



Briefing Notes Summary

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

DR Congo – January to June 2025

30 June 2025

27 January 2025

M23 rebel group seizes the provincial capital of Goma

According to media reports, the rebels of the Mouvement du 23 Mars (March 23 Movement (M23)) group captured the provincial capital of Goma in the eastern province of North Kivu in the early hours of 27.01.25. The leader of the Congo River Alliance announced this to Reuters news agency. According to the reports, the information could not yet be independently verified. However, local residents have shared videos of M23 rebels patrolling the main streets of Goma after carrying out a suspected lightning attack on the Congolese army. The M23 rebel group is part of the Congo River Alliance, a political-military alliance of rebel groups and political parties that aims to overthrow the government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Over one million people live in Goma, the largest city in the east of the country. Hundreds of thousands of residents are said to have been displaced. Since 2021, M23 has conquered more and more areas of Congolese territory in the border region with Rwanda, which has been under siege for decades. The rebel group has recently ramped up its fighting considerably and has been advancing towards Goma for days now. According to the UN, around 400,000 people have been displaced in just a few weeks since the beginning of 2025. Many people are said to have been fleeing from neighbouring villages and towns for months, constantly driven by the M23 captures, before finally arriving in the city of Goma. With the takeover of Goma by M23, these people have been deprived of their last remaining refuge. According to the UN, the main roads around Goma are now blocked and the city's airport can no longer be used for evacuations and humanitarian operations. According to UN and army officials, 13 soldiers from the international peacekeeping forces in the Democratic Republic of the Congo have also been killed in clashes that erupted with M23 rebels during the fighting that has taken place in recent weeks.

International governments and organisations condemn the heavy fighting between the rebels and the Congolese army. The Congolese government, as well as the UN and many international bodies, are accusing the government of neighbouring Rwanda of supporting the M23 rebel group. There are also believed to be more than 1,000 Rwandan soldiers in the region. A few hours before the takeover of Goma, on 26.01.25, the Congolese Foreign Minister called the deployment of Rwandan troops across the border a declaration of war. In this context, the Democratic Republic of the Congo suspended diplomatic relations with Rwanda. The UN Secretary-General had also reportedly called on Rwanda to withdraw its armed forces from the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and to refrain from supporting the M23. The President of Kenya and chairman of the East African Community (EAC) has called an emergency regional summit for the presidents of both conflict-ridden countries in the coming days, and has said it is up to the two heads of government to promote a ceasefire and a peaceful solution to the conflict.¹

03 February 2025

Fighting in the east: people dead and injured in Goma, UN calls for intervention, demonstrations in Kinshasa

Following the violent capture of the provincial capital and megacity of Goma in the eastern province of North Kivu by the M23 rebel group on 27.01.25 (cf. BN of 27.01.25), at least 700 people have been killed in heavy fighting that raged in the city, according to the UN. A further 2,800 people have reportedly been injured. The UN has warned that the number of dead and injured will continue to rise. The media report that hospitals in the city are overcrowded and are struggling to cope and that bodies are lying in the streets. The UN has called upon the international community to intervene in the escalating conflict, adding that the restricted access for aid organisations in the region and in the city of Goma in particular has heightened the risk of a humanitarian disaster. They say hundreds of thousands of people have been internally displaced.

According to reports, the rebels are now moving south towards Bukavu, the capital of South Kivu province. Corneille Nangaa, who leads an alliance of rebel groups that notably includes the M23 group, has said that they would continue their offensive all the way to the capital Kinshasa. Their primary goal is to overthrow the government of President Félix Tshisekedi.

Meanwhile, the tensions surrounding the situation in the east also reached the capital Kinshasa in the west of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. On 28.01.25, scores of people took to the streets of Kinshasa to demonstrate. The demonstrators attacked the embassies of France, Rwanda, Belgium and the Netherlands. The crowds began looting and setting fires. The police used tear gas to disperse the crowds and secured the buildings of the foreign missions. Embassy staff were reportedly not in any danger. The demonstrators had called on the international community to exert pressure on Rwanda so that the Rwandan government would stop supporting the rebels. The Rwandan government continues to deny both any involvement in the conflict and the allegation that it is supporting the rebels.²

17 February 2025

Eastern Congo: new casualty figures; displacement from IDP camps; advance by M23 in South Kivu

The fighting, in the course of which the Rwandan-backed rebel group M23 (Mouvement du 23 Mars) captured Goma, the capital of the North Kivu region (cf. BN of 27.01.25 and 03.02.25), has claimed more civilian victims than had initially been recorded. According to interim UN figures, around 2,900 people have been killed; other estimates put the death toll at over 3,000. It remains unclear whether these figures include combatants. According to Health Minister Samuel Kamba, over 4,200 injured people have been treated at healthcare facilities. A humanitarian corridor from Rwanda's capital Kigali, agreed between the WHO and humanitarian organisations on the one hand and Rwanda and M23 on the other, is intended to counteract the prevailing shortage of medical personnel and resources. Goma's airport remains non-operational.

Around 700,000 people have reportedly been internally displaced. According to media reports, which also quote UN OCHA sources and HRW, on 09.02.25, M23 ordered thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) who had fled to Goma to escape the fighting to return to their home villages within 72 hours. Camps were subsequently torn down and looted. M23 has rejected this information as "propaganda", saying that no one would be forced to return without security guarantees. M23 and Rwandan security forces are also accused of harassing hundreds of human rights defenders, journalists and civil society representatives.

After M23 declared a temporary unilateral ceasefire, the group reportedly attacked the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) again on 11.02.25. According to concurring media reports, M23 rebels entered the capital of South Kivu, Bukavu, on 16.02.25. The FARDC and Burundian armed forces had already withdrawn from the centre of the city, which has a population of 1.3 million, according to an officer, in order to avoid a bloodbath like the one that had occurred in Goma. As a result, looting took place, including at a large WFP depot, according to reports issued on 14.02.25.

M23 had already captured the important town of Kalehe, currently the epicentre of the epidemic of a new mpox strain, known as clade 1b (cf. BN of 19.08.24), and subsequently also Kavumu airport, which serves Bukavu. The airport is important for FARDC operations and is also used by the UN, according to a statement issued by the UN Humanitarian Coordinator, Bruno Lemarquis, on 12.02.25. There are reportedly no alternative supply routes, such as by water, available either. Even before the current M23 offensive was launched at the start of 2025, there were

around 1.65 million IDPs in South Kivu, over a fifth of the population. These were the result of tensions simmering between population groups and land disputes, but also natural disasters. Before Bukavu was captured, there was also an influx of people fleeing from the M23 rebels advancing southwards. The United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) withdrew from South Kivu in June 2024 as part of the agreed phased withdrawal plan.

The extensive suspension of foreign aid decreed by US President Donald Trump is also said to be having a massive impact on the possibilities of humanitarian aid. According to Lemarquis, the US financed around 70 percent of international aid totalling around USD 1.3 billion for the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2024.

In light of the latest developments, the UN and the African Union have warned against a regional war and a territorial break-up of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.³

Eastern Congo: UNICEF sounds alarm over violence against children

UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell has expressed deep concern over the devastating impact the escalating violence in North and South Kivu is having on children and families. In a statement issued on 13.02.25, she said the recruitment and abduction of children and sexual violence were increasing rapidly. In the week between 27.01.25 and 02.02.25, the number of rape cases treated at 42 UNICEF-supported health centres surged five-fold in just one week. Children accounted for 30 percent of those receiving treatment. UNICEF partner organisations are said to be running out of the drugs used to reduce the risk of HIV infection after a sexual assault. She said children are increasingly being separated from their families, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation, including by armed groups.

The violence is exacting a terrible toll on pregnant women who have been forced to flee multiple times. The Democratic Republic of the Congo is already among the countries with the highest mortality rates globally.⁴

Ituri: many killed in CODECO attack

On 10.02.25, armed men attacked several villages in the Ituri region, also in eastern Congo. According to initial reports, around 51 people were killed in the attack carried out in Djugu territory, including many children. The attack is being attributed, also by MONUSCO, to the militia Coopérative de développement du Congo (Cooperative for the Development of the Congo (CODECO)). In a press release issued on 12.02.25, MONUSCO announced that over 80 civilians had been killed. It said that CODECO's modus operandi using machetes, etc., increases the time it takes for an alarm to be recognised. MONUSCO reportedly expelled the assailants and stepped up measures to protect the population.

CODECO repeatedly carries out attacks in Ituri that include looting and pillaging, and engages in fights with other militias (cf. BN of 09.01.23, 16.01.23 and 24.04.23). According to MONUSCO, the most recent attack also was carried out in retaliation for an attack by the Zaire militia in Djugu territory, in which five people were reportedly killed on 09.02.25.⁵

24 February 2025

UN Security Council condemns Rwanda's support for M23

On 21.02.25, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution S/RES/2773(2025) concerning the recent events in the east of the country (cf. BN of 27.01.25, 03.02.25 and 17.02.25). According to reports, the resolution strongly condemns the offensive by the rebel group Mouvement 23 Mars (23 March Movement (M23)) that is backed by the Rwanda Defence Force. The Resolution says M23 must immediately withdraw from the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, must immediately cease hostilities and fully reverse the establishment of illegitimate parallel administrations in that country's territory. However, the resolution also calls on the Democratic Republic of the Congo to cease supporting the Hutu militia Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR) (Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda) (cf. BN of 02.01.23 and 17.04.23) and calls for the implementation of commitments to neutralise that group. Rwanda and M23 justify their actions in eastern Congo with the endeavour to protect Kinyarwanda speakers and the Tutsi ethnic group (cf. BN of 20.06.22, 25.07.22 and 21.11.22). The head of the UN blue helmet mission MONUSCO, Bintou Keita, had stated before the vote on the resolution that the occupation of North Kivu by M23 severely restricted the mission's ability to protect civilians and carry out life-saving operations in North Kivu.

According to media reports, there was also a mass breakout from Munzenze prison during the capture of Goma. Around 4,000 prisoners are said to have escaped. Hundreds of female prisoners were reportedly raped and burned to death after the women's wing of the prison was set on fire.

President Félix Tshisekedi announced the formation of a government of national unity in response to the situation in the east of the country at a meeting of his "Union sacrée" (Sacred Union) coalition of parties on 22.02.25 (cf. BN of 22.01.24). He continued to rule out direct negotiations with M23.⁶

Eastern Congo: M23 advance along the border with Burundi

Following the largely uncontested capture of South Kivu's capital Bukavu (cf. BN of 17.02.25), M23 is continuing to advance further south. According to media reports, the rebel group reached the town of Kamanyola on 18.02.25. The Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) have reportedly withdrawn again. Burundian troops, which had been deployed in support of the FARDC, are also said to be retreating in order to concentrate on defending their own border. Burundi's army spokesperson has denied this claim, however. Clashes have already been reported in the strategically important town of Uvira on the northern shores of Lake Tanganyika. This town is only around 30 km away from Burundi's economic capital Bujumbura. Fearing an imminent assault, many civilians have fled Uvira. In the past two weeks, 42,000 people have already fled to Burundi, the UNHCR announced on 21.02.25.

M23 is also said to be continuing to advance in North Kivu. In Masisi, several days of clashes have been reported with the self-defence militia Wazalendo. M23 fighters are also located near Lubero (around 250 km north of Goma). FARDC soldiers have reportedly fled.⁷

Opposition politician released from prison

According to a media report issued on 21.02.25, Jean-Marc Kabund, Felix Tshisekedi's ally until 2022, has been released from prison. According to a spokesperson for the presidential office, he received a presidential pardon. Kabund was arrested on 09.08.22 and sentenced to seven years in prison on 13.09.23 for, among other things, insulting the president. Kabund's party Alliance pour le Changement (Alliance for Change (A.CH)) described the prosecution as politically motivated (cf. BN of 15.08.22, 05.09.22, 24.10.22 and 18.09.23).⁸

10 March 2025

Eastern Congo: reward for the capture of rebel leaders

On 09.03.25, the government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo offered a reward of USD 5 million for help in arresting three M23 rebel leaders. According to media reports, they are Corneille Nangaa, Sultani Makenga and Bertrand Bisimwa. In August 2024, the three men had been prosecuted in absentia by a military court and given death sentences. However, the chances of anyone being arrested appear to be slim as the M23 rebels continue to control large parts of the eastern part of the country. M23 had just recently captured large cities such as Goma and Bukavu, killing thousands of people and displacing hundreds of thousands (cf. BN of 03.02.25, 17.02.25 and 24.02.25).

Corneille Nangaa is a former head of the Democratic Republic of the Congo's electoral commission. He now leads the Congo River Alliance, an alliance of rebel groups that notably includes the M23 rebel group. After seizing the city of Goma, Nangaa announced that they would continue their offensive as far as the capital Kinshasa. He said the primary objective was to overthrow the government of President Félix Tshisekedi.⁹

24 March 2025

Concerns about the economy due to conflict in the east

Several Congolese members of the Makutano Network, the largest business network in Central Africa, have warned in a guest article about the impact the conflict in the east of the country is having on the economy. The security situation there continues to exert considerable pressure on the national economy and the private sector in particular. For example, investors are less likely to invest in conflict areas. However, the financial sector is being particularly hard hit. North and South Kivu account for more than 50 percent of the country's microfinance sector. The two provinces are said to form the third-largest banking region after Kinshasa and Katanga and are therefore

a major financial and economic hub, which is currently cut off from the rest of the country as a result of the conflict. There are reportedly difficulties in carrying out transactions, meaning that amounts of money are tied up. Access to cash is also difficult. The telecommunications sector is also suffering as a result of the conflict; entire villages are said to have been cut off from telecommunications.

The state is reportedly also struggling with the effects. For one thing, the loss of taxes and tax-like revenues in the conflict-ridden provinces is problematic. Civil servants have been asked to stop working in the east until further notice, and the administration has been replaced.¹⁰

28 April 2025

Potential peace agreement with Rwanda; ceasefire between government and M23

The foreign ministers of Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo signed a Declaration on 25.04.25 in Washington in which both countries vow to respect one other's sovereignty and refrain from providing state military support to armed groups. According to reports, they commit in the Declaration to resolve conflicts through diplomacy. On 26.04.25, the government and the rebel group Mouvement du 23 mars (M23), which has gained control of large parts of the eastern Congolese North and South Kivu provinces (cf. BN of 27.01., 03.02., 17.02. and 24.02.25), announced a mutual ceasefire. This surprising development was achieved with mediation from Qatar. President Félix Tshisekedi had previously rejected direct talks between his government and M23.

Even though Rwanda denies providing support to M23, it is regarded as certain that it does so. The group recruits primarily among members of the Tutsi ethnic group and from Kinyarwanda speakers. Rwanda considers its security to be actively threatened by the armed group Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Rwanda (FDLR), which is active in Eastern Congo, the members of which include leaders linked to the 1994 genocide by the Hutu against the Tutsi in Rwanda. In common with many armed groups active in eastern Congo, M23 is however said to be also concerned to gain control of the rich mineral deposits there. Coltan from mining, which is said to be controlled by M23, is reported to be exported via Rwanda.¹¹

Kabila alleged to be in Goma; suspension of PPRD party; action against supporters

Former president and senator-for-life Joseph Kabila is said to have travelled on 18.04.25 from exile via Rwanda to the M23-controlled capital of North Kivu province, Goma. According to media reports, Kabila claimed to have come as an "ambassador of peace". The government however considers that there has been confirmation of the presumption that he is a supporter of the rebel Alliance Fleuve Congo (AFC), to which M23 also belongs, and that he was the mastermind behind the re-emergence of M23. The government thereupon suspended the activities of Kabila's Parti du peuple pour la reconstruction et la démocratie (PPRD) across the country. This was said to be a provisional, preventive measure. The government was also said to be preparing to seize Kabila's property and bank accounts, as well as those of several of his close associates, who were also prevented from leaving the country. The PPRD denies that Kabila has been in Goma at all. These are said to be unsubstantiated rumours from social media. The suspension was said to constitute an attempt to muzzle the party.¹²

26 May 2025

Senate strips ex-president Kabila of immunity

According to reports, the Senate in the Democratic Republic of the Congo voted on 22.05.25 in favour of lifting the immunity of ex-president Joseph Kabila, thus paving the way for making him liable for prosecution. Almost 90 senators voted in favour, and five against. The upper house thus backed exposing Kabila to prosecution for alleged support of the M23 armed group, which has taken control of swathes of territory in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with the backing of Rwanda.

The justice minister had stated on 30.04.25 that there was a "substantial body of documents, testimony and facts" linking Kabila to the M23 armed group. This was said to constitute clear evidence implicating him in treason, war crimes, crimes against humanity and participation in an insurrectionary movement.

Kabila commented on the evening of 23.05.25 from an unspecified location in a speech which was broadcast live on YouTube. During his speech, he is said to have hit out at "arbitrary decisions" that had been taken by the

government last month, after “rumours” had surfaced that he had travelled to the eastern city of Goma. It was possible to see the decline of democracy in the country in the manner in which incumbent president Tshisekedi was undermining the constitution, that parliament was failing to hold the president to account, and the justice system was allowing itself to be openly exploited for political ends.

On leaving office, Kabila, who was president from 2001 to 2019, became the first former head of state of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to be awarded the honorific title of senator for life, and with it parliamentary immunity. Kabila had left the country in 2023, but had hinted in recent months at making a comeback and made increasingly vocal criticisms of Tshisekedi. No evidence of his return has however ever emerged. The government has since suspended his Parti du peuple pour la reconstruction et la démocratie (PPRD), and security forces have amongst other things searched several of his properties (cf. BN of 28.04.25).¹³

30 June 2025

Peace agreement with Rwanda signed

The Congolese and Rwandan foreign ministers, representing their governments, signed a peace agreement in Washington on 27.06.25 aimed at ending the decades-long conflict in the east of the country, which was rekindled in 2021. The US administration, which most recently took up the diplomatic initiative, hailed the agreement. Critical voices by contrast voiced reservations that the content of the agreement did not go far enough. The agreement calls for the withdrawal and disarmament of armed groups fighting in the east, but offers few other details.

Both sides have undertaken with the agreement to disarm and disengage the armed groups which they are presumed to be supporting. The government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has long alleged that the armed M23 group, consisting mostly of ethnic Tutsis, receives military support from Rwanda.

Rwanda has repeatedly denied directly supporting the rebels, but nonetheless approved the agreement. The Rwandan government in turn demanded an end to the armed group Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), which was established by members of the Hutu ethnic group and operates on the national territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The ethnic group is linked to the massacres of Tutsis in the 1994 Rwanda genocide. There are however also dozens of other non-state armed groups active in the region, and it is not clear whether they will all abide by the ceasefire.

Particularly the heavy offensive of the M23 rebels in early 2025 led to the seizure of large parts of the country, including the key city of Goma. Thousands of people have been killed and millions displaced since the conflict reignited. Experts criticise that the “human aspect” seemed to be overlooked in the agreement, such as the return of refugees and displaced people. The peace agreement also does not address sexual violence directly, nor does it include any measures for justice and restitution. According to information from the UN, rape has systematically been used as a weapon of war by M23 rebels and other groups. The deal also leaves out key African players who have recently tried to mediate and stabilise the region. The East African Community (EAC) and Southern African Development Community (SADC) are excluded from the agreement. Critics even fear that the peace agreement has an exploitative dimension. Wording contained in the peace agreement on economic cooperation between the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and the USA was criticised as inadequate in light of the region’s mineral resources, given that this mineral wealth had sparked regional disputes in the past.¹⁴

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Imprint

Published by

Federal Office for Migration and Refugees
90461 Nuremberg

ISSN

2943-1107

Valid as of

06/2025

Printed by

Federal Office for Migration and Refugees

Design

Federal Office for Migration and Refugees

Reference source

Publications Centre, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees

www.bamf.de/publikationen

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