

FEAR AND FLIGHT

AN UPROOTED GENERATION OF CHILDREN
AT RISK IN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

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for every child

Cover photo: Displaced girl in a settlement in North Kivu province. © UNICEF/LeMoyne

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AN UPROOTED GENERATION OF CHILDREN
AT RISK IN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO



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Several thousand displaced people live in Loda IDP camp, located in a region which has suffered severely from conflict, and where basic services are very limited. © UNICEF/UN0381748/LeMoyné

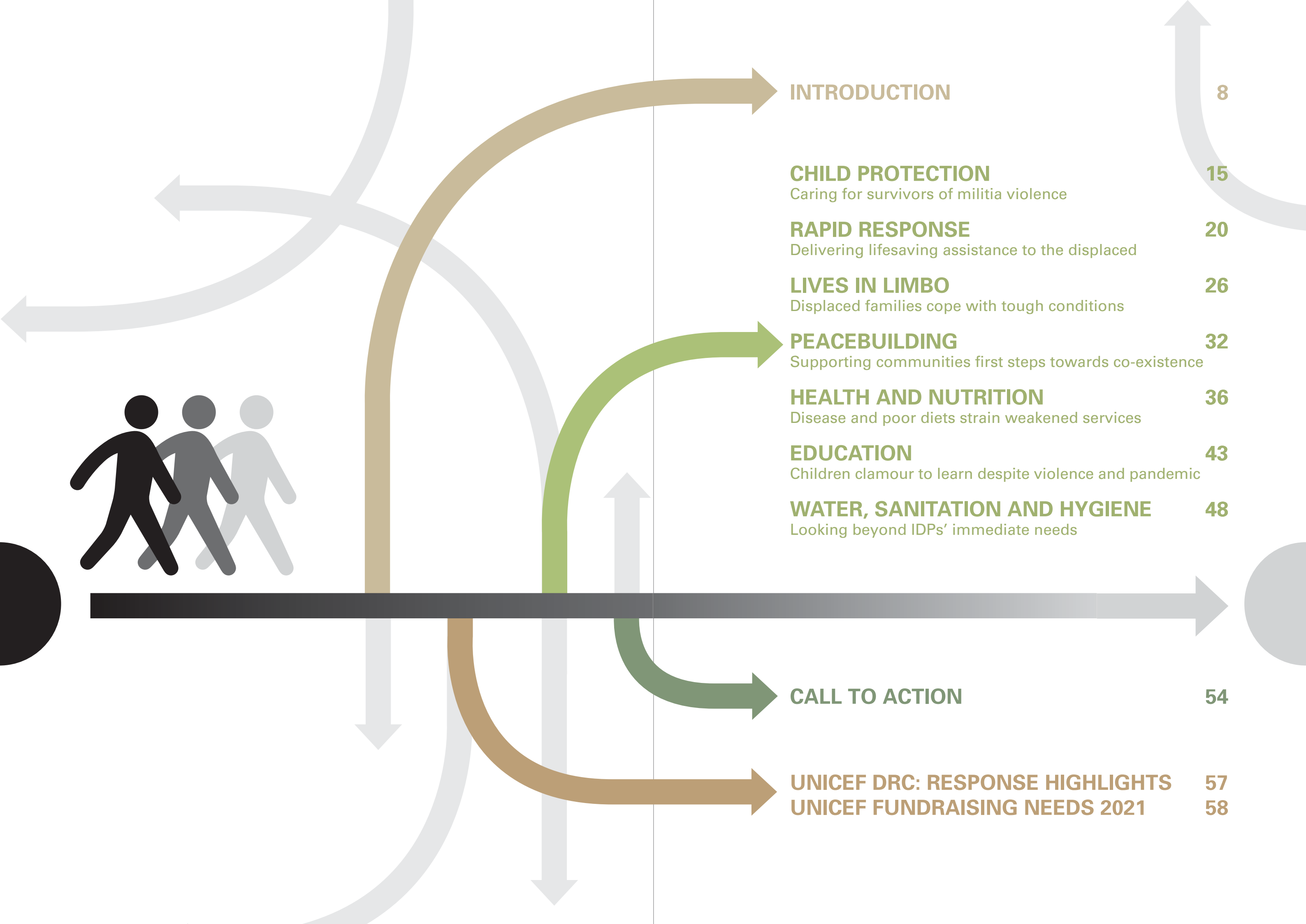


ESTIMATED DISPLACED POPULATION IN KEY AFFECTED PROVINCES



PROVINCE	IDPs	CHILD IDPs
North Kivu	1,800,500	1,053,292
Ituri	1,710,100	921,675
South Kivu	687,800	394,659
Tanganyika	489,100	301,725
Total in 4 provinces	4,687,500	2,671,351
Whole DRC	5.2 million	3.04 million

(source: OCHA November 2020)



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Dawn breaks in a displacement site sheltering several thousand people in Ituri province. © UNICEF/UN0381756/LeMoyne

INTRODUCTION

The militia descended on Sami's village at night, bringing mayhem and bloodshed under cover of darkness. The terrified inhabitants managed to flee into the surrounding fields. For many however, there was to be no escape.

"They caught a young boy and forced him to show them where people were hiding," recalled

14-year-old Sami. "They caught me and my family. I watched them kill my family on the spot and then they attacked me with a machete."

Somehow, Sami managed to hide, despite a severe injury to his right leg. He was later found by UN peacekeepers who took him to hospital where his leg was amputated.

"I watched them kill my family on the spot and then they attacked me with a machete."

Sami lost his leg in a militant attack in which his parents and siblings were killed. © UNICEF/UN0377454/LeMoyne



In the violence-wracked eastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo, attacks like that of August 2020, near the town of Boga, in Ituri province, have become a brutal norm.

In the wake of the fighting, whole communities abandon villages, homes and livelihoods, and flee with only the barest of possessions. Villages are razed to the ground. Schools and health centres are ransacked and destroyed.

The scale of the displacement is huge. More than 1.6 million people were driven from their homes in the first six months of 2020 alone.

The perpetrators use heavy weaponry as well as machetes and knives. Entire families are hacked to death, including children.

According to official UN data, 91 children were confirmed killed in Ituri province alone as a result of violence between January and August 2020. The actual number was certainly much higher.

Violence against girls and women is rampant, and largely responsible for making the DRC the world's biggest sexual and gender-based protection crisis.

The factors behind the conflict are numerous and complex. Disputes over land and resources combined with deep-rooted ethnic animosities, a militarized informal economy, the ready availability of arms, and weak governance have produced a surge in violence during the last three years.

By November 2020, official figures showed there were around 5,2

In the wake of the fighting, whole communities abandon villages and flee with only the barest of possessions.

Displacement site in Boga, Ituri province.
© UNICEF/UN0377451/LeMoyne

million internally displaced people (IDPs) in DRC, mostly in the four eastern provinces of North and South Kivu, Ituri and Tanganyika.

Just over 3 million of the IDPs are children, including nearly half a million under the age of 5.

Most displaced families are absorbed into local communities that are barely able to provide sustenance for themselves.

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Source: OCHA November 2020

They lack almost everything, not least food. According to the latest IPC classification, 8.2 million people in the four provinces are acutely food insecure – almost one third of

the total in the entire country.

Most displaced families are absorbed into local communities that are barely able to provide

Daily life for displaced families is a struggle just to survive. © UNICEF/UN0390907/LeMoyné



sustenance for themselves, let alone support those arriving from other areas.

Those living in informal settlements face even harsher conditions. Families of six or more persons share cramped tarpaulin and palm-leaf shelters which serve as living, sleeping and eating quarters. Families rely on untreated water that they collect from nearby streams or ponds. Latrines are often blocked or unusable, making open defecation commonplace.

Many families have been displaced

repeatedly in waves of violence perpetrated by armed groups, some of whom may operate across the borders with neighbouring Uganda.

“Displaced children know nothing but fear, poverty and violence. Generation after generation can think only of survival,” said Edouard Beigbeder, UNICEF Representative for the Democratic Republic of Congo. “Yet the world seems increasingly indifferent to their fate. We must do more to encourage these children’s hopes of a better future.”

“The displaced know nothing but fear, poverty, and violence and can think only of survival.”

A displaced family carry water and supplies along a road in North Kivu province. © UNICEF/UN0390910/LeMoyné

In a region where the rule of law is limited, the task of delivering life-saving assistance is complex and dangerous. Access is often hampered, whether by insecurity or because of the region's inadequate transport infrastructure. In South Kivu, there were nearly 30 incidents targeting humanitarian workers in 2020.

Corruption is another major challenge to the humanitarian community, an unavoidable reality in a setting where governance is weak, and profits from the region's rich natural resources are

a powerful lure. Recent instances of sexual exploitation and abuse involving aid workers have added to these concerns.

Little by little, the Congolese armed forces are trying to curb the power of the militia groups and re-assert the authority of the state. The region has also benefitted from the improving national rates of child mortality and education. But in many areas, the situation remains highly volatile.

Building on these tenuous signs of progress must now be the priority,

The task of delivering life-saving assistance is complex and dangerous.

Loda IDP site on the outskirts of Fataki, Ituri province.
© UNICEF/UN0377439/LeMoyné

and the international community has a crucial part to play. So much is at stake. Bordered by nine other nations, the DRC has a large, fast-growing and youthful population that is projected to reach 120 million in the next decade.

Yet global solidarity with DRC shows signs of fraying. In 2019, a shortage of funds meant that just over half of 9 million people needing lifesaving assistance were actually reached. As of November 2020, the DRC's 2020 Humanitarian Response Plan was only 34.7 per cent funded.

"Now is not the time to cut back on assistance for the DRC," said Beigbeder. "Without sustained humanitarian intervention, thousands of children will die from malnutrition or disease, and displaced populations will not receive the basic lifesaving services they depend on."

"Instead, the world should be seizing the opportunity to help steer the country and its people towards stability, while supporting their efforts to build safer and better lives for themselves and their children."

"Without sustained humanitarian intervention, thousands of children will die from malnutrition or disease."





Anwarita (centre) with her new family.
© UNICEF/UN0377452/LeMoyné

Girl left for dead in the bush relishes life with her new family

Aquatemba was collecting wood in the forest near the town of Boga, in Ituri province, when he stumbled on the aftermath of a massacre.

"It was terrible. I saw mutilated bodies. We tried to bury them but as we were doing so, we could hear the militia coming again. They were shooting and macheting people to death."

It was then that he heard a child's pleading voice. "Even though they were still shooting, I thought to myself: I can't abandon this child."

Aquatemba picked up the young girl, who was bleeding from a machete wound to her foot, and carried her to the local hospital.

"For the first two days she didn't speak, said Aquatemba's wife, Kasemira. "I realized that she was very traumatized."

Before long, Anwarita had settled in her new home and was getting on well with the couple's two young daughters.

"I love playing with my sisters and helping doing things around the house," said Anwarita.

"I don't know what the future will bring," said Aquatemba. "But whatever happens we will look after Anwarita as our daughter."



© UNICEF/UN0402428/LeMoyné



CHILD PROTECTION

Caring for survivors of militia violence

Days after his family was murdered by rebel fighters, 14-year old Gabriel became a militia fighter himself.

His parents and younger sister were killed, their throats slit, as they were taking their cassava crop to sell in the local market. Gabriel escaped and took shelter with an uncle. Three days later, the rebels came into the village.

"They started burning everything down," recalled Gabriel. "My uncle was killed and I ran into the forest to escape."

But the rebels caught him and took him to their camp where they gave him military-style training.

Amid the unrelenting conflict of eastern DRC, children can be perpetrators of the violence as

Amid the unrelenting conflict of eastern DRC, children can be perpetrators of the violence as well as its victims.

A UNICEF-supported rehabilitation centre for children and youth demobilised from militia groups or separated from their families. © UNICEF/UN0383537/LeMoyné



well as its victims. In Ituri alone, an estimated 400 children were recruited into armed groups during the first half of 2020.

Child recruitment is one of six grave violations of children’s rights that are systematically recorded and monitored by the UN. In DRC overall, there was a 16 per cent rise in violations against children in January to June 2020 compared to the same period in 2019.

“We attacked people and we destroyed their villages,” said Gabriel. “We poured petrol everywhere and we set fire to everything. They started shooting people and I also shot people.”

During a clash with the Congolese army, Gabriel was captured and taken for interrogation.

UNICEF Child Protection Specialist Flore Rossi says that there are



other reasons why some children join armed groups.

“Some children voluntarily choose to join because they want to defend their family,” said Rossi. “They want protection, and sometimes they see it as better

▲ A former youth militia fighter shows his battle scars at a shelter in North Kivu. © UNICEF/UN0390921/LeMoyné, © UNICEF/UN0390925/LeMoyné

▼ Remedial learning for boys at a centre for separated children in Goma, North Kivu © UNICEF/UN0390927/LeMoyné



A youth uses a home-made barbell at a rehabilitation centre for former child militia fighters. © UNICEF/UN0390933/LeMoyné

than being stuck in an IDP camp.”

Amid the turmoil of mass civilian displacements, children can easily become separated from their families. Those who avoid recruitment by militias face other major risks, including sexual or gender-based violence.

Providing temporary care and protection to all child victims of violence is the focus of UNICEF’s work with various implementing partner organisations. Between January and June 2020, UNICEF

helped 365 children previously associated with armed forces and militant groups trace their families, reintegrate within the community and receive psychosocial support.

In some cases, mediation or other assistance is needed to prepare families and the broader community to accept the child back. A case management approach, taking into account the child’s specific situation and needs is especially important for girls who can face rejection or isolation within their communities,

Those who avoid recruitment by militias face other major risks, including sexual or gender-based violence.

especially if they return with a dependent child.

After being released by the army, Gabriel underwent rehabilitation at a specialist transition centre in Bunia, the main town of Ituri province, run by a UNICEF local partner NGO. There, Gabriel and four other boys have been learning carpentry and other vocational skills.

“I’d like to stay here for the time being, because the area I came from is still not safe,” said Gabriel. “The rebels are still there, and I risk getting killed.”

The psychologist at the transition centre, Deogratias Bavi Baglu, said that the process leading to Gabriel’s release should not be rushed.

“What we aim for is that when they leave the centre, these



children are psychologically healthy, that they can lead normal lives in their communities, in society and in their families,” Baglu said.

▲ Children at a rehabilitation centre in Bunia, Ituri province. © UNICEF/UN0383536/LeMoyne

▼ Carpentry and other vocational skills help former child fighters and separated children return to normal life. © UNICEF/UN0383535/LeMoyne



“I love this work because it helps me care for my baby,” says Anabelle. © UNICEF/UN0410360/LeMoyne

Sewing project offers girls path to independence

To the whirl of treadle-powered sewing machines, 17-year-old Anabelle* and a dozen other adolescent seamstresses stitch ear-loops onto brightly coloured COVID-19 facemasks. Anabelle joined this UNICEF-supported sewing project in Kingonze IDP site in Ituri province after experiencing firsthand the sexual violence which is such a feature of the conflict in eastern DRC.

“It happened while we were fleeing from the militia,” said Anabelle. “A group of them caught me and then they raped me. That’s how I became pregnant.”

Anabelle says that without her earnings from the sewing project, she wouldn’t be able to feed her child, who is now one year old.

According to Grâce Malosi, who supervises the project, such initiatives allow the girls to gain some independence in the camps where they face a severe risk of sexual violence.

“The money they make here allows them to buy clothes, food, everything they need,” said Malosi. “They’ve even told me that they’re starting to invest, they’re starting to buy little things that could help them in the future.”

During the first six months of 2020, UNICEF provided 68 child victims of sexual violence with medical, psychosocial and legal support.

*Name has been changed

RAPID RESPONSE

Delivering lifesaving assistance to the displaced

The aid convoy had just reached its destination, a remote village in North Kivu province, when an urgent message crackled over the radio. A car belonging to another organization taking part in the operation had been ambushed nearby and four staff members seized. The mission, delivering urgent assistance to hundreds of families recently displaced from

their homes by violence, had been put on hold.

“It’s very discouraging,” said In Hye Sung, UNICEF emergency specialist and the leader of that day’s mission by UNICEF’s Rapid Response team (UniRR).

“It’s lifesaving assistance and (the families) need it right now,”

UN peacekeepers accompany a UniRR mission in North Kivu province. © UNICEF/UN0410362/Hubbard



said Sung. “We’re in touch with partners to understand the security situation and reschedule the distribution as soon as possible.”

Thankfully, the kidnapped staff were soon released unharmed. But the incident was a reminder that in large parts of eastern DRC, aid distribution can be fraught with risk. It also helps explain why – as a last resort – UN field missions may be accompanied by peacekeepers from the UN stabilization force, MONUSCO.

On the previous day, the UniRR convoy had reached a different village without mishap. Within minutes, staff from the Red Cross, UNICEF’s partner in the area, were unloading sacks of household items provided by UNICEF along with rice and other food essentials contributed by the World Food Programme (WFP). In this way, people receive life saving assistance in one package, and are

less likely to sell parts of the aid separately.

Receiving them were around 350 displaced families. For several weeks, they have been sheltered by the local community. Bauma Riziki and her 7 children were among the newcomers. She recalls fleeing to the forest after the brutal attack on her village during which her husband was shot and killed.

“We had nothing but the clothes on our backs, that’s all,” Riziki recalled. “We lost everything else we had.”

Riziki and a crowd of other women and children listened as a supervisor used a megaphone to explain the supplies that each family would receive. They clapped as he held up pots and pans, soap, tarpaulins, water purification tablets and buckets, followed by sacks of rice and flour, bottles of cooking oil and other items.

“We had nothing but the clothes on our backs, that’s all,” Riziki recalled. “We lost everything else we had.”

Unloading supplies from a UniRR convoy in North Kivu. © UNICEF/UN0390949/Hubbard





When her name was called, Riziki ran forward to collect their supplies.

“We haven’t received any help until now,” she said, hoisting a heavy sack onto her head. “Life is going to be much easier with the things I have received today.”

As violence forces communities to move empty-handed, the UniRR teams perform a critical lifesaving function. Between January and November 2020, they delivered assistance to nearly 500,000 people in the four most conflict-affected provinces.

In Tanganyika province, UniRR teams have helped facilitate the return of displaced families to

areas where calm has now been restored. Sofia Awaizayi is a single mother who returned to her home village in Luizi to find almost no trace of her former home. Since then, she and her five children have had to survive without even a tarpaulin to protect them from the seasonal rains. Other returning families, most of them from the ethnic Twa community, are in a similar predicament, with little food and few work opportunities.

To help address the situation in Luizi, UniRR made distributions to some 2,470 households in eight villages between August and October 2020.

As far as possible, UniRR teams

UniRR teams perform a critical function, delivering assistance to nearly 500,000 people in the four most conflict-affected provinces.

Families wait to receive supplies from a UniRR mission in Mukawa village, Tanganyika province.
© UNICEF/UN0410341/Acland

bring assistance to the affected population within seven days of their needs being assessed, reducing the chance that the families will turn to negative coping strategies to survive.

“These emergency distributions help deal with the immediate shock of being displaced, but they are also part of an integrated

response that looks to address a family’s broader needs in health, nutrition, WASH or education,” said Typhaine Gendron, UNICEF Chief of Emergency. “Just as critical is the involvement of partners, both at the local level, supporting the distribution itself, and more strategically, working alongside WFP or another agency.”

“These emergency distributions help deal with the immediate shock of being displaced, but they are also part of an integrated response”

UNICEF RAPID RESPONSE (UNIRR) JANUARY TO NOVEMBER 2020

Provinces	# Households	# People
Ituri	40,951	240,245
North Kivu	30,474	176,862
Tanganyika	6,241	32,816
South Kivu	4,991	24,955
Total	82,657	474,878

Sofia Awaizayi’s family was one of around 1,000 to receive essential supplies from a UNICEF-led rapid response mission in Tanganyika province.
© UNICEF/UN0410347/Acland



LIVES IN LIMBO

Displaced families cope with tough conditions

Sixty kilometres of rutted track connect the 24,000 inhabitants of Tsuya IDP site with Bunia, the main town of Ituri province. Set in the rolling hills of eastern DRC, the settlement feels especially remote during the September to October wet season, when deep mud can make the route impassable.

Nearly all Tsuya's inhabitants are Hema, farming people who have suffered repeated attacks by armed fighters claiming allegiance to a rival ethnic group, the Lendu, who they accuse of trying to take their land. Having abandoned their homes, the IDPs now live in long rows of flimsy grass and tarpaulin

A disused church building forms part of Tsuya displaced persons' site in Drodro. The site is home to about 24,000 displaced people. © UNICEF/ UN0377411/LeMoyné



Children play at a child friendly space in a displacement site in Ituri province. © UNICEF/ UN0377404/LeMoyné

shelters clustered on a hillside below a disused Catholic church.

Some of the IDPs walk to their fields to bring back cassava and potatoes to eat and sell. But they are too frightened to stay overnight in their former homes, many of which have in any case been destroyed. Other IDPs rely on handouts or on finding day work with which to pay for food and other necessities.

If the setting seems peaceful, the prospect of violence and further displacement is never far away – and children are especially vulnerable.

“There is a sense of tragedy about this camp,” said UNICEF Emergency Field Officer Hugo Kambale. “Many of the people here are skilled farmers, yet the militants will not let them live on the land.”

Sixty-year-old Anastasia Ndroyi lives in Tsuya with her daughter, son-in-law and ten grandchildren. The family is one of several occupying the church's crumbling outbuildings.

Early in 2020, one of Ndroyi's three sons was killed by a rebel group. That led to her third experience of being displaced from her home. She doubts it will be the last.

“I would obviously like my grandchildren to have a good life,” she said. “But I am not hopeful. The situation here is so bad.”

Looking after the children is a problem, especially when Ndroyi and the other adults are away working in the fields. Many children in Tsuya join games and other activities organized at a UNICEF-supported Child Friendly Space (CFS) which operates in the

If the setting seems peaceful, the prospect of violence and further displacement is never far away -- and children are especially vulnerable.



Ferceta cares for six orphaned or unaccompanied children. © UNICEF/UN0377458/LeMoyne

church courtyard. These CFS are often used by UNICEF and other agencies during emergencies, allowing children to gather and play in a safe and supervised setting.

"I fled with my family when the militia attacked our village," said 12-year-old Emmanuel. "I enjoy learning songs and the new games as well. And I enjoy playing football and cards."

The CFS supervisor, Stephanie Madasilove, says psychosocial activities help staff identify the children worst affected by their

experiences of conflict and displacement.

"There are some that keep to themselves, that don't play. So, you take the child, and the child tells you lots of things," said Madasilove. "It's important to distract them."

Single-headed households are common in the camps. Ferceta, a single mother herself, takes care of six unaccompanied children in Izinga settlement, one of five sites near Boga. She believes that the parents of the children she looks

after were killed in attacks by the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), a Uganda-based armed group blamed for numerous attacks.

"I felt I had to look after these children because I didn't know that anyone else would," said Ferceta.

In mid-2020, an improvement in the security situation in Ituri opened up access to some violence-ravaged areas that had been out of reach for many months.

One such area was Djugu territory.

In August 2020, a visiting UN mission painted a bleak picture of the situation there .

"Homes have been burnt in their majority, crops pillaged, cattle stolen and whatever basic social infrastructures existed destroyed," the report stated. Living conditions in the large camps in the area were inadequate. "Children do not receive education, there are problems with WASH, major protection issues, and in general a sense of people living in squalor over the years."

Playtime at a UNICEF-supported child friendly space in Ituri province. © UNICEF/UN0377403/LeMoyne





Raising children in an IDP site - one mother's experience

Mweso IDP site lies in hilly countryside four hours' drive north of Goma, the capital of North Kivu province.

In a region scarred by attacks by armed groups and counter measures by the Congolese military, tens of thousands of people have abandoned their homes and moved into the

relative safety of the seven IDP sites in the area.

Most of the 6,000 people who live in Mweso IDP site are Congolese Hutu, but there are other ethnic groups too. The sole primary school reopened in October after months of closure on account of the COVID-19 pandemic. Among the first families to register their children was



Nyiramahire (left) watches as four of her children are registered to join the primary school in Mweso IDP site. © UNICEF/UN0390904/LeMoyné



Displaced woman on the outskirts of Mweso, North Kivu. © UNICEF/UN0402442/Brown

Nyiramahire, a single mother of six. She described her daily routine.

"I get up at around 5 am to go and look for work in the farms that surround the camp. Otherwise I pick vegetables from nearby farms and take them to the town to sell. It takes about eight hours to walk there and back. It's often difficult to find work, in which case the family goes hungry.

"I usually come home from work at 4 and spend a few hours preparing the food [on a wood fire] We eat fou-fou (a popular local food made of cassava and green plantain flour). We can never afford meat, not even a chicken.

"There is good security in the camp. If I don't

come back home after work, my neighbours will alert the camp authorities and take care of the children.

The most common diseases are malaria, diarrhoea and malnutrition. (Nyiramahire lost two of her children to malaria and malnutrition). In September, the twins and I had malaria. We received [outpatient] treatment at the hospital in Mweso.

"I came (to the school) today to register my children because if they get an education one of them might become a politician or a teacher. We have been told to bring our children here and someone will teach them without us having to pay."

PEACEBUILDING

Supporting communities' first steps towards co-existence

UNICEF Emergency Officer, Rose Bubuya Namira, speaks to children during peacebuilding classes at a primary school in Nyunzu, Tanganyika province.
© UNICEF/UN0402433/Acland [Left]

On the long and difficult path towards peace in eastern DRC, the children of Mapatano Nyunzu primary school play a small but significant part. The school is one of 20 in Tanganyika province where children from the two main ethnic groups – Twa and Bantu – come together each week to discuss

what they can do to encourage the message of harmony and reconciliation in a region blighted by vicious tribal conflict.

Militia groups have frequently targeted Tanganyika's schools. More than 150 have been destroyed or badly damaged in the



past twenty years. It is against this backdrop that, as part of a UNICEF-supported initiative, teachers trained in mediation and conflict resolution are helping students learn why stealing and score-settling with violence are wrong, and why having good relations with neighbours is so important.

“Before children played in separate groups, and the animosity between Bantus and Twas was reflected in their relationships. But now they

mix together and play together,” said school director Brigitte Sagali Kihilu.

Efforts to improve relations between Tanganyika's ethnic groups come at a time when the central government is extending its grip on the province, reducing the influence of the militias, and improving security. A government strategy paper noted that the security situation in Tanganyika had improved substantially since

“Before children played in separate groups [...]. But now they mix and play together,”

Children from ethnic Twa and Bantu communities are taught why stealing and score-settling with violence are wrong. © UNICEF/UN0410342/Acland



2018, with large numbers of Twa and some Bantu militia laying down their arms. However, the paper noted that tensions remain, with a continuing potential for violence.

That has not deterred the authorities from moving ahead with plans to move some 70,000 IDPs from the sites they currently occupy and resettle them within existing communities. UN agencies including UNICEF are supporting the plan by providing more durable solutions for displaced populations.

“We want to help communities who have welcomed displaced families by supporting them in their development,” said UNICEF DRC

Representative Edouard Beigbeder. “This means working alongside the government to provide more basic social services – sanitation, water, education and health centres. We match the resources from the community with those of the government and partners. In the process, we are encouraging the transition from emergency conditions towards long-term development that will lay the foundations for peace.”

While Tanganyika has made progress, the situation is very different in Ituri and North Kivu, where killings and outbreaks of violence continue, and where tensions between local

“We are encouraging the transition from emergency conditions towards long-term development that will lay the foundations for peace.”

Children at Mapatano Nyunzu primary school are playing their part in efforts to improve community relations. © UNICEF/UN0410344/Acland

communities and the huge number of IDPs – especially those from other ethnic groups – frequently spill over into violence.

In Ituri, the Lendu and Hema ethnic groups share a long history of animosity that originates in disputes around land tenure and opportunities for social advancement. An upsurge in violence that began in January

2018 led to the displacement of 1.7 million people, including 600,000 in the first six months of 2020.

Around 80,000 of these IDPs are now in Djugu territory, on the fringe of Lake Albert. While the majority of the IDPs are Hema, some Lendu families live alongside them, enduring the same harsh living conditions.



Charlotte (left) and Francoise.
© UNICEF/UN0381753/LeMoyne

Friends across the ethnic divide

“Our village was attacked by militants who are supposed to be sympathetic to us Lendus,” said Charlotte Ngayelle Tabo, who lives in Loda camp with her husband and seven children. “But they destroyed everything, even though the two communities lived in separate parts of the village.”

One of Tabo’s current- and former -- neighbours is Francoise Nzale Rhuye, a Hema who used to live in the same village.

“We were on friendly terms with them,” said Rhuye. “But since we were forced to move to this camp we have become much closer.”

HEALTH AND NUTRITION

Disease and poor diets
strain weakened services

Overturned furniture, discarded medical records and empty vials are all that remains of the health centre serving the mountaintop village of Mikenge, in South Kivu province.

Until recently, this remote spot was reachable only by helicopter or

via a steep and treacherous path. But what affects villagers is not so much the isolation of their homes here in the Haut Plateau region as the recurrent fighting between rival militia groups.

The health centre and adjoining school were wrecked after coming

UNICEF Communications for Development officer Astrid Nsuka Muzita inspects a ransacked UNICEF-supported health centre near the small town of Mikenge, South Kivu. © UNICEF/UN0410359/Kivuyi



under fire during clashes in August 2020. A government doctor was killed in a separate incident.

Previously, the health centre's resident nurses were able to visit Berta Namujamba's home to provide vaccines and other essential care for her children, including the youngest, three-month-old Nabintu. But not anymore.

"Doctors used to visit regularly, but now it's too dangerous," Namujamba said. "I am worried about my child. If she falls sick there is no medical provision."

While baby Nabintu is left without protection against diseases like tuberculosis and Polio, expectant mothers in the village must now either make the arduous journey to hospital 25 kilometres away or risk giving birth without any medical help.

The area's chief medical officer, Dr Jen De Dieu Murhala, said it was unlikely the centre in Mikenge, which received support from UNICEF – would reopen in the short term.

"Although we are experiencing a period of calm at the moment, that can change very quickly," he said.

In rural areas of DRC, such attacks on health services by armed groups trying to deny services to their rivals are not uncommon. In Ituri alone, 18 health centres were destroyed between January and June 2020.

The deterrent effect on health staff is understandable.

"Our couriers are sometimes caught in the crossfire," said Lusandja Toussaint, the nurse in charge of vaccinations. "It's not safe for them to make the journey."

In rural areas of DRC, attacks on health services by armed groups trying to deny services to their rivals are not uncommon.

Monitoring a child's weight. Displaced children are particularly vulnerable to malnutrition. © UNICEF/UN0390892/LeMoyne

Once banished from their communities, displaced families find it especially difficult to access adequate healthcare including immunization. This can have fatal consequences for children who become even more vulnerable to the potentially lethal diseases which affect the country.

Malaria is the deadliest, killing around 17,000 people in 2019, mostly young children. 2019 also saw the worst measles outbreak in DRC's history, with nearly 320,000 cases and over 6,000 deaths recorded, again, mostly children. UN data shows that 3.1 million people live in measles-affected

Children are left vulnerable to potentially lethal diseases.

areas, many of them in eastern provinces.

Cholera is another threat, with more than 20,000 cases recorded from January to October 2019. In the first 41 weeks of 2020, the provinces of North Kivu, South Kivu and Tanganyika were responsible

for nearly 70 per cent of the DRC's entire cholera caseload.

In addition, eastern DRC was the focus of a nearly two-year-long Ebola outbreak which killed around 2,300 people before it ended in June 2020. By that time, DRC was also battling the global coronavirus pandemic.

Nurse Ange Amani (centre) provides nutrition guidance to outpatients at a UNICEF-supported clinic in Kizimba, North Kivu. © UNICEF/UN0390898/LeMoyne





Against such a backdrop, the task of providing basic healthcare in conflict-torn eastern DRC is especially challenging.

“When we have distressed people in a secure area, our basic priority is to work closely with our partners to provide basic health services focusing on immunization for children, taking care of killer diseases like diarrhea and malaria, and working on malnutrition, because rates among this population are very high,” said UNICEF chief of health, Xavier Crespin.

“But its very challenging especially in areas where health structures have been destroyed

and health workers are not there.”

Important lessons have been learned from the country’s recent Ebola outbreaks, not least the need to win the trust and support of the local population.

“We are seeing more community engagement when it comes to health issues specifically,” Crespin said.

It was this kind of community work that persuaded Odette Nyirasabimana to bring her five-year-old son Ishara to a UNICEF-supported health centre at Kazimba village, North Kivu province. She and her family have lived in a nearby IDP site for several years.

Against such a backdrop, the task of providing basic healthcare in conflict-torn eastern DRC is especially challenging.

Measuring the height of a malnourished child.
© UNICEF/UN0390894/LeMoyne

“Ishara was not eating properly and was getting very thin,” said Nyirasabimana. “Last week a community health person advised me to bring him here.”

That advice came none too soon: Ishara was found to be suffering from the most severe (and potentially lethal) form of malnutrition. He was prescribed vitamin supplements and antibiotics.

Malnutrition is a major threat to children in eastern Congo, especially among displaced populations.

“When they are displaced, people are forced to abandon their food stocks, their fields and their livestock,” said UNICEF nutrition specialist, Nelly Malela. “This results in a reduction in food intake that will eventually lead to malnutrition if no food assistance is provided.”

Emma Mapendu is director of nursing at Drodoro General Hospital in Ituri province. UNICEF supplies the hospital with therapeutic milk for the steady stream of malnourished children who come seeking treatment.

“Since September 2020, we’ve seen a lot of cases of malnutrition, especially children, the majority of whom are displaced.” Mapendu said. “The cases are still rising and we’re afraid we’ll be totally overwhelmed.”

The rates of malnutrition among children reflect a broader national crisis. 3.3 million children under 5 years are malnourished, and 1 million suffer from severe acute malnutrition (SAM). In 2019, 35 per cent of deaths among children under the age of 5 were directly or indirectly linked to malnutrition.

Malnutrition is a major threat to children in eastern Congo, especially among displaced populations.

Outpatients at a UNICEF-supported nutrition clinic in Kizimba, North Kivu. © UNICEF/UN0390891/LeMoyne





Children at a porridge club in South Kivu. © UNICEF/UN0410363/Brown

Porridge for displaced children

Antoinette Bideni set up what she likes to call a “porridge club” when she moved to Minembwe, in South Kivu, and noticed the effects malnutrition was having on the children.

“Many had faded hair, bloated stomachs and sallow cheeks,” Bideni recalled. “But after two weeks eating one bowl of porridge daily, they started to look healthy again.”

There are now 16 kitchens each serving daily up to 150 customers, mostly displaced children. At the start of the project, she received guidance from a UNICEF partner NGO, Medecins D’Afrique.

“I wanted to help people on the Haut Plateau who are suffering,” Bideni said. “We can’t always rely on the outside world to feed us.”



Porridge clubs have proved popular especially among hungry displaced children and their families. © UNICEF/UN0402417/Brown

EDUCATION

Children clamour to learn despite violence and pandemic

For years, conflict between Tanganyika’s main ethnic groups, the Bantu and the Twa, has taken a heavy toll on children’s hopes of gaining an education, leaving dozens of schools burned down or destroyed.

But when Mapendano primary school closed in early 2020, it was for a different reason. With fears of COVID-19 surging, the authorities ordered all schools in

the area to send students home. The school briefly re-opened in October and then was forced to close again at the end of 2020 because of the worsening crisis.

When it was open, 1,500 primary school students busily engaged in a UNICEF-supported “catch up” programme. The classes in reading, writing and mathematics run for three hours every weekday afternoon.

Ethnic conflict has taken a heavy toll on children’s hopes of gaining an education.

Children at a catch up French class in Mapendano primary school, Nyunzu. © UNICEF/UN0402434/Acland





10-year-old Fataki Luak has ambitions of becoming a doctor and had been waiting impatiently for school to resume.

"I have fallen behind in my work, so nothing will stop me from coming to do these extra classes as often as I can."

A stark reminder of the conflict can be found in the town of Nyunzu, where the charred remains of two incinerated school buildings are still visible. They were destroyed in March 2020 during an attack by Bantu militants.

Nearby two large white UNICEF

tents have been positioned, part of an initiative to allow classes to resume while destroyed schools are being reconstructed.

Besides taking a toll on education, the ethnic conflict has created a large IDP population. There are currently 11 displacement sites

in Tanganyika province, sheltering nearly 70,000 people. A larger number of displaced people live within the local community.

With so many schools rendered unusable, finding classes for children displaced by the conflict becomes even harder.

A boy stands to answer a question at a catch up French class in Mapendano primary school.
© UNICEF/UN0410340/Acland

“In the worst instances, the displaced children arrive in a place where local schools don’t want to accept more students,” said UNICEF education staff. “So we have to create learning spaces where children can get over the shock of being displaced and recover their routine.”

Even in the bleakest settings, the learning experience can play an important positive role in bringing the rival communities together.

15-year-old Patient Katoba Masudi – an ethnic Twa – and 12-year-old Kalega Kahengele – a Bantu – attend a dilapidated school in Kalombo village, south of Nyunzu. Learning conditions are primitive. There are no windows, no latrines and plaster is falling off the walls.

Teachers use crumbling walls as a makeshift blackboard. During the rainy season, water comes cascading through the roof. Once the classroom gets too waterlogged, the children are sent home.

“It was this school that helped us become such friends, despite the age difference between us,” Kalega said. “Our friendship has also brought our families closer together.”

Patient, smiling and gripping his friend’s arm, agrees.

“I know we will remain friends as we work to become teachers once we are adults.”

The learning experience can play an important positive role in bringing the rival communities together.

Teacher Simon Mwenu wa Mwenu teaches science to primary school students at a dilapidated school in Kilunga IDP site, Tanganyika province. © UNICEF/UN0410345/Acland



Children sift sand looking for tiny pieces of gold at an informal mine near the city of Bukavu, eastern DRC. © UNICEF/UN0402419/Brown

Children follow the lure of DRC’s mineral riches

School is a distant memory for 13-year-old Cinza Yamangu and his friend, Espoir Kalembo, 15, as they squat near a gold mine a hill above Luhihi village, South Kivu. They sift through piles of sand, looking for tiny pieces of gold, while nearby, men wearing head torches clamber out of deep holes in the brown earth.

“Sometimes the guards chase us away with sticks,” says Cinza, “Because we are minors and we are not supposed to be in the mine.” They always manage to sneak back in.

The boys dropped out of school five years ago when their families could no longer afford to buy them books or uniforms. They spend six days a week either in the mine or down at the river, panning for gold. A makeshift town has sprung

up there after gold was discovered in the area in May 2020.

On a good day, Espoir and Cinza might make 5,000 Congolese Francs each, (US \$2.50). They use the money to buy clothes and food. Even so, their shoes are broken, and they eat just one meal a day. “Some days I find gold, some days I find only dust,” says Espoir.

UNICEF data shows that some 40,000 children work in mines in the country’s south-east, mostly digging for cobalt used in mobile phones and electric cars. Further north in the embattled Kivu provinces, children toil in gold, tin and coltan mines often run by militia groups. “Many are trying to earn money for school fees,” said Adelard Mahamba, WASH officer for UNICEF in South Kivu.

WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE

Looking beyond IDPs' immediate needs



The floodwaters that surged through Uvira on 16 April 2020 were the worst in local memory. Following heavy rains, a raging torrent swept through the town at the far northern end of Lake Tanganyika, leaving behind a thick layer of mud and debris.

Thousands of people had to abandon their homes – a reminder that in eastern DRC, nature as well as conflict can destroy livelihoods and communities.

But the floods – on the shores of Africa's second biggest freshwater lake – also underscored that while water scarcity is rarely an issue for DRC, delivering safe water for a large population, including many IDPs, is a much bigger challenge.

The problem is apparent beside a road on Uvira's outskirts, where a group of women and children scoop brackish water from a muddy pond into 20 litre jerrycans.

People collect water from a broken water main in Uvira, South Kivu. Waterborne diseases such as cholera are a major threat to displaced populations.
© UNICEF/UN0402425/Brown



Across DRC, such sights are common. According to UNICEF data, just 5 per cent of the population has access to a safely managed water service. The majority rely on unprotected public water sources for their drinking and other needs, despite the risks of diarrheal disease. From January to October 2019, more than 20,000 cholera cases were recorded.

“Cholera is one of the major problems in Uvira but so too is diarrhea, typhoid, measles, malaria and respiratory illnesses,” said local epidemiologist Dr Yollande Ramazadi. “The hospital (here) has a 56-bed capacity, yet often the number of patients can be more

than double that number when there is a cholera outbreak.”

After the April floods, UNICEF and its partners provided clean water, soap and other emergency WASH assistance to more than 100,000 affected and displaced people in Uvira, many of them children. According to UNICEF DRC WASH manager, Nick Rice Chudeau, a much more severe challenge comes when displaced populations need support over the longer term.

“Emergency assistance is only a band-aid. It’s not going to solve longer term water supply and sanitation challenges for which we need the infrastructure,”

“Emergency assistance is only a band-aid. It’s not going to solve longer term water supply and sanitation challenges for which we need the infrastructure”

Joseph Mbarato surveys the damage done to his home by floodwaters that surged through the city of Uvira in April 2020. Almost 78,000 people were left without shelter. © UNICEF/UN0410348/Brown



said Chudeau. “You can have a gathering of people at the site, but there could be land ownership issues that prevent you drilling a borehole to supply water. Then there is the sanitation – if its private land would the owner allow you to build latrines?”

In addition to these sensitive issues there is the question of funding. Donors are more responsive when the needs are acute. Convincing them to provide support for a displaced population’s longer-term needs is harder.

On occasion, however, local WASH solutions can help defuse tensions between host communities and IDPs. Some years ago, IDPs settled

on vacant land in the centre of Bunia, in Ituri province. The IDP population soon grew, creating tensions with local people in the densely-populated town. To help address the issue, UNICEF and an NGO partner have recently installed a series of tap stands.

“These tap stands are primarily for use by the Bunia host community,” said UNICEF Bunia Chief Field Officer Dr Cisse Ibrahim. “They also offset any impression that agencies (like UNICEF) only serve IDPs and not the local population.”

In displaced families and host communities alike, the laborious routine of fetching water usually falls on women and girls.

In addition to these sensitive issues there is the question of funding.

Children queue at a handwashing point in Kigonze IDP camp, in Ituri province. © UNICEF/UN0383628/LeMoyné



Widowed mother-of-five Francoise lives in Kalunga IDP settlement, three kilometres north of the Tanganyika provincial capital, Kalemie. She and one of her children make four trips daily to the water pump located near the settlement perimeter.

“Even early in the morning there is a queue at the well,” said Francoise. “We need water daily for our cooking and washing and have to collect it so often because its rationed.”

In some regions, IDPs have access to villages and schools covered by a huge UNICEF-backed development initiative that

provides sustainable access to safe drinking water, adequate sanitation and proper hygiene. Benefiting over 8 million people in total, the Healthy School and Village National Programme (PNEVA) is also helping tackle the stigma and other issues that girls face around menstrual hygiene.

“Women and girls are still menstruating when they are displaced or when they are returnees,” said Chudeau. “We need to ensure that they have the means to manage their menstruation safely, in dignity and stay healthy without any fear of stigma or marginalization.”

A woman carries a container of water near her home in Uvira, South Kivu. © UNICEF/UN0402424/Brown

► Women leave empty-handed from a water pump near Kalunga camp, Tanganyika province where rationing is a regular occurrence. © UNICEF/UN0410346/Acland



CALL TO ACTION

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, one of the world's worst humanitarian crises continues to unfold. More than 5 million people are displaced, including some 3 million children. Efforts to stem the conflict which caused most of

these desperate families to flee their homes continue. But there is an urgent need to strengthen the basic services on which the displaced and affected host communities depend, both for their survival and for their longer-term sustenance.

It is vital that humanitarian efforts are maintained and stepped up, while confronting the challenges of a uniquely complex environment. To that end, UNICEF makes the following Call to Action.

WE CALL ON ALL PARTIES TO THE CONFLICT IN EASTERN CONGO TO:

UNICEF CALLS ON THE GOVERNMENT OF DRC TO:

UNICEF CALLS ON THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO:

- End the killing, maiming and brutal assaults – including rape and other forms of gender-based violence -- which have led to the displacement of civilian populations in many areas
- Adhere to international humanitarian law and ensure the safe and unrestricted access of humanitarian actors to displaced children and their families
- Cease all attacks and threats against health facilities, schools and their staff, and to ensure that children have safe access to all essential services
- End the recruitment and use of children and to hold perpetrators accountable

- Redouble efforts to bring peace to the eastern provinces and all areas affected by ongoing conflict, ensuring that those responsible for acts of violence face justice
- Take firm measures to stem the flow of funds which has allowed armed groups active in eastern DRC to expand their activities at the expense of local communities
- Allocate increased resources from the national budget to extend the provision of essential health care, nutrition and immunization services for pregnant women, new-born and young children
- Prioritise the strengthening of WASH, education and other essential basic services for displaced and host community populations

- Commit generous, multi-year resources to the Government of DRC's efforts to revamp and strengthen basic health, nutrition, WASH and education services for displaced, returned, and host community child and family
- Provide assistance that is flexible and responsive to the needs of an evolving, complex humanitarian crisis, supporting both emergency response as well as long-term interventions to sustainably reduce humanitarian needs
- Ensure that the mechanisms for relief delivery fully mitigate the risk of fraud and protect recipient populations from sexual exploitation and abuse
- Invest in DRC's local and national capacity to deliver humanitarian and development assistance to ensure sustainability of aid activities and accountability to affected populations

UNICEF has been active in the DRC since 1963. We reiterate our commitment to realizing these critically important priorities and to working in partnership with the Government of the DRC and civil society partners to achieve common goals for children, women and vulnerable groups – regardless of ethnicity, religion or any other status.



Girl at a catch up maths class in Mapendano primary school, Nyunzu, Tanganyika province. © UNICEF/UN0402437/Acland



Loda IDP camp in Ituri, eastern DRC. © UNICEF/UN0381747/LeMoyné



A child water carrier in Uvira, South Kivu. © UNICEF/Brown

UNICEF DRC: RESPONSE HIGHLIGHTS

Between January and November 2020, UNICEF and partners have:

GIVEN MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT TO 181,00 CHILDREN

PROVIDED OVER 3,000 UNACCOMPANIED AND SEPARATED CHILDREN WITH ACCESS TO FAMILY-BASED CARE OR APPROPRIATE ALTERNATIVE SERVICES

SUPPORTED THE REINTEGRATION OF NEARLY 3,000 CHILDREN SEPARATED FROM ARMED GROUPS

PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT AND CHILD PROTECTION

PROVIDED 478,000 DISPLACED PEOPLE WITH ESSENTIAL HOUSEHOLD ITEMS, AND SHELTER MATERIALS

RAPID RESPONSE

VACCINATED NEARLY 540,000 CHILDREN AGED 6 MONTHS TO 14 YEARS AGAINST MEASLES

DELIVERED PRIMARY HEALTH CARE IN UNICEF-SUPPORTED FACILITIES TO OVER 71,000 CHILDREN AND WOMEN

ADMITTED OVER 272,000 SAM-AFFECTED CHILDREN AGED UNDER 5 YEARS FOR NUTRITION TREATMENT

HEALTH AND NUTRITION

PROVIDED 104,000 CHILDREN AGED 6 TO 17 YEARS WITH ACCESS TO FORMAL OR NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

TRAINED 2,400 FEMALE AND MALE TEACHERS ON LEARNER-CENTRED METHODOLOGIES AND PEACE EDUCATION

EDUCATION

PROVIDED WASH ASSISTANCE AT HEALTH CENTRES OR HOMES TO MORE THAN 12,000 SEVERELY MALNOURISHED CHILDREN, AS WELL AS PREGNANT/ BREAST-FEEDING WOMEN

PROVIDED ACCESS TO WASH SERVICES TO OVER 391,000 PEOPLE AFFECTED BY NATURAL DISASTERS, POPULATION MOVEMENTS AND/OR CONFLICTS

WASH

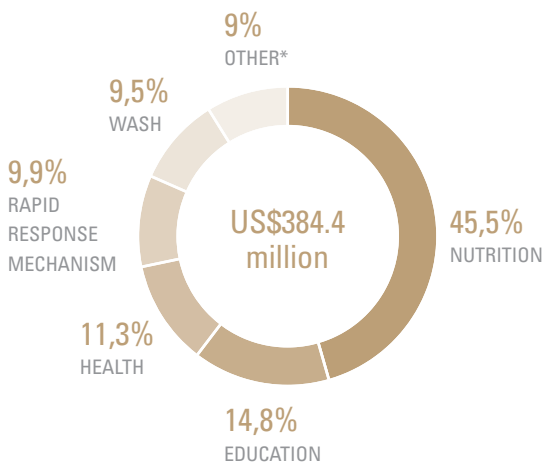
REACHED 14,700,000 PEOPLE WITH KEY LIFE- SAVING MESSAGES ON HUMANITARIAN SERVICES

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

UNICEF FUNDING NEEDS 2021

UNICEF requires US\$384.4 million to ensure the continuity and expansion of its support to meet the acute needs of children and women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This represents a 37.5 per cent increase over the 2020 appeal, which corresponds to the 32 per cent increase in the total number of people to be reached. These funds will enable UNICEF to scale up its rapid response, promote integrated life-saving interventions and use a community-based approach to provide more timely, effective and efficient support to vulnerable children. Without timely and adequate funding, UNICEF and its partners will be unable to provide critical services addressing the acute humanitarian needs of 2.9 million Congolese children and their families and uphold and promote their rights.

Displaced people who have returned to their homes in Tanganyika province. © UNICEF/UN0410378/Acland



*This includes costs from other sectors/interventions: Child protection, GBViE and PSEA (4.2%), Social protection and cash transfers (1.8%), C4D, Community engagement and AAP (1.8%), Cluster coordination (<1%).

SECTORS	2021 REQUIREMENTS (USD)
Nutrition	175,088,235
Health	43,598,460
WASH	36,698,249
Child Protection, GBViE and PSEA	16,198,380
Education	56,955,555
Social protection and cash transfers	7,100,000
C4D, Community engagement and AAP	7,080,400
Rapid response mechanism	37,942,810
Cluster coordination	3,750,000
TOTAL	384,412,089



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