

EASTERN DRC SITUATION

21 March 2025



*Congolese refugee family receiving support at a temporary site in Rugombo, Burundi.
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HIGHLIGHTS

- The security situation across eastern DRC remains highly volatile. Human rights violations, including reprisal killings and abductions, continue to be reported.
- On 21 March, UNHCR issued a [press statement](#) warning that critical funding gaps were severely hampering humanitarian efforts in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and neighbouring countries, leaving thousands without life-saving aid and pushing an already dire humanitarian situation closer to catastrophe.
- UNHCR and partners continue to carry out key activities under its protection mandate across North and South Kivu—including **protection monitoring, awareness-raising, referral and case management, and participation in joint assessments.**
- On 18 March, the [State of Qatar](#) convened a trilateral meeting between President Kagame of Rwanda and President Tshisekedi of the DRC ‘as part of efforts to ease the situation in Eastern DRC’.
- On 17 March, **Southern African Development Community (SADC) and East Africa Community (EAC)** Ministers met in Harare to discuss the situation in eastern DRC and forged a three-tier [strategy to restore peace and stability](#).
- As of the evening of 19 March, the strategic town of Walikale reportedly fell under M23 control. UNHCR is planning to conduct a monitoring mission as soon as possible to assess possible population movements away from the town.

- **As of 20 March, over 103,000 people have fled from DRC to neighbouring countries since the beginning of the year.** High levels of new arrivals from DRC continue to be reported in Uganda, resulting in significant overcrowding in transit centres and a growing risk of transmission of communicable diseases, including Ebola.

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

- **The security situation across eastern DRC remains highly volatile. Human rights violations, including reprisal killings and abductions, continue to be reported.** On 18 March, seven civilians were reportedly killed in Walikale Territory, accused of collaborating with rival armed groups. That same day, around 30 young men were reportedly abducted in Goma and Nyiragongo and there are concerns it could be for forced recruitment. In Rutshuru, 10 civilians, including three women, were reportedly abducted while working in their fields. Clashes on 17 and 18 March in Bukavu and Walungu reportedly caused numerous casualties, with Walungu residents particularly at risk. Armed actors are also reported to have seized control of Walikale town.
- **On 18 March, the [State of Qatar](#) convened a trilateral meeting between President Kagame of Rwanda and President Tshisekedi of the DRC ‘as part of efforts to ease the situation in Eastern DRC’.** According to the joint statement from the meeting, the heads of state ‘welcomed the progress made under the Luanda and Nairobi processes as well as the joint EAC-SADC summit held in Dar es Salaam on 8 February’ and reaffirmed their collective commitment to an immediate and unconditional ceasefire. They also agreed to continue the discussions initiated in Doha.
- On 17 March, **Southern African Development Community (SADC) and East Africa Community (EAC) Ministers met** in Harare to discuss the situation in eastern DRC and forged a three-tier [strategy to restore peace and stability](#). Immediate steps within 30 days include enforcing a ceasefire and reopening key airports for humanitarian access. Medium-term actions (30–120 days) focus on political dialogue, confidence-building, and merging the Nairobi-Luanda peace tracks. The longer-term efforts aim to strengthen DRC’s security forces, restore state authority, and address the root causes of the conflict.
- **UNHCR, in collaboration with its partners, continues to implement protection activities across North and South Kivu.** In North Kivu, Joint monitoring with INTERSOS recorded violent clashes between armed groups, leading to the displacement of 7,340 people to surrounding villages. Awareness-raising efforts are ongoing, with INTERSOS recently conducting a session for internally displaced persons (IDPs) at the Kayembe collective center near Goma. Additionally, INTERSOS facilitated the referrals of gender-based violence (GBV) survivors to local health services, including the provision of PEP kits within 72 hours.
- **A rapid assessment on 14 March by UNHCR and partners northeast of Kalemie, Tanganyika Province,** indicates 16,000 new arrivals in villages on the periphery of the city, which is already hosting 30,000 IDPs.
- **Hostilities and insecurity in North and South Kivu is resulting in growing numbers of cross-province displacements.** According to [OCHA](#), significant numbers of people have crossed into the neighbouring provinces of Maniema, Tanganyika and Tshhopo, where the presence of humanitarian partners is extremely limited. In Maniema Province, NGO partners report that some 108,000 people may have recently crossed into Luboto Territory from North Kivu, while an estimated 50,000 IDPs have newly arrived in Tanganyika Province.
- **UNHCR began preparations for the fourth voluntary repatriation convoy of the year from Goma to Rwanda.** To date, 78 people have been received at the centre and registered while biometric checks are ongoing. During the transit centre visit, UNHCR assessed the conditions at the centre and identified the need for several upgrades.

- **In response to the recent surge in cholera cases, cholera treatment centres (CTCs) have become operational in both Minova and Uvria in South Kivu.** Meanwhile, WHO has deployed an emergency response team to Kirotshe health zone in North Kivu to support cholera and Mpox response, with the authorities in North Kivu reporting a 40 per cent increase in cholera cases over the last week. As previously reported the current cholera outbreak has triggered the activation of the Anticipatory Action Framework (AAF) by the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC), which allows for an automatic allocation of up to US\$750,000 from the CERF fund to support the response.
- **Amnesty International has [documented](#) ‘rampant human rights abuses’** and has called on the East African Community (EAC), Southern African Development Community (SADC), European Union (EU) and other international actors ‘to increase pressure on all partners to the conflict to protect civilians and treat detainees humanely, in accordance with International Humanitarian Law (IHL)’. The statement from Amnesty highlights reprisal killings against civilian populations, hospital raids, abduction of patients, attacks on human rights defenders and alarming rates of sexual violence.
- **UNHCR’s partner INTERSOS continues to conduct awareness-raising sessions and community focus groups, most recently in Masisi and Beni Territory.** The sessions focused on social cohesion and coexistence between communities, the rights and duties of displaced people and protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA).
- **According to the latest analysis from the UNHCR co-led CCCM Cluster, there are at least 10,258 people (2,263 households) dispersed across 63 collective centres in Goma, Nyiragongo and Masisi.** These people had previously been among the roughly 700,000 Internally Displaced People (IDPs) living in IDP sites in and around Goma, prior to their deliberate dismantling. As of 14 March, the CCCM cluster estimates that 960 people have reoccupied these sites, which had previously been emptied. Many of these IDPs describe efforts to return to their villages of origin, but found their homes and fields occupied by others.
- In February, escalating violence in **Ituri Province displaced an estimated [100,000 people across the territories of Djugu, Irumu, and Mambasa.](#)** According to OCHA, at least 102 civilians, including women and children, were killed in Djugu Territory alone during the month, with a total of 205 civilian deaths recorded across the three territories since the start of the year. The ongoing insecurity has severely disrupted access to basic services, with over 100 schools reportedly closed in the Fataki, Drodoro, and Tchomia health zones.
- **Protection monitoring by the [Protection Cluster](#) in North Kivu recorded 353 incidents affecting 896 individuals during the first two months of the year.** In seven out of nine territories, over half of the reported cases involved violence causing death or physical harm—60 per cent of which were homicides. The reporting period marked a sharp deterioration in the protection environment, driven by intense fighting in civilian areas, the proliferation of small arms, increased armed banditry and reprisal attacks, the presence of unexploded ordnance, high levels of gender-based and sexual violence, and grave violations against children.

Regional Updates

- **UNHCR issued a [press statement](#) warning that critical funding gaps were severely hampering humanitarian efforts** in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and in Burundi and Uganda, leaving thousands without life-saving aid and pushing an already dire humanitarian situation closer to catastrophe. Funding constraints have made a proper emergency response by UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, civil society and local government nearly impossible, hampering shelter construction and the distribution of essentials like blankets, mosquito nets, menstruation supplies and soap. It has also prevented the replenishment of emergency supplies.

- **As of 20 March, over 103,000 people have fled DRC to neighbouring countries since the beginning of the year**, the majority of whom have arrived in Burundi. Elevated levels of daily arrivals continue to be recorded from DRC to Uganda, while recently, Tanzania has also recorded increased numbers of daily arrivals
- **WFP warned that it may be forced to cut all food assistance to some 120,000 refugees from DRC by July** if additional funding is not forthcoming.
- The latest figures on new arrivals to neighbouring countries are reflected in the [Eastern DRC Displacement Dashboard](#) and [Burundi CORE](#), which is updated daily and available on the [Operational Data Portal](#)

Country	Total New Arrivals* since 1 Jan (as of 20 March unless specified)	Arrivals in the Past 7 Days
Burundi	69,854 (as of 19 March)	2,744
Uganda	29,825	4,242
Zambia	879	72
Rwanda	1,320	429**
Tanzania	1,067	667
TOTAL	102,945	8,154

*For countries where data is available, the new arrivals figure includes returnees as well as refugees from third countries, alongside the Congolese new arrivals. The inclusion of these group reflects that returnee populations and third country nationals may also have specific international protection and humanitarian need.

** This figure includes 368 Rwandan refugee returnees recorded on 14 March.

Burundi

- As of 19 March, **almost 70,000 people in need of international protection have arrived in Burundi from DRC since the beginning of the year**. Of these, close to 49,000 are staying in various locations in Rugombo Commune (Cibitoke Province), a significant proportion of whom continue to shelter in the extremely overcrowded Rugombo stadium
- **The Government of Burundi is leading efforts to relocate new arrivals from temporary transit sites near the border to Musenyi settlement and other inland areas**. While the relocation is being scaled up—with a target of around 1,000 people per day—many refugees, especially those from urban backgrounds, have expressed a preference to remain in urban areas or closer to the border.
- With overcrowded conditions and sub-optimal **access to potable water and sanitation infrastructure, there remain significant concerns around the risk of communicable disease outbreaks in Rugombo**. As of 17 March, there have been three confirmed cases of cholera in Rugombo. This comes amidst a recent surge in cholera cases in DRC, including in Uvira.
- **UNHCR is scaling up its staffing capacity to strengthen the emergency response**, with several deployments underway in key areas, including protection, WASH, shelter, supply, reporting, and both emergency and inter-agency coordination.
- Under the Refugee Coordination Model (RCM), UNHCR, in support of the Government of Burundi's efforts, continues to coordinate a multi-sector inter-agency response to new arrivals. Key response interventions include:

Protection:

- UNHCR, in collaboration with the Government and the National Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (ONPRA), is leading the ongoing registration of new arrivals. As of 17 March, 27,937 individuals (5,071 families) have been registered, 51% are female and 53% are children. Among them, 1,134 people (5%) have specific needs, including 431 women at risk and 352 unaccompanied or separated children. The vast majority of registered arrivals—96%—come from Uvira (51%) and Walungu (45%) territories in the DRC, both of which border Burundi.

- UNHCR has also enhanced border monitoring at key crossing points and upgraded basic protection safeguards, such as lighting, in various transit centres
- Save the Children, in partnership with UNHCR, is leading the response to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), providing case management, psychosocial support, group therapy, safe housing, and material assistance. In Rugombo, UNFPA is distributing dignity, baby, and hygiene kits to new arrivals. The *Association pour la Paix et les Droits de l'Homme (ACPDH)*, a local partner, is supporting SGBV prevention and awareness, offering legal aid, and conducting protection monitoring in Rugombo and Bujumbura rural border areas. World Vision International is also involved in SGBV prevention training and distributing dignity kits.
- UNICEF, in collaboration with its partners, is providing psychosocial support to children through individual counselling and group counselling sessions, while also supporting case management for children affected by violence. Mechanisms for family reunification are also being supported

Health & Nutrition:

- HealthNet TPO, in partnership with UNHCR, are supporting fixed health clinics across Rugomobo, at the Cishemere transit centre and at the Musenyi site. These services are complemented by mobile health clinics deployed by MSF and WHO which support health awareness, provide primary healthcare services and facilitate referral, including for SGBV cases.
- Following an initial screening by MSF, which identified an alarming Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) rate, WFP and Concern International have conducted mass malnutrition screening of children aged 6-59 months in a number of locations, including Rugombo, combining this with vitamin A supplementation and deworming.

WASH:

- The WASH response is being led by *Centre d'Organisation pour la Promotion de l'Éducation et du Développement (COPEDE)*, a national NGO, supported by UNHCR. Enhancing solid waste management and implementing drainage improvements is a key priority.
- In Musenyi, the Dutch NGO ZOA is planning to construct additional latrines and expand water supply systems.

Shelter/ NFI:

- COPEDE, supported by UNHCR, is also leading the shelter response. UNHCR has so far donated some 500 tents, while rub halls have also been provided by various partners.
- IRC is closely partnering with UNHCR on the provision of shelter and NFIs, with ZOA also distributing NFI kits in Rugombo

Food Security:

- WFP, in partnership with CARITAS, is supporting the provision of emergency food rations, while the NGO AIRD is providing hot meals to around 45,000 individuals in Rugombo.
- In Musenyi, WFP is providing half rations amidst funding shortages, with reports that some residents have resorted to stealing crops. A cash and voucher assistance programme is planned by ZOA and World Vision in the Musenyi settlement.

Logistics:

- UNHCR, in partnership with AIRD, has been renting trucks to facilitate the relocation of new arrivals to Musenyi and other transit centres away from the border

Rwanda

- An **increasing number of Rwandans have recently returned home from the DRC**. Since January 2025, Rwanda has received 792 returnees, including 368 on 14 March alone.
- According to returnees, the recent increase in returns is largely due to enhanced awareness-raising on voluntary repatriation by national NGOs working in North and South Kivu.

However, **a key challenge remains: many refugees cannot afford the transport from their places of residence**, from IDP camps to the transit centres in Goma and Bukavu. Returnees reported that the journey costs around 15,000 Congolese Francs (5 USD), making it unaffordable for many.

Tanzania

- There has been a **significant increase in new arrivals from the DRC to Tanzania, with 512 people recorded over the past 7 days compared to 169 in the preceding week**. Some of those who have recently crossed into Tanzania are Burundian refugees who fled Uvira in South Kivu. They are currently undergoing screening.
- **On 18 March UNHCR conducted a joint border visit with the Government of Tanzania**.
- UNHCR continues to closely monitor the situation in eastern DRC, particularly in and around Kalemie, the provincial capital of Tanganyika, where intensified fighting would likely trigger increased movements across Lake Tanganyika to Tanzania.
- While **new arrivals in Tanzania are being relocated to existing camps, the ability of these sites to accommodate more people is limited, with around 400 individuals still awaiting transfer**. At the same time, UNHCR's relief supplies are nearly depleted, with available stocks running low.

Uganda

- **New arrivals from the DRC continue to enter Uganda through two main routes, with the majority crossing at Bunagana and nearby areas**. From there, they are transferred to the already overcrowded Nyakabande and Matanda Transit Centres. New arrivals continue to report fear of looting, rape, killings, hunger, and lack of access to basic services. More recent arrivals from Goma have also reported violent abuses—including rape, and killings—allegedly committed by former prison inmates.
- **As of 20 March, some 30,000 people are estimated to have arrived in Uganda from DRC**, roughly five times the number of arrivals from DRC recorded over the past two years.
- The high number of new arrivals continues to **put extensive pressure on transit centres in border areas, which are routinely operating at some 300-500 per cent of their capacity**. This is despite an ongoing and costly operation to expedite the processing of new arrivals and their transportation to refugee settlements, with approximately 3,000 individuals being relocated per week (1,000 individuals / 3 times per week).
- The ongoing **funding crisis is significantly impacting UNHCR and partners' ability to fully support new arrivals, requiring tough prioritization decisions**. With limited resources, the focus has shifted toward improving living conditions in transit centres and reducing the risk of disease outbreaks such as Ebola and Mpox. Current priority activities include latrine construction, hygiene promotion, solid waste management, provision of clean water, and shelter expansion, while efforts to sustain critical protection activities continue amid funding constraints.
- **Funding constraints have affected the continuation of supplementary feeding programmes**. Following the reported deaths of four children due to malnutrition-related anaemia, UNHCR is engaging with WFP to explore options for resuming targeted nutritional support, particularly for new arrivals.

Zambia

- The number of asylum seeker arrivals in Zambia has remained steady, **with 72 individuals recorded over the past seven days. This brings the total number of arrivals since the beginning of the year to 879**. While not large in scale, the consistent flow underscores the continued need for monitoring and support to ensure timely assistance and protection.

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