



Democratic Republic of Congo – Key Advocacy Messages

09 February 2025

As a follow-up from its [Protection Alert](#) issued on 27 January, the Global Protection Cluster (GPC) is releasing these Key Advocacy Messages to reinforce the protection of civilians, ensure humanitarian access to vulnerable populations, and prevent escalating protection risks, including attacks on civilians, forced displacement and obstruction of humanitarian aid.

Renewed fighting in North and South Kivu, has led to massive displacement, with around 500,000 people newly or re-displaced, adding to the 6.4 million in displacement in DRC at the end of 2024, making it one of the world's largest displacement crises. Civilians, especially women and children, face grave human rights violations, including killings, arbitrary arrests, sexual violence and forced recruitment. As of 5 February, at least 2,900 people have reportedly been killed in the hostilities and more than 3,000 injured. Significant damage to public infrastructure was also reported, including on IDPs sites, hospitals and health centers. In and around Goma, several displacement sites have been abandoned, dismantled, or destroyed, forcing displaced persons to leave and return to their area of origin, despite ongoing insecurity and a lack of protection guarantees. Others have sought refuge in host communities and various structures, such as health centers, schools and churches within Goma. Since the cessation of armed conflicts in the region, some internally displaced persons (IDPs) have returned to the sites, with at least five IDP sites now re-occupied at over 70% capacity.

1. **Sustained and principled engagement with all parties to the conflict** is critical to prevent attacks on civilians, uphold human rights, and ensure humanitarian access. Humanitarian actors must establish and uphold neutral, independent and impartial engagement principles to ensure access to affected populations. This includes consistent dialogue with all parties to secure rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access to affected populations.
2. Strong **civil-military coordination mechanisms** are needed to prevent interference in humanitarian operations, reduce risks to civilians, and ensure respect for international humanitarian law (IHL). All stakeholders must clearly distinguish between military operations and civilian efforts, ensuring that military personnel respect protected zones for civilians and facilitate humanitarian access.
3. Displaced people have the right to freely choose whether to return to their places of origin, integrate locally, or relocate elsewhere. **Any return must be voluntary, safe, and dignified**, adhering to international standards. This includes ensuring that conditions in areas of return are secure, sustainable, and provide access to essential services such as housing, healthcare, and education. Furthermore, reintegration efforts should encompass livelihood support, legal assistance, and protection monitoring to prevent further displacement and promote long-term stability.

4. The escalating insecurity and displacement are **disproportionately affecting women, girls, and vulnerable groups** (such as children, older persons, and people with disabilities), exposing them to heightened risks of violence, including forced recruitment, rape and other forms of sexual abuse. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1820 recognizes sexual violence as a weapon and tactic of war, that can constitute a war crime. To prevent further violations, including sexual violence and child rights abuses, it is critical to strengthen efforts in reporting, monitoring and ensuring accountability, reparation and justice for these violations.
5. Protection Cluster members will engage with all parties to the conflict in order to **continue or resume priority protection activities as soon as possible**, including support to civilian protection mechanisms, monitoring of population movement, and provision of assistance to the most vulnerable and the survivors/victims of various violations. As a first step, protection actors should re-establish contact with community-based protection networks in affected areas to understand the impact and how they can best be supported. Other immediate Protection Cluster activities include providing emergency assistance to survivors of sexual violence, as well as prevention programs. Engagement with communities in areas of return aims to address land-related conflicts and promote peaceful coexistence. Additionally, efforts will focus on raising awareness of the risks posed by explosive remnants of war and collaboration with relevant stakeholders to carry out decontamination activities.
6. **Diplomatic pressure from regional and international actors** is necessary to prevent further loss of life, support humanitarian actions and push for sustainable political solutions that address the root causes of the conflict.
7. **Resources must be mobilized** to strengthen protection efforts, enhance humanitarian assistance for the affected population and restore access to essential services and livelihoods.

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