

Democratic Republic of the Congo
Protection of Civilians Report 2021

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This report is the culmination of a collaborative research effort to satisfy the requirements of a Brown University Group Independent Study Project at the Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, facilitated by Professors David Polatty and Theodore Shanks. It provides an overview of key facts, data, and analysis of issues related to civilian protection, civilian harm, and humanitarian concerns in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2021.

Acronym Glossary:

AWSD = Aid Worker Security Database

ECHO = European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations

EV = Electric Vehicles

EVD = Ebola Virus Disease

FY = Fiscal Year

IDP(s) = Internally Displaced Person(s)

MLC = Movement for Liberation of the Congo

MNC = Congolese National Movement

NIAC = Non-international Armed Conflict

OCHA = UN Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

PMC = Private Military Contractor

RCD = Rally for Congolese Democracy

(RMNCAH+N) = Reproductive, maternal, newborn, child, adolescent health and nutrition

SGBV = Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

UN = United Nations

UNFPA = UN Population Fund

UNHCR = United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

WASH = Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene

WFP = World Food Program

WHO = World Health Organization

Executive Summary

This report covers our analysis of and recommendations for the protection of civilians and amelioration of the most pressing humanitarian issues facing the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The report covers the following topics: background, geography and climate, food insecurity, health impacts, aid worker security, violence against civilians, impacts on vulnerable populations, displacement, geopolitical implications. It concludes with a set of recommendations on how to prepare, mitigate, and respond to these humanitarian issues. This report is the culmination of a collaborative research effort to satisfy the requirements of a Brown University Group Independent Study Project at the Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs.

Background

Conflict

For outside observers, the cause of the conflict currently ravaging the eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is nearly impossible to decipher. The origins of the present fighting are rooted in the nation's struggle for independence and the tumultuous history that followed. The DRC achieved independence from Belgium on June 30, 1960, after a burgeoning nationalist group – the Congolese National Movement (MNC) – pressured the Belgian authorities to hold parliamentary elections. The MNC's leader, Patrice Lumumba, became the country's first Prime Minister just one week before independence was officially granted. After expressing sympathy with the Soviet Union and threatening to nationalize the Congo's natural resources, the United States and Belgium covertly backed a 1965 coup led by a Congolese Army Colonel named Joseph Mobutu, who succeeded in deposing and executing Lumumba.

Colonel Mobutu's staunch stance against Communism ensured significant Western financial and political support despite his abhorrent human rights record. Consequently, a significant amount of foreign aid allocated for the development of the DRC was siphoned by Mobutu and his allies; the colonel adopted a similar approach to internal government funds, allowing the DRC's infrastructure to deteriorate dramatically from its zenith in the early 1960s. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Mobutu's importance to Western nations waned and his position became increasingly tenuous. In 1997, after nearly 33 years in power, Mobutu was ousted by a Rwandan-backed militia led by Laurent-Desire Kabila.

In the twilight years of the Mobutu regime, the situation in the Eastern Congo became highly volatile, the result of Rwandan Hutu militants who participated in that nation's 1994 genocide escaping anticipated reprisals. Those militiamen allied themselves with Mobutu's forces in a bloody campaign against ethnic Tutsi in the DRC. That campaign prompted the invasion of Kabila's forces, setting off the First Congo War (1996-1997). Kabila, after declaring himself the new leader of the DRC, dismissed Rwandan officers from his forces, fearing they would try to depose him. As a result, those officers formed a new movement called the Rally for Congolese Democracy (RCD), which began attacking Kabila's military. In response, the Ugandan government sanctioned the creation of another rebel group called the Movement for the Liberation of the DRC (MLC), which joined the RCD in its efforts to depose Kabila. That alliance instigated the Second Congo War (1998-2003), a conflict involving nine other nations and at least 25 non-state armed groups (NSAGs) that resulted in well over five million casualties.

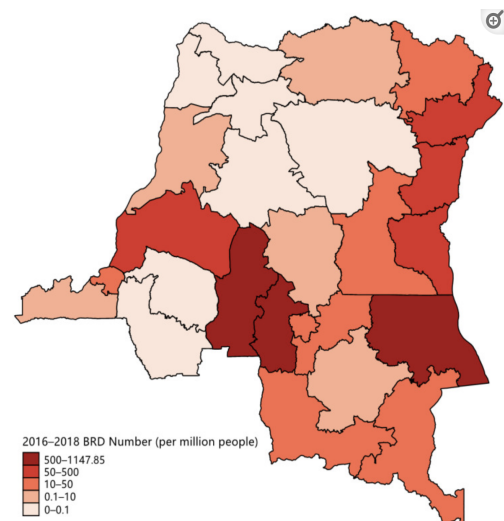
In 2001, Laurent-Desire Kabila was assassinated. His son Joseph Kabila succeeded him and initiated multilateral peace talks bolstered by a United Nations (UN) peacekeeping force. After a series of negotiations and a highly contested multi-party election in July 2006, Kabila

ultimately was elected president in October of that year. In 2008, a Congolese general named Laurent Nkunda, defected along with a large group of soldiers, and began an armed rebellion in the eastern region of Kivu. In 2009, the Rwandan army was permitted to enter the DRC to capture Nkunda and end the rebellion, which they succeeded in doing. A tentative ceasefire was reached before another rebel group, known as the M23, instigated a new conflict; M23 was able to briefly seize the vital city of Goma before a UN intervention and government forces were able to contain the insurgency in November 2013.

Since 2013, ethnic conflict, armed insurgencies, and foreign-backed rebellions have destabilized the DRC – particularly in the mineral-rich eastern provinces. In 2022, the fighting involved at least 130 armed groups in the North and South Kivu provinces alone; many of these groups are thought to be connected to the Rwandan or Ugandan governments.¹ While the motivations behind the insurgencies vary, the primary drivers of the current violence are financial incentives – namely control of natural resource deposits – or political factors, including the repulsion of government forces from certain regions.

Basic Geography and Climate

At 2,344,858 square kilometers, the Democratic Republic of Congo is the second largest country in Africa. The DRC borders nine other African nations, as well as a small portion of coastline along the Atlantic Ocean. Situated on the equator, the climate and its cycles vary greatly between the northern and southern parts of the country; while the northern and western parts of the country are hot and humid with dense



¹ “World Report 2020: Rights Trends in Democratic Republic of Congo” (Human Rights Watch, January 14, 2020), <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/democratic-republic-congo#>

tropical rainforest covering much of the landscape, the southern highlands are cool and dry, with savannas and dense grasslands. The Congo Basin, the second largest tropical rainforest in the world, is the primary source of food, shelter, and livelihood for over 80 million inhabitants of the region.² (The map on the previous page shows the varying levels of conflict severity by province.)³

The Democratic Republic of Congo has been referred to as a “country of paradoxes” because it is rich in natural resources (namely oil, diamonds, and rare earth elements) despite its inhabitants being some of the poorest in the world; 64% of the country lives on less than \$1.90 USD a day.⁴ The DRC is also uniquely vulnerable to climate change. Due to the natural cycle of wet and dry seasons, the nation is extremely susceptible to the negative impacts of climate change, including increased temperatures, more intense weather events, and lengthier dry seasons. These exacerbated climate cycles have the potential to damage roads and infrastructure, lead to harmful erosion and flash flooding, and threaten crop yields.⁵ While these climate risks are daunting for any country, the high degree of political instability, frequency of armed conflict, prevalence of food insecurity, and variety of health challenges that the DRC faces make its citizens uniquely vulnerable.^{6,7,8,9}

² “Democratic Republic of the DRC | Global Climate Change.”

<https://www.climatelinks.org/countries/democratic-republic-congo>.

³ “The Effects of Conflicts and Self-Reported Insecurity on Maternal Healthcare Utilization and Children Health Outcomes in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) - PMC.”

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8305244/>.

⁴ “DRC Conflict: Facts, FAQs, and How to Help | World Vision.”

<https://www.worldvision.org/disaster-relief-news-stories/drc-conflict-facts>.

⁵ “Climate Risk Profile: Democratic Republic of Congo | Global Climate Change.” Accessed May 8, 2022.

<https://www.climatelinks.org/resources/climate-risk-profile-democratic-republic-congo>.

⁶ “DRC Conflict: Facts, FAQs, and How to Help | World Vision.”

⁷ “About OCHA DRC | OCHA.” Accessed May 8, 2022.

<https://www.unocha.org/democratic-republic-congo-drc/about-ocha-drc>.

⁸ World Bank. “Overview of World Bank in DRC” Text/HTML. Accessed May 8, 2022.

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/drc/overview>.

⁹ ReliefWeb. “Top 5 Things to Know about the Violence in the Kasai Region - Democratic Republic of the DRC.”

<https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/top-5-things-know-about-violence-kasai-region>.

Food Insecurity

27 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance and protection in the DRC in 2022. For over half a century, the volatile humanitarian situation has persisted due to the complexity of ongoing conflicts and frequent attacks on civilians, which have left over 5.2 million Congolese citizens as internally displaced persons (IDPs).¹⁰ As the African country with the highest number of IDPs, food insecurity presents an enormous challenge in the DRC. As of the first quarter of 2022, there are 1.3 million children under the age of five affected by severe acute malnutrition, and over 4.8 million children and adults experiencing food insecurity at critical levels.¹¹

The World Food Programme (WFP) describes conflict and hunger in the DRC as cyclical and self-perpetuating. The provinces of North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri experience the highest degrees of war and unrest, and the food insecurity in these areas is exacerbated due to the high number of families hosting IDPs when they are already struggling to feed themselves.¹² The COVID-19 pandemic has also significantly impacted both the price of food, and the DRC's economy writ large. The disruption of goods and services has caused inflation that has resulted in a loss of income and purchasing power, forcing 85% of households in Kinshasa — the nation's capital — to reduce food consumption.¹³ Conflict and climate change have both also contributed

¹⁰ “Democratic Republic of the DRC| IDMC.”

<https://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/democratic-republic-of-the-congo>.

¹¹ “ECHO Emergency Response Coordination Center Flash - DRC”

<https://erccportal.jrc.ec.europa.eu/ECHO-Products/Echo-Flash#/daily-flash-archive/4347>.

¹² “Democratic Republic of the DRC| World Food Programme.”

<https://www.wfp.org/countries/democratic-republic-congo>.

¹³ “Reversing the Adverse Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Democratic Republic of Congo.” World Bank Blogs. Accessed May 8, 2022.

<https://blogs.worldbank.org/africacan/reversing-adverse-effects-covid-19-pandemic-democratic-republic-congo>.

to below-average harvests throughout Eastern DRC, raising concerns of even higher rates of food insecurity in the second half of 2022.¹⁴

A November 2021 press release by Educational Concerns for Hunger Organization (ECHO) declared that the DRC has the largest number of highly food insecure people in the world, the result of “a combination of persistent conflict, insecurity and massive displacement, economic decline and chronic underdevelopment, high food prices, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.”¹⁵ Many studies have shown that food insecurity and conflict are inextricably linked as conflict often leads to food shortages as a result of the accompanying political instability, economic degradation, and supply chain interruptions. Conversely, food scarcity can provide an impetus for conflict and attacks on civilians. Unfortunately, there is very little empirical data available from 2020 and 2021 documenting the specific relationship between the DRC’s food crisis and non-state armed conflicts.

Health Impacts

As a result of the ongoing conflicts, there are a number of different interconnected health issues that acutely affect the population of the DRC, both directly and indirectly. Due to the fact that decades of conflict have all but collapsed the DRC’s healthcare infrastructure, however, it is nearly impossible to differentiate between health challenges considered to be directly derived from conflict and those that are merely co-existent. This section aims to focus on the conflict’s direct impacts on both the health sector and the health of civilians within the past year.

¹⁴ “Food Assistance Fact Sheet - Democratic Republic of the DRC | Food Assistance | U.S. Agency for International Development,” July 12, 2021. <https://www.usaid.gov/democratic-republic-congo/food-assistance>.

¹⁵ ReliefWeb. “Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) – Food Insecurity (IPC) (DG ECHO) (ECHO Daily Flash of 12 November 2021) - Democratic Republic of the DRC.” Accessed May 8, 2022. <https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/democratic-republic-congo-drc-food-insecurity-ipc-dg-echo-cho>.

Sector Impacts

Much of the deterioration of the health sector can be attributed to the political instability that has resulted from decades of conflict.¹⁶ Because there is a chronic lack of funding for the sector and no modern precedent of effective management, it is disorganized, corrupt, and wholly lacking proper accountability mechanisms.¹⁷ Healthcare facilities also lack adequate equipment, supplies, and trained staff. To make up for underfunded facilities, the sector has high user fees that also make it largely inaccessible to most citizens, especially those most in need. All medical interventions require direct payments, and prescription drugs do not have set costs.¹⁸ A staggering 61% of total healthcare expenditures are derived from out-of-pocket payments on behalf of households. One report by the START Center at the University of Washington also noted that patients who can find access to care do so only “in advanced stages of disease,” when there is little that healthcare workers can do with the resources they have available.¹⁹

Violence stemming from inter-ethnic conflict in the South Kivu province throughout 2020 resulted in the evacuation of over 40,000 people, including 1,500 pregnant women. During these clashes, it’s estimated that 10 health centers were either looted or rendered unusable, while medical personnel abandoned 18 additional centers to flee impending violence.²⁰ Beyond the fallout from that episode - which gravely undermined the healthcare used by thousands of local residents - the COVID-19 pandemic has further burdened neighboring provinces’ health

¹⁶ Naughton B., Abramson R., Wang A., Kwan-Gett T., “DRC Survey: An Overview of Health, Demographics, and Financial Services in Democratic Republic of the Congo” START Center Report to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. March 29, 2017. Accessed May 8, 2022.

http://uwstartcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/START-Center_DRC-Survey_Final.pdf

¹⁷ Naughton, B. et al, “DRC Survey: An Overview of Health, Demographics, and Financial Services in Democratic Republic of the Congo”

¹⁸ Naughton, B. et al.

¹⁹ Naughton, B. et al.

²⁰ ReliefWeb. “Supporting War-Ravaged Health Centers in Eastern DRC - Democratic Republic of the DRC.” <https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/supporting-war-ravaged-health-centres-eastern-drc>.

infrastructure and care systems as IDPs overcrowd facilities.²¹ Despite the country receiving \$47.2 million USD in emergency funding from the World Bank in early 2020 to help respond to the pandemic, ongoing conflicts have made an effective response particularly difficult as citizens continue to be forcibly displaced or injured by violence.²² Further, COVID-19 is not the only infectious disease to reach an epidemic-level in the DRC during this time; the country has waged an ongoing battle against the Ebola virus disease (EVD), combatted the world's worst measles outbreak, and fallen victim to ongoing cholera outbreaks.²³ While the Ministry of Health did officially declare the EVD outbreak over as of December 2021, the eradication effort redirected funding, supplies, and personnel from humanitarian aid projects in conflict zones, putting individuals in these areas at further risk.

Civilian Vulnerability - Maternal Care and Infectious Disease

In early 2010, researchers completed a study examining the impact of violence against civilians as it pertained to healthcare access in North Kivu. Among other things, the study found that while humanitarian aid may have had a positive impact on disease mortality and access to care, the population remained exposed to extremely high levels of violence with few prospects for decreasing the rate of mortality.²⁴ Despite the report being published over a decade ago, its findings remain illustrative of the devastating situation that civilian populations face in the DRC; even when access to life-saving humanitarian aid is available, high levels of violence still places civilians at extreme risk on a daily basis. One particularly challenging aspect of civilian

²¹ “Supporting War-Ravaged Health Centers in Eastern DRC - Democratic Republic of the DRC.”

²² “Overview of World Bank in DRC”

²³ Kasumba, Dacquin M. “COVID-19 Shows That the DRC Must Invest in a Health Research Industry.” The Conversation. Accessed May 8, 2022.

<http://theconversation.com/covid-19-shows-that-the-drc-must-invest-in-a-health-research-industry-144214>.

²⁴ Alberti, K.P., Grellety, E., Lin, YC. et al. Violence Against Civilians and Access to Health Care in North Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo: Three Cross-sectional Surveys. *Confl Health* 4, 17 (2010).

<https://doi.org/10.1186/1752-1505-4-17>

vulnerability in regard to health impacts is that those vectors exist alongside numerous other threats. Civilians are often in danger from random acts of violence and conflict, while also at risk of becoming ill with diseases such as EVD, COVID-19, and cholera, among others. The DRC has had a series of moderate to severe EVD outbreaks over the past decade, the most widespread and deadly of which occurred in 2018.²⁵ Unsurprisingly, the North Kivu province — where much of the country’s violent conflict has taken place — was the first and hardest hit region to experience that outbreak. The DRC Ministry of Health (MoH), in partnership with the WHO has been successful at containing and treating subsequent outbreaks, with under 100 cases occurring in the three years since the initial outbreak. Still, EVD remains a prominent and deadly threat to already at-risk populations.

In terms of COVID-19, the DRC does not have adequate access to testing and therefore is believed to dramatically underreport levels of COVID-19 infection compared to developed nations. Therefore, the number of infections may be misleading, and it is important not to equate the lack of data with a low degree of impact. At the onset of the pandemic, many hoped that it would provide sufficient impetus for a pause in conflict; however, it was immediately clear that not only would this not be the case, the conflict would in many instances escalate, continuing to cause mass displacement that made social distancing and quarantining near impossible.²⁶ Though case numbers and deaths are not accurate, the impact of the pandemic on civilians can be observed through the nation’s overall economic downturn and the increased stress on an already fractured public health system. Because such a high number of individuals in the DRC are battling preexisting conditions such as diabetes and high blood pressure due to low availability of

²⁵ “History of Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) Outbreaks | History | Ebola (Ebola Virus Disease) | CDC,” February 18, 2022. <https://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/history/chronology.html>.

²⁶ The Borgen Project. “The Impact of COVID-19 on Poverty in the DRC,” July 1, 2021. <https://borgenproject.org/impact-of-covid-19-on-poverty-in-the-drc/>.

primary care, the reported percentage of people who contracted COVID-19 and died - 45% of patients with pre-existing conditions as opposed to 2.6% without - is very high.²⁷ The DRC's rate of economic growth also fell from 4.4% pre-pandemic to 0.8% in 2020, pushing approximately four million more people into poverty.²⁸ As of May 6, 2022, the DRC had been able to administer just 881,000 vaccine doses, meaning that just 0.6% of the population was fully vaccinated.²⁹ These low rates can be attributed to both a lack of accessibility to the vaccine, due to logistical issues and excessive stockpiling on the part of developed countries, and vaccine hesitancy caused by anxiety derived from a sordid colonial history of Western medical treatments and experimentation.

Cholera is also a significant problem in the DRC as a result of poor water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) infrastructure and the high numbers of IDPs living in crowded, make-shift camps. Cholera is especially insidious as it can become lethal within hours if left untreated and is highly contagious; it is, however, also much more traceable and preventable than diseases like COVID-19 and EVD.³⁰ Various cholera vaccination campaigns have been implemented, especially in South Kivu and Tanganyika where the outbreaks are the worst. The Global Task Force on Cholera Control allocated approximately 4 million doses and 3,600 health workers - including both vaccinators and community mobilizers - to those areas in late December 2021 to combat the disease.³¹

²⁷ "The Impact of COVID-19 on Poverty in the DRC."

²⁸ "The Impact of COVID-19 on Poverty in the DRC."

²⁹ "The Impact of COVID-19 on Poverty in the DRC."

³⁰ "Democratic Republic of the DRCTargets 2 Million in Cholera Vaccination Drive | WHO | Regional Office for Africa." Accessed May 8, 2022.

<https://www.afro.who.int/news/democratic-republic-congo-targets-2-million-cholera-vaccination-drive>.

³¹ "Democratic Republic of the DRCTargets 2 Million in Cholera Vaccination Drive."

Maternal and early childhood mortality is also an enormous problem in the DRC due to problems stemming from violent conflict, as well as chronically poor health systems, widespread malnutrition and general food insecurity, weak infrastructure, and a lack of medical personnel.³² There has been a “systemic deterioration” of maternal healthcare coverage in the DRC throughout the past decade, with DRC recently being named the “worst place to be a mother.”³³ Power cuts, outdated equipment, poorly-paid staff, and drug shortages all lead to high levels of both maternal and early childhood mortality, with those causes being exacerbated by years of corrupt leadership, fighting, and low levels of federal investment in healthcare.³⁴ In 2015, it was estimated that approximately 258 infants less than a month old would die each day, with 241 stillbirths occurring daily, out of a national figure of 8,800 babies born each day.³⁵ Reproductive, maternal, newborn, child, adolescent health and nutrition (RMNCAH+N) have poorer outcomes in conflict-affected territories, where the availability and retention of skilled personnel, the lack of basic materials and equipment, and the insufficient financial resources to ensure payment, medication availability, and facility running costs are all barriers to providing adequate care.³⁶ Furthermore, sexual assault and violence towards women and girls has also been a prevalent issue as a result of the conflict. Gender-based violence is further perpetuated by a lack of alternative work opportunities in conflict zones, which often forces women and girls to turn to

³² Guo, Fuyu, Xinran Qi, Huayi Xiong, Qiwei He, Tingkai Zhang, Siyu Zou, Hanyu Wang, Rie Takesue, and Kun Tang. “Trends of Maternal Health Service Coverage in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: A Pooled Cross-Sectional Study of MICS 2010 to 2018.” *BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth* 21, no. 1 (November 5, 2021): 748. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12884-021-04220-7>.

³³ “Democratic Republic of Congo Worst Place to Be a Mum.” <https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/blogs/2013/democratic-republic-of-congo-worst-place-to-be-a-mum>.

³⁴ “Congo’s Maternal Mortality Rate Exacerbated by Poverty and Ignorance | Maternal Health | The Guardian.” <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2012/may/11/congo-maternal-mortality-rate-poverty>.

³⁵ ReliefWeb. “Maternal and Newborn Health Disparities: Democratic Republic of the DRC(DRC) - Democratic Republic of the DRC.” <https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/maternal-and-newborn-health-disparities-democratic-republic-congo>.

³⁶ Guo, Fuyu, Xinran Qi et al., “Trends of Maternal Health Service Coverage in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.”

“survival sex” to meet basic needs such as food and health care.³⁷ In early 2019, approximately 17,000 survivors of such violence received humanitarian support from groups such as UNFPA; gaps in data suggest that this estimate is likely far below the real figure.³⁸ Organizations such as UNFPA are working to extend access to reproductive health services to protect girls from this violence and offer women and children the early childhood health support and counseling they need.³⁹ High conflict regions such as the North and South Kivu provinces should increase governmental and international assistance to promote the availability and access to maternal and child health services.

Aid Worker Security

Aid worker security is always a concern in high conflict settings, and the DRC is no exception. In some areas, it is reported that aid workers face the risk of attack on a “near-daily” basis. Humanitarian staff experienced 383 security incidents during the 2020 calendar year, including 10 staff deaths, 19 staff injuries, and 42 kidnappings.⁴⁰ The safety and security threats that humanitarian aid workers face in efforts to carry out their life-saving work fall under three main categories: 1) difficulties and dangers associated with accessing remote areas; 2) lack of health infrastructure and supplies making medical care hazardous; 3) direct targeted attacks.

The first category of threats stems from the long-standing political unrest engendered by a conflict that has resulted in a lack of investment in critical infrastructure. For example, only

³⁷ ReliefWeb. “Urgent Support Needed for Violence-Affected Women and Girls in the Democratic Republic of the DRC- Democratic Republic of the DRC.”
<https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/urgent-support-needed-violence-affected-women-and-girls-democratic>.

³⁸ “Urgent Support Needed for Violence-Affected Women and Girls in the Democratic Republic of the DRC- Democratic Republic of the DRC.”

³⁹ United Nations Population Fund. “Sexual & Reproductive Health.”
<https://www.unfpa.org/sexual-reproductive-health>.

⁴⁰ “DRC Interactive Humanitarian Access OCHA Report.”
<https://interactive.unocha.org/publication/humanitarian-access/drc.html>.

20% of the 6,500 kilometers of roads linking the DRC's 11 provincial capitals are paved. Those that are paved have largely eroded, and rail and river transport systems are similarly dilapidated.⁴¹ Air services are insufficient as well, which results in both a massive delay in the delivery of aid, and increases the likelihood that aid workers will experience security threats on aid missions.⁴² Because of the way the international humanitarian aid system is structured, humanitarian organizations are tasked with negotiating access to areas with afflicted populations. Many of those locations are controlled by armed groups, making the process of simply gaining access in the first place quite difficult.

The second overarching obstacle humanitarian aid workers face is the array of interconnected challenges associated with the delivery and administering of vital health interventions. With a lack of health infrastructure, proper supplies like PPE, and an institutional fixation on solely Western medicinal practices, health workers face threats to both their own physical health as well as threats from aid recipients acting out of fear and misperception.⁴³ For example, in 2019, assaults and shootings of Ebola workers in the DRC became more prevalent as aid recipients and their families acted out of grief for their sick loved ones and widespread misunderstanding of aid workers' intentions.⁴⁴ COVID-19 has also exacerbated economically motivated crimes against health workers due to financial hardship, increased poverty, and 'retreat of the state' in areas where conflict is rampant.⁴⁵

⁴¹ "DRC Interactive Humanitarian Access OCHA Report."

⁴² "DRC Interactive Humanitarian Access OCHA Report."

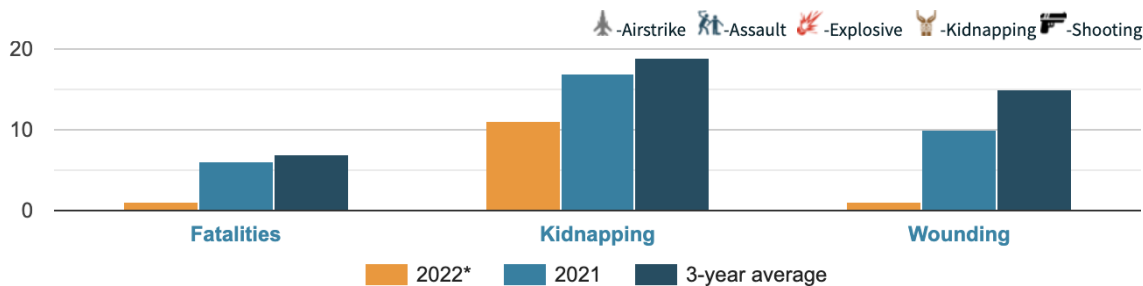
⁴³ Stoddard, A., Harvey, P., Czwarno, M. & Breckenridge, M.-J. (2021). "Aid Worker Security Report 2021: Crime risks and responses in humanitarian operations", *Humanitarian Outcomes*, October 2021. <https://www.humanitarianoutcomes.org/sites/default/files/publications/awsr2021.pdf>

⁴⁴ Stoddard et al., "Aid Worker Security Report."

⁴⁵ Stoddard et al., "Aid Worker Security Report."

Direct attacks on aid workers are coded into three main categories when they are recorded by the Aid Worker Security Database (AWSDB): economic reasons, political/ideological motives, and incidental occurrences. The data shows that economically motivated attacks have increased significantly in recent years. This means that aid workers are at risk not only of directly targeted strikes in conflict areas, but also of common criminality as a result of the deteriorating economic and political systems, and corresponding increase in poverty. Aid worker casualties remained at an all-time high in 2020, with DRC ranking third on the list of most violent nations for humanitarian operators.⁴⁶

AWSDB reports that, “An interviewee representing one of the world’s largest international NGOs reported they had experienced as many incidents of crime in the DRC as in all their other



Aid Worker Security Report: Figures at a Glance 2021

programs combined, and the criminal gangs were keeping pace with their security adaptations. When they reduced the amount of cash on hand, capped program size and limited staff movements to avoid robberies, they saw a subsequent increase in kidnappings for ransom.”⁴⁷ The chart above shows the *reported* incidents of violence against aid workers over the past two years broken down into three categories, highlighting how violence against aid workers evolves in

⁴⁶ ReliefWeb. “Aid Worker Security Report: Figures at a Glance 2021 - World.” <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/aid-worker-security-report-figures-glance-2021>.

⁴⁷ Stoddard et al., “Aid Worker Security Report.”

conjunction with the mechanisms designed to mitigate against those events.⁴⁸ It is clear that the ongoing conflict, and added unrest due to COVID-19, have increased the incidence of both direct and indirect attacks on aid workers, making the tasks of protecting civilians, saving lives, and alleviating suffering much riskier and more challenging to accomplish.

Violence Against Civilians

While violence against civilians has long been an endemic element of the DRC's humanitarian crisis, the recorded instances of attacks on internally displaced populations have risen considerably since 2020. The Congolese government enacted an "enforced state of siege" in May 2021, aimed specifically at reducing violence in the North Kivu region.⁴⁹ That operation has failed to mitigate the violence, as evidenced by several recent high-profile attacks. In the first ten days of February 2022 alone, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported eight "major attacks" in the northeastern Ituri province; the attacks were directed at displaced communities and consisted of killings, arson, and "looting of livestock and food".⁵⁰ On February 1, 2022, another attack in the Djugu Territory of Ituri left 62 internally displaced refugees killed and another 47 injured; additionally, the attack displaced 25,000 people living in the area who fled the violence.⁵¹ Another incident in the Djugu Territory on February 15 involved the massacre of 17 civilians – including 8 children – by militia fighters; a mother and her two children were also burned alive during the raid.⁵²

⁴⁸ Stoddard et al., "Aid Worker Security Report."

⁴⁹ Boris Cheshirkov, "UNHCR Alarmed by Rising Violence Against Displaced Civilians in Eastern DR Congo," UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, February 18, 2022), <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/briefing/2022/2/620f65234/unhcr-alarmed-rising-violence-against-displaced-civilians-eastern-dr-congo.html>.

⁵⁰ Cheshirkov, "UNHCR Alarmed by Rising Violence Against Displaced Civilians in Eastern DR Congo".

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

The perpetrators of those horrific attacks capitalize on the impermanent living situations of internally displaced people, of which there are an estimated 5.6 million in the DRC as of November 2021.⁵³ Without communities or homes to take refuge in, IDPs may become susceptible to informal taxes levied by local militia groups. In February 2022, seven people were whipped for failing to pay an armed group while another six were abducted as ransom; they were subsequently released when the payment was made.⁵⁴ The targeting of IDPs is a perpetual cycle as already displaced individuals are continually forced to flee localized violence by NSAGs. As constant relocation becomes necessary to ensure personal safety, the number of IDPs constantly increases. In just the first three weeks of February 2022, skirmishes in South Kivu displaced over 10,000 people.⁵⁵ Violence against Congolese civilians is not restricted within the nation's borders; with over 800,000 Congolese refugees spread across neighboring nations, often situated in improvised and unmonitored locations, the threats of intimidation, violence, and execution faced by IDPs are also prevalent in foreign camps.⁵⁶

Violence against civilians in the DRC is difficult to measure by virtue of the country's size and inaccessibility. As mentioned previously, humanitarian access is frequently impeded by conflict and dilapidated infrastructure. Despite those impediments, the UNHCR recorded over 1,200 civilian deaths, 1,100 instances of rape, and at least 25,000 total human rights abuses just in the provinces of Ituri and North Kivu from January 1st to September 9th, 2021.⁵⁷ Based on that recorded data, the total number of violent incidents against civilians across the DRC since the September 2021 report may easily be in the tens of thousands.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ "Operational Data Portal – DRC Situation." Operational Data Portal – Refugee Situations. UNHCR, April 3, 2022. <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/drc>.

⁵⁷ "Human Rights Abuses Intensifying in Eastern DR Congo - UNHCR," United Nations News (United Nations, September 10, 2021), <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/09/1099582>.

Impacts on Vulnerable Populations

Women and Children -- Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) can occur at any time, but the incidence rate increases dramatically in conflict zones and during humanitarian crises. The definition of sexual and gender-based violence is defined as “acts inflicting mental, physical, or sexual suffering perpetrated against a person’s will and based on gender differences.”⁵⁸ The DRC is subject to innumerable other social, health, and economic issues caused by the ongoing violence and conflict, and that instability has continued to facilitate the increase in SGBV.⁵⁹ A 2020 DRC-based United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission “documented 1,053 cases of conflict-related sexual violence, affecting 675 women, 370 girls, 3 men, and 5 boys. Of these cases, 177 dated back to previous years.”⁶⁰ There are several groups in the DRC that are responsible for these acts - the majority of SGBV is committed by NSAGs (700 incidents) and the rest were committed by state actors including the Armed Forces, Congolese National Police, and other miscellaneous state officials (353 incidents).⁶¹ As with many countries, there is a lack of accountability, prevention measures, and help for survivors due to the intense stigma in the country. This leads to a lack of reporting of rape or other forms of sexual violence, so any numbers reported are likely grossly underestimates. SGBV in the DRC is both a product of and a tactic used in war and conflict. It is often used to assert control during active conflict, but it is

⁵⁸ Lugova, Halyna, Nandeeta Samad, and Mainul Haque. “Sexual and Gender-Based Violence among Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: Post-Conflict Scenario.” Risk management and healthcare policy. December 9, 2020. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7734039/>

⁵⁹ ReliefWeb. “Gender Based Violence in the Democratic Republic of the DRC: Key Facts and Priorities of Humanitarian Actors - Democratic Republic of the DRC.” ReliefWeb, May 24, 2019. <https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/gender-based-violence-democratic-republic-congo-key-facts-and>

⁶⁰ Secretary-General. “Conflict-Related Sexual Violence.” United Nations. United Nations, March 30, 2021. <https://www.un.org/en/our-work/documents>

⁶¹ Ibid.

also a leftover facet of war and conflict even after it has diminished.⁶² In the regions of North Kivu, South Kivu, Iturim and Tanganyika, there is still widespread sexual violence being carried out by several groups.⁶³ The prevalence of SGBV has been heightened in recent years due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The added instability of the pandemic on top of other social issues increased sexual violence by a staggering 99% in North Kivu.⁶⁴

There has historically been a lack of accountability for perpetrators of SGBV in the DRC. There has been some movement towards justice in this regard, but it is still sorely lacking in appropriate measures to eradicate this problem. Instances of progress can be seen with former armed group commanders Ntabo Ntaberi Sheka and Serafin Lionso being convicted to life in prison for war crimes including rape and sexual slavery.⁶⁵ This trend of sentencing for perpetrators has occurred with several other leaders of armed groups that committed these crimes. However, there has been an absence of other forms of justice for survivors. For example, court-ordered reparations have not been repaid.⁶⁶ The government is working on methods to ensure accountability and create prevention measures. Some of these accountability measures include having national protocols for managing cases of SGBV, creating a database in order to track all incidents of SGBV, and creation of a National Road Map on the Call to Action for the Protection from Gender-Based violence.⁶⁷

⁶² “Democratic Republic of the DRC- United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.” United Nations. United Nations, March 30, 2021. <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/countries/democratic-republic-of-the-congo/>

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ “DRC Takes a Step towards Zero Tolerance against Gender-Based Violence.” UN Women - Africa. UN Women, September 1, 2020. <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2020/09/drc-takes-a-step-towards-zero-tolerance-against-gender-based-violence>

⁶⁵ Secretary-General. “Conflict-Related Sexual Violence.” United Nations. United Nations, March 30, 2021. <https://www.un.org/en/our-work/documents>. Page 12.

⁶⁶ Ibid, page 13.

⁶⁷ ReliefWeb. “Gender Based Violence in the Democratic Republic of the DRC: Key Facts and Priorities of Humanitarian Actors - Democratic Republic of the DRC.” ReliefWeb, May 24, 2019. <https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/gender-based-violence-democratic-republic-congo-key-facts-and>

SGBV Exacerbated by Displacement

As stated previously, the DRC has struggled with refugees and displacement due to the ongoing conflicts. Many of the instances of SGBV are connected to the vast IDP population.⁶⁸ Both refugee and IDP sites may lead to an increased risk of SGBV occurring, as vulnerability is increased and gender inequalities and unbalanced power dynamics are heightened in the absence of defined social networks that govern traditional communities.⁶⁹ The absence of older, and typically male, family members is responsible for the heightened susceptibility of female and adolescent refugees to sexual violence.⁷⁰ This separation often instills a sense of desperation amongst individuals seeking assistance in obtaining life-saving resources and protection; that desperation is often taken advantage of by men operating illicit marketplaces. Women and children are often forced into sexual scenarios in order to obtain resources such as clothing, sanitary products, or promises of legal or physical protection.⁷¹ Survivor and mother of three, Gisele, agonizingly summarized the situation women like her face: “I took refuge in a camp for displaced people where three armed men raped me...physical and psychological pain was immense... distressed that I felt I could not look after my children after the attack. I felt like my family and community completely abandoned me.”⁷² That anecdote alone demonstrates the panoply of threats that women and children face as IDPs, as well as why there is a lack in reporting: the feeling that there is no support. As stated above, there are very few measures in place to help with the actual prevention of SGBV, only short-term measures after the fact to provide relief. However, there is even more of a dearth of this kind of help and targeted support

⁶⁸ Lugova, Halyna, Nandeeta Samad, and Mainul Haque. “Sexual and Gender-Based Violence among Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: Post-Conflict Scenario.” Risk management and healthcare policy. December 9, 2020. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7734039/>

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

for situations in which SGBV occurs in refugee camps.⁷³ Unfortunately, this is a more specific situation that may require its own set of preventative measures to protect women and children.

Displacement

Internally Displaced Persons

Beyond SGBV, there are other humanitarian issues that often arise in refugee sites. Transnational Figurations of Displacement (TRAFIG) conducted research in Bukavu that shows that IDPs in urban settings, such as Bukavu, are often ignored and unsupported by any state or non-state actors.⁷⁴ The continuing violence and instability that has impacted the country since the early 1990s has facilitated one of the world's most dire displacement crises. The number of IDPs has not abated in recent years, and in fact appears to be increasing exponentially; the International Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC) noted that there were more than 1.4 million new IDPs in the first half of 2020.⁷⁵ That is a staggering statistic and demonstrates the overwhelming and ongoing need for support for the displaced population. Despite the violence in the DRC, 88 percent of people that are displaced do not cross borders into other countries and elect to remain within their own country. Consequently, the DRC is ranked in the top three countries with the highest number of IDPs.⁷⁶ That dynamic presents unique challenges in thinking about how to facilitate support for refugees. While displacement is by no means a problem that is unique to the DRC, around 13 percent of the global population of IDPs are Congolese - as of 2019. IDPs are often on the move and are typically displaced multiple times throughout their life, leaving them with only temporary access to resources like housing and

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Katsiaficas, Caitlin, Carolien Jacobs, and Martin Wagner. "Leveraging Networks to Overcome Displacement: Urban Internally Displaced Persons in the Democratic Republic of the DRC." *Transnational Figurations of Displacement*, February 2021, 1–6.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

food; conversely, that constant state of motion deprives them of permanent resources like land, livestock, crops, or housing.⁷⁷ Displacement, therefore, is an incredibly disruptive problem that exacerbates other insecurities faced by the Congolese. One of the problems that IDPs face is the lack of institutional support, with statements such as, “We have never received any help from either the state or an organization,” being a common refrain.⁷⁸ While there are measures in place that are intended to allocate responsibility for supporting IDPs, these are almost never actually implemented, creating a large gap for where humanitarian support should be deployed.

The vulnerabilities that displacement creates for IDPs can also be seen through the violence directed at those communities. In late 2021, there were a series of attacks on communities of displaced people. On November 30th, there was an attack on the Ndjala site in the Ituri province that killed 26 people and injured others.⁷⁹ Only nine days earlier, a militia group attacked another site, killing 44 and destroying over 1,200 shelters.⁸⁰ Attacks against these sites have been caused in part from “inter-communal tensions,” which are exacerbated by the presence of large IDP communities seen as a drain on already scarce local resources. These attacks perpetuate future instability as IDPs have to flee their shelters and relocate to other already overpopulated sites.⁸¹

Climate Change Impacts

As noted in the geographical section of the report, the DRC has an incredibly varied climate across the country. That climatological constitution presents several different risk factors when it comes to climate change. There are some regions that will face increased heat, dryness, and drought, and others that will have to endure increased rain and flooding. Climate change is

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ “Series of Appalling Deadly Attacks on Displaced People in DR Congo || UN News.” United Nations. United Nations, November 30, 2021. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/11/1106782>

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

also an exacerbating factor for other issues such as hunger, epidemics, political and social instability, food production, and housing. In fact, in a study conducted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Netherlands, the DRC was considered to be the 12th most vulnerable to climate change and the 5th least prepared, out of 181 countries that were evaluated.⁸² Increased temperatures and inconsistent rainfall (over 100% more dry spells in the next 100 years) are predicted, leading to humanitarian issues worsening: “Food security will be affected due to crop losses and failures, increased livestock mortality, negative impacts on fisheries, and damage to infrastructure.”⁸³

Agriculture will be one of the foremost losses that the DRC will face as a result of climate change. 70% of Congolese citizens work in agriculture. The deterioration of the agricultural sector would generate potentially irreparable economic and social distress, and will dramatically exacerbate issues of acute hunger and cyclical poverty caused by chronic unemployment.⁸⁴ Some of the most vulnerable areas are the Great Lakes region and the DRC River Basin. The river basin is home to over 75 million people - across several countries, including the DRC - putting a massive population at increased risk for the consequences of climate change enumerated above.⁸⁵ The basin holds the second largest rainforest in the world, making it an incredibly important space in terms of global efforts to combat climate change. Despite this, there has been little focus from the international community on this region and area in terms of broader debates about how to prevent and mitigate incipient climate disasters.⁸⁶

⁸² “Climate Change in the Eastern Congo: A Current Look at Impact.” *Plant with Purpose*, January 17, 2020.

<https://plantwithpurpose.org/easterncongo/>

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Karam, Sara, Ousmane Seidou, Nidhi Nagabhatla, Duminda Perera, and Raphael M. Tshimanga. “Assessing the Impacts of Climate Change on Climatic Extremes in the DRC River Basin.” *Climatic Change* 170, no. 3-4 (February 28, 2022): 1–24. Page 1.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-022-03326-x>

⁸⁶ Ibid, 2.

Between 1960 and 2019, there have been over 11,566,029 people affected by flooding in the basin region, killing several thousands, and creating economic damages estimated to be worth \$96 billion USD.⁸⁷ One of the issues that needs to be addressed when determining mitigation and prevention strategies for this area is that the climate around this significant area varies: the center will become dryer, and the north, east, and western areas of the Basin will become wetter.⁸⁸

Another topographical environment that will need increased attention is the DRC's mountains, which host many of the nation's subsistence and commercial farmers. Many of the mountainous areas in the DRC are encumbered with higher warming rates than that of the global average, and the consequences of that reality have already become acute.⁸⁹ Those effects include food shortages, reduced income, and poorer health outcomes.⁹⁰ Mountain communities are incredibly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, but do not have the resources, financial or physical, to respond to the issues that arise.⁹¹ Two ethnic groups that live in the Itombwe mountain region, the Bafuliru and Lega, have noted a host changes in the climate that will ultimately affect their livelihood: changes in rainfall distribution, interannual variability, fewer foggy days, increased hailstorms, increased temperatures, lower amount of rainfall, late onset of rains, less frost and more drought, reduced cassava yields, increase in cassava mosaic disease, reduced human health, soil erosion, and increased diseases of livestock.⁹² Consequently,

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 15.

⁸⁹ Amani, Rodriguez Kakule, Bernard Riera, Gerard Imani, Rodrigue Batumike, Noelia Zafra-Calvo, and Aida Cuni-Sanchez. "Climate Change Perceptions and Adaptations among Smallholder Farmers in the Mountains of Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo." *Climate Change Perceptions and Adaptations Among Smallholder Farmers in the Mountains of Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo* 11, no. 5 (2022): 1–14.

<https://doi.org/10.3390/land11050628>

Page 1.

⁹⁰ Ibid. Page 2.

⁹¹ Ibid. Page 3.

⁹² Ibid. Page 6.

addressing climate change must be integral to any broader humanitarian efforts to alleviate suffering in the DRC.

Geopolitical Implications

The Democratic Republic of the Congo, by virtue of its size, natural resources, ethnic diversity, and turbulent history, has long been a source of interest for policymakers from Washington to Brussels to Beijing. With the ongoing non-international armed conflict (NIAC) raging across the DRC's Eastern provinces being inextricably tied to the nation's resources and politics, the humanitarian crisis is directly linked to the geopolitical calculations of foreign powers. To fully comprehend the humanitarian issues the nation faces, it is imperative to understand the myriad interests other nations have in the DRC's stability and prospects for long-term prosperity. Perhaps no component of that strategic-humanitarian nexus is as significant as the coltan industry.

Coltan is a precious metal required for the construction of most modern technology. Major corporations like Apple, Samsung, IBM, and Tesla require constant access to refined coltan in order to maintain production capacity and avoid supply chain bottlenecks. Coltan's significance has only increased in recent years, as most contemporary electric vehicle batteries require the material; with global markets increasingly shifting toward EVs, the demand for coltan (and the often confused but entirely distinct mineral, cobalt) will likely increase in the coming years.

That demand is relevant to the DRC by virtue of the fact that the nation holds 80% of the world's known coltan reserves.⁹³ The vast majority of mines are located in the eastern part of the

⁹³ Kathy Feick, "Coltan Profile," (Earth Sciences Museum - University of Waterloo, October 9, 2013), <https://uwaterloo.ca/earth-sciences-museum/resources/detailed-rocks-and-minerals-articles/coltan>.

nation, which is also home to nearly all the armed groups currently operating in the DRC. Outside of the fighting associated with control over the reserves, which will be expanded upon later, the operation of the mines presents its own humanitarian concerns. The number of children and teenagers currently working as miners, both voluntarily and forcibly, is estimated at approximately 40,000.⁹⁴ The Congo's mines are notoriously volatile, and conservative estimates suggest that at least one worker dies every month during the extraction process.⁹⁵ In June 2019, a landslide at the DRC's largest cobalt and copper mine killed at least 43 people.⁹⁶ In addition to coltan and cobalt, there are five other minerals and rare earth elements produced by the Congolese mining industry that rely on both child and forced labor for extraction.⁹⁷

Outside of occupational hazards and labor-related abuses, the DRC's natural resources are also the primary impetus behind much of the ongoing armed conflict. Though scholarly analysis of the cobalt/coltan-conflict nexus remains contested, resources like oil, diamonds, tin, tungsten, and gold have been directly identified as sources of revenue for many of the militias operating in the DRC. As addressed previously, Rwandan and Ugandan sponsorship of armed groups – a charge both nations categorically deny despite legitimate evidence supporting the accusations – is often correlated with mineral concessions. Groups alleged to have foreign support, like the Rwandan-backed M23 rebels, have often fixated their efforts on controlling resource-rich territories, suggesting a financial motivation.

⁹⁴ Oluwole Ojewale, "Child Miners: The Dark Side of the DRC's Coltan Wealth," ISS Africa (Institute for Security Studies, October 18, 2021), <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/child-miners-the-dark-side-of-the-drcs-coltan-wealth>.

⁹⁵ Esther Nsapu, "Deaths Are All Too Common, Compensation All Too Rare for Artisanal Miners in DRC," Global Press Journal, May 10, 2018, <https://globalpressjournal.com/africa/democratic-republic-of-congo/deaths-common-compensation-rare-artisanal-miners-drc/>.

⁹⁶ Neil Hume, "Death Toll at DRC Mine Rises to 43," Financial Times, June 28, 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/ad0aafba-99a9-11e9-8cfb-30c211dcd229>.

⁹⁷ "List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor" (United States Department of Labor, December 1, 2014), <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/reports/child-labor/list-of-goods/>.

Beyond local and regional actors, the DRC has become a frontline in the great power competition between China and the United States. Beijing has increased its presence in the DRC through state-run mining entities. As of August 2021, Chinese companies controlled around 70% of the DRC's mining sector, having acquired numerous projects in recent years that were abandoned by Western companies dissuaded by logistical costs and security concerns.⁹⁸ Given the enormous value of those mining interests, foreign nations have reportedly hired private military contractors (PMCs) to protect their concessions. Those PMCs purportedly include the Wagner Group, a Kremlin-affiliated mercenary company that has previously been deployed to Syria, Libya, Sudan, and several other African nations, as well as to Ukraine, where they are currently serving alongside Russian forces in their unlawful invasion.⁹⁹ The Wagner Group has been accused of committing war crimes in their areas of deployment including, but not limited to, extrajudicial killings, torture, and government destabilization.¹⁰⁰ That Wagner and other PMCs have been deployed to the DRC at the behest of other nations presents real concerns regarding the potential for human rights abuses.

It is difficult to predict whether the increasing commercial interests in the DRC will have positive or negative implications for the nation's ongoing humanitarian crisis. The necessity of coltan and other rare earth elements for attaining clean energy objectives, alleviating inflation, and maintaining production of vital technology may garner media attention to the situation in the DRC, which has been chronically underreported compared to Yemen, Syria, Afghanistan, and

⁹⁸ Karin Strohecker and Aaron Ross, "Congo Reviewing \$6 Billion Mining Deal with Chinese Investors," Reuters (Thomson Reuters, August 30, 2021), <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/exclusive-congo-reviewing-6-bln-mining-deal-with-chinese-investors-finmin-2021-08-27/>.

⁹⁹ Mustapha Dalaa and Halime Afra Aksoy, "Russia's Wagner Group Reportedly Deployed in Africa," Anadolu Agency, May 3, 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/russias-wagner-group-reportedly-deployed-in-africa/2165414>.

¹⁰⁰ Hans von der Burchard, "EU Slaps Sanctions on Russian Mercenary Group Wagner," POLITICO Europe (POLITICO, December 13, 2021), <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-hit-mercenary-group-wagner-sanctions/>.

Ukraine. That the vast majority of the country’s mineral deposits are located in the conflict zones where the humanitarian crisis is most acute could incentivize lawmakers in Washington, Beijing, and Brussels to increase both bilateral aid packages and funding allocated through multilateral organizations like the United Nations. Given the universal importance of the Eastern DRC’s natural resources, stabilizing the situation on the ground may provide a rare source of consensus for the international community.

Conversely, the fact that the increased interest in the DRC is driven primarily by financial incentives may actually exacerbate the present crisis. Development aid for the DRC – which at under \$3.03 billion in 2019 was already inadequate – could become contingent on resource-related conditions.¹⁰¹ Conditional aid has long been employed by Western donor governments to improve democratic institutions, governmental transparency, and organizational efficacy among recipient nations; such provisions are designed to benefit the recipient’s long-term stability while ensuring a return on the donor nation’s investment. In a highly charged geopolitical competition, however, it is not unfathomable to think that Western governments, Beijing, and Moscow may implement aid conditions related to securing mining concessions. In fact, the Chinese government already initiated a comparable “infrastructure-for-minerals” program with the Congolese government, worth approximately \$6.2 billion USD.¹⁰² The deal was put under review in August 2021 because Congolese authorities believed the agreement was predatory in its implementation, with Beijing exporting vast amounts of the DRC’s resources without constructing the roads, railways, and other infrastructure promised under the initial agreement.¹⁰³ Similarly, in February 2022, a Congolese court revoked Chinese authority over one

¹⁰¹ “Net Official Development Assistance Received - Democratic Republic of Congo” (The World Bank, January 2020), <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/DT.ODA.ODAT.CD?locations=CD>.

¹⁰² Strohecker and Ross, “Congo Reviewing \$6 Billion Mining Deal with Chinese Investors.”

¹⁰³ Ibid.

of the DRC's largest copper and cobalt mines due to billions of dollars in unpaid fees owed by Beijing.¹⁰⁴ Those examples may provide insight as to what a global power rivalry may inflict on the DRC's primary source of wealth, and perhaps its best avenue for long-term political stability.

Conclusion

The present humanitarian crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo is among the worst in recent history. Infectious disease outbreaks, continued violence perpetrated by well over one-hundred non-state armed groups, and the sheer lack of infrastructure have only exacerbated the situation by obstructing a comprehensive humanitarian response. Ultimately, the DRC is also condemned by its geography. Unlike with Ukraine or Syria, the situation in the DRC lacks the urgency and strategic relevance that might incentivize a more effective response from the developed nations that finance and address most contemporary humanitarian crises. Since the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Congress has appropriated over \$50 billion USD in aid to Kyiv; by contrast, in FY 2021 the U.S. government allocated a total of \$131.3 million USD to the DRC - a little over 0.2% of the aid provided to Ukraine in the last three months alone.¹⁰⁵ While the support for Ukraine is unequivocally necessary and urgent, the discrepancy in funding is helpful in underscoring the chronic disinterest and inadequate financial commitments to a crisis afflicting a comparable, if not larger, number of people. It is also important to recognize the deeply embedded systemic racism and historic disregard for non-European humanitarian crises that perpetuates this discrepancy in funding, attention, and awareness. While the DRC's geopolitical significance will continue to increase in the coming years, strategic relevance should not be a consideration when addressing humanitarian disasters. It is incumbent

¹⁰⁴ Eric Lipton and Dionne Searcey, "Chinese Company Removed as Operator of Cobalt Mine in Congo," The New York Times (The New York Times, March 1, 2022),

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/28/world/congo-cobalt-mining-china.html>.

¹⁰⁵ "Democratic Republic of the DRC— Complex Emergency." USAID, April 17, 2021.

https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/04.27.2021_-_USG_DRC_Fact_Sheet_3.pdf

on the international community to act decisively to improve the quality of life for the Congolese people. Throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, the relationship between the DRC and the wider world has been primarily one of exploitive financial incentives. As the situation continues to devolve, particularly in the eastern provinces, now is the time to engage the DRC beyond the extraction of natural resources. Mere acknowledgement of the severity of human suffering is insufficient. The present crisis demands action, and the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo cannot afford to wait.

Recommendations

The following section details a list of recommendations based on all of the above analysis. The recommendations are categorized according to the humanitarian issue they were designed to address.

SGBV

Sexual and gender-based violence has become an increasingly vexing issue as conflict continues to persist in the regions. SGBV is an exacerbating factor that worses existing issues in public health and other sectors. There is little being done about the issue of stigma surrounding the reporting of sexual violence. That hesitancy may perpetuate the use of sexual violence as an instrument of war, mostly against women and children.

1. In order to combat this significant threat to personal safety and well-being, there needs to be greater accountability for the perpetrators of these crimes. When these perpetrators are not held responsible for their actions, it allows these acts to continue without consequences. While there have been some cases of convicted leaders, the vast majority have not faced any consequences and even with these convictions, court-ordered reparations have not been paid. Establishing formal enforcement mechanisms to ensure

payment would be enormously beneficial as an ex post facto measure for victims of SGBV.

2. While the aforementioned recommendation addresses issues of SGBV that occur after the attack, it is imperative that stronger mitigation measures be put in place. The Deputy Minister of Planning and the Minister of State for Gender, Family and Child initiated a campaign and new policy, detailing a National Strategy for Combating Gender-based Violence.¹⁰⁶ That policy will be helpful in terms of prevention of these crimes in the first place, but must be employed in concert with a greater law enforcement presence in areas with high levels of SGBV.
3. When humanitarian aid workers are in the region, they need to be aware of the prevalence of survivors of SGBV and have appropriate care and resources prepared. The requisite supplies are often omitted from standard health care clinics. Furthermore, aid workers have historically engaged in overtly masculine practices and social norms that may encourage sexual exploitation of women and children.¹⁰⁷ Consequently, we need greater training for aid workers and other peacekeepers being deployed to the field. Establishing greater awareness of these practices is the first step in dismantling them. For those that are trained healthcare professionals, there should be specific training on how to help survivors of SGBV.
4. There are reintegration centers that are available to help survivors of SGBV, including the Mary Mother of Hope Recovery and Reintegration Center. These clinics are a great

¹⁰⁶ “DRC Takes a Step towards Zero Tolerance against Gender-Based Violence.” UN Women -- Africa. UN Women, September 1, 2020. <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2020/09/drc-takes-a-step-towards-zero-tolerance-against-gender-based-violence>

¹⁰⁷ Lugova, Halyna, Nandeeta Samad, and Mainul Haque. “Sexual and Gender-Based Violence among Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: Post-Conflict Scenario.” *Risk Management and Healthcare Policy*. December 9, 2020. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7734039/>

resource for women and children, and should become more prevalent and accessible across the DRC. Ultimately, the goal will be to not need such institutions as the prevalence of SGBV will be virtually eliminated through other prevention measures.¹⁰⁸ Since such ambitions remain overly aspirational in the current environment, a concerted focus on increased availability would be enormously beneficial.

5. Presently, the support that is administered is often designed for expressly short-term relief. An increase in government programs is absolutely necessary. Engaging local actors to bolster the sustainability of treatment and protection will be critical. Admittedly, support from all levels of government and organizations is necessary to address the disproportionately high level of SGBV.

IDPs

Universally, internally displaced people deserve greater attention in the humanitarian sphere. Too often, they are forgotten, since they remain within the borders of their nation and therefore are often in active combat areas. In the DRC, however, the majority of afflicted individuals are IDPs.

1. Therefore, our first recommendation is to increase awareness and visibility of IDPs so that they can get the aid necessary to ensure protection, housing, and employment opportunities.
2. There needs to be greater involvement of the state in the protection and aid of IDPs.

Many IDPs noted that they have never received help from the state. Because IDPs

¹⁰⁸ Sharif, Sahra, and Robert Sibson. "Survivors of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in DRC Receive Norwegian Support." UNHCR Nordic and Baltic Countries, November 8, 2021. <https://www.unhcr.org/neu/65059-survivors-of-sexual-and-gender-based-violence-in-dr-ongo-receive-norwegian-support%E2%80%AF.html>

remain in the country and do not cross borders, local and state governments are best equipped to handle these cases. As those actors have been largely absent from those roles, the international community - led by multilateral organizations and advocacy NGOs - must actively lobby the Congolese government to intervene.

3. Regrettably, existing frameworks designed to protect IDPs are virtually never applied. As with SGBV, inaction perpetuates the high degree of violence against IDPs. There have been several recent attacks on sites for refugees, which highlight this present lack of protection. Therefore, there needs to be a strengthening of security for IDP camps and across the provinces with the highest IDP populations. Personnel deployed to those sites, whether government forces, private security, or UN peacekeepers should receive context-specific training in order to ensure those tasked with protecting IDPs.¹⁰⁹
4. One of the unofficial policies in which IDPs have found the greatest degree of support is through leveraging their personal networks. If those informal networks were codified into a central database, in the model of other federal assistance programs, this could provide additional support for those seeking shelter, medication, and other basic needs.

Climate Change

Climate change is drastically affecting several regions in the DRC and exacerbating an already fraught humanitarian crisis. There must be protocols in place to safeguard the environment, while simultaneously protecting the domestic agricultural sector and other opportunities for economic self-sufficiency or even upward mobility. In the next century, there is expected to be a drastic increase in extreme weather patterns. Insufficient action at the global level means that

¹⁰⁹ “Forced Displacement in the Democratic Republic of Congo: The Global Compact on Refugees: Digital Platform.” The Global Compact on Refugees | Digital platform, June 22, 2021.
<https://globalcompactrefugees.org/article/forced-displacement-democratic-republic-congo>

actors engaged with the DRC must implement mitigation strategies immediately to prevent the worst outcomes.

1. Perhaps the most important objective is to create climate resiliency in the Congolese economy and governance. Climate resilience is defined as a state of existence wherein local populations and the environment in which they reside are capable of addressing novel challenges presented by climate change. Those strategies must focus on adaptation and mitigation concurrently, given the incipient nature of the climate crisis.¹¹⁰
2. The concept of climate resilience is especially relevant to the DRC's agricultural sector, as the vast majority of the nation's rural population depends on farming for employment and sustenance. Reforestation, while helpful for absorbing atmospheric carbon, must be done in conjunction with sustainable farming practices. As planting native tree species is not as lucrative as other crops, some form of government-granted incentive for reforestation could be one method of encouraging farmers to supplement their property with native flora. Trees help to attract moisture and prevent soil erosion, both of which will be necessary to alleviate the effects of increased dryness and to help protect the land when there are heavy rains.¹¹¹
3. Elaborating on that point, the DRC should adopt a policy of growing "food forests." When crops are interspersed between different types of trees, the crops are strengthened as a result of the better soil quality and diminished erosion.¹¹² This is essential for protecting harvests, and thus food security and employment.

¹¹⁰ "Climate Change in the Eastern Congo: A Current Look at Impact." Plant With Purpose, January 17, 2020. <https://plantwithpurpose.org/easterncongo/>

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

4. Strategic decision making in regard to crop choice should also be encouraged. Having multiple different crops growing simultaneously grants farmers an added degree of financial security; in the event one plant succumbs to climate-related issues, other species may remain viable for consumption and distribution. Additionally, INGOs and organizations like the UN should fund the dissemination of climate resistant crop seeds, with hardy produce like quinoa, millet, and sorghum.
5. To the degree possible, conceptualization and implementation of climate adaptation and mitigation policies should be overseen by local populations. Beyond having the greatest comprehension of the land, they are more apt at identifying incipient threats. More importantly, ensuring the locals maintain ownership of their initiatives will generate better outcomes than efforts overseen by federal or international agencies. While the local population should be granted executive authority over such matters, the Congolese government and other organizations should support the project financially to the greatest degree possible.

Food Insecurity

Food security is critical to the survival of any nation. It is also one of the first threat vectors to emerge in conflict zones. Food security is intrinsically tied to many other humanitarian issues so addressing the issue will inherently be to the benefit of myriad other obstacles faced in humanitarian crises.

1. As already mentioned above when thinking about climate change, one of the most important ways in which to ensure food security is through mitigating and protecting against the effects of climate change. In addition to the aforementioned agricultural recommendations, INGOs and multilateral organizations should make a concerted effort

to supply refugees and IDPs with food. While a crisis like that in the Eastern DRC may necessitate the importation of foodstuffs grown abroad, every effort should be made to cultivate domestic food supply chains through micro-loans and other targeted, microcosmic financial measures.

2. Food insecurity and conflict are intrinsically linked, which makes overcoming this particular challenge very difficult. Often, armed groups will raid and destroy crops or markets as a deliberate strategy to destabilize an area and foster the desperation conducive to continuing their illicit activities. Accordingly, aid agencies - particularly the WFP and FAO - may need to be especially preactive in safeguarding crops, food depots, and other storage facilities integral to feeding local populations.

Health Impacts

Issues related to health have been one of the most prominent and pressing issues facing the DRC. The healthcare sector in the DRC has been significantly undermined by the ongoing conflict, which impedes the availability of treatment and degrades an already dilapidated transportation network.

1. The instability triggered by conflict is the central issue behind the lack of medical services available. Even prior to the fighting, the DRC had an insufficient number of trained healthcare professionals, medical equipment, and basic medications. The scarcity of resources means that anything that is available is extremely expensive and therefore inaccessible to the majority of Congolese citizens. Humanitarian organizations should help underwrite the importation of medical supplies, particularly essentials like bandages and antiviral medicines. By providing the supplies, INGOs can help alleviate the

untenable price hikes that emerge as an inevitable consequence of a resource-deprived marketplace.

2. Additionally, healthcare centers need significant financial support. Funding should be used to repair damaged centers, provide the necessary medicines to afflicted populations, hire more medical workers, and even possibly contract better security to prevent attacks and raids that endanger patients, providers, and the healthcare system itself.
3. Since women and children are often at higher risk due to complications associated with maternal health, the heightened threat of SGBV, and food insecurity stunting child growth - especially in the high conflict areas like the North and South Kivu provinces - there should be an increase in both local and federal government support and international assistance (either from INGOs or on a bilateral basis) to make these services more accessible to women and children.

Aid Worker Security

Aid workers face innumerable security threats when operating in the DRC. Humanitarian workers and UN peacekeepers are consistently threatened by non-state armed groups while attempting to provide life-saving services and aid. Rectifying the present lack of security and protection for those workers would considerably improve the international community's ability to address the ongoing crisis.

1. One of the problems facing aid workers in the DRC is the fact that they must negotiate with armed actors in order to get access to certain areas. In many cases, these areas might be controlled by NSAGs, who are often inclined to prevent aid workers from gaining access. While different INGOs have varying approaches to the issue of access, there is no

way to guarantee the safe passage of any humanitarian convoy. International laws governing war and humanitarianism are no guarantee of access in lawless environments like the Eastern DRC. In the absence of feasible preemptive measures, an active database should be created that tracks aid workers deployed in the field in real-time and is accessible to all INGO and UN personnel in the region. Given the high rate of kidnappings, such a system could help recover abducted personnel.

2. When aid workers are directly targeted or attacked, there needs to be a better mechanism for ensuring accountability. Such actions need to be condemned on both an international and state level. Like with any situation, crimes that go unpunished will continue if there are no consequences. In the context of the DRC, a specific penal code for prosecuting individuals who harm humanitarian workers could be a crucial first step toward disincentivizing future attacks.

Violence Against Civilians

Hundreds of thousands of civilians face the threat of violence from the many NSAGs, PMCs, and militaries involved in the ongoing conflict. This violence not only impacts people's physical wellbeing but their financial well being as well - including the destruction of livestock, crops, shelter, and other resources.

1. As mentioned previously, much of the violence toward civilians is targeted against IDPs. Accordingly, there must be heightened awareness for this segment of the population when thinking about mitigating violence. Regardless of what solutions are proposed, there will inevitably need to be significant enforcement from law enforcement or the military.

2. The establishment of a federal relief fund for victims of property destruction by NSAGs would help alleviate some of the financial hardships associated with the conflict. By ensuring that an attack does not irreparably damage an individual's capacity to make money, the Congolese government could gradually reduce the number of IDPs - many of whom become displaced as a consequence of economic instability.

Final Commentary

This is by no means an exhaustive list of recommendations. As is very clear throughout this report, the myriad issues plaguing the humanitarian sphere in the DRC are all very much intertwined. Fortuitously, that interconnectedness means that for any one solution that is implemented successfully, a host of other issues are improved by association.

The extent of the suffering in the Democratic Republic of Congo is nearly biblical in scale. Displacement of millions, casualties in the thousands, and the spread of disease have amalgamated into one of the 21st Century's worst humanitarian crises. Our report was born out of a deep concern that the international community is granting inadequate attention to the Congo. The impetus for inaction may lie in the historic overlooking of African nations, an insidious vestige of colonialism that leads Western policymakers to dismiss the concerns of a continent long deemed strategically insignificant. Perhaps the lack of resources allocated is simply because the world is caught up in other crises, in Ethiopia, Syria, Yemen, and Ukraine. Ultimately, the reason is irrelevant. The international community has an obligation to assist the Congolese people. Universal dereliction of that responsibility cannot be tolerated.

To the thousands of individuals who have committed themselves to alleviating suffering in the DRC, we give you our utmost thanks and appreciation. To the Congolese people, who

endure these hardships with heroic stoicism, unmatched in modern history, we salute you and make this solemn pledge: If afforded an opportunity to assist, we will seize it.

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