

4. DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

Record number of people facing severe food insecurity

KEY FACTS

Population: **89.6 million**

19.6 million people in need of humanitarian aid

21.8 million facing crisis or worse levels of food insecurity (IPC 3+)

5.5 million people internally displaced

161st (of 195 countries) for capability to prevent and mitigate epidemics

50.7% of women over 15 report they have ever experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner

161st (of 167 countries) for women's equality

177th (of 181 countries) for resilience to climate change

4/5 score for severity of access constraints

35% of funding received for 2020 Humanitarian Response Plan

Above: Dr. Sylvie Musema Ngimba, an IRC staff doctor, delivers personal protective equipment to a local health facility in Beni, North Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo.

PROBABILITY

8 HUMAN THREAT

5 NATURAL THREAT

IMPACT

9 CONSTRAINTS ON COUNTRY RESPONSE

9 EXISTING PRESSURES ON POPULATION

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) ranks in the top five of Watchlist for the third year in the row, reflecting persistent volatility in a country that is now in its fourth decade of a major humanitarian crisis.

The DRC has experienced a protracted humanitarian crisis - the east of the country has hosted a major response for over 30 years - and yet the humanitarian situation is still constantly evolving and deteriorating, principally due to conflict. There are now more people facing crisis (IPC 3) or worse levels of food insecurity in the DRC than has ever been recorded in any country. The DRC faces other major challenges on top of large-scale violence: 2020 saw the conclusion of the DRC's tenth Ebola outbreak in eastern DRC, the start and end of the country's eleventh Ebola outbreak in western DRC and the arrival of COVID-19. Conflict, economic struggles and the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic are all driving up food insecurity.

"Years of insecurity and the multiple humanitarian needs make the DRC a complex operating environment. It is imperative that we are able to balance the requirements of battling pre-existing health and protection needs for the most vulnerable, especially women and children, whilst simultaneously preventing and containing the effects of new shocks such as COVID-19. With the long history of our presence in DRC, the IRC is well placed to engage and mobilise communities as part of our response programming."

- Nelly Moleka
Deputy Director of Programs, IRC DRC



HUMANITARIAN RISKS IN 2021

- ▶ **Conflict involving an array of local armed groups, often vying for control of natural resources, will continue to affect many parts of eastern DRC, driving humanitarian needs and making the country one of the most dangerous for civilians and humanitarians.** In the first half of 2020, over 1.4 million people were displaced by conflict in eastern DRC, mostly in North Kivu and Ituri; this total is second only to Syria globally ([IDMC](#)). The enduring presence of dozens of armed groups across eastern DRC means such insecurity is likely to continue in 2021, particularly if they come to see the proposed reduction in the size of the DRC peacekeeping force, MONUSCO, as an opportunity to expand their influence. Additionally, the northeastern province of Ituri has seen increased violence largely along ethnic lines since 2018, although the reasons for the escalation remain opaque, and this instability is likely to continue into 2021. The DRC was the second deadliest of the Watchlist countries for civilians in 2020, with over 1,800 deaths in the first three-quarters of the year ([ACLED](#)). It also saw the second highest number of aid workers being kidnapped in 2020 (33 as of writing), after only Mali ([AWSO](#)).
- ▶ **Conflict, economic collapse and the COVID-19 pandemic could push food insecurity to famine levels.** 21.8 million people are experiencing Crisis (IPC 3) or higher levels of food insecurity ([IPC Info](#)) - a 40% rise compared to the last food insecurity assessment from mid-2019 and the highest absolute number ever recorded in any country ([OCHA](#)). Conflict-driven displacements are a major cause of food insecurity since families often have to abandon their agricultural activities. IRC teams in the DRC have noted that COVID-19 restrictions are likely responsible for a 15% drop in children being treated for malnutrition in 2020 despite the rapidly rising food insecurity ([IRC](#)). The DRC is also one of the ten countries globally most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change ([ND-GAIN](#)) and COVID-19 has further weakened the Congolese economy, making it more difficult for families to meet their needs.
- ▶ **Multiple diseases will continue to spread, not just COVID-19.** The DRC's eleventh Ebola outbreak was declared over in November 2020, and was far smaller (119 confirmed cases and 55 deaths - [WHO](#)) than the tenth outbreak – which killed 2,287 people in North Kivu and Ituri between mid-2018 and mid-2020 ([WHO](#)). In mid-2020 Congolese health authorities also announced the end of a 25-month measles outbreak that had killed over 7,000 children. Weak health infrastructure in many areas, particularly low vaccination coverage, means that disease outbreaks are a constant risk for 2021, though the DRC now has significant expertise in containing outbreaks.
- ▶ **Needs are growing rapidly yet funding for the humanitarian response is falling.** 19.6 million people will be in need of humanitarian assistance in 2021, making it the third-largest humanitarian crisis ([OCHA](#)). However, the HRP has become more underfunded each year since 2015. Just 35% of the humanitarian funding required for 2020 has been received to date ([FTS](#)), raising questions about whether many needs can actually be met.

THE IRC IN DRC

The IRC has operated in the DRC for over two decades (since 1996). We provide life-saving services related to health, epidemic control, water, sanitation, and support for survivors of violence. We work with communities on peace-building projects aimed at conflict reduction and economic recovery. The IRC has launched emergency responses to contain Ebola outbreaks in recent years, including the latest Ebola outbreak in western DRC. The IRC's response to COVID-19, Ebola, and other health crises includes training health workers, rehabilitating hospitals and clinics, and providing essential medicine. Learn more about the [IRC's DRC Response](#).

