

EASTERN DRC SITUATION

21 February 2025



People fleeing rising tensions and violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) arrive in Burundi.
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HIGHLIGHTS

- The situation in Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) remains extremely tense and insecure.
- A major influx of new arrivals began on 15 February, and so far this month, [over 40,000 Congolese nationals have arrived in Burundi](#) seeking asylum. This number will likely increase as hostilities in the DRC advance towards Uvira and further south to Kalemi.
- The government of Burundi announced it would recognize the refugees on **prima facie** basis.
- [UNHCR has launched a \\$40.4 million critical needs appeal](#) to enhance preparedness and provide life-saving assistance to 275,000 **internally displaced people** in eastern DRC, while also supporting a potential **influx of refugees, asylum-seekers, and returnees** in neighboring countries for up to 258,000 people for three months.
- IDP sites in and around Goma are being emptied as more people are pushed to return to their home areas. According to the CCCM cluster, co-led by UNHCR and IOM, **15 of 21 sites have been completely cleared**.
- [OCHA](#) reported that **humanitarian operations are severely disrupted in Ituri** due to the closure of Goma airport.
- UNHCR, in collaboration with governments and partners in neighbouring countries, continues to **update interagency contingency plans and maintain a state of readiness to support**

any new arrivals. Since the beginning of the year, [more than 50,000](#) have sought international protection in neighboring countries.

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

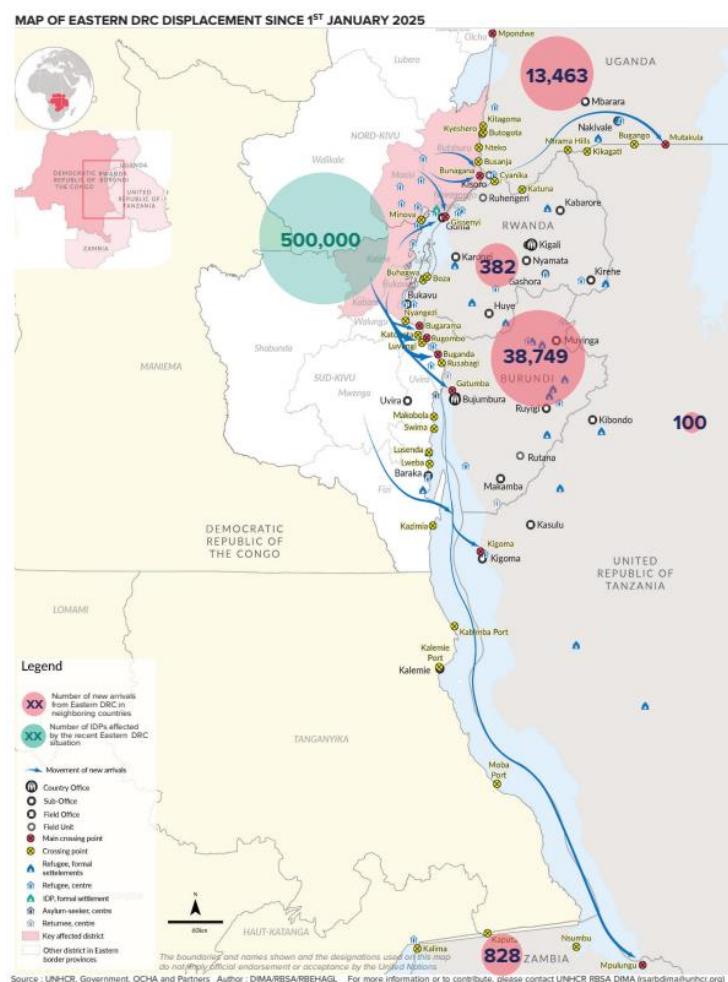
- **The situation in Eastern DRC remains extremely tense and insecure.** On 19 February, an emergency meeting of the [UN Security Council was convened](#) to discuss eastern DRC. SRSG Bintou Keita highlighted the advances of armed groups, MONUSCO's operational constraints, and the deteriorating human rights situation. On 18 February, the [Humanitarian Coordinator](#) (HC) in the DRC, Mr. Bruno Lemarquis, issued a press statement expressing his deep concern regarding the humanitarian consequences of the continued expansion of the conflict. The AU Peace and Security Council issued a [communiqué](#) on 18 February endorsing the outcomes of the Joint EAC-SADC Summit.
- **OHCHR has expressed concern at the deteriorating situation in eastern DRC,** which has resulted in 'grave human rights violations and abuses, such as summary executions, including of children, and conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence. The note also referenced reports of 'arbitrary arrests, detentions, degrading treatment and alleged forced returns of Congolese young men fleeing violence in neighbouring countries.
- **As of 19 February, the CCCM cluster, co-led by UNHCR and IOM, estimates that 15 of the 21 IDP sites in and around Goma have been completely emptied.** Of the estimated 700,000 IDPs living in sites in and around/ Goma before 30 November 2024, less than five per cent are currently estimated to be still living in the sites as people are pushed to return to home areas. While some displaced people are returning to their homes, others are moving into the city or newly established collective centres. Nearly **56,000 IDPs** have been identified in these centres, which, like the IDP sites, continue to be dismantled and emptied, leading to repeated displacements.
- **The DRC Education Cluster released a joint advocacy note for safe school resumption in the DRC,** calling for more vigorous advocacy with parties to the conflict to ensure the safety of students, teachers, and education personnel as a prerequisite for resuming school activities.
- Children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) are facing an unprecedented crisis, with **armed groups increasingly targeting displaced and street children in North and South Kivu,** the [UN Child Rights Committee warned](#). Reports indicate a surge in child recruitment, abductions, sexual violence, and killings as conflict spreads. Verification remains challenging, but a reliable source found that 45 of 120 children from a day transit centre in Goma had been killed.
- The DRC's **National Commission for Refugees continues to play an active role in managing the Burundian refugee camps in Fizi territory, South Kivu.** However, fears of possible armed clashes have led some Burundian refugees and members of the host community to leave. Meanwhile, the Transit Centres on the Ruzizi Plain have also largely been emptied.
- **In South Kivu, initial estimates indicate that at least 150,000 people have been internally displaced by recent hostilities.** Some 85,000 of these individuals are living in newly created spontaneous sites for internally displaced people, where essential services such as water, shelter and access to health services are in short supply.
- Looting during civil unrest in Bukavu, 7,000 metric tons of humanitarian food supplies were taken, [according to WFP](#). These supplies were meant to support the most vulnerable families facing a growing humanitarian crisis.
- The situation in reportedly Uvira remains volatile as the conflict continues to advance further south. Authorities have confirmed that **449 detainees** escaped following a jailbreak in Uvira.

On 20 February, 390 prisoners reportedly escaped from the central prison in Kalemie, some 380 km south of Uvira. [OHCHR](#) has raised concerns about possible reprisals against victims and witnesses by the escapees.

- Insecurity has also reportedly resurged in Ituri province. An [OCHA](#) report highlights that worsening security in North Kivu has severely disrupted humanitarian operations in Ituri, as many organizations rely on Goma airport for supplies and personnel movement.

Regional Updates

- UNHCR, in coordination with governments and partners in countries neighboring DR Congo, is closely monitoring the situation **as the conflict spreads, particularly in South Kivu**. As fighting spreads beyond Bukavu toward Uvira, mass displacement continues, with many fleeing toward Burundi and others to neighbouring countries.
- UNHCR has **launched an appeal of \$40.4 million to strengthen preparedness and deliver life-saving protection and assistance** to 275,000 internally displaced people in South Kivu, North Kivu, Maniema, and Tanganyika provinces of the DRC, as well as to support a potential influx of 258,000 refugees, asylum-seekers, and returnees in neighbouring countries, including Burundi, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia for a period of 3 months.
- During the past week, a surge of Congolese **arrived in Burundi seeking international protection**. Uganda has received over 13,000 new arrivals. Other neighboring countries continue to receive people fleeing, though in smaller numbers.
- Inter-Agency contingency planning continues in case of large-scale displacement from the DRC to neighboring countries. The following are the current planning figures; 100,000 people in Rwanda, 58,000 in Burundi, 50,000 in Uganda, 25,000 in Tanzania, and 15,000 in Zambia.
- The total number of those newly arrived since the beginning of the year in **neighboring countries is 53,522**.



Rwanda

- Between 16 and 18 February, **44 individuals were received as asylum seekers in Rwanda**. On 17 February, approximately 1,500 people crossed from the DRC into Rwanda. According to the Rwandan government, all requested assistance to return to Bukavu and Goma to stay with family. The government organized transport, though returnees covered the cost themselves.

- During UNHCR's visit to the border points, **both the DRC and Rwandan sides were fully reopened, with normal business operations resumed**. Services on the Congolese side resumed on 17 February, followed by the reopening of the Rusizi border crossings on 18 February. Immigration officials confirmed that operations were back to normal, with no asylum seekers recorded.

Uganda

- Between 14 and 19 February, 1,725 new arrivals from DRC were recorded, **bringing the overall number of new arrivals since 1 January to 13,463**. Most asylum seekers cite insecurity and forced recruitment into armed groups as their main reasons for fleeing. They also report rising levels of sexual violence, widespread looting, and increased criminality as other factors.

Burundi

- Arrivals in Burundi surged between 14 and 20 February as the conflict in eastern DRC moved southward toward Uvira, near the Burundian border. In response, the Government of **Burundi announced it will grant *prima facie* refugee status to those fleeing DRC**, ensuring swift access to protection and humanitarian assistance.
- As of 20 February, over 50,000 people have crossed from the DRC into Burundi, **with 43,383 of them requesting refugee status**. The majority of arrivals, 36,145 people, are sheltering in schools and a stadium in Rugombo, while smaller populations are spread across Ciséméré, Gihanga and Makombe Centres, as well as the Kaburantwa site.
- The situation remains critical for most new arrivals in Rugombo, where many are sleeping in the open with severe shortages of **shelter, water, food, and healthcare**. The **Gihanga and Ciséméré transit centres** are severely overcrowded, with Gihanga operating at nearly **ten times its capacity** and Ciséméré exceeding its limit by **300 people**.
- UNHCR and partners continue to ramp up efforts to provide them with essential support and lifesaving assistance, especially in Rugombo. **UNHCR has installed ten tents** for vulnerable individuals, while the **Burundian Red Cross** has set up communal shelters for **400 households**. **Caritas** is preparing to distribute **UNHCR-donated NFI kits**, and **mobile clinics** are operational, with **MSF providing first aid**. The **Ministry of Health** is vaccinating children aged **0–15 years**, while **UNICEF** has donated **25 mobile toilets**. Despite these efforts, **urgent resources** are needed to meet the growing needs.

Tanzania

- Arrivals to Tanzania continued with the numbers increasing over the past few days. **Since the beginning of the year, 131 individuals have sought safety in Tanzania**. The Government of Tanzania and UNHCR's joint visit to border entry is planned for the week of 24 February 2025.

Namibia

- Since late December 2024, **Namibia has recorded a significant increase in asylum seekers from eastern DRC**, reportedly from Goma, Fizi, and Uvira. Monthly arrivals, previously averaging 30, rose to 47 in December and peaked at 75 in January 2025, with 122 new arrivals recorded this year. Many cite escalating insecurity linked to the recent conflict in eastern DRC as their reason for fleeing.
- Katima Mulilo in the country's northeast remains the main entry point, where the Namibian government conducts initial screenings before transferring asylum seekers to Osire Settlement for further processing. **However, funding challenges have left a critical gap in cash assistance for basic needs**.

Angola

- UNHCR has received reports of at least **two families who have recently arrived from DRC to Angola** in a village in the Lunda Norte Province, which borders DRC to the southwest. These families reportedly fled the ongoing conflict in eastern DRC. UNHCR is planning a mission to assess their needs and the broader situation in the area.

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)