

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Conflict-related displacement in North Kivu

CRISIS IMPACT OVERVIEW

In January 2024, violent incidents between the March 23 Movement (M23) and the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) increased in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) province of North Kivu. Besides M23, the Islamic State-affiliated Allied Democratic Forces, Mayi Mayi groups, the Wazalendo, and Nyatura militias also operate in eastern DRC (CFR accessed 15/06/2024; UN SC 21/02/2024; Le Monde 19/12/2023; ACLED 04/03/2024). By January 2024, the use of explosives and remote violence, specifically shelling and air strikes, had quadrupled compared to the average in 2023. **The escalation in violence is displacing a significant number of civilians and increasing casualties from shelling and different types of attacks** (IOM 11/06/2024; ACLED 04/03/2024). Since 2021, M23 attacks have been increasing in North Kivu. After surrendering in 2013, M23 resumed armed activities in 2021, with the group swiftly capturing some territories in southeastern North Kivu by 2022. There have since been several episodes of escalation, particularly since March 2022 (IPIS 04/04/2024; ICG 20/03/2024; AJ 08/06/2024; Reuters 05/11/2013).

Currently, **DRC has one of the largest IDP numbers in the world, with over 7.3 million spread across the country and 2.4 million returnees by April 2024**. January–April saw an additional 940,000 IDPs and 378,000 returnees in the country (OCHA 15/05/2024). Between the start of 2024 and 5 June, three indiscriminate bombings of IDP sites killed 18 and injured 32. In overcrowded IDP camps, people feel unsafe. Because of heavy artillery and armed elements, camp security incidents have also increased, endangering displaced populations (MDM 05/06/2024).

North Kivu hosts the largest refugee population in the country, totalling approximately 164,000 in April 2024 (UNHCR 21/05/2024). The large number of refugees and asylum seekers, as well as IDPs and returnees, is likely to aggravate the province's already complex humanitarian situation.

2.6 million people in North Kivu need humanitarian assistance (HI 05/03/2024). Priority needs include protection, food security, WASH, health, and education (REACH 09/06/2024). Across DRC, more than 25.4 million people, equivalent to 22% of the total population of 113.6 million, need assistance in 2024 (ICRC 13/03/2024).

After M23 and the FARDC clashed in May, many Rutshuru and Kibumba students fled. Because of conflict trauma, some youth are studying for state exams away from home. Approximately several hundred school graduates who remain in areas under M23 occupation do not have access to these tests (Africanews 07/05/2024).

Anticipated scope and scale

Despite pleas for a peaceful conflict resolution from several regional and international entities, such as the UN and the Governments of Algeria, Burundi, France, Guyana, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, the UK, and the US, the efforts of peacekeepers and local authorities to promote dialogue and reach an agreement to stop hostilities have mostly failed (IOM 08/05/2024; UN SC 27/03/2024). The conflict is expected to continue, likely worsening the overall humanitarian situation in North Kivu.

DRC President Félix Tshisekedi has pushed for the full withdrawal of MONUSCO by the end of 2024 (ACSS 20/05/2024). The security conditions in some areas may deteriorate, likely affecting humanitarian response coordination.

Allegations to the M23 of Rwandan support heighten regional tensions. Recent accusations have increased diplomatic tensions and strained relations between neighbouring countries (IOM 08/05/2024). Specifically, strained relations between Rwanda and Burundi have closed border crossings since January (UN SC 24/04/2024; TNH 04/04/2024). Rwanda has denied supporting M23 (Africanews 31/03/2022).

The conflict in North Kivu since 2021 has been impeding agricultural activities and restricting farmers' access to crop cultivation areas. Consequently, the total crop production for 2024 is anticipated to be lower than the past five-year average (FAO 06/06/2024).

Humanitarian constraints

The conflict has greatly affected the main roads surrounding Goma, the capital city of North Kivu, and neighbouring areas, rendering them inaccessible. The obstruction has significantly impeded civilian mobility, the transportation of goods, and the distribution of essential humanitarian assistance (IOM 08/05/2024).

Violence in Masisi and Rutshuru territories in North Kivu is further hampering humanitarian organisations from providing essential assistance to isolated populations, worsening existing challenges (UN 14/04/2024).

On 30 May 2024, ICRC suspended food aid to displaced people in the North Kivu towns of Bulindi, Burangiza, and Kanyabayonga as conflict intensified between government forces and the M23 in Kanyabayonga. Aid distribution had started on 24 May and was supposed to last for ten days (ICRC 04/06/2024).

CRISIS IMPACTS

Displacements

According to the Population Movement Commissions (CMP), **in April 2023, there were 2.75 million displaced people and 1.34 million returnees in North Kivu**. As of 28 May, 1.77 million IDPs and nearly 682,000 returnees, out of the total figures, were displaced because of the conflict between M23 and the FARDC (IOM 11/06/2024; OCHA 15/05/2024).

About 56% of the conflict-related displaced people live in host communities, while 44% live in displacement sites, such as shelters and camps. They experience precarious conditions in each location and need food, water, and healthcare services (ICRC 04/06/2024; IOM 08/05/2024). Years of deadly clashes in Ituri, North Kivu, and South Kivu have forcibly displaced people several times (NRC 06/06/2024).

There are reports of people returning to villages in Masisi Territory and the city of Sake in southern Masisi, after a month of clashes forced them to seek refuge in neighbouring towns. The returnees have expressed concern about the growing presence of rebels in Sake and nearby Bweremana city. This presence has resulted in increased insecurity, structural damage in villages, livelihood losses, and inadequate humanitarian assistance, leading to persistent humanitarian needs (Radio Okapi 03/06/2024).

Protection

Between the start of 2024 and 5 June, three indiscriminate bombings of IDP sites resulted in at least 18 fatalities and 32 injuries. As a result, people feel unsafe in overcrowded IDP camps. **Heavy artillery and armed elements in camps have also increased security incidents, endangering displaced populations** (MDM 05/06/2024). In May alone, stray bullets killed at least nine people, including four children, and injured 22. In Masisi, at least 40 houses were looted, 43 bombs were dropped, and 22 clashes were registered in the same month (INTERSOS/UNHCR 10/06/2024).

There are **increased reports of fighting and displacement separating children from their parents**, although the total number of unaccompanied and separated children is unknown (STC 08/02/2024). There are also reports of M23 forcibly recruiting children during fighting in Rutshuru and Masisi territories (Radio Okapi 30/01/2024). There have also been cases of child recruitment in the FARDC (UN Peacekeeping 09/06/2023).

Many **gender-based violence (GBV) and abuse cases are underreported, meaning the prevalence is likely significantly higher than recorded**. On average, the camps record 50 GBV incidents per week (NRC 06/06/2024; MDM 05/06/2024). Many women are afraid to report GBV because of stigma and fear of reprisal from perpetrators (UNFPA 24/05/2019). Displaced women venturing into the forest to gather firewood for sale and for their families are frequent targets of sexual assault and rape (NRC 06/06/2024).

In May 2024, North Kivu reported 164 cases of child abuse (INTERSOS/UNHCR 10/06/2024). As with GBV, child abuse cases are underreported, so the actual number is likely higher.

88% of grave violations in North Kivu occur in combat zones during the retreat of conflicting parties or in armed group-controlled areas (INTERSOS/UNHCR 10/06/2024).

Health

Because of conflict-related disruptions of essential services and infrastructure, medical care and essential supplies are difficult to access (IFRC 27/05/2024). **The constant influx of injured people in North Kivu has overwhelmed the healthcare system** (Newvision 18/02/2024).

Poor WASH conditions in IDP sites have been contributing to a rise in cholera and diarrhoea cases since the influx of IDPs. Some makeshift camps also lack water access (UN SC 21/02/2024; Oxfam 22/02/2024). In 2023, North Kivu was already experiencing the most severe effects of the worst cholera crisis in eastern DRC since 2017 (UNICEF 18/08/2023). **Between the start of 2024 and 14 April, there were 7,815 cholera cases registered in North Kivu – the highest in the country** (Govt. DRC/WHO 30/04/2024). In 2023, North Kivu was also one of the provinces worst affected by DRC's largest measles epidemic since 2019 (WHO 22/09/2023; Crisis24 08/05/2023).

There is a lack of proper maternal healthcare in North Kivu. Approximately 30 high-risk pregnant women from remote villages give birth without healthcare each month in the Village d'Accueil at the general reference hospital in Walikale, 150km east of Goma (MSF 04/04/2024).

WASH

There is a lack of potable water in the crowded IDP sites in Goma (UN SC 21/02/2024). **Goma is experiencing a water shortage as its adduction system has reached capacity, and displaced people fleeing the conflict significantly increase the city's population** (Africanews 01/06/2024). In Rusayo 1 camp (located close to Goma), IDPs have access to only 3L of water per day, well below the international standard of 15L, and there is only one shower for every 500 people

(NRC 15/02/2024). There are reports of hosts charging IDPs a fee equivalent to USD 0.40 to use their showers and latrines, which many cannot afford. These constraints force people to travel several hours for water, exposing women, in particular, to violence (Oxfam 22/02/2024).

Education

By 28 March, violence had closed approximately 190 out of a total of around 6,800 schools in North Kivu since the start of 2024. In 2023, violence affected a total of 540 schools; including 24 taken over by armed groups, ten directly targeted by attacks, and 29 serving as emergency shelters for displaced families. **School closures in the region have deprived approximately 270,000 children of education**, exposing them to the risk of lacking the fundamental skills necessary for their future development (STC 28/03/2024 and 09/05/2023; DW 09/08/2023). Children affected by school closures are more vulnerable to the protection risks prevalent in North Kivu, including early marriage and armed group recruitment (UNICEF 15/10/2023; STC 28/03/2024; NRC 06/06/2024).

After M23 and FARDC forces clashed in May, many students in Rutshuru and Kibumba had to flee. Some of these youth are preparing for state exams away from home (Africanews 07/05/2024).

Agricultural livelihoods and food security

The conflict in North Kivu continues to disrupt agriculture activities and restrict farmers' access to crop-growing areas (FAO 06/06/2024). This could affect the already precarious food insecurity situation in the province by considerably decreasing the productivity of agricultural products and increasing hunger. **Restricted access to areas under M23 control is isolating Goma from the surrounding regions, hampering food production and distribution** (UN SC 21/02/2024).

In January 2024, 2.63 million people were experiencing acute food insecurity in North Kivu. Approximately 48,000 children under the age of five were experiencing severe acute malnutrition (OCHA 25/02/2024). Limited access to markets and livelihoods is likely to aggravate food insecurity in the province, where, according to IPC projections in September 2023, more than 2.7 million people (31% of its population) were projected to experience Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse food insecurity between January–June 2024. This figure includes nearly 170,000 people in Goma or 20% of its population (IPC 29/09/2023).

The prices of major food items in DRC markets are unusually high and continue to increase. In April 2024, staples such as beans cost 5% more than in the previous year and 31% more than the five-year average. Mixed bean prices were 16.9% higher than in 2023 and 46.21% higher than the five-year average. Cassava prices were 18.04% higher than in 2023 and 69% higher than the five-year average (FEWS NET 30/04/2024).

DRIVERS OF THE CRISIS

Conflict between M23 and FARDC in eastern DRC

North Kivu is currently experiencing a highly complex and protracted conflict with the presence of multiple armed factions, including M23, the FARDC, and their respective allies (IOM 11/06/2024). The conflict between these two groups has resulted in a significant displacement of people and a growing population requiring humanitarian aid and essential resources (food, shelter, healthcare), which are still very challenging to access (IOM 01/03/2024).

On 23 March 2009, the Congolese Government signed a peace agreement with M23 (TV5 Monde 27/05/2022). M23 was initially formed in response to the lack of implementation of a 2009 peace treaty between the DRC Government and M23's predecessor, the National Congress for the Defence of the People. M23 called off its initial offensive in 2013 but re-emerged in November 2021, resulting in a nearly thirtyfold increase in activity in 2022 compared to the year before (AI 20/02/2024; CFR accessed 15/06/2024; IPIS 16/11/2023; ACLED 23/03/2023). In March 2022, M23 launched a major large-scale aerial and artillery offensive. Over the following year, the group gained control of large parts of North Kivu, including almost all of Rutshuru and parts of Masisi (AJ 15/02/2024; CFR accessed 15/06/2024; IPIS 16/11/2023). In early March 2023, M23 and the FARDC agreed on a ceasefire, which provided for M23's withdrawal from Rutshuru and Masisi. Both sides repeatedly violated the ceasefire, which expired on 28 December 2023 (IPIS 16/11/2023; UN SC 21/02/2024). By 18 June, there had been no significant progress in the negotiation of a ceasefire between the FARDC and M23.

There are allegations that Rwanda supports M23. This allegation stems from the belief that the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda, a Rwandan rebel group comprising people who took part in the 1994 genocide, has been completely assimilated into the Congolese army and that the Congolese Government is involved in extensive military operations forcibly removing Congolese Tutsi civilians (The Conversation 29/02/2024). Rwanda has denied supporting M23 (Africanews 31/03/2022).

Aside from M23, other armed groups, including the Islamic State-affiliated Allied Democratic Forces, Mayi Mayi groups, the Wazalendo, and Nyatura militias, are active in eastern DRC (CFR accessed 15/06/2024; UN SC 21/02/2024; Le Monde 19/12/2023). The conflict caused by these groups, along with frequent natural hazards, such as volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, flooding, and drought, has internally displaced over six million people in DRC. 97% have relocated to the eastern provinces (CARE 19/02/2024; GFDRR accessed 18/06/2024).

Between 29 March and 26 April, a rise in criminal activity characterised the situation in and around the city of Goma. This happened at a time when the city and nearby displacement sites were experiencing a scarcity of resources and economic opportunities, along with an

increase in the number of weapons. Areas of Masisi (including Bashali-Mokoto, Kamuronza, Mfunyi-Kibabi, and Mfunyi-Shanga) and Rutshuru (including Kanyabayonga and Mutanda) experienced significant and intense spontaneous combat on multiple battlefronts (IOM 08/05/2024).

COMPOUNDING/AGGRAVATING FACTORS

Cross-border displacement from neighbouring countries

Besides having more than 7.1 million IDPs, the country also hosted 526,249 refugees and asylum seekers until 31 May 2024. The majority of refugees were from the Central African Republic (more than 40%) and Rwanda (40%). 23.8% of the total refugee population resided in refugee settlements, while 75% resided in rural areas. The province of North Kivu hosts the largest refugee population in the country, totalling approximately 164,000 people as of 31 May 2024 (UNHCR 14/06/2024). The large number of refugees and asylum seekers, as well as IDPs and returnees, is likely to aggravate the province's already dire humanitarian situation.

Climate-related issues

DRC is highly vulnerable to climate change and has an INFORM climate change risk score of 7.7/10, with extremely high scores in several areas: hazard exposure (7.2/10), hazard vulnerability (7.9/10), and lack of coping capacity (8/10). These scores are primarily the result of the effects of river floods, droughts, epidemics, displacement, and inadequate infrastructure and institutional capacities (EC accessed 10/06/2024).

Floods have been one of the most frequently occurring natural hazards in DRC for the past 30 years, with an average of 35 floods per year across the country (WB accessed 10/06/2024). As a result of climate change, the likelihood of heavy rainfall and its intensity have increased, ultimately causing floods and landslides. The most recent devastating flooding occurred in May 2023. Flooding and subsequent landslides around Lake Kivu devastated communities in DRC, resulting in at least 595 fatalities (WWA 29/06/2024). This will likely limit the capacity of communities to cope with the present IDP influx in North Kivu.

Economic issues

DRC ranks among the five most impoverished nations globally, alongside Burundi, the Central African Republic, Somalia, and South Sudan (WB accessed 08/04/2024). As of 2024, approximately 65 million Congolese people (nearly 65% of the population) lived on less than USD 2.15 per day (WB accessed 08/04/2024; Global Finance 06/05/2024). The national central bank reported that inflation surged to 22.6% in 2023, a significant increase from 9.2% in 2022, primarily driven by the devaluation of the Congolese franc (FAO 06/06/2024).

For further contextual information, please read the following ACAPS report: Democratic Republic of Congo: Conflict in North Kivu.

FUNDING AND RESPONSE CAPACITY

Despite growing access constraints, particularly related to security issues, humanitarian organisations continue to assist affected communities (OCHA 29/01/2024).

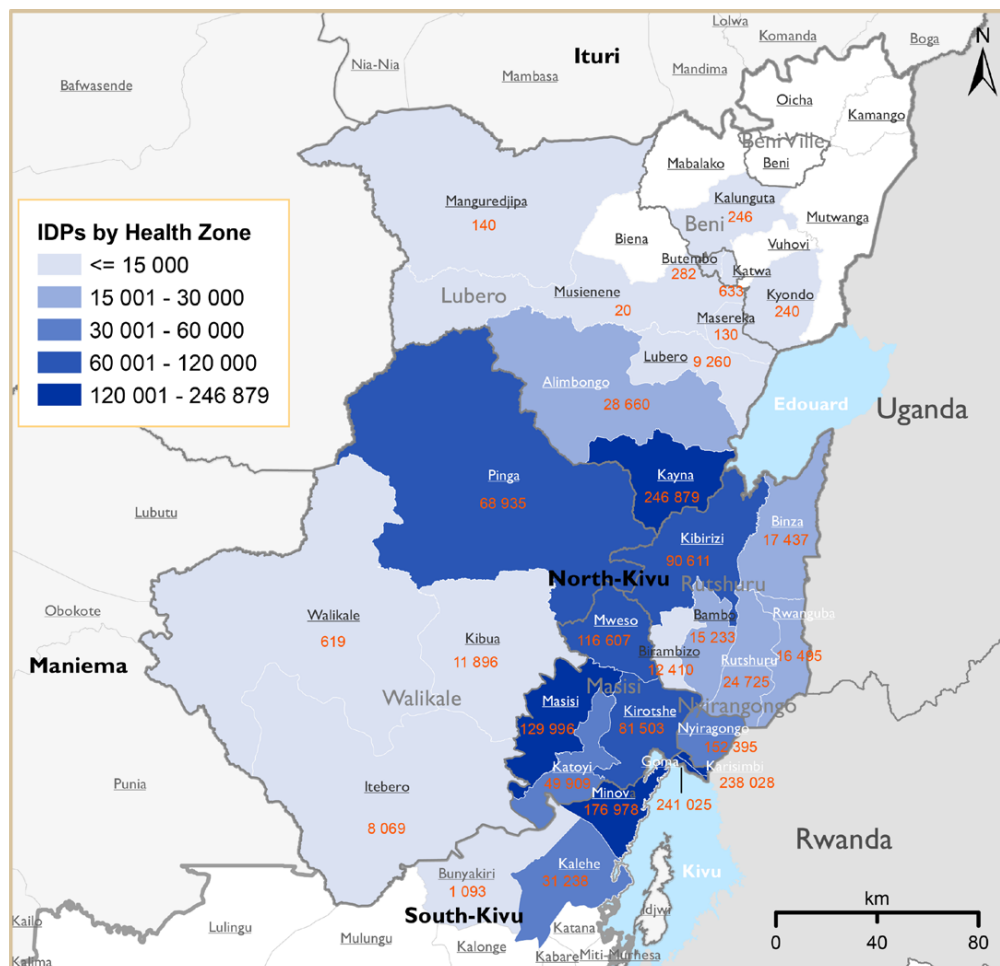
Until 19 March, 101 humanitarian entities were present in North Kivu (OCHA 19/03/2024).

By 30 April, the 2024 UNHCR financial requirement for DRC was 18% funded, while the UNICEF level 3 emergency response appeal in DRC was 25% funded (UNHCR 29/05/2024; UNICEF 28/05/2024).

By 10 June, the 2024 Humanitarian Response Plan for DRC (for USD 2.58 billion) was 23% funded (OCHA accessed 10/06/2024).

MAP OF IDPS AND RETURNEES IN NORTH KIVU BY 28 MAY

MAP - DISPLACEMENT



Source: IOM (11/06/2024)

MAP - RETURNS

