

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Impact of intercommunal violence and displacement in Kwango, Kwilu, and Mai-Ndombe provinces



KEY PRIORITIES

+48,000

IDPS

+2,600

REFUGEES IN THE
REPUBLIC OF CONGO

+180

PEOPLE KILLED

+230

HOUSES BURNT

CRISIS IMPACT OVERVIEW

Clashes between the Teke and Yaka communities over a land dispute have displaced more than 48,000 people in Kwango, Kwilu, and Mai-Ndombe provinces since 24 July. A customary fee imposed on so-called non-native populations is at the origin of the crisis, which started in Kwamouth territory (Mai-Ndombe) before spreading to other territories and provinces, such as Kwilu and, more recently, Kinshasa. More than 180 people have died since the violence began, although this figure is probably underestimated as not all the victims have been counted and sporadic clashes are often unreported (OCHA 25/10/2022; RFI 26/09/2022; Radio Okapi 04/11/2022 and 26/07/2022; Actualité 03/12/2022 a).

Displaced people have fled to other localities in Kwilu and Mai-Ndombe provinces and to the neighbouring provinces of Kinshasa and Kwango. At least 2,600 people from Mai-Ndombe have found refuge in the Republic of Congo, but this number is likely underestimated as populations continue to cross the Congo River (OCHA 25/10/2022). As at 6 October 2022, many refugees in the Republic of Congo were with host families, while others were sleeping in the open air or in makeshift shelters (UNHCR 11/10/2022).

During the clashes, dozens of houses, livelihoods, and granaries have been burnt. In Kwamouth territory, insecurity has interrupted agricultural activities, the main source of income for the populations, and agricultural product prices have increased as a result. In Kwilu and Mai-Ndombe provinces, the populations' economic resources have considerably diminished (OCHA et al. 03/09/2022; Radio Okapi 11/12/2022).

Map: areas affected by intercommunal violence and displacement between July and December 2022



ANTICIPATED SCOPE AND SCALE

The clashes started in Mai-Ndombe province before spreading to Kwilu province and are likely to spread to other provinces, such as Kwango, which host many people already displaced as a result of this crisis. Compared to August, recent weeks have seen less reported violence, but there are continued reports of sporadic attacks that could cause renewed violence. In early December, an attack attributed to armed men from Kwamouth territory killed at least 12 people in Maluku commune (Kinshasa province) (RFI 26/09/2022; Radio Okapi 10/12/2022; Actualité 03/12/2022 a).

Some armed men extort money from the populations in Bagata territory (Kwilu) to buy ammunition for attacks; it is likely that these newly formed militias will carry out regular attacks against civilians belonging to the different communities. There is a risk for the violence to become a protracted conflict and for its intensity to increase as both groups get more organised. This situation would hamper humanitarian access and the ability of affected populations to return to their places of origin (Radio Okapi 14/11/2022; 7sur7 22/10/2022; Actualité 15/12/2022).

In December, armed men targeted a military camp in the Kwamouth area, killing troops and civilians. Military operations will likely intensify in response to the attacks, causing more clashes and potential displacements. People who had already returned to their places of origin are likely to flee again if clashes in the provinces continue or increase (Actualité 08/12/2022; Radio Okapi 09/12/2022).

HUMANITARIAN ACCESS CONSTRAINTS

The rainy seasons (September–January and February–May) have accentuated poor roads and, along with the presence of armed people from rival communities, limited humanitarian access to the affected population for several weeks. In October, access to Kikongo health zone (Kwilu), which hosted more than 24,000 displaced people, was only via river and motorbike, as cars could not travel through the damaged roads. In some areas, these physical constraints have prevented needs assessments (OCHA et al. 03/09/2022; OCHA 25/10/2022).

Insecurity and a lack of funding limit the humanitarian presence in areas affected by intercommunal violence (Kwango, Kwilu, and Mai-Ndombe provinces). Local NGOs have reduced capacities. In Kwango, some civil society members partly attribute the deaths of more than a dozen IDPs from various pathologies to the lack of healthcare assistance (MSF 01/11/2022; Radio Okapi 07/12/2022; Actualité 14/12/2022).

LIMITATIONS

The lack of regular reporting on population movements makes it difficult to distinguish between people who are still displaced and those who have returned to their place of origin or who have been displaced a second time. The numbers of displaced people in Kwango, Kwilu, and Mai-Ndombe provinces have very likely changed since the last update on 24 October, as the security situation is changing rapidly.

CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

The Teke and Yaka communities have lived together in villages along the Congo River in Mai-Ndombe province for several decades. The Teke community that first settled in this area consider themselves owners of the territory's villages. The Yaka community came to settle shortly after the Teke. For several decades, the cohabitation between both communities had been based on arrangements for access to and use of the land. The Yaka community, whose main livelihoods are agriculture and livestock, had agreed to pay a customary fee to the Teke community to be able to practise these activities. Customary chiefs had imposed a fee on agricultural products, which suddenly increased a few months ago, causing the Yaka community to refuse to pay it. The violent incidents started after the forced collection of the customary fee (TV5MONDE 28/08/2022; BBC 23/09/2022; DW 12/09/2022).

Customary fees are often a source of tension between these two communities. Mediation efforts have previously enabled local authorities to avert the escalation of violence. Some members of the Yaka community have since said they no longer want to pay the customary fee as the constitution stipulates that they have the right to settle freely anywhere on national territory. The Yaka community appointed a customary chief (who was later killed) to replace a former Teke customary chief, which also contributed to the increase in violence in August (TV5MONDE 28/08/2022; RFI 02/09/2022; Radio Okapi 26/07/2022).

Some civil society members indicate that this dispute concerns many other communities (Balubas, Bambala, Bangala, and Batetela) considered close to either the Teke or Yaka communities, since the Teke consider all those who do not come from their community as Yaka (7sur7 22/10/2022).

PRIORITY NEEDS

Food

Most of the violence-displaced population lived from agriculture and lost their livelihoods and granaries. In the host areas in Bandundu town (Kwilu), displaced people depend on the host communities' solidarity and the limited humanitarian assistance. Access to food remains very limited for most of the displaced people, who mainly eat a paste made from a mixture of maize and cassava every day (WFP 06/12/2022; OCHA et al. 03/09/2022; OCHA 25/10/2022).

In September, the looting and burning of shops and markets and insecurity in the food supply routes further reduced access to food for populations returning to Lediba territory (Mai-Ndombe). As the clashes started during the planting season, many people had abandoned their fields, likely affecting agricultural production (WFP 06/12/2022; OCHA et al. 03/09/2022).

In Bandundu town (Kwilu), the price of a sack of maize went from CDF 85,000 (USD 41) to CDF 165,000 (USD 80) mainly because of the paralysis of agricultural activities in Bateke Plateau (Kwamouth territory, Mai-Ndombe) following the clashes. Farmers and traders no longer have access to this part of Mai-Ndombe, which largely supplies the town of Bandundu with agricultural products (Radio Okapi 11/12/2022; Actualité 10/12/2022).

WASH

With sudden demographic pressure in some areas of Kwango, Kwilu, and Mai-Ndombe provinces, displaced people live with very few sanitary facilities in both IDP sites and with host families. The practice of open-air or river defecation because of insufficient WASH services increases the risk of outbreaks of waterborne diseases, such as cholera. During the clashes, dignified and safe burials are not carried out in some villages, raising fears of disease outbreaks in these areas (OCHA et al. 03/09/2022; OCHA 25/10/2022; WFP 06/12/2022; MSF 15/09/2022).

Health

The clashes have injured many people and limited access to healthcare and medicine in the affected areas. In Kwamouth territory, the destruction of about ten health facilities has worsened the health and nutritional situation. The violence has also affected the mental health of many people aside from their immediate physical medical needs (OCHA et al. 03/09/2022; MSF 03/10/2022).

Several deaths have been reported in sites hosting people displaced by intercommunal violence. In Kwango and Kwilu provinces, at least 19 deaths are already counted among the more than 41,000 displaced from Kwamouth territory. These deaths are partly attributed to the lack of health and nutritional assistance and to the living conditions in IDP sites and with host families (Actualité 03/12/2022 b, 17/12/2022, and 19/12/2022; Radio Okapi 07/12/2022 and 24/09/2022).

Shelter

More than 230 houses have been burnt during the clashes. Many displaced people live with host families who have limited resources and space. A family of six sometimes hosts up to two other families of nine to ten people each, resulting in overcrowding and insufficient sanitary conditions. Other displaced people live in public places, such as churches and schools, or in the open, where they are exposed to the rains. Some displaced people living in public spaces sleep on the ground or on school benches (OCHA et al. 03/09/2022; Actualité 01/11/2022).

Following the improved security situation at the end of October, the government in Kwilu province decided to close the collective site for displaced people from Kwamouth in Malebo (Bandundu town). The site hosted more than 2,300 people in October, including people with specific needs, such as pregnant women, breastfeeding women with newborn babies, unaccompanied children, and elderly people. The displaced people each received CDF 200,000 (about USD 97) for travel and reintegration costs. Many who had lost their homes and livelihoods did not wish to return to their places of origin and went to places where they had family. Some decried the closure of this site as premature, as the security situation remained volatile (OCHA 25/10/2022; WFP 06/12/2022; Radio Okapi 25/10/2022; RFI 24/10/2022).

Protection

Although the clashes have decreased in certain areas, groups of criminals hidden in the forests continue to attack the displaced people who try to return to their villages of origin. The presence of criminal groups also threatens the safety of displaced people, especially during aid distributions in Bandundu (WFP 06/12/2022).

In Kwilu province, armed men extort money from villagers in Bagata territory to obtain cartridges to continue the clashes. These armed men threaten to kill the inhabitants if they refuse to give them money (Radio Okapi 14/11/2022).

In Mai-Ndombe province, populations crossing the Congo River are subject to armed attacks, particularly on the Nkana–Kwamouth route. Several boats have already received fire, further reducing population movements in this area (Radio Okapi 16/11/2022).

Education

The violence disrupted the start of the school year scheduled for 5 September and destroyed many schools in Kwamouth territory. In Masia-Kwa village, displacement, parents' lack of economic resources, and fear of violence have prevented many children from returning to school (OCHA et al. 03/09/2022; Actualité 12/09/2022 a and 12/09/2022 b).

AGGRAVATING FACTORS

Seasonal road damages

In Bandundu town, the current rainy season is limiting the supply of food to affected areas, as roads have become impassable. The Bandundu–Bagata route, widely used for the transport of agricultural products, is one of the most affected routes, contributing to a rise in maize prices.

INFORMATION GAPS AND NEEDS

The regular reporting of population movements would allow for better monitoring of the humanitarian situation. Displaced people are spread across several territories in several provinces, and there are frequent return movements whenever the security situation improves. The situation makes keeping track of displacement movements, IDP needs, and conditions in the affected provinces challenging.

Information on humanitarian access dates to October. An update would help provide a better understanding of whether the needs of the affected populations are being addressed or not and what their current conditions are.

Since physical and security constraints hamper some needs assessments, information about needs in affected areas remains scattered.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Areas affected by the intercommunal violence and displacement between July and December 2022



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Coordinate System: GCS WGS 1984

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