

# DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

An overlooked displacement crisis tops the global figures

Political insecurity in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) aggravated long-standing ethnic tensions and clashes between armed groups in 2016, particularly in the provinces of North and South Kivu in the east of the country. There were more than 920,000 new displacements over the course of the year, the highest number associated with conflict recorded globally. Ninety-three per cent of IDPs cited violence as the main driver of their displacement.<sup>13</sup>

Of the 2.2 million IDPs currently in DRC, 837,000 are in North Kivu and 378,000 in South Kivu.<sup>14</sup> Together they account for 55 per cent of the country's displaced population. The humanitarian situation is increasingly dire, but little seems to have been done to stem the violence, respect IDPs' human rights or address their protection needs.

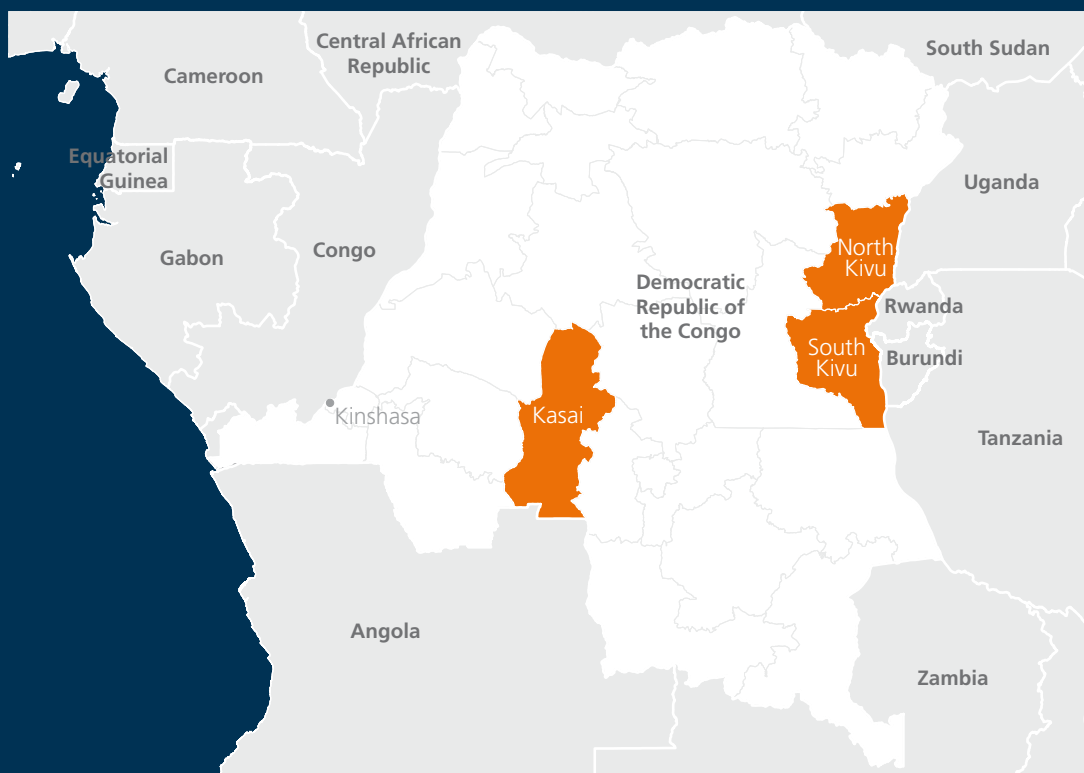
People in North Kivu, who have already endured years of war and disasters, have been left with acute needs. Raids and inter-ethnic and communal clashes between armed groups in Walikale and Lubero territories forced nearly 373,000 people to flee their homes, making up 42 per cent of the province's displaced population as of the end of 2016. Some IDPs have been persuaded to return to their home villages, but many in Lubero remain displaced because of continued insecurity.<sup>15</sup>

The provincial government's call for North Kivu's displacement camps to be closed has complicated humanitarian efforts even further. Five camps were closed in 2016. The authorities justified the move by claiming that the camps harbour anti-government militias and foster violence among IDPs. It has also claimed that several areas of the province have stabilised and that IDPs can return to their homes.

Internally displaced families in Mweso, North Kivu province. Photo: NRC/Ephrem Chiruzza, September 2016



Map: Affected provinces in the Democratic Republic of the Congo



The UN mission to DRC, MONUSCO, has also cited improved security as the basis for reducing its presence in some territories. Whether proper measures will be taken to ensure that IDPs are moved to areas where their protection needs are fully addressed as camps close remains to be seen.

Kasai province in central DRC had remained relatively calm until July 2016, when conflict broke out between a tribal group and the country's armed forces. Brutal fighting affected around 36,000 households, uprooting residents and forcing them to flee to nearby villages and forests.<sup>16</sup> Many parents who remained in the territory have taken their children out of school in an attempt to spare them the violence.<sup>17</sup>

IDPs' protection needs were at their most acute in Beni territory, where civilians have been kidnapped, maimed and executed.<sup>18</sup> Nearly 200,000 people have been displaced by armed conflict between foreign militias and government forces that continues to uproot vulnerable men, women and children and shows no sign of easing.

Inter-communal violence also led to kidnappings, rape and killings in Rutshuru. At least 15,000 IDPs were seeking shelter in the territory and required emergency assistance following their displacement from Nyanzale town and nearby areas in

mid-2016. Humanitarian agencies working in the area have said that the violence has hindered their ability to help.

Funding for the response to the crisis in DRC has become a major concern. Data shows a steady decline in donor governments' commitments over the last four years, and only 60 per cent of pledged funding was provided in 2016.<sup>19</sup> The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has said that it needs at least \$748 million to implement its 2017 action plan to meet the needs of more than 7.3 million people in need of aid.<sup>20</sup>

DRC's crisis is often overlooked by media and an international community focused on the latest disaster or conflict to capture their attention. This will have dire consequences for several million people in desperate need of assistance. The country has been in conflict for the best part of 20 years, but evidence shows that the situation for the most vulnerable has deteriorated severely in recent years.

Humanitarian agencies that bear the brunt of the protection burdens are having to work ever harder and longer in very dangerous conditions, and with ever fewer financial and human resources.