

EASTERN DRC SITUATION

April 2026



Convoys of Congolese refugees from Burundi are received in Uvira, South Kivu, at the start of a voluntary repatriation operation facilitated by UNHCR and the Governments of both countries © UNHCR/April 2026

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Facilitated voluntary returns of Congolese refugees from Burundi began in April, with UNHCR and the Governments of the DRC and Burundi organizing two convoys, enabling around 1,400 people to return in safety and dignity to South Kivu.**
- **Spontaneous returns continued in April, with nearly 45,700 people crossing from Burundi into Uvira through the Gatumba–Kavimvira area since the border reopened on 23 February 2026. UNHCR and partners assisted returnees, but with limited services and livelihoods in many areas of return, needs remain significant.**
- **Diplomatic engagement gained momentum in April as key parties to the conflict in eastern DRC met in Geneva and agreed on measures to strengthen humanitarian access, civilian protection and ceasefire monitoring. However, the situation remained fragile, with armed clashes still reported in some territories.**

DRC Updates

- **Facilitated voluntary returns from Burundi:** On 23 and 30 April, two facilitated voluntary return convoys brought 1,452 Congolese refugees from Burundi, back home to Uvira, in accordance with tripartite agreements between UNHCR, and the Governments of Burundi and the DRC. Authorities framed the operation as a step toward restoring state authority and normalcy in South Kivu.
- Upon arrival in the DRC, the returnees were transferred to the Kavimvira Transit Centre, from where UNHCR and its partners conducted registration, protection screening, referrals for people with specific needs, and initial assistance such as essential items and transport to onward destinations within South Kivu, subject to available capacity and resources.
- UNHCR and its partners also provided multi-purpose cash assistance to 462 returnees, covering the cost of housing, school fees for children aged 5–18, menstrual hygiene items for women aged 12–49, and secondary transport to their home villages. Distributions are continuing.
- UNHCR is planning for an estimated 1,000 returnees per week and is working with partners and authorities to reinforce reception and transit capacity, including improving transit centre conditions, strengthening protection monitoring, and pre-positioning assistance to support safe onward movement within eastern DRC and early reintegration.
- It is worth noting that UNHCR's non-return advisories primarily directed at States, advising against forced returns / deportations, non-voluntary repatriations and premature cessation of refugee status, do not prohibit or negate the fundamental right of refugees to voluntarily return to their country of origin at any time as outlined in the 1951 Refugee Convention and UNHCR guidelines. The current facilitated return operation supports individuals who have made a free, informed, and individual decision to go back home, with UNHCR ensuring that each participant has received accurate, up-to-date information about conditions on the ground. The returnees are being transferred to government-controlled areas with established protection presence. UNHCR and partners will continue monitoring conditions and can suspend operations if the situation deteriorates. Meanwhile, the non-return advisory remains in place and reflects UNHCR's assessment that conditions for large-scale returns to eastern DRC including South Kivu are not yet met. This operation does not constitute an endorsement that those conditions have changed.
- **Spontaneous returns to the DRC:** Spontaneous returns of Congolese refugees from Burundi have continued since the reopening of the border on 23 February 2026, with 45,590 people returning to Uvira as of 30 April 2026. Joint monitoring by UNHCR, the National Refugee Commission (CNR) and INTERSOS continued. These returns highlight the strong link between improved security conditions in some areas, political progress, and the potential for large-scale returns.
- Improved security in parts of Rutshuru territory, North Kivu, also enabled 6,230 internally displaced persons (IDPs) to return to Kibirizi health zone earlier in April.
- Conditions in return areas, whether for refugee or IDP returnees, however, remained fragile, with limited basic services and livelihood opportunities, requiring sustained investments to support safe and durable returns whenever conditions allow.
- The signing of an MoU between UNHCR and WFP in Bukavu, South Kivu, also reinforced operational readiness by initiating food supply requests, contributing to a more stable assistance pipeline for Congolese voluntarily returning home.

- **Voluntary repatriation from the DRC:** More Burundian and Rwandan refugees from North Kivu and South Kivu returned home in safety and dignity with 18 convoys organized since January 2026, bringing the total number of people voluntarily repatriated to 2,729 refugees (837 households) as of 30 April, including 2,064 Rwandans and 663 Burundians.
- UNHCR and the CNR also transferred 114 voluntary repatriation candidates from way stations and assembly points in Masisi and Rutshuru territories to the Goma Transit Centre, where they are undergoing registration and protection screening in preparation for the next repatriation convoy. In total, 238 individuals (70 families) currently at the Goma Transit Centre are waiting to be voluntarily repatriated to Rwanda in May.
- UNHCR and CNR continued awareness-raising and intention surveys on voluntary repatriation from South Kivu, with both Burundian and Rwandan refugees. While no new return intentions were recorded in Uvira and Fizi, 136 new intentions were recorded in northern South Kivu and along the Kamanyola–Ruzizi Plain axis, bringing the cumulative total to 4,669 individuals awaiting voluntary repatriation to Rwanda and Burundi.
- **Protection monitoring:** UNHCR and its partners conducted protection monitoring across eight territories and 54 axes and documented 1,329 cases during the last two weeks of April. Most incidents occurred in Kalehe, Walungu, Mwenga, Uvira, Kabare, and Fizi and mostly involved violence against women and girls, including rape, recruitment of children by armed groups, and attacks on schools and hospitals.
- **Community-based protection:** UNHCR and its partner INTERSOS handed over three quick-impact projects identified by community-based protection committees in North Kivu. The projects—implemented in Rutshuru and Nyiragongo included four classrooms and a health post, identified and constructed with strong community participation. Three other projects were handed over in Masisi territory, including two classrooms at Kihindo Primary School, a health post in Bukobati, and a peace hut in Kimoka. These projects will improve access to education and healthcare, reduce protection risks linked to long distances and insecurity, strengthen social cohesion and peaceful coexistence.
- **Shelter/Essential items:** UNHCR and its partner CIAUD distributed shelter kits and essential items to 1,000 IDP households in Lemera Health Zone in Uvira territory. The distributions conducted with community leaders and the local IDP committee, provided immediate relief. However, the situation in Lemera requires continued monitoring, regarding transitional shelters, water hygiene and sanitation.

Regional Updates

- Neighbouring countries also continued to bear the brunt of the crisis in eastern DRC, hosting around 1.2 million Congolese refugees and asylum-seekers as of 30 April 2026, including an estimated 245,800 people who fled between January 2025 and April 2026. Burundi and Uganda host the majority of new arrivals, despite spontaneous returns from Burundi since February and facilitated returns in April. Host communities remain overstretched, with critical gaps in shelter, health, water and sanitation services, despite the \$145 million Appeal that covered December 2025-March 2026, underlining the persistently fragile context in the DRC. [Additional funding is urgently needed](#) to meet life-saving needs of refugees, returnees and internally displaced people.

Country	New arrivals in 2026	Total arrivals since January 2025
Burundi	Registration ongoing	142,157¹ (109,000 remaining as of March 2026)
Rwanda	2,205	9,371² (as of 30 April 2026)
Tanzania	329	4,272 (as of 30 April 2026)
Uganda	7,739	86,549 (including 80,740 registered as of 30 April 2026)
Zambia	499	3,606 (as of 30 April 2026)
TOTAL	10,716	245,848

Burundi:

- **Voluntary repatriation and spontaneous returns:** Of the 66,700 remaining Congolese refugees in Busuma, over 20,000 refugees (30 per cent) have expressed their intention to return to Uvira. Ongoing registration will confirm the actual number of people remaining at the site and inform further planning for a more effective response.
- A significant increase in spontaneous returns to the DRC has also been recorded since the reopening of the borders. This has resulted in a notable decrease in populations at the Cishemere and Makombe transit centres, as well as return movements from Busuma and Bujumbura. In the two transit centres, Cishemere and Makombe, hosting an estimated 4,000 refugees, living conditions remain dire, with very limited assistance and protection services available.
- As of 30 April, 66,700 Congolese refugees (about 14,000 households) are hosted at the Busuma site in Ruyigi province. UNHCR and partners continued to provide protection and assistance to the refugees relocated to the site, though significant gaps remain across all sectors.
- **Registration:** Level 2 biometric registration has been ongoing since March and, as of 28 April, nearly 31,200 refugees (7,500 households) have been registered in Busuma, representing approximately 50 per cent of the site's population.
- **Protection monitoring:** UNHCR and its partners continued protection monitoring. Partners identified six new cases of peoples with specific needs (all women with disabilities), bringing the total number to 1,710. Of these, 198 persons received essential items, while 12 wheelchairs and 30 crutches were distributed to persons with disabilities.
- **Child protection and gender-based violence (GBV):** Protection partners continued to provide case management and psychosocial support for children with specific needs, including unaccompanied, separated and at-risk children. 109 birth certificates were issued by civil registry services for children born at the Busuma site. In addition, 793 children are benefiting from language classes (Kirundi and French) as well as mathematics lessons.
- Survivor-centred services such as individual psychosocial support and referrals were also provided for survivors of violence against women and girls at the site. The majority of reported cases concerned sexual violence, accounting for around 92 per cent.

¹ The total does not yet reflect recent spontaneous returns to the DRC since 23 February 2026 and include Burundian refugees who have spontaneously returned from DRC to Burundi since 6 December 2025.

² This total includes Rwandan returnees from DRC.

- A peer support group session was organized by partners for female survivors on various topics, including menstrual hygiene, with the objective of strengthening resilience, providing psychosocial support, and facilitating peer support and experience sharing. All 100 women who participated in this session received dignity kits at the end of the session.
- **Health and nutrition:** During the reporting period, health facilities recorded 12,000 individual consultations, comprising 9,800 refugees and 2,200 host-community members. The main conditions reported were malaria, mental health concerns and diarrhoea. Diarrhoea accounted for 8.5 per cent of consultations, reflecting poor hygiene and limited access to water. Although measles cases have decreased, five new cases were reported. Nutrition screening identified 132 new malnutrition cases, bringing the total number of people under treatment to 977, including 858 children under five and 119 pregnant women with moderate acute malnutrition.
- **Shelter:** More than 60 per cent of the Congolese refugee do not have access to adequate shelters and are exposed to serious protection risks.
- **Water, sanitation and hygiene:** Water supply reached around 437,000 litres per day, providing an average of 6.5 litres per person per day. This amount is still below the Sphere standard of 20 litres. Emergency latrines and showers constructed brought the standards to 82 persons per latrine and 365 persons per shower, respectively, while hygiene promotion activities continued across the site to reduce risks of disease.
- The deterioration of roads and drainage channels in Busuma site is worsening, rendering some routes impassable, including access for water tankers supplying certain areas. Soil erosion is also affecting site infrastructure, particularly emergency latrines, which are gradually deteriorating from the bottom of the pits. This situation poses a risk to the safety of refugees.

Rwanda:

- **New arrivals from the DRC:** From January to April 2026, Rwanda received 190 Congolese new arrivals (114 in Nkamira Transit Center and 76 in Kigali) and 2,015 Rwandan returnees, bringing total arrivals since January 2025 to 9,371.
- **Reception capacity:** The three transit centres currently operating are Nyarushishi, Kijote and Nkamira. Nyarushishi, which hosts returnees from the DRC, has a capacity of 2,000 and currently accommodates 434 individuals. Kijote, also designated for returnees, has a standard capacity of 250, with a maximum of 300, and hosts 317 individuals. Nkamira, which receives new arrivals, has a capacity of 7,200 and currently hosts 2,450 refugees and asylum-seekers from the DRC.
- **Health and nutrition:** Upon arrival, UNHCR and its partners conduct systematic clinical and nutrition screening to identify individuals in need of urgent medical care, including older persons, people with chronic conditions, pregnant and lactating women, and children under five. Screening also enables early detection of measles cases, followed by case management, isolation, and vaccination of children aged 9 to 15 months.
- **Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and Shelter:** UNHCR ensured operation and maintenance of WASH facilities in transit centres for continued services delivery to new arrivals and Rwandan returnees. The WASH coverage was within the standards of 20 litres per person per day and 20 persons per latrine drop hole. The disinfection at key sanitary areas and latrines was regularly done for vector and odour nuisance control. This helped to prevent the spread of diseases among refugees

and returnees. The adequacy of shared shelter facilities was kept through regular maintenance and repairs for all accommodation blocks and renovating electrical installations for lighting.

Tanzania:

- **New arrivals:** From 16-30 April 2026, Tanzania received nine new arrivals from the DRC, bringing total arrivals since January 2026 to 329 and to 4,272 since renewed violence in eastern DRC in January 2025. New arrivals said they were coming from Baraka, Fizi, and Uvira, and they entered Tanzania through land routes. Overall arrival numbers remained low.
- **Education:** From 24-25 April 2026, UNHCR facilitated training delivered by a DRC Ministry of Education official for Congolese refugee teachers and education focal points in Nyarugusu Camp on the Ministry's new electronic student information management system. The training enhanced the quality, reliability, and accessibility of student data for evidence-based planning and oversight in line with the DRC curriculum. Tanzania requires refugee children to follow this system while in camps, significantly increasing the cost and complexity of education service delivery. DRC officials who were present also coordinated with education actors on updated guidelines for upcoming Congolese refugee students' examinations in Nyarugusu Camp.

Uganda:

- A total of 2,730 individuals arrived from the DRC between 14 and 30 April, contributing to a cumulative 86,549 new arrivals from DRC since January 2025, with Nakivale Settlement hosting the largest share of the Congolese refugee population.
- Between 16 and 30 April, 1,621 Congolese asylum-seekers and refugees were registered in Uganda, bringing the total number of Congolese registered since January 2026 to 7,166. The cumulative total of registered Congolese asylum-seekers and refugees since 2025 is 80,740.
- The increasing arrivals in Uganda, through Kisoro, are driven by persistent violence in eastern DRC, affecting civilian populations, including attacks by multiple armed groups. Reported incidents include killings, looting, kidnappings for ransom, land grabbing, and worsening food insecurity, significantly undermining community safety and livelihoods. New arrivals reported sudden and unpredictable attacks, resulting in family separation and forcing many of them to flee with few or no belongings.
- Media reports indicate that the Government has intensified measures to curb irregular entry in western border districts particularly Bundibugyo, Ntoroko, and Kasese where most Congolese refugees enter Uganda. According to the reports, the Ministry of Internal Affairs is working closely with internal security structures and local council leaders to strengthen community-level screening and identification of non-nationals. These measures are intended to enhance national security and manage pressure on public services. The development underscores increased government focus on border management, while highlighting the importance of ensuring that such measures are implemented in line with national and international protection obligations.

Zambia/ZAMCO:

- **New arrivals trends:** Between 16 and 30 April 2026, Zambia registered 113 new asylum-seekers from the DRC. Of these, 88 originated from South Kivu, 11 from North Kivu, six from Tanganyika, and eight from other provinces.
- Around 100 of the new arrivals were registered in Meheba Refugee Settlement (North-Western province) and 13 in Mantapala Refugee Settlement (Luapula province). Since the start of 2026,

Zambia has recorded 499 new arrivals from the DRC; around 56 per cent entered via Mpulungu on Lake Tanganyika (Northern province) and then travelled onward to Meheba for registration. This preference reflects structural, economic and social factors, including comparatively better infrastructure, as well as facilitated movement supported by people already living in Meheba.

- In Mantapala Refugee Settlement, Nchelenge District, Zambia, 163 Congolese refugee households received counselling on voluntary repatriation ahead of the first convoy scheduled for May 20, 2026. The sessions covered conditions in areas of return and reintegration assistance in Pweto, resulting in 59 cases registered in the UNHCR database, comprising 180 individuals.
- Malawi registered 152 asylum-seekers from the DRC at Dzaleka Camp in Dowa District (Central Region) during the reporting period. Since the start of 2026, Malawi has recorded a cumulative total of 802 new arrivals from the DRC.
- **Flooding at the Transit Centre:** On 18 April, heavy rainfall caused significant flooding at the B12 temporary Transit Centre in Mantapala Settlement, located in a low-lying area. The facility hosted 218 asylum-seekers (61 households) at the time. Floodwater entered 18 shelters, directly affecting 56 individuals, destroyed food supplies and bedding and personal belongings, rendering shelters uninhabitable. UNHCR and its partners temporarily relocated women and children to the One Stop Centre at the rural health clinic, while men were accommodated overnight at the Inter-Agency Office.
- On 19 April 2026, UNHCR and local government services conducted a joint rapid assessment and found that sanitation facilities at the transit centre were at risk of overflowing. This raised public health concerns, including the potential for water-borne disease outbreaks. Nearby vacant plots and unoccupied houses were also affected, with some sanitation facilities nearing inundation. The 61 households will be relocated to the old transit centre.
- All 61 households at the B12 Temporary Transit Centre received food assistance from the Disaster Management and Mitigation Unit (DMMU). The 18 most affected households also received Red Cross relief items comprising blankets and sleeping mats. While the relocation site has running water, sanitation remains inadequate with toilets nearing full capacity; without improved WASH infrastructure, the risk of disease outbreaks persists.
- **Health:** On 21 April 2026, Zambia's Ministry of Health, with partners under the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, launched a Sub-National Immunization Day (SNID) campaign administering novel oral polio vaccine type 2 (nOPV2), which has been deployed in over 40 countries. The one-week campaign aimed to vaccinate approximately 3.7 million children nationwide, including all forcibly displaced people and newly arrived asylum-seekers.

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