EASTERN DRC SITUATION

30 January 2024



Displacement site near Goma in eastern DRC before the escalation of violence. As fighting continues, families are being forced to flee once again, seeking safety in Goma and beyond. The crisis has escalated rapidly, with displacement reaching half a million this year. © UNHCR/Guerchom Ndebo

HIGHLIGHTS

- Since 23 January, the security and humanitarian **situation in South Kivu and North Kivu provinces in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) rapidly declined** However, relative calm has been observed in Goma since 28 January, although isolated skirmishes continue to be reported in the city and its surroundings. In the lead-up to the crisis, UNHCR issued two briefing notes on 17 January and 24 January.
- **Reports from Goma and surrounding areas indicate significant civilian casualties, violations of International Humanitarian Law, and large-scale forced displacement.** Humanitarian operations have been severely impacted by the violence. Various humanitarian warehouses in the city have reportedly been looted, and programmes face significant disruption.
- The humanitarian situation in the eastern DRC continues to be very worrying**. Humanitarian agencies do not have access to displaced populations in and around Goma due to the deteriorating security situation**. With no electricity, water, or connectivity, the situation is becoming very dire.
- **UNHCR reiterates the calls for humanitarian access and for the safety of civilians, including aid workers, to be respected**. We also call for the right to seek asylum to be upheld and for civilians to be allowed to move to safer areas.
- There are very small numbers of new arrivals of people seeking asylum in neighbouring countries so far.

- **UNHCR is working with governments and partners in neighbouring DRC countries to update interagency contingency plans** and stands ready to support any new arrivals from the latest crisis, including the nearly 600 people who have requested asylum in Rwanda UNHCR in recent days.
- On 28 January, **protests erupted in the capital, Kinshasa**, following developments in Goma, with key installations, including premises linked to the international community, being targeted.
- Prior to recent development, The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) faced **one of the largest displacement crises in Africa, with 6.7 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), including 4.6 million in South and North Kivu.** The country also hosts over 520,000 refugees and asylum seekers from neighbouring countries, while 1.1 million Congolese refugees were hosted in neighbouring countries in the region, more than half of them in Uganda. **The recent surge in violence has internally displaced over half a million people since the beginning of the year.**

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

- Electricity and water networks have been cut in Goma since 26 January, with concerns that fuel supplies in the city could soon run out.
- While relative calm has been observed in Goma since 29 January, **isolated skirmishes continue, and the civilian toll remains significant.** Reports indicate violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL), including sexual violence by armed groups. The volatile situation has made it difficult to verify casualty figures, but humanitarian sources report bodies in the streets and hospitals receiving large numbers of wounded. **According to OCHA's Flash Update 3, as of 28 January, the ICRC had recorded over 256 injured at Ndosho Hospital, while MSF had treated at least 61 at Kyeshero Hospital in Goma**.
- There are concerns that the conflict may move southwards towards Bukavu, the provincial capital of South Kivu, which would have significant humanitarian implications and likely lead to further forced displacement of civilian populations including refugees**. On 26 January, clashes between the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (FARDC) and non-state armed groups were reported in and around Minova town in South Kivu province**, which borders North Kivu and is strategically located on the main National Road 2 (RN2) which links Sake with Bukavu.
- According to the CCCM cluster (co-led by UNHCR and IOM), **the escalation of hostilities in North and South Kivu led to the internal displacement of 43,500 people to IDP sites in and around Goma between 6 and 25 January.** Since the escalation of hostilities in Goma City on 25 January, IDP sites have been directly impacted, with at least 12 people killed and a dozen others injured in the Rusayo 1 and Rusayo 2 IDP sites on the outskirts of Goma City. Over half of the population of the Kanyaruchinya, Bushagara, Rusayo 1, and Rusayo 2 IDP sites left these areas, initially moving towards Goma city or surrounding localities where they are sheltering with host communities. As of 26 January, humanitarian activities in the sites had been largely suspended, with only interventions related to health and WASH reportedly continuing.
- **Between mid-October 2024 and 20 January 2024, IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) estimated that 658,000 people have been newly displaced in North and South Kivu.** While significant population movements have been observed in recent days, there are challenges in corroborating figures given the lack of access.
- **The hostilities have severely impacted humanitarian operations in North and South Kivu**. In Goma city, warehouses of humanitarian agencies have been looted.
- **On 29 January, there were reports that displaced people were being told to return to their home areas. People are moving away from IDP sites, with reports that some IDP**

sites are being deliberately destroyed. Local officials in surrounding villages and towns have been asked to make schools available to those fleeing Goma.

- In a statement, Vivian van de Perre, Deputy Special Representative for Protection and Operations of MONUSCO, **called for the establishment of humanitarian corridors, the reopening of Goma airport, and border crossing points to allow the voluntary movement of populations seeking refuge in areas safe from conflict**.

Regional Updates

- UNHCR operations in neighbouring countries—Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania, Burundi, as well as Zambia—are closely monitoring the situation and strengthening preparedness for potential cross-border movements from the DRC.
- Operations remain on high alert for any influx beyond normal levels. Rwanda is currently the only country reporting a significant increase in new arrivals exceeding usual daily numbers. Countries are revising their contingency plans, including updates to planning figures, staffing needs, and supply requirements.

Rwanda

- As of 29 January, the Government of Rwanda (GoR) **confirmed the arrival of 577 new asylum seekers at the Rugerero site,** which is currently under construction and has been specifically designated to receive new arrivals. Of these, 292 are children, 186 are women, and 88 are men.
- On 29 January, the UNHCR's Representative visited the border and the Rugerero site to better understand immediate needs and ensure a coordinated response with the GoR and partners.
- On 26 January, 600 people living in the town of Rubavu, which directly borders the DRC, were displaced by shelling.
- UNHCR is working closely with the government to update contingency plans and support the coordination of key partners.

Uganda

- **Daily arrivals to Uganda remain within the usual range, averaging 154 per day.** The operation has bolstered its border monitoring capacity and scaled up preparedness to accommodate additional arrivals at the main transit centre.
- In preparation for a possible large-scale arrival, **core relief items have been prepositioned. The main transit centre near the border has a capacity of 1,200 people, and additional space may need to be identified by the government if arrivals exceed this number.** In such a scenario, UNHCR will support efforts to decongest the transit centre by relocating people to settlements as soon as possible.
- UNHCR together with partners are supporting the government in reviewing and updating contingency plans.

Burundi

- **Daily arrivals from DRC to Burundi remain within the normal range of 50-60 per day.** The operation has also strengthened its border monitoring capacity, noting that the official land border between Burundi and Rwanda remains closed.
- **Reviewing and updating contingency plans** are underway**.**

Tanzania

- Daily arrivals to Tanzania also appear to be within the normal daily range, with **UNHCR receiving reports of 14 new arrivals from Goma on 29 January**, of whom half arrived via

Lake Tanganyika and are currently awaiting pre-screening, while the remaining half arrived via the Mutukula border point with Uganda.

- **A preparedness meeting took place on 30 January** between UNHCR, the local authorities and partners to discuss border monitoring alongside the activation of the DRC contingency plan.

Zambia

- Since November 2024, **there has been a gradual increase in arrivals from DRC**, linked to the increased intensity and frequency of violence. Efforts are ongoing to strengthen monitoring capacity.

Contacts

Tina Ghelli – Head of External Engagement, Regional Bureau for Southern Africa (ghelli@unhcr.org)
Edward Ogolla – Communications Officer, Regional Bureau for Southern Africa (ogolla@unhcr.org)