

EASTERN DRC SITUATION

28 March 2025



Sikuja, a Congolese mother of six, is no stranger to Rugombo, Burundi—first displaced here as a child, she has returned decades later, once again fleeing violence in eastern DRC. ©UNHCR/Charity Nzomo

HIGHLIGHTS

- The security situation across eastern DRC remains highly volatile. Human rights violations, including reprisal killings and abductions, continue to be reported.
- On 26 March, 175 Rwandan refugees (54 households) were voluntarily repatriated from Goma to Rwanda in safety and dignity. This brings the total number of returns from North Kivu in 2025 to 967.
- 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.
- According to the latest [Integrated Food Security Phase Classification](#) report, a record 27.7 million people are in the grip of acute hunger in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), amid ongoing conflict linked to massive displacement and rising food prices.
- The [Joint Virtual Summit](#) convened between East African Community (EAC) and Southern African Development Community (SADC) heads of state on 24 March validated the outcomes of the 17 March Joint EAC-SADC Meeting of Ministers
- Over 108,000 people have fled from DRC to neighbouring countries since the beginning of the year. While the number of new arrivals being recorded in Burundi over the past seven days has decreased, Uganda continues to observe a daily average of 600 new arrivals over the past seven days.

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

- **UNHCR’s protection monitoring continues to reveal alarming levels of violence against civilians across both North and South Kivu.** In territories such as Walikale, Rutshuru, Masisi, Nyiragongo, Lubero, and Fizi, reports of grave abuses by armed groups persist—including killings (often in reprisal attacks), abductions, and widespread sexual violence—highlighting the urgent need for protection, support, and accountability.
- **On 26 March 2025, 175 Rwandan refugees (54 households) were voluntarily repatriated from Goma to Rwanda in safety and dignity.** This brings the total number of returns from North Kivu in 2025 to 967, representing 64.5% of the annual repatriation target achieved in under three months. As part of the process, best interest assessments were conducted for five refugee children who were among the returnees. UNHCR’s Sub-Office in Goma coordinated with UNHCR in Rwanda to complete the data transfer requests for all returnees.
- A rapid assessment by the **Shelter Cluster reported extensive destruction of shelters and looting of humanitarian supplies, particularly in Bukavu and Idjwi.** In Bukavu, 17,861 households (around 107,166 people) are in need of shelter and essential household items, according to DIVAH and Caritas. In Idjwi and Kalehe territories, more than 30,000 displaced households are living in precarious conditions, as reported by ACTED, Médecins d’Afrique, Caritas, UNHCR, and INTERSOS. The response is hindered by limited access, land constraints, and delays in finalizing sub-agreements.
- **According to [OCHA](#), the security situation in Ituri has sharply worsened amid heavy clashes.** Since February, attacks against civilians—especially IDPs—have increased, with critical infrastructure also targeted. On 24 March, an attack on the Loda displacement site in Djugu reportedly killed six IDPs. Since 18 March, over 27,000 people have fled Fataki and Djugu Centre. Insecurity has also forced several humanitarian organizations to suspend operations, **leaving over 300,000 people—both IDPs and host communities—without access to vital services.** Tensions remain high, with a growing risk of further escalation.
- **According to the latest [Integrated Food Security Phase Classification](#) report, a record 27.7 million people are in the grip of acute hunger in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC),** amid ongoing conflict linked to massive displacement and rising food prices. On a scale of one to five – where five indicates famine – 3.9 million people in DRC are classified as IPC Phase 4, which indicates “emergency” levels of hunger - and a 23.8 million are enduring Phase 3 “crisis” levels.
- At the Mulongwe refugee site in Fizi Territory, which hosts Burundian refugees, UNHCR’s partner AIDES **distributed agricultural inputs—including watering cans, spades, rakes, sprayers, paddy seed, and twine—to 10 market gardening associations supporting refugee livelihoods.** They also monitored the planting of sweet potato vines as part of efforts to promote food security and self-reliance.
- **The [Joint Virtual Summit](#) convened between East African Community (EAC) and Southern African Development Community (SADC) heads of state on 24 March** validated the outcomes of the 17 March Joint EAC-SADC Meeting of Ministers which laid out a roadmap for immediate, medium and long-term measures to ‘attain sustainable peace and security in eastern DRC’. The summit also confirmed a group of five ‘facilitators’, comprising former African Heads of State, to lead negotiations around the implementation of these peace-building measures.
- **According to [IOM](#), as of March 2025, approximately 1.2 million people (226,140 households) were displaced in North and South Kivu due to intensified fighting, while roughly 1.8 million people (355,105 households) returned to their places of origin.** This reflects a decrease of 781,696 IDPs and an increase of 1,009,024 returnees compared to its previous rapid crisis analysis assessment in December 2024.

- UNHCR, in collaboration with its partner INTERSOS and local community mechanisms, continued protection monitoring activities in the field. **Through this joint effort, the voluntary return of approximately 715 households—comprising 3,576 individuals—was reported in Lweba village, Fizi Territory.**
- **Three awareness-raising sessions on peaceful coexistence between IDPs and host community members were held in Lac-Vert (Goma), Nzulo (Masisi Territory), and Kiziba 2 (Nyiragongo Territory), reaching 55 people,** including IDPs, returnees, and host community members. In Nzulo, the session helped address a land dispute that arose when returning IDP families found their homes occupied. The discussions contributed to identifying the root causes of the conflict and engaging local authorities and community leaders on their role in promoting dialogue and conflict resolution.
- UNHCR’s urban partner, AIDES, **conducted monitoring visits to seven schools where 32 refugee children are enrolled at the primary level.** Of these, 28 were present, while four were absent—one of whom has been out of school since early January and is considered to have dropped out. With UNHCR support, the parents of 31 pupils were able to pay first-term school fees in full. However, a significant number of refugee secondary school students were unable to sit for the second-term exams due to unpaid fees.

Regional Updates

- **As of 27 March, over 108,000 people have fled the DRC to neighbouring countries since the beginning of the year,** the majority of whom have arrived in Burundi and Uganda. The number of new arrivals in Burundi in the past week has declined significantly, while Uganda continues to record a daily average of over 600 individuals daily for the past seven days.
- The [Burundi Inter-Agency Refugee Response Plan](#) for the DRC Emergency Situation and [Emergency Appeal](#) has been released.
- While not directly related to the situation in eastern DRC, **ethnic and inter-communal violence in Bolobo Territory in Mai-Ndombé Province between 21 and 22 March has led to the displacement of more than 5600 people** to the Republic of the Congo.
- 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 27 March unless specified)	Arrivals in the Past 7 Days
Burundi	70,001	157
Uganda	34,082	4,257
Zambia	925 (as of 24 March)	35
Rwanda	1,495 (as of 26 March)**	182**
Tanzania	1,682 (as of 26 March)	103
TOTAL	108,185	4,734

*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 Rwandan refugee returnees.

Burundi

- The [Burundi Inter-Agency Refugee Response Plan](#) for the DRC Emergency Situation and [Emergency Appeal](#) to support refugees arriving from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has been released. A total of 16 humanitarian partners will work together to

assist approximately 110,000 refugees expected to arrive in Burundi, as well as refugee returnees and other arrivals. To carry out this response effectively, US\$76.5 million is required. This emergency plan will also be integrated into the revised Regional Refugee Response Plan, ensuring a coordinated effort across the region.

- Following an order by the Cibitoke Provincial Governor, **the Rugombo stadium—formerly used as a temporary shelter for Congolese refugees—was closed, and all occupants were relocated.** Over 400 individuals were transferred to Musenyi and Cishemere, while some opted to return to the DRC. The site has since been repurposed as a reception centre for Burundian returnees from the DRC, with over 1,100 returnees assisted by UNHCR as of 26 March. UNHCR remains present to address ongoing protection and relocation needs.
- The **Cishemere Transit Centre in Cibitoke Province currently hosts 946 individuals (326 households), including recognized refugees, newly arrived prima facie refugees awaiting profiling, and asylum seekers of other nationalities.** UNHCR and its partners continue to provide key services such as protection support, water supply, emergency latrines, and the distribution of food and non-food items. However, the centre faces critical challenges, including severely limited food rations and a pressing need for mosquito nets amid high malaria risk.
- The **Musenyi refugee camp is being expanded with some 10,111 new arrivals transferred to the site, bringing the current total population to 13,147.** Additional tents have been procured to support the expansion. The site is expected to host up to 15,000 people; however, further discussions with the provincial governor are ongoing to secure additional land to meet potential future needs.
- **The Cibitoke Zone and surrounding areas currently host approximately 6,166 individuals, of whom 90 percent are Congolese refugees, with the remainder being Burundian returnees.** Due to limited shelter capacity, around 2,000 people are staying in tents, while about 4,166 others have sought shelter support from the local community. Registration and relocation efforts continue to facilitate the transfer of refugees to Musenyi refugee camp.
 - UNHCR and partners have activated a protection desk to identify vulnerable individuals and provide specialized support. Despite daily water supply by the Red Cross and regular food distribution by Caritas, severe shortages persist, affecting many families. Street Child UK is providing daily nutritional porridge for approximately 350 young children.
 - Child protection assessments identified numerous unaccompanied and separated children, who are receiving psychosocial care, material assistance, and family tracing through the Red Cross.
 - A cholera outbreak has been confirmed among refugees, with 11 cases reported as of 25 March. Patients are being treated at a Cholera Treatment Centre managed by district health authorities and MSF. Preventive measures include mass sensitization, soap distribution to 850 households, active case finding by community leaders, installation of handwashing stations, and improved water storage. Significant gaps remain, including shortages of essential medicines and inadequate sanitation infrastructure.
 - Concurrent vaccination campaigns have successfully immunized the majority of refugee children against measles, rubella, polio, and other vaccine-preventable diseases.

Rwanda

- A steady number of Rwandans continue to return home from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Since January 2025, Rwanda has received 967 returnees, including 175 this week alone.

Tanzania

- There has been a reduction in the number of new arrivals in the past week, with approximately 100 recorded in the last seven days compared to 500 the previous week.
- To strengthen service delivery for asylum seekers, **a joint needs assessment on protection, shelter, and WASH facilities was carried out this week at the NMC transit centre in Kigoma**, northwestern Tanzania. The assessment was conducted by the UNHCR, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA), and partners, including the Danish Refugee Council and the Norwegian Refugee Council.
- The current absorption capacity at the NMC transit center is 1,000 persons and will be upgraded to 1,500 as the number of new arrivals continues to increase. **On 28 March, 187 new arrivals were relocated from NMC to Nyarugusu Refugee Camp.**
- **689 asylum seekers are currently at the reception shelters in Nyarugusu**, pending Level 2 registration and relocation to the designated zones or plots.

Uganda

- **As of 28 March, over 34,000 people are estimated to have arrived in Uganda from the DRC, a five-fold increase in the number of arrivals from the DRC recorded over the past two years.**
- Civilians report fleeing due to severe violence—including **killings, sexual violence, kidnappings, forced recruitment by armed groups as well as hunger, disrupted livelihoods, and the breakdown of essential social services** in affected regions in eastern DRC
- Despite funding challenges, efforts to **reduce overcrowding continue, with 1,566 refugees relocated from Nyakabande and Matanda Transit Centres to Nakivale Refugee Camp on 28 March.** In Sebagoro, 46 new arrivals were transferred to Kagoma Reception Centre on 27 March for further registration, healthcare, and nutritional support.
- **Persistent overcrowding at transit centres heightens protection concerns, including risks of gender-based violence, family separation, and disease outbreaks.** Health interventions remain crucial, evidenced by isolated TB cases and referrals of conflict-related injuries for urgent medical attention.

Zambia

- The number of asylum seeker arrivals in Zambia has remained steady, **with 35 individuals recorded over the past seven days. This brings the total number of arrivals since the beginning of the year to 925.** While not large in scale, the consistent flow underscores the continued need for monitoring and support to ensure timely assistance and protection.

Republic of the Congo

- More than **5,600 asylum seekers fleeing inter-communal violence in Bolobo and Qamu territories (Mahdombe Province, DRC) have arrived in the southern Republic of Congo since the beginning of 2025.** The refugee influx is notably intense in Guen Bar near the border with the DRC, where 1,891 people arrived within five days, averaging about 350 arrivals daily.
- **While the majority of the arrivals are being hosted by the host community, approximately 1,500 refugees are temporarily staying at a primary school that is closed for the current school holidays.** However, with classes soon resuming, there is an urgent need to relocate refugees to alternative accommodations. Existing arrangements within classrooms are inadequate, and UNHCR and authorities are considering establishing temporary shelters or utilizing community hangars as interim reception sites.

- **The water supply for refugees and host communities is severely limited.** Of the 12 boreholes drilled, only two are functional, providing an insufficient amount of only five litres per person per day—well below minimum humanitarian standards. Urgent interventions are required to enhance water availability and sanitation conditions.
- **Coordination efforts are underway between the Ministry of Health, humanitarian actors, and technical and financial partners to address significant health concerns among the refugees.** Key issues identified include low vaccination coverage, malnutrition, cases of diarrhea among children, and considerable distances to health facilities and referral hospitals

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