

Displaced women living with host families take part in a focus group discussion in Swima, South Kivu. Photo: IDMC, March 2015

Conflict in DRC is intractable, and the internal displacement crisis it has caused is multifaceted. Despite apparent similarities among the waves of displacement, their causes, dynamics and perpetrators vary from one situation to the next. Our estimates show that over the past 15 years, there have consistently been more than a million IDPs in the country, and in peak years such as 2003 more than three million.

The implication is that DRC is faced with a range of both protracted and new displacement situations, sometimes in the same places, which in

turn means IDPs have varying needs and challenges. Both national and international responses need to take this complexity into account if all IDPs are to achieve durable solutions.

There were an estimated 1.5 million IDPs in the country as of December 2015, the ninth highest figure worldwide. Most have fled violence and human rights abuses committed by armed groups and the military, but inter-communal tensions and disputes over land and the control of natural resources have also caused displacement, as have natural hazards. Conflict and violence are concentrated in eastern DRC, as are the country's IDPs. More than half live in the provinces of North and South Kivu, and the remainder in Orientale, Katanga, Maniema and Equateur.

Multiple and chronic displacements are commonplace, particularly in the Kivus but also in other provinces. Many IDPs in North Kivu have been displaced two, three or even more times in the last 18 months alone, and surveys suggest that a significant majority in North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri have been displaced more than once since 1993.⁶⁸

Each time people flee, they lose almost everything and are forced to start rebuilding their lives from scratch. They lose their homes, material assets and often their jobs and livelihoods. Their children's education is interrupted, and they become separated from their communities and support networks. Their sense of cultural identity may suffer, and the trauma and upheaval of fleeing conflict and violence leave many with psychological and physical scars.

Whether it is the first or the fifth time that a person is displaced in DRC, they face a long struggle to try to recover their assets, access basic services and re-establish their social and psychological wellbeing. The longer and more often they are displaced, the more difficult these challenges become, and the more their ability to cope is eroded.

