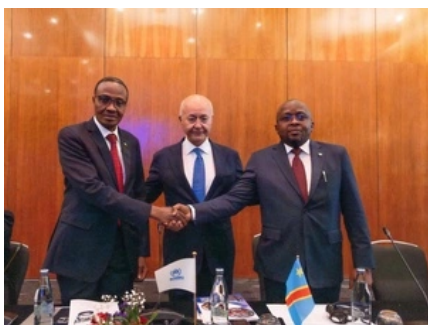
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