REPUBLIC OF CONGO
Flooding in 9 out of 12 departments

CRISIS IMPACT OVERVIEW

Torrential rains since the beginning of 2024 have resulted in the rise of the Ubangi River, the largest right-bank tributary of the Congo River, flooding the Congo River Basin in the Republic of Congo. Heights of up to 5.94m have been recorded, 30cm higher than the record since 1961. As at 12 January, the floods had affected 9 of the country's 12 departments, with Brazzaville, Cuvette, Likouala, Niari, Plateaux, Pointe-Noire, and Sangha being the most affected (WHO 12/01/2024 IFRC 16/01/2024). Assessments by the Government and the Congolese Red Cross found that as at 19 January, the floods had affected more than 1.8mn people leaving more than 350,000 people in need of humanitarian assistance, and 17 deaths (IFRC 16/01/2024; ECHO 17/01/2024).

As at 12 January, floodwaters had affected more than 2,200 hectares of farmland and completely inundated the peri urban market garden belt along the Congo River, affecting 34 heath facilities, 120 schools, and 64,000 houses (IFRC 16/01/2024; WHO 12/01/2024). As at 16 January, the majority of affected people had settled in host communities without access to basic services, food, and healthcare. Children, older people, and pregnant women are highly exposed to malnutrition, disease, and protection risks (IFRC 16/01/2024).

With more rain anticipated, more people are also expected to be affected (ECHO 17/01/2024). The socioeconomic crisis in the country has aggravated the situation for the affected communities, including the over 50,000 refugees, and asylum seekers hosted in the country (WFP 31/10/2023).

The Republic of Congo is prone to recurrent flooding along the river corridor, affecting around 170,000 people each year. The country has an INFORM climate change risk score of 5.2, with a change in flood exposure of -2.2 and coastal flood exposure of 3.3 (UNICEF 2021; EC 11/07/2023).

Anticipated scope and scale

The rainy season in Congo usually runs between October–May, with peak rainfall experienced in March (Climate-Data.org accessed 17/01/2024; WB accessed 17/01/2024). This means that more floods are likely to hit both already affected and new communities.

Between 17–19 January 2024, heavy rainfall was forecast over central and southern Republic of Congo (ECHO 17/01/2024).

Humanitarian constraints

The continuous flow of floodwaters, access limitations, and incessant rains have made it difficult for humanitarian responders to reach affected communities (IFRC 16/01/2024).

Major barriers to humanitarian access in Congo that continue to hinder humanitarian operations include insecurity, bureaucratic impediments, movement restrictions (e.g. checkpoints, demonstrations), government interference with humanitarian operations, and physical constraints (OCHA 16/03/2018).

CRISIS IMPACTS

Shelter

The floods have destroyed more than 64,000 houses in the affected departments, with displaced families staying in host communities and town halls (WHO 12/01/2024). With the floods likely to endure as the rainy season continues, more people are expected to be affected, increasing shelter needs. It was also determined as at 23 November 2023 that the floods would likely compound the shelter needs of the over 45,000 refugees and asylum seekers in Likouala department, 9,000 in Bouemba within Plateaux department, and

KEY PRIORITIES

350,000
PEOPLE IN NEED OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

9 of 12
DEPARTMENTS AFFECTED

High risk
OF DISEASE OUTBREAK

5.2
INFORM CLIMATE CHANGE RISK SCORE

FUNDING AND RESPONSE CAPACITY

• UN agencies (WHO,WFP, UNICEF, UNHCR)

• IFRC, ICRC, including the Congolese Red Cross (initial response activities)

13,000 in Pool-Nord department and its adjacent communities. These migrants and asylum seekers are primarily from neighbouring Central African Republic and Democratic Republic of Congo (IFRC 23/11/2023; WFP 31/10/2023).

Health

As at 12 January 2024, floodwaters had affected at least 34 health centres in the nine affected departments. In Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire departments, local councils have reported receiving children suffering from skin diseases and diarrhoea. Additionally, this has raised concerns, as Dolisie and Pointe-Noire have experienced cholera epidemics in recent years. Shigellosis, salmonellosis, and typhoid have also been identified in the flood-prone departments of Bouenza, Brazzaville, Niari, Kouilou, and Pointe-Noire (IFRC 16/01/2024). In September 2023, the country reported over 2,300 cases of a triple outbreak of gastroenteritis, with typhoid fever, shigellosis, and cholera. The outbreak likely continues and will likely be worsened by the floods (WHO 21/09/2023).

As at 16 January 2024, the affected communities were in need of first aid, psychosocial support, and waterborne disease prevention awareness (IFRC 16/01/2024).

There is a risk of outbreaks of waterborne diseases (such as cholera), vector-borne diseases (such as malaria or dengue), and preventable diseases (such as measles). Maternal and child health nutrition risks and the risk of gender-based violence further aggravate the overall health challenges for affected communities.

WASH

According to the 2018–2022 National Development Plan, the rate of drinking water access in rural areas was estimated at 57%, compared with 78% in urban areas. In terms of sanitation, improved services in urban areas were at 76.2%, while the sanitation rate in rural areas was just 27% (DGPD 2018; JMP accessed 19/01/2024).

Drinking water infrastructure in the country includes wells and boreholes, which floods are likely to contaminate, increasing the spread of waterborne diseases as affected populations remain without clean drinking water (JMP accessed 19/01/2024).

Sanitation infrastructure in the country is mainly latrines (43% in urban areas and 14% in rural areas) (JMP accessed 19/01/2024). The flooding of these latrines will likely result in the contamination of drinking water sources and create an environment conducive to the development of bacteria, causing waterborne diseases such as cholera as populations seek clean drinking water. The lack of sanitation kits will likely compound communities' ability to decontaminate available drinking water (IFRC 16/01/2024).

Most of the displaced have sheltered in host communities and city halls. Information on their WASH needs is currently unavailable.

Livelihoods

The majority of the affected communities depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. With floodwaters inundating more than 2,000 hectares of farmland and the potential of additional floods as the rainy season continues, more people are likely to be left without an income, further compounding already existing needs (IFRC 16/01/2024). As floods have also affected roads and markets, even communities living in areas that are not flooded may still face challenges, as they cannot sell their produce in the urban centres of the affected departments and districts.

COMPOUNDING/AGGRAVATING FACTORS

Socioeconomic crisis

The Congolese economic recession between 2018–2021 worsened the country's poverty level, increasing from 48% to 53% in 2021. Annual floods have placed periodical strains on the country's economy. With rainfall levels being twice as heavy as the average for the same period in 2023, and with many losing their livelihoods, poverty levels are likely to rise sharply. At the same time, almost half of the country's population was unemployed in 2023 and the employed portion mostly works in the agricultural sector, which is currently facing flood-related challenges (DGPD 2018; USAID accessed 17/01/2024; IFRC 16/01/2024). In 2022, 33.3% of the population was food-insecure (29% moderately and 4% severely), with agricultural production severely affected by climate change and rapid urbanisation (WFP 31/03/2023).

FUNDING AND RESPONSE CAPACITY

As at 12 January 2024, WHO and various collaborating organisations were formulating a comprehensive emergency response strategy to provide essential support, including the distribution of food and agricultural resources. WHO is addressing malnutrition in children under the age of five and pregnant and breastfeeding women and enhancing access to clean WASH facilities. With the Ministry of Public Health, WHO is also establishing an early warning alert and response system for potential epidemics to allow for the prompt deployment of national first responder teams (WHO 12/01/2024).

UNHCR is present in Likouala and Plateaux and is involved in setting up temporary shelters for disaster victims in these areas. WFP has three warehouses across the country (in Brazzaville, Owando, and Pointe-Noire) and intends to assist the affected people with the food and non-food stocks available (IFRC 16/01/2024).

As at 19 January, the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) had allocated $3.6 million to meet the most urgent needs of more than 270,000 people (A News 19/01/2024)

MAP OF THE DEPARTMENTS OF CONGO SHOWING TRIBUTARIES OF THE CONGO RIVER AS AT 17 JANUARY 2024

Source: World Atlas (accessed 17/01/2024)