

# Democratic Republic of the Congo

## Quick facts

Number of IDPs	1,400,000
Percentage of total population	2.2%
Start of current displacement situation	1996
Peak number of IDPs (and year)	3,400,000 (2003)
New displacement in 2008	At least 400,000
Returns in 2008	At least 400,000
Causes of displacement	Internal and internationalised armed conflict, generalised violence, human rights violations
Human development index	177



It was estimated in December 2008 that almost 1.4 million people were displaced by the various conflicts which have killed several million people and continue to affect the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The situation was dynamic with at least 400,000 returning home and at least 400,000 being newly displaced by armed conflict, generalised violence and widespread human rights violations during the year. The UN's Emergency Relief Coordinator described the situation in North Kivu Province in November 2008: "Congolese civilians found themselves in the worst of all worlds: subject to attacks, displacement, sexual violence and forced recruitment perpetrated by advancing rebel forces; and to acts of violence, rape and looting carried out by members of the official Congolese armed forces and Mai Mai and other militias."

The majority of the new displacements were in North Kivu, followed by Ituri and Haut-Uélé Districts (Orientale Province) and South Kivu. People there have been displaced several times since the mid-1990s; the latest wave followed fighting between government forces and militia of the National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP), and between the CNDP and the Hutu Democratic Liberation Forces of Rwanda (FDLR) and local Mai Mai militia groups. The violence and displacement in North Kivu between government and CNDP forces peaked between the end of August and the end of November. In Haut-Uélé, Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) attacks led to the displacement of tens of thousands of villagers at the end of 2008, and DRC's armed forces worked alongside those of Uganda and Southern Sudan to root the LRA out.

All these groups, including government soldiers, have frequently attacked civilians to seize food and belongings, or punish people for perceived or real allegiance to other groups. Armed non-state actors have also abducted children to fight. The government's troops are ill-equipped, poorly trained, and barely paid. All of them prey on the population, and aim both to defeat historic enemies and secure territory in order to benefit from the extraction of natural resources.

Most IDPs live with host communities. In North Kivu, they have sought shelter in camps, with hosts in areas out of the immediate firing line, or in forests. The majority are support-

ing themselves or relying entirely on the limited resources of their hosts, as humanitarian access has been severely limited by the fighting.

Thus eastern DRC's IDPs face a range of severe threats. IDP sites have come under attack. They have been victims of widespread killings, rapes, and the destruction and looting of their homes and camps. The vast majority of IDPs and returnees lack access to basic infrastructure such as health centres, schools and roads, clean water, food, seeds, tools, clothes and straw to build houses. In North Kivu, the conflict in 2008 led them to lose access to their fields and so miss the planting season, and caused the disruption of education for many children. There were many reports of separated families in 2008, and few IDPs in North Kivu had the identity documents needed to help them to be reunited.

IDPs at particular risk include children, and particularly those separated from their family, and female-headed households and pregnant women. Women and children are at great risk of sexual violence, and children risk being recruited in armed groups. People from ethnic groups which are in the minority in their displacement area are also particularly vulnerable.

The government has tasked the Ministry for Solidarity and Humanitarian Affairs to address the situation of IDPs, but it has had no impact and there has been no legislation to support their protection. Some national NGOs have distributed food and other items, provided counselling for rape victims, and training and education; they have also worked with international NGOs and UN agencies to register and monitor IDPs.

International responsibility for IDP protection has fallen in the first instance to MONUC. The UN peacekeeping mission has had some successes, but was overwhelmed during the second half of 2008 due to a lack of manpower and clear rules of engagement to protect civilians. The cluster approach was introduced in 2006 and did lead to a better-coordinated response. UN agencies and international NGOs have provided assistance to IDPs in zones they could access, and have made efforts to reach IDPs in host communities despite the access difficulties.

Where peace has returned to their areas of origin, people have been able to return home and restart their lives with very little external help.