

Monitoring Brief

DRC: Spotlight on M23

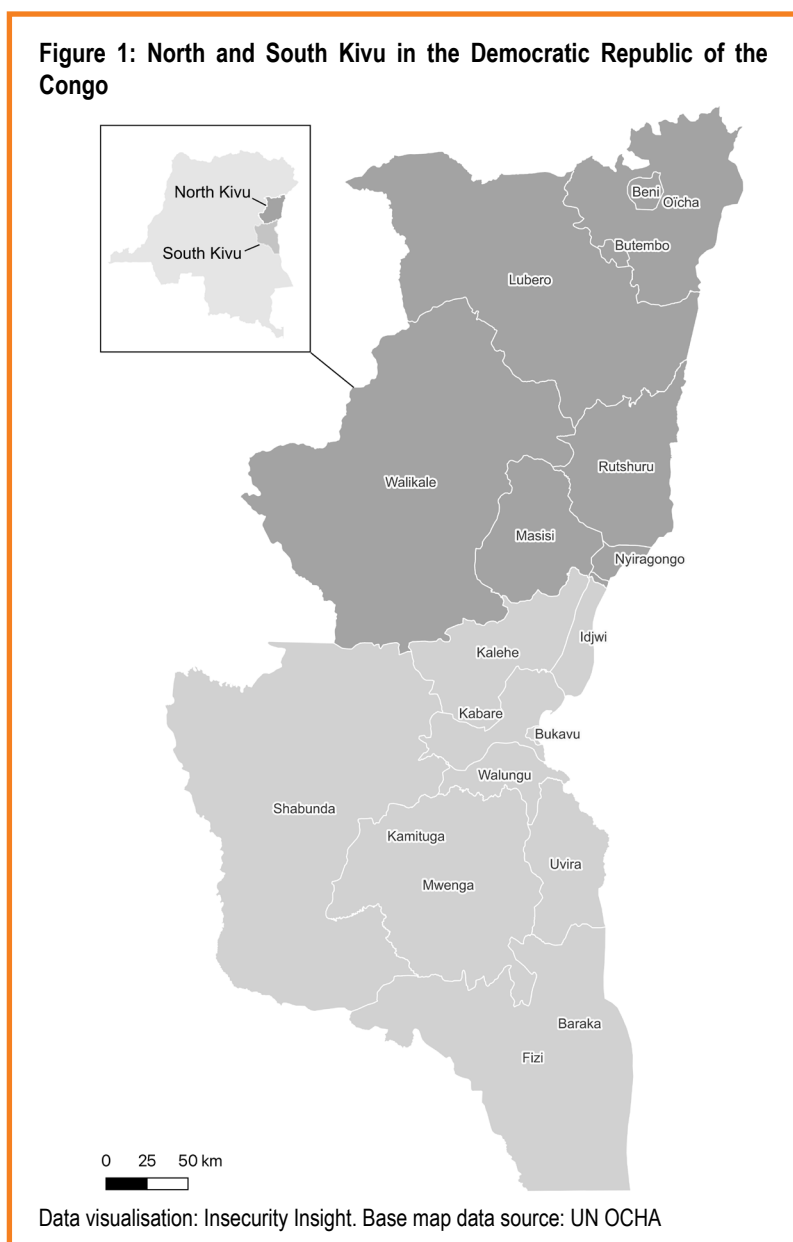
Data: March 2025



This is the first brief in a series examining factors impacting the aid agency access and safety in the Eastern DRC to support aid agency risk mitigation and forward-looking approaches to maintain access to food, health care, education and protection.

Using Insecurity Insight's [incident monitoring data](#), [social media sentiment analysis](#) and armed actor activity analysis from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data ([ACLED](#)), the series provides aid organisations with insight into patterns of violence affecting civilians and aid access. Through examination of reported violence affecting key sectors of aid activity attributed to various conflict parties, the series provides background to better assess specific threats to aid access, food security, health care, education, and community protection in IDP and refugee camps.

This first brief focuses on patterns of impact on aid of the March 23 Movement (M23).





Concerns over rising violence affecting aid and health workers

- In March 2025, 38 reported incidents directly affected aid and health operations—a 15% increase from February. Over a third occurred in Ituri and North Kivu, with additional reports from Maniema, South Kivu and Tanganyika. On 09 March, a major incident in South Kivu saw five health workers and four patients killed in a hospital shelling. See: [Direct Violence Affecting Aid Agencies](#)
- At least three aid workers were directly attacked, one of whom was shot and killed, in Ituri and Tanganyika. See: [Aid in Danger](#)
- Three hospitals and an INGO medical base were damaged by explosives during ongoing fighting between the M23 and the Armed Forces of the DRC in North and South Kivu. A hospital in North Kivu was also raided by an unidentified armed group who kidnapped patients, and in Ituri, a health worker was kidnapped by CODECO militia. See: [Attacks on Health Care](#)
- Politicised narratives around USAID funding cuts on social media called for an end to all foreign assistance framing aid as part of the problem not a solution to human suffering. See: [Reputational Threat to Aid Agencies](#)
- Livestock was looted, farm goods set on fire and farmers killed and kidnapped in Ituri and North Kivu. See: [Violence Affecting Food Systems](#)
- At least five schools in Maniema and South Kivu were raided by armed men. See: [Education in Danger](#)
- At least three sites hosting displaced people were affected by direct violence. See: [Protection in Danger](#)

Download the [data](#).

Focus sections in this brief

! Conflict Party in Focus: The M23

🔍 Social Media Sentiment Analysis: The USAID aid freeze and Attack on Lodha IDP site

Conflict Party in Focus: The March 23 Movement (M23)



Since its resurgence in November 2021, the M23 has been linked to a high number of reported incidents affecting aid operations, health care, education, and IDP support in North and South Kivu. The M23, which emerged in 2012 and maintained marginal presence until it re-organised and resumed operations in 2021, launched a full offensive in early 2022.¹ The group is one of the most active non-state armed entities in the DRC in relation to reported armed activity and clashes, with growing territorial presence and control in North and South Kivu.²

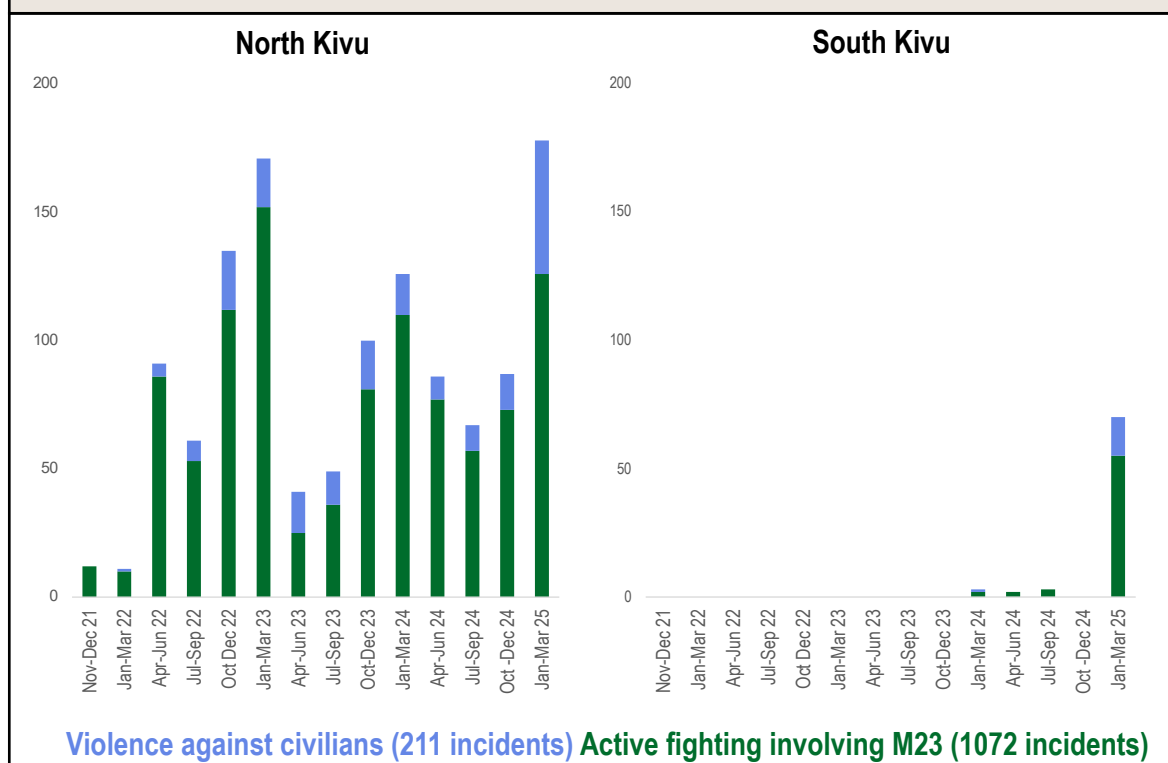
M23's growing influence and role in escalating violence.

Initially concentrated in North Kivu, M23's attacks expanded to some extent into South Kivu in 2024. By early 2025, the M23 had taken control of Goma and Bukavu - holding the largest territory among armed actors operating in the country, reportedly setting up parallel governance systems.

The expanded territorial reach affected civilians, disrupted essential services and impeded aid access. In 2025, the M23 seized control over Goma city (January 2025) and Walikale town (March 2025), and advanced further into South Kivu. Following these territorial gains violence against civilians attributed to the M23 increased in these areas compared to 2024 (figure 2).

Figure 2: Reported violence attributed to the M23: Active fighting and violence against civilians, November 2021 - March 2025

Until the end of 2023, the M23 was only active in North Kivu. In 2025, the M23 expanded presence into South Kivu.



Conflict Party in Focus: The March 23 Movement (M23)



Incidents involving violence against civilians - including aid and health workers - attributed to the M23 increased in early 2025 with a peak number of incidents reported in the first three months of 2025. The increased fighting and insecurity also disrupted essential services, including health care and education, forcing some services to be suspended as a result. Violence against aid and health workers also increased during this time, whilst some health facilities reported damage due to explosive weapon use as a result of fighting. The M23's presence further destabilised an already fragile context, compounded by funding cuts to humanitarian aid and social media narratives marked by misinformation and growing distrust of the sector.

Rising reported violence in M23 held areas and the impact on aid related sectors

By March 2025, the M23 had been linked to 149 incidents affecting aid operations, health care, education, or IDP protection —accounting for 14% of all such incidents recorded in eastern DRC between November 2021 and March 2025. This is the highest number of direct aid-related conflict incidents attributed to a single armed entity in North and South Kivu, underlying the impact the M23 has on aid operations.

Violence that damages or destroys civilian food, health, and education systems has long-term consequences, increasing the population's reliance on external aid. Attacks directly targeting aid operations further undermine the humanitarian sector's ability to respond. This subset of conflict-related incidents is particularly significant for assessing the impact of violence on access to health care, food security, and protection during conflict. All conflict violence affects humanitarian access.

Directly aid related violent incidents make up a smaller number of all conflict events. Of the total 1374 ACLED incidents of violence linked to the M23 between November 2021 and March 2025, 77% were described as battles between the M23 and other armed actors (called active fighting in figures below). 16% were classified as violence against civilians because civilians were directly harmed.

The 149 incidents identified by Insecurity Insight directly impacted on aid operations because they affected the infrastructure (33) or the people (39) working in vital civilian services necessary for the survival and functioning of society such as health care or aid. These aid related incidents occurred both during battles as well as part of one-sided violence against civilians. They are incidents that signal a consequence for societal systems that are important for the survival of the civilian population, and they are not a description of tactics. Among the incidents attributed to the M23, over a third affected health infrastructure and health workers.

Conflict Party in Focus: The March 23 Movement (M23)



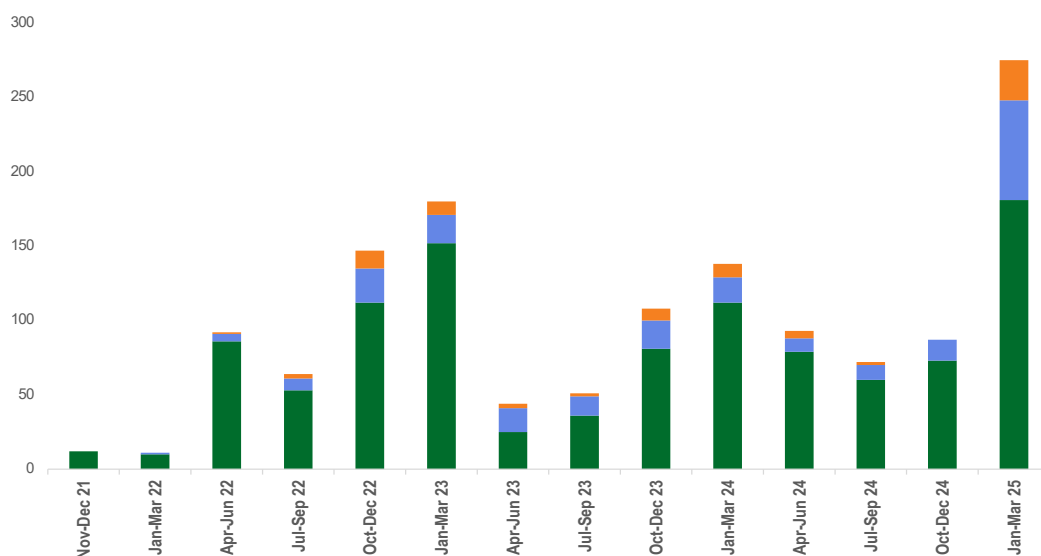
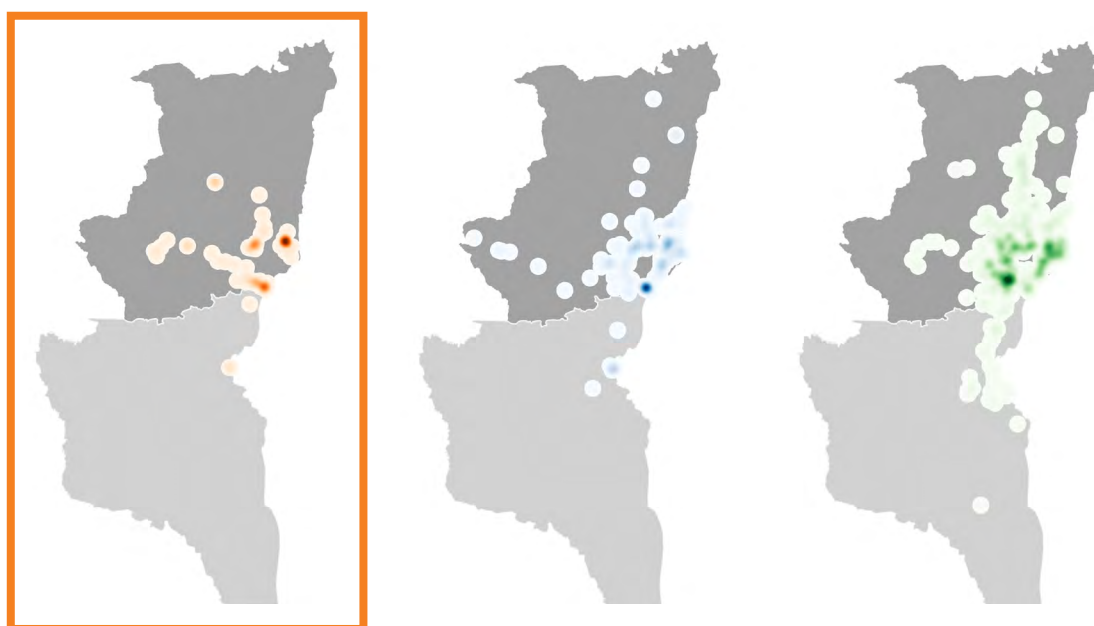
Figure 3: Heatmaps of the reported violence attributed to the M23: reported impact on aid systems, violence against civilians and active fighting, November 2021 - March 2025

Active fighting hinders humanitarian access. Conflict violence that destroys health care and education creates aid dependence. Direct violence against the aid systems undermines the ability to support civilians attacked and affected by conflict

 **Violence impacting aid operations (81 incidents)**

 **Violence against civilians (211 incidents)**

 **Active fighting involving M23 (1072 incidents)**



* Heat maps: Deeper colours indicate higher concentration of incidents.

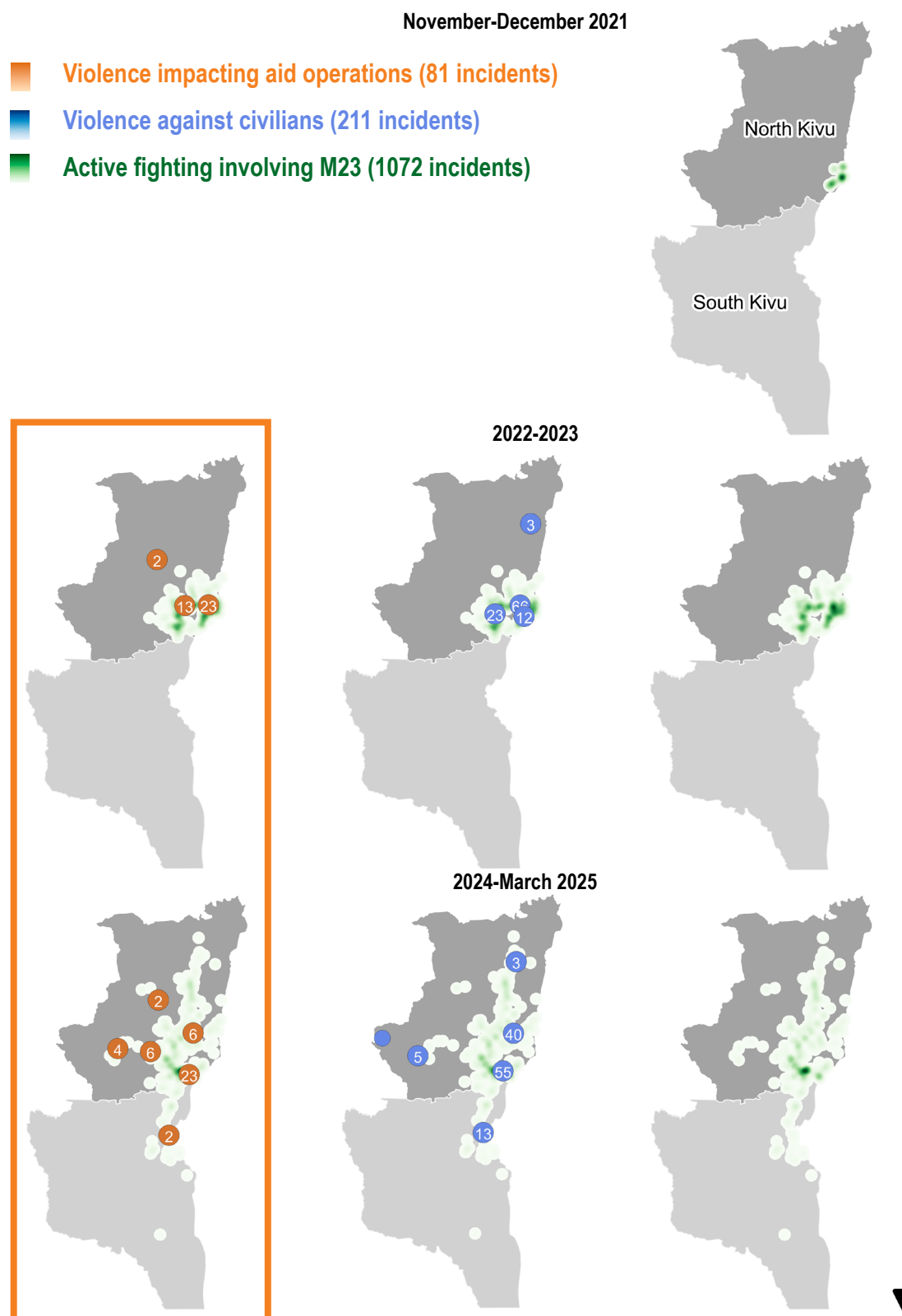
Data visualisation: Insecurity Insight. Data sources: Insecurity and ACLED. Base map data source: UN OCHA

Conflict Party in Focus: The March 23 Movement (M23)



Figure 4: M23 reported activity and impact over time, November 2021-March 2025

In November 2021, reports emerged of active fighting involving the M23 group. From 2022 onwards, violence continued to spread across the Kivus, affecting aid operations and civilians.



* Heat maps: Deeper colours indicate higher concentration of incidents.

Data visualisation: Insecurity Insight. Data sources: Insecurity and ACLED. Base map data source: UN OCHA

Conflict Party in Focus: The March 23 Movement (M23)



Following 12 reported clashes between the M23 and other armed actors at the end of 2021, more than 1,000 incidents of active fighting involving the M23 have since been reported with fighting spreading far beyond its initial epicenter in southeastern North Kivu, reaching areas to the north, south, and west. As active fighting spread violence against civilians also followed. As the M23 gained territorial control over towns and villages, aid-related sector incidents clustered around vital infrastructure, such as health facilities, increased notably.

Active fighting has increased over the past years, with violence against civilians and violence affecting aid spreading with it. For example, following the capture of Goma city, North Kivu, in January 2025, violence against civilians attributed to the M23 increased with reports of [mass killings](#) taking place between February 22 - 23, almost a month after their occupation of the city. Additionally, during this time period violence against health care also increased with M23 soldiers reportedly raiding hospitals, abducting patients and looting supplies. As such facilities, supplies and trained staff are in urban settlements, violence with consequences for systems cluster in such centres.

M23 violence affecting aid operations, health care, education, food security and protection

Since 2022, as active fighting attributed to the M23 increased, the impact on aid operations and vital civilian infrastructure also increased, particularly in North Kivu and since 2024 also in South Kivu. Along with violence against civilians, violence against aid operations, health care and education attributed to the M23 peaked in the first three months of 2025 with incidents almost reaching the annual totals recorded in 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024.

Reported M23 incidents

- M23 activities have in particular affected health operations. Frequently reported were raids on health facilities, including lootings of stocks of medicine, medical supplies generators, batteries and solar panels. There are reports from gunfire inside facilities, injuring patients and staff. In some cases medical facilities were looted by M23 soldiers following the withdrawal of the M23 from an area.
- Aid and health workers were detained on accusations of being soldiers or links to rival armed groups.
- Lootings of warehouses or UN-supported cafeterias with food reserves after the M23 gained control over the area.
- Hijacking of aid vehicles traveling in areas with known M23 presence.

Understanding the patterns of such attacks helps anticipate risks for aid and aid operations operating in an area experiencing such violence or under control of this group, enabling contingency-planning and practical adaptation to evolving threats. It ensures that fundamental services - such as health care and education can continue. Download the [data](#).



This section reports on the impact of conflict on aid operations, health, food systems and education. It includes all incidents attributed to any conflict party and focuses on incidents recorded in March 2025. It provides a summary of key events, trends and links to further resources.

Direct Violence Affecting Aid Agencies

Documented incidents March 2025

A Red Cross volunteer was shot in the head and killed in his field on 09 March near the Djangapoli mining area (Ituri) by suspected CODECO militants. Two local aid workers were attacked and robbed by unidentified armed perpetrators while conducting a food security assessment in Kalemie territory (Tanganyika) on 24 March. An MSF base was hit by crossfire, impacting their structures and vehicles, on 20 March as fighting between FARDC and M23/AFC, along with their allies, reached Walikale town centre (North Kivu).

Sources: Aid in Danger: [05-18 March](#); [19 March-01 April](#). Download the [data](#).

Reputational Threat to Aid Agencies: Insight from Social Media Sentiment Analysis

The suspension of USAID funding in January 2025 forced many aid organisations in the DRC to halt operations. At the same time, escalating violence, attacks on aid workers, looting, and threats from armed actors have further undermined humanitarian access and safety. These challenges are not confined to logistics—they are fuelling a global aid rejection. Insecurity Insight analysed 738 public comments on Facebook and X and found widespread frustration, misinformation, and politicised narratives—some even calling for violence or an end to all foreign assistance. These were not isolated complaints: amplified by local media and influencers, they turned social platforms into civic forums where aid is increasingly framed not as a solution, but part of the problem.

Social media users identifying as teachers, farmers, and health workers voiced their disillusionment, asserting that aid had never reached them. This reflects a dangerous perception gap between aid narratives of impact and the lived realities of those the system is meant to support. Criticism targeted both western donors and the Congolese government. While the West was often blamed for entrenched crises, domestic anger focused on corruption and weak governance—highlighting the fragility of localisation efforts in such contexts.

Why does this matter for the aid sector?

Online narratives shape real-world risks. In politically fragile or conflict-affected settings, social media has become a frontline where perceptions of aid are formed, contested, and reshaped in real time. These narratives don't simply reflect public sentiment—they can ignite protest movements, fuel disinformation, and endanger humanitarian operations on the ground.



In environments where discourse is driven more by political frustration than humanitarian principles, unchecked narratives risk eroding the legitimacy of aid, fuelling hostility towards aid workers, and jeopardising access. If unaddressed, this perception crisis threatens to alienate the very people humanitarian action is meant to support.

For aid organisations, engaging with these narratives is not optional. It is a strategic imperative for safeguarding operational space, rebuilding trust, and ensuring that humanitarian efforts remain relevant, credible, and accepted in fragile contexts like the DRC.

You may be interested in

This brief - available in [English](#) and [French](#) - highlights how a single policy decision reverberated through digital spaces, fuelling anti-aid rhetoric and exposing growing risks to humanitarian actors and the future of international engagement in the DRC.



Violence affecting food systems

Over the past months, looting of livestock—including cattle, goats, and poultry—attributed to seven different armed actors has affected livelihoods across several territories, notably Rutshuru, Irumu, Djugu, and Lubero.

Communities are often attacked during food-related activities—especially farming. In North Kivu and Ituri - particularly Rutshuru, Beni, Irumu, and Djugu - many reports detail killings, abductions, and harassment during fieldwork or food collection.

Attacks on markets disrupt commercial food supplies. Violence affecting food systems is disrupting food systems and is driving displacement.

The M23 has severely impacted food security in eastern DRC through violence, livestock theft, and systematic exploitation of rural populations—killing farmers, looting livestock and injuring civilians en route to their fields. Beyond direct violence, the group imposes agricultural taxes, appropriates harvests, and enforces forced labour in controlled areas, depleting local food supplies and disrupting production, while extracting monthly funds from roadblock taxation alone.

Documented incidents

In **Ituri**, violence affecting food security was attributed to the Zaire militia and CoDECO militants across Djugu territory. 441 cows were looted for ransom in Datule and Nyere towns and 143 cows were looted in Tchomia village. Farmers were killed and kidnapped in their fields, while farm goods were set on fire in Zati town.



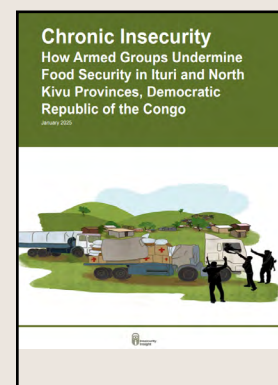
In **North Kivu**, the ADF reportedly killed or kidnapped farmers on their fields in Ngohi town, Lubero territory and Beni territory. Unidentified groups killed farmers in Kyasenda village, Rutshuru territory and livestock was looted from several villages in Walikale territory during widespread looting. Walikale town came under the control of M23 rebels on 19 March after intense fighting with the Congolese army.

In **South Kivu**, a market was looted by an unidentified armed group in Mugogo village, Walungu territory (19 March). Download the [data](#).

You may be interested in

This monitoring [brief](#) highlights how farmers, civilians and livestock owners in North Kivu and Ituri are being directly affected through killings, abductions, looting, and extortion. Violence peaked in December 2024 following the collapse of peace talks and renewed clashes involving M23 and other armed groups. Attacks on civilians engaged in food production, livestock theft by multiple conflict actors, and conflict-related sexual violence are deepening the crisis with 27.7 million people facing acute food insecurity. The brief calls for protection measures, flexible funding, and anticipatory action to safeguard rural livelihoods.

Read more: [Chronic Insecurity](#): How Armed Groups Undermine Food Security in Ituri and North Kivu Province (February 2025)



Attacks on Health Care

A protracted and escalating conflict, mass displacement and attacks on health care has strained the DRC's already fragile health care systems. More than [8.9 million people](#) are reportedly unable to access essential medical services due to violence and infrastructure collapse. Health care centres are operating at up to [4,000% beyond their capacity](#), placing immense pressure on medical staff, who also have to cope with limited supplies and dangerous conditions. The DRC is facing recurrent epidemics including cholera, Ebola, measles and mpox.

Documented incidents

In **North Kivu**, an MSF base was struck by crossfire between FARDC and M23/AFC, impacting their structures and vehicles, as fighting reached the centre of Walikale town (20 March). On the same day, two explosions were also reported near the General Hospital in Walikale. A hospital in Goma was raided and patients were abducted by armed men (Around 01 March).

DRC Monitoring Brief:

Conflict Incidents with Impact on the Aid Sector



In **Walungu territory, South Kivu**, two health facilities were damaged (09 March). Fonds Social du Kivu (FSKI) Hospital was damaged when a suspected M23 shell hit the roof of the paediatric ward. Nurses were injured, patients were killed and injured by shrapnel, and windows were broken in the pharmacy. Kaziba General Hospital was also struck by shelling from an unidentified origin, killing five health workers and a number of patients (09 March).

In **Ituri**, the Director of Nursing for Nioka Referral Health Centre was kidnapped for 24 hours by CODECO militia in Mahagi territory (14 March). Clashes in Djugu territory forced Fataki General Hospital to close, cutting off health care access for 170,000 people (14 March). As of 10 May, the facility had resumed operations.

Sources: Attacks on Health Care: [19 February-04 March](#); [05-18 March](#); [19 March-01 April](#). Download the [data](#).

You may be interested in

The impact of violence against health care on the health of children and mothers

In 2024, Insecurity Insight, the International Rescue Committee, the [Researching the Impact of Attacks on Healthcare](#) (RIAH) project, and the University of Bukavu carried out a [study](#) in three health zones in the Kivus looking at the impact of three attacks in 2023 on maternal and children's health care services. The study documented a number of immediate and long-term impacts on maternal and children's health services following an attack, including:

- Health workers and pregnant women were too afraid to visit the facility, causing a significant drop in assisted deliveries.
- Health centers either reduced service provision, or ceased operating altogether for a period of one to four weeks.
- Women's attendance at maternal health services decreased; childbirth was the maternal health service most affected, given the probability of night-time occurrence.
- The rate of post-natal consultations, pre-school consultations and vaccinations fell sharply.

The Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition (SHCC) identified 84 incidents of violence against or obstruction of health care in the DRC in 2024. In these incidents, eight health workers were killed, nine were kidnapped and medical supplies were looted. The actual number of incidents and the severity of the problem are likely much greater. Protracted conflict, mpox outbreaks and over-crowded displacements sites strained the DRC's already-fragile health care system. Attacks on health care doubled in Tanganyika province, where vaccination campaigns were disrupted by threats and violence. In some areas, health centers operated at up to 4,000% beyond their capacity, placing immense pressure on medical staff, who also had to cope with limited supplies and dangerous conditions.



Read the full factsheet in [English](#) and [French](#). Download the [data](#).



Education in Danger

Armed conflict has forced the closure of around [2,500 schools in North and South Kivu](#) since early 2025, leaving nearly 800,000 children without access to education. In Ituri province, over [1.6 million children](#) are out of school. While some schools in Goma reopened in February, many parents remained reluctant to send their children due to ongoing insecurity.

Documented incidents

In **South Kivu**, four schools were taken over and converted into military camps in Fizi territory, disrupting education for over 2,000 students. In Maniema, a school in Kindu city was taken over and occupied by armed men, preventing over 1,000 children from accessing education (23 March).

Sources: Education in Danger: [March](#). Download the [data](#).

Attacks on IDP and Refugee camps

The DRC has one of the highest numbers of internal displaced people globally, with around [5.6 million](#) - mostly in the eastern Kivus and Ituri provinces. Around [72% live outside](#) formal refugee camps or settlements while others reside in IDP or refugee camps. Many of these camps are overcrowded and [lack adequate](#) food, health services and water and sanitation services

Documented incidents

Lodha IDP site in Ituri was attacked by around 20 CODECO/URDPC militiamen who fired shots in the air and broke into various shelters (25 March). Six people were killed with machetes, including a child and two women, and three people were injured. Violence against protection settings was also reported in Lala Camp, where an IDP woman was kidnapped by CODECO whilst on her way to the fields. Two people were killed when an armed group raided an IDP site and looted property (18 March). All three incidents took place in Djugu territory.

Sources: Protection in Danger: [March](#). Download the [data](#).



Accountability to affected populations

Attack on Lodha IDP site: Social media reactions of one edited media post on the 25 March 2025 describing the event in Lodha IDP site. Comments provided by social media users to the report on the IDP camp highlighted a number of sentiments:

- **Disillusionment with MONUSCO's Long-Term Presence:** Several commenters question the value of MONUSCO's continued presence in the DRC, with the mission often portrayed as ineffective. One states, *"Je n'aime pas entendre parler de l'ONU en RDC 🇷🇺" (I don't like hearing about the UN in the DRC)* and *"La mission de la MONUSCO c'est quoi ?" (What is MONUSCO)*, reflecting broader doubts about the organisation's purpose.
- **Criticism of FARDC's Capacity:** The national army is repeatedly described as either incapable or complicit in ongoing violence. A comment claims, *"FARDC est complice dans ça," (FARDC is guilty in all of this)*. These views reflect a recurring perception that FARDC is unable to protect civilians or confront armed groups such as CODECO.
- **Frustration over ongoing insecurity in the East:** Commenters from Ituri and beyond highlight a pattern of unaddressed violence, particularly by CODECO. Reactions such as *"En Ituri nous sommes massacrés tous les jours par codeco sans aucune intervention. Que Dieu nous arrive en aide sans cela il n'y a plus l'espoir de vivre. Ce qui se passe ici, tellement grave." (In Ituri, we are being massacred every day by CODECO without any intervention. May God come to our aid, otherwise there is no hope for survival. What is happening here is so serious.)* express frustration that interventions come too late, if at all, and often only after major loss of life.

Endnotes

1 Jaffe, C and Lord, D. (23 March 2025). The resurgence and alliances of the March 23 Movement (M23). Armed Conflict & Event Data Project (ACLED) <https://acleddata.com/2023/03/23/the-resurgence-and-alliances-of-the-march-23-movement-m23/>

2 Serwat, L. (20 March 2025). March 23 Movement (M23). Armed Conflict & Event Data Project (ACLED). <https://acleddata.com/actor-profiles/march-23-movement-m23/>

3 Effects on the food system were not included in the analysis on the M23 due to the overlap with violence against civilians.

4 ACLED. (2019). "ACLED Codebook, 2019." Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED). www.acleddata.com

5 ibid.



Effects on aid operations, health care and education: These incidents refer to incidents of violence, threats and obstructions to aid operation, health care and education. It covers the damage and destruction of related infrastructure and the impact on trained staff. These incidents can be the result of unintended effects of a military act, violence against civilians or attacks on civilian infrastructure. Insecurity Insight.

Effects on food systems: These incidents refer to conflict-based incidents which affect food systems, such as food production or food distribution, that may impact food security. They describe the impact that can be the result of unintended effects of a military act, violence against civilians or attacks on civilian infrastructure.³ Insecurity Insight

Active fighting: Based on ACLED's definition of 'Battles' "violent interactions between two organized armed groups at a particular time and location". These incidents are sub-divided into whether or not these battles resulted in territorial exchanges or not.⁴

Violence against civilians: "Violence events where an organised armed group inflicts violence upon unarmed non-combatants" These incidents also include attempts at inflicting harm or forcibly disappearing and are further sub-divided into types of violences including 'Sexual Violence', 'Attack', and 'Abduction/forced disappearance'.⁵

What do different datasets tell us?

Conflict event data can be classified by the strategic or tactical objectives of conflict parties — such as territorial gains, armed clashes, or the targeting of civilians — as well as by the impact of violence on civilian populations, particularly through the destruction of vital civilian infrastructure.

ACLED datasets offer valuable insights into the strategic objectives of conflict actors by providing incident data showing patterns of tactical behaviour. Insecurity Insight datasets focus on the humanitarian consequences of conflict, providing incident data showing how violence disrupts essential sectors critical to civilian survival, such as health, education, and food security and how protection settings have been affected.

Understanding how the consequences of conflict in the context of tactical moves by conflict parties, can help aid agencies to predict emerging needs caused by the conflict. The data also highlights the foreseeable consequences of civilian harm that conflict parties should take into account — and actively seek to prevent — in their tactical planning as part of their obligations for precaution under IHL

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This document is funded and supported by the generous support of the H2H Fund which is supported by aid from the UK government. The opinions expressed in it do not reflect in any way the position of the H2H Network or the UK government who are not responsible for the content expressed in this.

Insecurity Insight. 2025. Insecurity Insight DRC March Monitoring Brief, Spotlight on: M23, June 2025. Switzerland: Insecurity Insight.