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Displacement in Eastern DRC and Neighbouring Countries

TWO-MONTH IMPACT REPORT

February - March 2025

Overview

Since January 2025, renewed fighting in eastern DRC has led to a dramatic worsening in humanitarian situation and mass displacement, particularly in North and South Kivu provinces. Intense hostilities, which began in Goma in January, have engulfed the region leading to hundreds of thousands of population movements and a significant deterioration in the protection environment.

Inside the DRC, population movements have been extremely fluid, with internal displacement and return movements occurring simultaneously, with some 4 million people estimated to be displaced in North and South Kivu. Efforts to track IDP movements and returns are underway, however the volatile security situation and difficulty in humanitarian access means that gaining a holistic picture of displacement remains difficult. At the same time, many IDP settlements have been deliberately dismantled. The Camp Coordination and Camp Management Cluster estimated that close to 900,000 people, mostly in North Kivu, have been forcibly displaced due to the deliberate emptying and dismantling of IDP sites.

Widespread violations of human rights and international humanitarian law have been reported, including summary executions, sexual violence and arbitrary arrest. A general rise in criminality has made life even more challenging, with civilians in areas on the margins of armed clashes facing widespread looting, extortion by armed actors, reprisals against those perceived to be affiliated with armed groups, and a dramatic decrease in access to medical and psychosocial assistance. The increased displacement and

resource scarcity exacerbates the vulnerability of women and girls, exposing them to further sexual violence and abuse.

This situation has led some 123,600 people to seek refuge in neighbouring countries between January and end of March, the vast majority to Burundi and Uganda. Some 70,000 arrived in Burundi, mainly via unofficial crossing points in Cibitoke province, many making the dangerous crossing of the Rusizi river.

The Government of Burundi announced it would grant all new arrivals from DRC since 1 January *prima facie* refugee status. Almost 36,000 people have also crossed into Uganda as of the end of March, over half entering via formal crossing points in Kisoro District, with the majority originating from Nyiragongo, Rutshuru and Masisi territories in North Kivu. From January to March 2025, arrivals from DRC to Uganda are 480 per cent higher than in the same period in 2024.

The humanitarian situation upon arrival remains extremely challenging. In Uganda, transit centres are operating at some 300 to 450 per cent beyond their capacity, putting strain on basic services. This has been compounded by funding cuts, leading to the suspension of essential health services and resulting in difficult decisions to deprioritize some protection activities in favor of WASH, shelter and health interventions, increasing the risk of infectious diseases such as Ebola. In Burundi, overcrowded living conditions and a lack of basic infrastructure in the recently dismantled Rugombo stadium site have contributed to a cholera outbreak, with 11 cases reported as of 26 March.

UNHCR Response

Despite immense challenges, UNHCR, particularly through the support of its local, civil society partners in the DRC and neighbouring countries,

have made strides in providing life-saving assistance and protection to affected populations.

Inside the DRC

Despite severe operational challenges, UNHCR remains active across North and South Kivu working alongside local partners. In North Kivu, support continues in displacement sites like Lubero and Oicha, while in South Kivu, more than 42,000 refugees have received life-saving assistance.

UNHCR has also focused efforts on IDPs who are returning to their areas of origin, including Nyiragongo and Rutshuru, which have received 41,000 and 200,000 returnees respectively.

In each of these areas, UNHCR and partners are focusing on protection monitoring, shelter assistance and the provision of core relief items and cash assistance where possible. UNHCR in collaboration with partners is also delivering awareness sessions focusing on community coexistence, conflict management, sexual violence and the risks of mines and explosive remnants of war.

Protection

Protection monitoring is underway in 20 health zones in North Kivu and across all zones in South Kivu through UNHCR and partners. Protection monitoring is focused on documenting living conditions of people who have returned to home areas, incidents of violence against civilians and gender-based violence, among others. All assessments are highlighting alarming levels of human rights abuses against civilian women and children, including alarmingly high rates of sexual violence and rape, with reports on average of 70 incidents per day.

In collective centres and displacement sites around Goma and nearby areas, UNHCR and its partners continue to assess the needs and vulnerabilities of displaced people to provide protection and explore shelter solutions.

UNHCR's protection partners in North Kivu are providing referral and case management services

to vulnerable people and providing psychosocial support to survivors of gender-based violence. Awareness raising sessions are also taking place in various locations across North Kivu focusing on community coexistence and conflict resolution—particularly important in the context of IDPs residing with host families. Further sessions were also held on the impacts of sexual violence and how survivors of violence can self-refer for support.

In Butembo, North Kivu, UNHCR and NGO partners held education sessions on gender-based violence, the consequences of rape and how to seek support for survivors, and activities for women's empowerment.

On 12 March, UNHCR and the National Commission for Refugees (CNR) conducted a detailed review of the situation of urban refugees in Goma, following recent assessments of their

socio-economic conditions. The discussion highlighted key concerns, including challenges faced by refugees with specific needs who have been unable to receive cash assistance due to the liquidity crisis, as well as the plight of those injured or displaced by the ongoing conflict in the city.

Shelter and non-food items (NFIs)

UNHCR and partners are speeding up the construction of emergency and transitional shelters in Lubero to support newly displaced people and returnees. Cash-for-shelter distributions are coupled with emergency aid to give vulnerable families the opportunity to meet their most urgent needs.

UNHCR and partners have recently regained humanitarian access to Kalehe and Minova in South Kivu which were cut off for many weeks. Protection monitoring is now being activated to identify urgent needs, and activities are being sped up to provide support to vulnerable groups including women and children.

In response to the increase in cholera cases in Uvira and Ruziri health zones, UNHCR through partners has provided 25kg of chlorine tablets to help treat water and combat the outbreak.

In Rutshuru Territory, returnees are sheltering in collective shelters as homes are destroyed and living conditions are poor. UNHCR has prioritized this group for NFI assistance.

Camp coordination and camp management (CCCM)

Camp coordination and camp management remains a challenge, with all 20 IDP sites in and around Goma - hosting approximately 700,000 people as of November 2024 - dismantled and destroyed following instructions by the de-facto authorities for displaced people to return to their home villages.

A significant number of displaced people have subsequently tried to return to their place of origin to find that their land is now occupied by others. To avoid further violence, these IDPs are therefore seeking shelter in other villages or sites. There are also reports of expulsions from other collective centres and sites by landowners, affecting families temporarily taken in by host communities.

As of 31 March, there were 26,643 people in CCCM-managed/monitored collective centres in North Kivu. Across the east there are 62 new collective centres, hosting 19,781 individuals. UNHCR currently manages 30 collective shelters

in Goma sheltering 3,712 people and two in Sake housing 1,795 people.

UNHCR, in collaboration with partners, is supporting a range of services and delivering assistance to IDPs in collective centres. This includes facilitating inter-communal dialogue and awareness-raising between IDPs and host communities, addressing themes including disinformation, access to resources and the challenges facing local Peace and Development Committees (CLPDs), particularly in areas under the control of armed groups.

A local partner of UNHCR has also been conducting hygiene promotion and health awareness activities specifically targeted at IDPs in collective centres, to help minimize the transmission of communicable diseases such as mpox and cholera. UNHCR has also been distributing CRI kits and hygiene kits to IDPs in collective centres.

Together with other international aid organisations, UNHCR's CCCM and Protection team conducted a joint mission to Sake in North Kivu, where a significant number of IDPs have returned due to the dismantling of IDP sites in and around Goma. Kamuronza primary school is serving as a collective centre, hosting 1,479 IDPs. Significant numbers of IDPs were also residing with host families who were providing use of their land to establish makeshift shelters. The most pressing needs were shelter, food, WASH and protection.

UNHCR is assessing and prioritizing shelter interventions to IDP returnees, with a specific focus on Nyiragongo and Rutshuru territories in North Kivu. UNHCR plans to assist these returnee

populations through the provision of transitional shelters, shelter repair kits and cash for rent.

Baraka in South Kivu is surrounded by two refugee camps hosting 42,600 refugees. Baraka is cut off from major urban centres to the west and east by conflict and mudslides. Refugees and the local community are working together to help address lack of resources. Six hectares of farmland are maintained by refugees and their host community, providing the only source of fresh vegetables in local markets. Refugee nurses have also been integrated into the roster of first responders working alongside Congolese doctors to provide women with pregnancy and childbirth support, and to help identify and treat suspected cases of mpox.

In neighbouring countries

Burundi

At the time of reporting, approximately 70,000 refugees have arrived in Burundi from the DRC - the largest refugee influx the country has received in decades. Most of these arrivals happened since 14 February. 53 per cent are children, 25 per cent are women and 22 per cent are men. The Minister of the Interior has granted prima facie refugee status to those seeking protection.

Many arrivals have taken dangerous journeys to reach Burundi, including crossing the Rusizi river which has fast currents and deep sections. Others walked for hours, traversing difficult terrain at night without stopping to rest, fearful of getting caught up in hostilities.

UNHCR continues to support the coordination of the inter-agency response alongside the Government of Burundi. Burundian authorities have established reception and transit facilities to register, shelter, and provide emergency assistance to those arriving. The majority of arrivals, some 47,000 people, were hosted in the temporary site established in the stadium in

Rugombo (now shut down). As living conditions in the stadium were extremely poor with numbers well surpassing capacity, UNHCR and partners scaled up the provision emergency shelters and WASH points.

UNHCR has set up protection desks at all sites - include transit centres and settlements such as Musenyi where people are transferred upon registrations. UNHCR also set up a protection desk at Rugombo to provide critical psychosocial support and to assist in identifying specific needs among the new arrivals, including unaccompanied children, survivors of sexual violence, the elderly, and people with serious medical conditions. The Rugombo site has now been shut down, with refugees transferred to other sites or residing with host communities in Rugombo.

Working with the Government of Burundi, UNHCR is relocating refugees to existing refugee settlements, including Musenyi, to help reduce overcrowding in arrival sites and provide refugees with more dignified living conditions. Musenyi, which can host 10,000 people, is now 60 per

cent full, with people setting up in communal shelters as UNHCR and partners construct more appropriate housing. Refugees are receiving food and water and can access local health facilities.

In early March, UNHCR visited a provisional site identified by local authorities for new refugee

arrivals. Located 7km from Bwagiriza camp and less than 5km from Nyankanda camp, the 43-hectare site could accommodate up to 20,000 people. Site preparations are underway, with ongoing discussions with authorities to ensure essential services are in place.



Congolese refugee couple Amani and Ivette arrived in Musenyi, Burundi, after fleeing conflict in North Kivu, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), with their five children. A carpenter and tailor, the couple now live with their family at a refugee site in Musenyi, and are grateful to be able to rebuild their lives in Burundi. © UNHCR/Charity Nzomo

Rwanda

Since January 2025, Rwanda has received 1,495 arrivals from the DRC as of end of March. In consultation with the Government of Rwanda, UNHCR has developed an inter-agency contingency plan to respond to up to 100,000 potential new arrivals over a three-month period. As of the beginning of April 2025, this revised plan was awaiting validation by the Government of Rwanda.

UNHCR, in collaboration with the Government of Rwanda, has continued to support Rwandan refugee returnees through several key initiatives.

Upon arrival, returnees are accommodated in Kijote and Nyarushishi transit centres where they receive temporary shelter, health services, and basic assistance. In these centres, the Government screens returnees and issues them with documentation. Identities are verified with UNHCR support, using Biometric Identity Management Software. UNHCR supports returnees with a cash grant and arranges transportation to take returnees to their districts of origin. These efforts aim to ensure a smooth and sustainable reintegration process for returnees.

Tanzania

Since January 2025, Tanzania has received just over 1,900 arrivals from the DRC. UNHCR supported the government on preparedness planning with partners and continuously advocated for border monitoring. On 11 March, a joint border mission went to entry points along Lake Tanganyika, led by the Government. The

team is monitoring arrivals from the DRC and assessing protection needs. Newly arrived refugees and asylum seekers are being provided with basic assistance and supported by UNHCR - in collaboration with its partner Africa Initiative for Relief and Development - and supporting them to relocate to Nyarugusu refugee camp.

Uganda

Since the start of January, Uganda has received more than 36,000 arrivals from the DRC, a 500 per cent increase from the same period in 2024. The majority of new arrivals have fled from Rutshuru Territory in North Kivu or Goma city, with more than half of all new arrivals entering via Kisoro.

Following the influx of new arrivals from the DRC, a Level 2 Emergency was declared for Uganda on 28 March 2025, for a period of six months. The declaration will enable the Uganda operation to seek increased support internally, to enhance its preparedness and response capacity.



UNHCR is scaling up its response at the Nyakabande transit centre in southwest Uganda. The transit centre is operating at six times its initial capacity. © UNHCR/Yonna Tukundane

Under the Government of Uganda's leadership, UNHCR and partners are providing multi-sectoral support to new arrivals. This includes medical screening, measles vaccinations, and registration, with vulnerable individuals identified for specialized assistance.

At transit centres, asylum seekers receive shelter, food, clean water, and essential items. Once registered, refugees are transported to settlements, where they undergo biometric registration and receive emergency shelter kits and household supplies.

Zambia

The Government of the Republic of Zambia and UNHCR co-led the establishment of a dedicated National Emergency Preparedness Coordination Task Force for the DRC Situation, which included key line ministry focal points, heads of UN agencies and country directors of the national and international NGOs to develop Contingency and Preparedness Plans. UNHCR is providing technical capacity development to Government on access to asylum, protection monitoring in remote border

A sharp increase in arrivals has put significant pressure on the response to new asylum seekers and refugees, straining reception and transit centres, some of which are operating at 450 per cent capacity. Overcrowding is worsening living conditions, increasing the risk of disease outbreaks, and stretching essential services. The congestion is also affecting logistics and registration, causing delays in processing and transferring refugees to settlements.

areas, safe and dignified reception and early screening of asylum-seekers, protection-sensitive registration, and training on access to territory for Provincial Joint Operations Committees and District Joint Operations Committees. UNHCR staff are delivering this support at border entry points, in settlements, and at the national level. Since January, Zambia has registered 1,010 asylum-seekers from the DRC.

Donor acknowledgement

UNHCR is grateful for the critical support provided by donors for the DRC situation. Donors that contributed \$100,000 or above to the DRC situation:

Canada | Denmark | United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland | United States of America | Central Emergency Response Fund | Private donors in Brazil | UNO-Flüchtlingshilfe | USA for UNHCR

Flexible funding

Flexible, multi-year funding is essential to adapt to evolving displacement dynamics and provide sustained support in the DRC. It also ensures ongoing protection and stability for refugees who remain in host countries. By investing in flexible funding, donors enhance efficiency, predictability, and long-term solutions for millions affected by displacement.

Cover photo: Congolese refugee Chancelline is settling into her new life at the Musenyi refugee site in the south of Burundi in March 2025. Before she and her family can move into more permanent structures, they stay in tents set up by UNHCR and partners to shelter newly arrived families relocated from Rugombo, Cibitoke Province, where they were initially received after fleeing violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). © UNHCR/Charity Nzomo