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EASTERN DRC SITUATION

13 - 27 March 2026



Congolese families happily returned home from Burundi, around three months after they fled violent clashes in South Kivu province, eastern DRC © UNHCR/March 2026

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Around 33,000 Congolese refugees spontaneously returned from Burundi within one month of the border reopening on 23 February. Needs remain high as returns increase and conditions in return areas remain fragile, requiring urgent support to sustain returns.**
- **More than 109,000 Congolese refugees displaced in 2025 remained in Burundi, including around 67,000 people at Busuma site and 4,500 people in transit centres awaiting relocation. Overcrowding and gaps in shelter, water and basic services are putting pressure on the response, require urgent additional funding.**
- **Voluntary repatriation continued in South Kivu, with 366 Burundian and Rwandan refugees returning since the start of 2026. More than 4,700 people registered their intention to return and were awaiting UNHCR-supported convoys with partners and government services.**

DRC Updates

- **Spontaneous returns:** 33,275 Congolese refugees (6,656 households) have spontaneously returned from Burundi (including 1,174 people in the past week), since the reopening of the

Burundi–DRC border on 23 February 2026. Most returnees crossed through the Kavimvira border point near Uvira in South Kivu province.

- 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 and 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 distress and unable to resume normal life without substantial support.
- UNHCR and partners are increasing protection monitoring and providing urgent humanitarian assistance in close coordination with national and provincial authorities. Border monitoring teams are identifying risks and vulnerable individuals.
- In Uvira and Fizi, UNHCR is providing emergency tarpaulins, blankets, soap and protection services, while returnees receive hot meals, registration, screening and transportation from the border to the Kavimvira transit centre and onward to their neighbourhoods of origin, in close coordination with government counterparts.
- The local Population Movement Commission (CMP), in coordination with the CCCM Cluster, has updated data on population movements in South Kivu province. To date, around 1.2 people from 234,680 households are internally displaced, including 53,500 individuals from 10,000 households living in sites and collective centres.
- Of the 34 health zones affected by forced population movements in South Kivu, 11 have spontaneous sites and collective centres, generally characterised by limited community governance and the absence of structured site management systems.
- According to the CMP, around 983,600 people from 175,700 households have returned to their areas of origin over the past 18 months.
- In North Kivu province, UNHCR and the CNR also identified 1,088 spontaneous Congolese returnees from Uganda and Rwanda in Masisi (Kitshanga) and Rutshuru territories, through a community-based monitoring mechanism established with partner INTERSOS.
- **Voluntary repatriation:** Voluntary repatriation continued in South Kivu, with the third convoy of Burundian refugees departing on Wednesday, 18 March, from the Mulongwe site via the Kavimvira Transit Centre. The operation ensured safe, and dignified return for 162 people from 55 households, with support from the National Refugee Council and UNHCR partners in the Baraka and Uvira areas. This convoy brings the total number of people repatriated to Burundi in 2026 to 256 (83 households), representing an implementation rate of 5 per cent of the planned target of 5,000 people for 2026.
- Since the beginning of 2026, six voluntary repatriation convoys have been organized with the support of UNHCR, CNR, and implementing partners. The first, conducted by air, enabled the return of 26 Burundian refugees from Bukavu to Burundi, while five land convoys facilitated the repatriation of 340 refugees, including 256 Burundians and 84 Rwandans.
- As of 26 March, 4,726 intentions to return have been registered, including 3,568 Rwandan refugees from 646 families and 1,158 Burundian refugees from 250 families awaiting convoys to their respective countries.

- During monitoring, UNHCR and partners identified around 1,800 Rwandan nationals near Kilembwe in Fizi territory, South Kivu, believed to have fled fighting in Fizi town, Uvira and Mwenga. A joint UNHCR–CNR mission on 17 March conducted verification of their status and willingness to return to their country of origin.
- Interest in returns continues to increase, with 4,877 intentions recorded, including 3,557 Rwandans and 1,320 Burundians awaiting convoys, and 257 new requests registered during the reporting week.
- **Protection Monitoring:** Through presence-based protection monitoring, 533 protection incidents were documented in North Kivu, a decrease of 70 incidents compared to the previous week (603 incidents).
- Violence against women and girls remained a concern and included cases of rape. Serious violations of children's rights in the context of armed conflict were also documented, with 14 cases recorded, including 11 cases of recruitment and use of children by armed groups and three cases of rape.
- **Community-Based Protection:** UNHCR organized a capacity-building workshop on community-based protection on 18–19 March in Goma, North Kivu, bringing together 25 participants from INTERSOS and community-based structures. The workshop strengthened participants' capacity to implement community-centred approaches, promoting more effective protection services.
- **Child Protection:** UNHCR and its partner CIAUD organized two Early Childhood Integration Sessions for unaccompanied refugee children at Sange Regional Park. Two mass awareness sessions were also held at the Kavimvira transit centre, reaching 45 people and focusing on the theme "Every child has the right to education."
- **Education:** On 21 March, UNHCR and its partner handed over a six-classroom building at the Mapinduzi Institute in Panzi, Bukavu, expanding learning capacity and reducing overcrowding for displaced and host community children, with management entrusted to local education authorities.
- **Livelihood:** UNHCR handed over a warehouse at Kunda market in Bagira, Bukavu, to the market committee, improving storage, supporting small businesses and strengthening local economic activity.
- **Health:** On 17 March, a mass measles vaccination campaign targeting 260,000 children began in North Kivu after over 12,000 cases and 157 deaths were reported in early 2026, mostly among children under five, amid ongoing fighting and displacement.

Regional Updates

- The number of Congolese refugees who arrived in neighbouring countries since December 2025 is estimated at 239,500 people. Burundi continues to host the majority of them and although spontaneous returns to the DRC have been taking place from the Busuma site in the last few weeks, needs remain critical. Regular updates on the situation in Burundi are provided through the emergency CORE, available [here](#).

UNHCR's [emergency appeal](#) for \$47.2 million covering December 2025 to March 2026 is ending, while needs remain high due to continued displacement of Congolese. UNHCR's response inside the DRC is 34 per cent funded against requirements of \$145 million, and support for Congolese refugees in Burundi is only 20 per cent funded as March 2026. [Additional funding is urgently needed](#) to meet life-saving needs of refugees, returnees and internally displaced people.

Country	New arrivals in 2026	Total arrivals since January 2025
Burundi	None registered	142,157¹ (109,000 arrived in December 2025)
Rwanda	778	7,115² (as of 28 February 2026)
Tanzania	296	4,239 (as of 24 March 2026)
Uganda	3,713	82,745 (as of 19 March 2026)
Zambia	168	3,275 (as of 14 March 2026)
TOTAL	4,955	239,531

Burundi:

- **Population movement:** Despite recent spontaneous returns of Congolese refugees to the DRC, Burundi continues to host around 109,000 people who fled renewed fighting in eastern DRC since January 2025. As of 23 March, about 67,000 refugees remained at Busuma site, while nearly 4,500 people were staying in transit centres awaiting relocation.
- Funding shortfalls have further strained conditions in Busuma, leading to overcrowding and limited access to water, sanitation, health care and shelter despite efforts by the authorities, UNHCR and partners. The deteriorating situation is contributing to increased spontaneous returns to South Kivu, even as protection risks remain high due to the presence of non-state armed groups in parts of eastern DRC.

At the same time, following persistent clashes in parts of eastern DRC, Congolese nationals have continued arriving in Burundi. UNHCR is yet to determine whether they are refugees arriving for the first time or returning to Burundi after having previously left voluntarily.

- **Registration:** The ongoing Level 2 registration exercise in Busuma remains essential to strengthen data accuracy, improve targeting, and clarify current population dynamics, including recent voluntary departures and new arrivals. By 26 March, 8,131 individuals (2,323 households) had been registered.
- **Protection Monitoring:** 80 new cases of violence against women and girls were reported at the Busuma, during the third week of March, most of them linked to violence experienced in the country of origin.
- Child protection concerns also remained acute. Protection actors continued providing multi-sectoral assistance to 188 child protection cases, including unaccompanied and separated children, children at risk, and other highly vulnerable groups.

¹ The total does not yet reflect recent spontaneous returns to the DRC since 23 February 2026 and include Burundian refugees who have spontaneously returned from DRC to Burundi since 6 December 2025.

² This total includes Rwandan returnees from DRC

- Humanitarian partners identified 72 new persons with specific needs during the reporting period, highlighting the growing number of refugees requiring targeted support, including older persons, survivors of violence, and children facing heightened protection risks.
- **Shelter:** Housing conditions remain critical at Busuma site, where only 38 per cent of the 67,000 people at the site are adequately sheltered, leaving more than 41,000 people without proper accommodation, while additional emergency tents and communal hangars continue to be installed amid funding and material constraints.
- **Health:** In the Busuma/Ruyigi area, health partners delivered 5,267 medical consultations over the week, including 3,495 consultations in Busuma, alongside hospital referrals, malaria treatment, mental health support, maternal health care and nutrition services.
- Around 98 new malnutrition cases were recorded, including both severe and moderate acute malnutrition, underlining the fragility of the newly arrived population.
- **Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH):** WASH conditions were among the most critical gaps in the emergency response. In Busuma, water availability remained at around 4–5 litres per person per day, far below emergency standards, while sanitation infrastructure continued to face immense pressure.
- **Essential Items:** During the reporting period, UNHCR and its partners provided essential items such as blankets, sleeping mats and buckets to, 3,772 refugees, helping families meet urgent and immediate needs.
- **Food and cash assistance** in Busuma and other sites, reached more than 21,000 refugees in one distribution cycle, with food rations complemented by financial aid, although overall rations remained below normal levels.
- **Education:** UNHCR and its partners provided education support for Congolese refugees, including the distribution of school materials to more than 16,000 refugee children, while partners prepared remedial education programmes for 5,700 children at Busuma site to address learning gaps caused by displacement, amid persistent challenges linked to overcrowding, limited infrastructure and lack of teachers.

Tanzania:

- **DRC New Arrivals:** From 13 – 24 March 2026, Tanzania received 21 new arrivals from the DRC. This brings the total number of new arrivals to 296 in 2026 and a total of 4,239 since renewed violence in eastern DRC in January 2025. During the reporting period, new arrivals said they were coming from Fizi, Goma, and Uvira and entered Tanzania through land routes.
- **Essential Items:** On 17 March, UNHCR and its partners completed the distribution of food and non-food items donated by the Government of the DRC during the January visit of representatives from the Congolese Ministry of State for Social Affairs, Humanitarian Action, and National Solidarity. The assistance reached a total of 238 newly arrived Congolese refugees at the transit centre in Kigoma and the reception centre in Nyarugusu Camp.

Uganda:

- **Congolese arrivals and registration:** During the reporting period, 278 Congolese asylum-seekers and refugees were registered. Total number of Congolese registered in Uganda since January 2026 is 3,713. The cumulative total of registered Congolese asylum seekers and refugees since January 2025 is 77,285.
- A total of 390 individuals arrived from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) during the reporting period, contributing to a cumulative 82,745 arrivals from DRC since January 2025, with Nakivale Settlement hosting the largest share of the Congolese refugee population.
- Kabazana Reception Centre in Nakivale Refugee Settlement hosted 1,190 individuals against a capacity of 1,500. The increased population resulted in a gap of 24 latrines and a shortfall of over 7,000 litres of water, with access at only 9 litres per person per day compared to the minimum standard of 15 litres per person per day.

Zambia/ZAMCO:

- In Zambia, 31 new arrivals from the DRC were registered, of which 11 were from South Kivu, 11 from Tanganyika, and nine from North-Kivu. Most arrivals were registered in Meheba Settlement in North-Western Province and Mantapala Settlement in Luapula Province. Since the beginning of 2026, Zambia has registered a cumulative total of 168 new arrivals from DRC.
- Under ZAMCO, this week Malawi received 72 individuals from the DRC who are registered at Dzaleka Camp in Dowa District, Central Region. Since the beginning of 2026, Malawi has registered a cumulative total of 346 individuals from the DRC.

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