



DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO COUNTRY REPORT

THE STATE OF THE HUMANITARIAN
SYSTEM 2026

1. INTRODUCTION AND CRISIS CONTEXT

This country report supplements the *2026 SOHS*, contributing context-specific insights into the humanitarian landscape in (eastern) DRC that can also inform broader discussions around humanitarian action around the world. The research was designed to include the perspectives and lived experiences of both Congolese people affected by crisis, as well as humanitarian and para-humanitarian actors and stakeholders. Our aim is to contribute to the broader objectives of assessing needs and performance and to highlight the ways that the humanitarian system is adapting in the context of DRC.

1.1 The crisis context

DRC, the second largest country in central sub-Saharan Africa, has endured over two decades of devastating conflict involving numerous armed groups. This protracted instability has fuelled alarming levels of gender-based violence, both as a tactic of war and also as abuse perpetrated by actors within the aid system in DRC (Lusambya, 2024). This is set against a backdrop of a staggering humanitarian crisis, with over 6.97 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) recorded across the country in September 2024 (UNHCR 2024) – one of the highest displacement figures globally. This is compounded by widespread poverty, with 64% of the estimated 113.6 million population living on less than US\$2.15 a day (FSIN 2023). Consequently, in February 2025, the Office of the Humanitarian Coordinator in DRC launched a Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) requiring US\$2.54 billion to address the urgent needs of 11 million people. In all, 21.2 million Congolese people are affected by the convergence of armed conflict, disasters and recurring epidemics (UN News, 2025).



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The humanitarian situation in DRC is exacerbated by the ongoing conflict involving the Congolese Army (Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo, FARDC) supported by the Wazalendo (a reserve armed group affiliated with the Army), and the Rwanda-backed Alliance Fleuve Congo (AFC)¹ and M23 (March 23 Movement) coalition. This conflict is causing massive displacement; huge refugee flows and significant loss of life. Fighting around

¹ The AFC/M23 rebellion movement fights against the Congolese State and its army (FARDC). Fighting resumed in 2022 and has controlled large spaces of North Kivu and South Kivu.

Goma in January 2025 involving heavy weaponry in populated areas resulted in nearly 3,000 casualties, including many children (IMA World Health 2025). In Ituri and North Kivu, regular Allied Democratic Force (ADF) attacks continue to severely undermine human rights, with widespread abuses against civilians. Critically, the 2025 HRP was hugely underfunded at only 8.2%, severely limiting response capacity (Peace Direct 2019).

This research specifically focused on the humanitarian crises stemming from the ongoing conflict in North and South Kivu, particularly the massive displacement around Goma (North Kivu) and Bukavu due to the fighting between the FARDC (allied to Wazalendo) and the AFC/M23 coalition (backed by Rwandan forces). Goma currently hosts around 615,000 IDPs in camps around the city (IOM, 2025). The research also examined the humanitarian consequences of the displacement caused by the Kalehe flooding crisis in May and June 2023.

Notably, this research unfolded against the backdrop of ongoing peace negotiations between belligerent parties in Doha, Qatar, and in Washington DC, United States. It was unclear if these negotiations would yield progress and lead to a visible return of government control and improved security in North and South Kivu during the research period. Being aware of the security challenges, particularly in areas outside the main cities, the initial research phase prioritised conducting key informant interviews (KIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) within safer urban peripheries, adhering to strict security protocols. This adaptive approach allowed for data collection while closely monitoring the evolving security landscape and potential improvements resulting from the Doha and Washington talks. These talks resulted in a peace agreement being signed between DRC and Rwanda in December 2025, though there was widescale evidence of violence continuing in eastern DRC despite this agreement (Al Jazeera 2025). The research team only observed incremental change in eastern DRC in early 2026.

1.2 Responses to current crises and humanitarian presence

Even before the capture of Goma in January 2025 and of Bukavu in February 2025 by the AFC/M23 coalition, humanitarian coordination in both cities was already critical. For instance, a representative of a non-governmental organisation (NGO) in Goma reported that some local organisations were unable to access the cluster coordination systems, resulting in poor coordination efforts (Biferd, 2025). Operations by humanitarian actors and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) both in Goma and Bukavu were still affected by the presence of M23 forces, following the rebels' occupation in January and February 2025 (OCHA, 2026a). However, some interviews and reports (Biferd, 2025) indicated that humanitarian coordination mechanisms were resuming operations.

The 2025 HRP corresponds to the context of both ongoing conflicts, though several interviews indicated that humanitarian actors prefer to operate in zones under the control of the Congolese Government. In addition, funding cuts by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) at the beginning of 2025 sharply reduced humanitarian assistance in the region, leading to a 53% shortfall in the 2026 coordinated response plan for DRC.

