

EASTERN DRC SITUATION

07 March 2025



New Congolese asylum seekers at Rugombo reception center in Burundi being registered so that they can access essential services. ©UNHCR/Charity Nzomo

HIGHLIGHTS

- The situation in North and South Kivu, and increasingly Tanganyika Province, remains highly volatile, with sustained fighting and ongoing attacks on civilian populations. **Protection challenges in eastern DRC persist, with reports of forced child recruitment, sexual violence, and attacks on civilian infrastructure, including hospitals.**
- Since the beginning of the year, [over 86,000 people from DRC](#) have sought protection in neighbouring countries, including some [63,000 individuals](#) who have been granted prima facie refugee status in Burundi.
- The [EU Special Representative](#) for the Great Lakes Region, Ambassador Borgstam, visited DRC as part of a more extensive mission to the region.
- Under the framework of the Refugee Coordination Model (RCM), UNHCR in Burundi has actively engaged partners to support the Government-led response to new arrivals, including through the establishment of new coordination fora, enhanced information-sharing and updating of the Regional Refugee Response Plan for the DRC situation.
- The latest [WFP mVAM assessment \(19–22 February\)](#) highlights the dire conditions for IDPs in North and South Kivu.
- UNHCR released the update to its “[Position on Returns to North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri in the DRC](#)”, which calls on States not to forcibly return persons originating from

these provinces or adjacent areas until the security and human rights situation has improved sufficiently to permit a safe and dignified return.

- UNHCR announced the new position paper and highlighted protection concerns during a [media briefing](#) by UNHCR's Deputy Director of the Division of International Protection.
- UNHCR issued a press statement highlighting the [strain on aid efforts in Burundi](#) as the country faces its largest influx of Congolese refugees in decades.

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

- Between 2 and 5 March, the [EU Special Representative](#) for the Great Lakes Region, Ambassador Borgstam, visited DRC as part of a more extensive mission to the region. During his time in Kinshasa, the Ambassador met with President Tshisekedi. He expressed concern about the escalation of the conflict in eastern DRC, its humanitarian consequences and the risk of regional conflagration.
- UNHCR has released its updated [Position on Returns to North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri](#), reaffirming that 'persons fleeing conflict and violence from North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri may meet the criteria for refugee status under the 1951 Convention' and 'are likely to be in need of international protection under UNHCR's broader mandate criteria.' Given the ongoing insecurity, the situation in these provinces and surrounding areas 'challenges the feasibility of safe and dignified return.' It thus urged states not to forcibly return individuals from these areas until conditions improve to ensure safety and dignity.
- On 4 March, UNHCR issued a [media briefing highlighting the international protection needs of those fleeing eastern DRC](#). It called on states to register all asylum seekers from the DRC and process their asylum claims through 'fair, transparent and efficient procedures.'
- Despite operational challenges, UNHCR remains active across North and South Kivu, working alongside local partners. In North Kivu, it continues to support displaced communities in sites like Lubero and Oicha, while in South Kivu, **over 42,000 refugees receive life-saving assistance**. Where access is constrained, efforts are being reoriented towards safer return areas, such as Nyiragongo and Rutshuru, which have recently welcomed 51,000 and 200,000 returning IDPs, respectively. The focus remains on protection monitoring, housing, land and property (HLP) support, shelter, Core Relief Items (CRI), and Cash-Based Interventions (CBI)
- In collective centers and displacement sites around Goma and nearby areas, UNHCR and its partners continue to assess the needs and vulnerabilities of displaced people to provide protection and explore shelter solutions. **In Butembo, North Kivu, UNHCR and its NGO partners engaged 143 people, including 21 girls, in educational discussions on gender-based violence (GBV)**, the consequences of rape, women's empowerment, and access to and control of resources.
- This week, **UNHCR participated in a joint field mission with OCHA, the CCCM Cluster, and others to assess displaced people in residual sites and collective centers around Goma**. The team visited the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) school, now sheltering 57 households, including 18 families who returned after failed attempts to go home due to insecurity. Restrictions hinder their ability to rebuild at former IDP sites. The team also visited Stella Carter public school, hosting 100 households unable to return due to insecurity and lack of transport. Many displaced families hope to return home if conditions improve.
- On 6 March, **UNHCR, in collaboration with the National Commission for Refugees (CNR), held a focus group discussion with refugees in Lusenda Camp, Fizi Territory, South Kivu**. The session brought together refugee representatives and Congolese police (PNC) stationed at the camp to discuss measures to strengthen security. CNR and PNC

officials stressed the importance of maintaining the camp’s civil, humanitarian, and apolitical nature while limiting movements.

- The latest [WFP mVAM assessment \(19–22 February\)](#) highlights the dire conditions for IDPs in North and South Kivu. IDP sites around Goma are nearly empty, with half of those displaced returning to devastated home areas. Many returnees live in improvised shelters, and food insecurity is severe, with 90% reporting poor or borderline consumption. Access to water, sanitation, and healthcare remains inadequate, while income sources are scarce—some relying on daily labor, agriculture with no land access, or even begging. Though market prices have dropped slightly, they remain high due to ongoing instability and liquidity challenges.
- [OHCHR](#) has expressed grave concern regarding alleged attacks on hospitals, including with regards the safety and wellbeing of at least 130 sick and wounded men who were reportedly abducted last week from two hospitals in Goma. OHCHR called for the ‘immediate release’ of those abducted and ‘return them to hospital so that they can continue their medical treatment.’
- The [Humanitarian Coordinator](#) in the DRC, Bruno Lemarquis, issued a statement expressing deep concern regarding the growing number of incidents of targeted violence against civilians, medical and educational infrastructure, and humanitarian personnel in North and South Kivu. The HC called on all parties to protect civilians and respect their obligations under International Humanitarian Law (IHL).
- The [Education Cluster](#) continues to highlight the colossal impact of the recent unrest in eastern DRC on children’s education. As of 3 March, the Education Cluster estimates that at least 775 schools in North Kivu (of at least 1,483 schools) remain closed. In South Kivu, 1,111 schools were closed as of 13 February 2025.

Regional Updates

- Since the beginning of the year, over 82,000 people from DRC have sought protection in neighbouring countries, including some 61,500 individuals who have been granted prima facie refugee status in Burundi. This week saw an increase in new arrivals to Zambia and Uganda.
- The latest figures on new arrivals to neighbouring countries are reflected in the [Eastern DRC Displacement Dashboard](#) and [Burundi CORE East DRC Situation](#), available on the [Operational Data Portal](#). Additional information on the DRC Situation is available on [Global Focus](#).

| Country | Total New Arrivals* since 1 Jan (as of 6 March) | Arrivals in Past 7 Days |
|--------------|---|-------------------------|
| Burundi | 63,078 | 2,406 |
| Uganda | 20,519 | 3,794 |
| Zambia | 1,439** | 112** |
| Rwanda | 888** | 29** |
| Tanzania | 233 | 46 |
| TOTAL | 86,157 | 6,386 |

*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 groups reflects that returnee populations and third-country nationals may also have specific international protection and humanitarian need

** Figure as of 5 March 2025

Burundi

- On 7 March, UNHCR issued a press statement highlighting the **growing strain on aid efforts in Burundi as the country experiences its largest influx of Congolese refugees in decades**. Nearly 63,000 people have arrived in less than a month. In the current constrained funding environment, Burundi is one of many countries where an urgent injection of support is needed. Without it, more lives will be put at risk.
- On 6 March, UNHCR and the Government held the first inter-agency coordination meeting to strengthen the joint response to new arrivals. Attended by Government, UN, and NGO partners, **the meeting reinforced the Refugee Coordination Model (RCM) as the key framework for managing the refugee response in Burundi**.
- **UNHCR is working with partners to define their financial requirements to respond to the emergency, which will be included in an updated Regional Refugee Response Plan (R-RRP)**. This plan will outline both emergency needs and support for the existing refugee population and host communities. The emergency requirements will also form the basis of the Burundi Inter-Agency Emergency Appeal.
- **UNHCR has hosted several high-level visits to highlight the urgent needs of people forced to flee**. On 26 February, the Ambassadors of South Africa and Tanzania visited new arrival sites in Cibitoke. This was followed by visits to the Musenyi refugee settlement on 3 and 5 March with the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) and the World Bank.
- **As of 6 March, 63,078 people have fled from the DRC into Burundi**, with most arriving in Rugombo, Cibitoke Province, crossing the Rusizi River. Currently, 45,206 refugees (8,107 households) are sheltering in the Rugombo stadium, with 10,592 individuals (2,010 households) already registered. Makeshift camps have also been observed on the DRC side of the river, suggesting that more people may cross if the situation worsens. Beyond Rugombo, approximately 17,000 new arrivals are spread across five additional sites.



Rwanda

- In recent weeks, the number of new arrivals from the DRC to Rwanda has remained low, averaging around six per day, while UNHCR and its partners continue to monitor the situation closely. The updated Inter-Agency Contingency Plan is under review by the Government of Rwanda and awaits approval.

Tanzania

- A total of **46 Congolese were registered in Tanzania in the past week**, bringing the total number who have arrived since the beginning of the year to 233.

Uganda

- As of 6 March, **20,519 people have arrived from DRC since the beginning of the year**. Most arrivals continue to transit through the Nyakabande and Matanda transit centres- both of which are critically overcrowded- prior to relocation to reception centres and refugee settlements.
- There has been a sharp increase in arrivals from the DRC via the Sebagoro landing site on Lake Albert. **Between 3 and 6 March, around 600 individuals arrived, with more than 400 seeking international protection**. The majority fled villages around Bunia, including Tchomia and Blukwa, citing fears of violence in Ituri Province. Efforts are underway to expedite their relocation to Kagoma Reception Centre in Kyangwali, and additional transportation support is needed.
- **The high volume of cross-border movements has placed immense pressure on transit centers, which are now operating well beyond their capacity**. To ease overcrowding, efforts are underway in collaboration with the Government and partners to streamline arrival procedures and ensure the swift transfer of people from the border to transit centers and refugee settlements. This, in turn, has increased logistical demands, requiring substantial additional resources.
- **Response capacity has been further strained by funding challenges, significantly impacting the provision of health services for new arrivals**. This has weakened efforts to control communicable diseases, including Ebola, Mpox, and cholera, making the response more challenging.

Zambia

- The number of new arrivals in Zambia has **increased over the past 7 days, with 112 arrivals recorded, almost double the previous week**. Overall, over 1400 individuals have been registered since the beginning of the year.

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