

# UNHCR Preparedness and Response

## Displacement in Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and Neighbouring Countries

December 2025 – March 2026



*Thousands of Congolese families are fleeing intense fighting in eastern DRC and crossing into Burundi in search of safety.*  
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## KEY FIGURES



**500,000** internally displaced people targeted for assistance in DRC



**166,000** new arrivals targeted for assistance in Burundi, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia



**\$47.2 million** required for December 2025 - March 2026

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is issuing this appeal<sup>1</sup> in response to the worsening humanitarian situation and rising displacement in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and across neighboring countries since early December 2025. UNHCR seeks \$47.2 million for the period December 2025 through March 2026 to support the immediate and ongoing response for internally displaced people (IDPs) in eastern DRC, reinforce preparedness, and sustain life-saving protection and assistance for refugees and returnees arriving in Burundi as well as Rwanda, in addition to preparedness measures in Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia.

This revised appeal builds on the previous plan that initially covered [February–April 2025](#), reflecting the renewed violence and displacement in eastern DRC and underscoring the urgent need for scaled-up, sustained support across the region.

## Overview

The humanitarian situation in eastern DRC has sharply deteriorated since early December 2025, marking the most significant escalation of hostilities this year. Despite the Washington Accords signed between the Governments of the DRC and Rwanda—first in June 2025 and reaffirmed in December—renewed fighting has spread across Walungu, Mwenga, and Uvira territories. This escalation has triggered large-scale displacement within the DRC and neighboring countries, with over 500,000 people newly displaced in South Kivu. Conditions remain dire, with many sheltering in

overcrowded communal facilities, while cholera and measles outbreaks compound the crisis.

Since early December 2025, close to 80,000 people have been forced to flee to neighbouring countries, the vast majority (78,000) to Burundi, and over 1,000 to Rwanda. This is in addition to the more than 176,000 arrivals recorded across the region between January and November 2025.

<sup>1</sup>UNHCR's requirements for this response fall within the Executive Committee–approved budget for the operations covered by this appeal and are aligned with relevant inter-agency appeals, including the DRC Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) and UNHCR-led inter-agency regional refugee response plans (RRPs)



# Ongoing and planned response

## Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

Renewed fighting in eastern DRC since early December 2025 has displaced more than 500,000 people in South Kivu, including over 250,000 people fleeing the most recent armed clashes on the Kamanyola-Uvira axis (and beyond), many fleeing pre-emptively amid fears of escalating violence. Conditions for IDPs are dire: most are sheltering in overcrowded communal facilities, heightening protection risks, including gender-based violence. Major cholera and measles outbreaks, combined with limited healthcare access and an ongoing nurses' strike, further exacerbate vulnerabilities.

The civilian and humanitarian character of key displacement sites—particularly Sange assembly point and Kavimvira transit centre—has been compromised, forcing temporarily suspension of several humanitarian activities. While access remains severely restricted, UNHCR and its protection partners are preparing to resume assistance as soon as conditions allow:

- ◆ Reinforcing protection monitoring through field

teams, community mechanisms, and civil society engagement.

- ◆ Conducting multi-sectoral assessments and documenting protection incidents.
- ◆ Mobilizing actors to strengthen the protection response.

UNHCR will continue these measures alongside coordination and delivery of shelter and core relief items (CRI) assistance, in line with its leadership role within the Protection Cluster and Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) and Shelter Clusters.

Prior to this escalation, 5.3 million people were internally displaced across the DRC, including 3.6 million in the east, while over 500,000 refugees were hosted across the country. Additionally, 1.1 million DRC refugees remain in neighbouring countries.

## NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES

Close to 80,000 people fled to neighbouring countries since early December, adding to the more than 176,000 arrivals recorded in the DRC's border countries between January and November 2025. Contingency plans in neighbouring countries have been updated with national authorities and humanitarian partners to address the evolving crisis, with further adjustments

likely as the situation unfolds. Preparedness efforts focus on life-saving interventions and defining minimum response measures in case of further escalation and large-scale displacement. Current operations prioritize both readiness for additional influxes and meeting the immediate needs of new arrivals.

## Burundi

In the first two weeks of December, some 78,000 people arrived in Burundi after fleeing eastern DRC, including around 7,000 Burundian returnees, primarily through Buganda in Cibitoke Province. Most originate from Uvira, Sange, Luvungi and Rumonge, crossing Lake Tanganyika and land borders, and many were previously internally displaced within the DRC.

This latest influx adds to the significant arrivals earlier in 2025, when over 71,000 people fled the DRC to Burundi, some of whom eventually returned to the DRC. The cumulative movements have placed immense pressure on reception capacity, underscoring the urgent need for scaled-up support.

The Cishemere Transit Centre is hosting 5,000 people

against a capacity of 700. A temporary transit site has been established at Kansega Colline in Ndava, and at the Government's request, a new settlement is under development in Bweru, Buhumuza Province, where over 13,000 people have already been relocated from border areas, with more arriving daily.

Refugees—primarily women and children—are arriving exhausted, sick, and, in some cases, injured. Despite efforts to scale up the response, conditions remain extremely precarious. Shelter, food, water, hygiene supplies, sanitation facilities, and protection support are urgently needed:

- ◆ Delivering life-saving protection and humanitarian assistance to new arrivals.

- ◆ Strengthening protection for vulnerable groups.
- ◆ Accelerating relocation of new arrivals to decongest the transit centre and temporary site.
- ◆ Expanding reception capacity and providing life saving assistance.

Despite considerable challenges, UNHCR and partners have transported some 13,000 refugees to Bweru, installed tents, Refugee Housing Units (RHUs), latrines, and water tanks, and improved road access while clearing land for additional RHUs and communal shelters.

UNHCR will continue to prioritize support for new arrivals, maintaining its presence at border entry points and working closely with government authorities and partners to ensure a coordinated and timely response.

This includes:

- ◆ Ensuring access to protection services, including border monitoring, registration, and support for persons with specific needs, including women and girls at risk, unaccompanied children, older people, people with disabilities, and survivors of gender-based violence.
- ◆ Delivering multi-sectoral assistance, including shelter and CRIs, water, sanitation and hygiene for refugees and host communities.
- ◆ Improve living conditions in refugee sites, including access roads, reception areas, emergency water points and latrines and family emergency shelters.

At the end of November 2025, before the current influx, Burundi was already hosting more than 111,000 refugees, the majority from the DRC.

## Rwanda

Since early December 2025, Rwanda has received just over 1,000 people from the DRC, crossing via Bugarama, primarily from Kamanyola following heavy shelling. While some have since returned to the DRC through Kamembe to Bukavu, those without documentation or wishing to remain were transported to the nearest transit centre. After screening, new arrivals can choose to return to the DRC, stay with family or friends in Rwanda, or seek asylum and receive further assistance.

UNHCR and partners are supporting the Government's response, particularly in the areas of protection (including registration, targeted services for child protection, as well as gender-based violence), health and nutrition, shelter, and water, sanitation and hygiene.

Although Rwanda offers a favourable protection environment, urgent measures are needed to ensure sufficient capacity for a potential further influx, including:

- ◆ Enhancing registration and protection capacity at entry points and transit centres.
- ◆ Ensuring transportation from borders to transit centres and onward to refugee camps.
- ◆ Procuring and pre-positioning CRIs, including shelter kits, to meet basic needs.
- ◆ Improving health infrastructure at key transit centres and camps.

UNHCR will continue to advocate for integrated services for both refugee and host communities wherever possible.

Rwanda currently hosts over 137,000 refugees, including nearly 84,000 from the DRC. In addition, Rwanda has received close to 6,000 Rwandan returnees from eastern DRC so far in 2025.

## Tanzania

UNHCR is working with the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania and partners to enhance preparedness for potential new arrivals from the DRC. Additional support is urgently required to implement the following activities:

- ◆ Pre-position emergency stocks of CRIs, shelter materials, and water, sanitation and hygiene supplies to meet the immediate needs of new arrivals.
- ◆ Provide protection assistance, including registration, shelter, health care, and other essential services for vulnerable individuals.
- ◆ Utilize zones vacated by repatriated Burundian refugees in Nyarugusu Camp—where most DRC

refugees currently reside—leveraging existing service delivery infrastructure to accommodate potential new arrivals.

- ◆ Upgrade existing infrastructure to ensure adequate capacity for possible new arrivals.
- ◆ Promote integrated solutions whenever possible.

Tanzania currently hosts approximately 299,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, including more than 86,000 from the DRC.

## Uganda

UNHCR is working with the Government to strengthen preparedness for additional arrivals from the DRC, with over 78,000 people having crossed the border since January 2025. The focus will be on:

- ◆ Screening at border entry points, including security and immigration checks carried out by relevant personnel, and transportation to transit/reception centres and settlements.
- ◆ Biometric registration, including identification of persons with specific needs.
- ◆ Multi-sectoral management and provision of assistance and protection at transit/reception centres, including hot meals, clean water, medical care and

referrals, mental health support, alternative care for children, targeted support for persons with disabilities, and response to gender-based violence.

- ◆ Provision of CRI kits containing blankets, sleeping mats, jerry cans, basins, sanitary napkins, laundry soap, and underwear to meet immediate needs upon arrival.
- ◆ Financial aid, including mobile phones for mobile money transfer and cash grants to support refugees relocating to their assigned plots in settlements.

Uganda hosts over 1.9 million refugees, including more than 647,000 from the DRC.

## Zambia

In Zambia, asylum-seekers are expected to arrive at Mpulungu on Lake Tanganyika and through remote border areas with poor roads and limited services, placing immediate strain on reception systems. Transit and reception facilities urgently require upgrades to provide clean water, sanitation, hot meals, primary healthcare, psychosocial support, and accommodation.

New arrivals will require safe reception, security and protection screening, registration, refugee status determination, and core relief items. While the Government includes refugees in national social services, Mantapala Settlement, where new arrivals would be relocated, faces severe staffing shortages at its rural health centre, reducing service hours and leaving emergencies unattended. Health services for refugees and host communities need reinforcement, shelters, and water, sanitation and hygiene infrastructure require expansion.

Zambia's inclusive refugee policy—granting access to land, healthcare, and education—needs urgent support to stabilize reception capacity, strengthen national systems, and uphold protection commitments while promoting self-reliance.

Priority activities:

- ◆ Strengthen reception, screening, and registration by deploying surge staff to provide protection

services and emergency assistance.

- ◆ Upgrade shelter and water, sanitation and hygiene at four transit centres and one reception center inside the settlement.
- ◆ Scale up emergency health, nutrition, vaccination and mental health and psychosocial support services; address staffing and supply gaps at Mantapala Rural Health Center.
- ◆ Expand Mantapala Settlement with new villages, roads, plot demarcation, emergency shelters, water, sanitation and hygiene facilities and schools.
- ◆ Deliver protection services, including child protection, gender-based violence prevention and response, and support for persons with specific needs.
- ◆ Pre-position food assistance and transitioning to cash assistance, and provide emergency kits and agricultural tools to promote self-reliance.

Zambia currently hosts more than 113,000 forcibly displaced people, including more than 71,000 who are from the DRC.

# Financial requirements

This appeal seeks \$47.2 million for the period December 2025 through March 2026 to support the immediate and ongoing response for IDPs in eastern DRC, sustain the delivery of life-saving protection and assistance to

refugees currently arriving in Burundi and Rwanda, as well as reinforce preparedness measures in Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

## Budget breakdown by country (US\$)

Country	Total population targeted for assistance	Total requirements (US\$)
DRC	500,000	10,000,000
Burundi	90,000	15,600,000
Rwanda	5,000	2,000,000
Tanzania	25,000	4,000,000
Uganda	31,000	8,000,000
Zambia	15,000	7,600,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>666,000</b>	<b>47,200,000</b>

## Budget breakdown by sector (US\$)

Country	Protection	Shelter and CRIs	WASH	Health and Nutrition	Site Development and Coordination	Total requirements (US\$)
DRC	3,700,000	6,300,000	-	-	-	10,000,000
Burundi	6,000,000	5,800,000	300,000	1,000,000	2,500,000	15,600,000
Rwanda	200,000	400,000	500,000	500,000	400,000	2,000,000
Tanzania	870,000	1,853,000	600,000	677,000	-	4,000,000
Uganda	2,000,000	3,000,000	1,000,000	2,000,000	-	8,000,000
Zambia	2,100,000	3,000,000	1,200,000	1,300,000	-	7,600,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>14,870,000</b>	<b>20,353,000</b>	<b>3,600,000</b>	<b>5,477,000</b>	<b>2,900,000</b>	<b>47,200,000</b>

# Coordination

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Inside the DRC, UNHCR leads the Protection and CCCM and Shelter Clusters and collaborates with partners to address ongoing displacement.

In neighboring countries, governments and UNHCR coordinate the refugee response under the Refugee Coordination Model (RCM). UNHCR coordinate inter-agency efforts with national authorities, UN agencies, NGOs, and other partners.

Aligned with the Global Compact on Refugees and a

sustainable response approach, UNHCR advocates with development partners to prioritize internally displaced people and refugee-hosting and return areas in their programmes. In coordination with authorities, UNHCR and partners pursue a “solutions from the start” strategy, adopting a settlement approach that avoids parallel systems and strengthens national services for both new arrivals and host communities through the operationalization of the humanitarian–development nexus.

# Flexible funding

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Flexible funding enables UNHCR to prepare for the unpredictable, launch emergency responses without delay, and sustain support for crises that are forgotten or under-resourced. It allows efficient planning and resource management.

Without flexible contributions, UNHCR could not adequately prepare for new emergencies or deliver essential relief items, shelter, and protection during the

critical first phase of a response.

Flexible funding remains vital as emergencies evolve, especially for situations that risk being neglected. Unearmarked contributions to emergency preparedness and response are a lifeline for people forced to flee.