

Escalating crisis along the DRC–Burundi border



This Flash Update was prepared by WeWorld in light of the latest escalation of the conflict in DRC (16 December 2025)

“

“The situation is very worrying. The fighting that led to the fall of Uvira in South Kivu has increased the number of refugees arriving, which now stands at around 35,000, including Burundian returnees. We are monitoring developments with humanitarian coordination agencies and, as WeWorld, we have already participated in an assessment in the former provinces of Cibitoke and Bubanza, where we have a long-standing presence, to understand the real needs of the refugees.”

Giampaolo Pastorelli, WeWorld Burundi Country Representative

SITUATION UPDATE

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is facing a deepening crisis as clashes between the M23 rebel movement and the Congolese army (FARDC), backed by local militias and Burundian troops, escalate in South Kivu near Uvira and Kamanyola. Recent fighting has killed at least 74 civilians, injured more than 80, and displaced over 200,000 people, many of them children.

Between 5 and 11 December, an estimated 40,000–50,000 Congolese refugees crossed the Rusizi River into Burundi, seeking safety from the violence. They are crowded into transit points like Ndava and Gatumba or

temporary camps such as Bweru, facing dire conditions with scarce water, poor sanitation, and growing health risks including cholera and malnutrition. Children and other vulnerable groups are the most affected by water-borne diseases.

At the same time, Burundi is experiencing an increase in returnees from Tanzania, as thousands of Burundians come back amid tightening conditions in refugee camps. This dual influx is straining resources and complicating efforts to assist both returning families and newly arrived Congolese refugees, highlighting the regional dimension of the crisis and the urgent need for coordinated humanitarian response.

KEY DATA

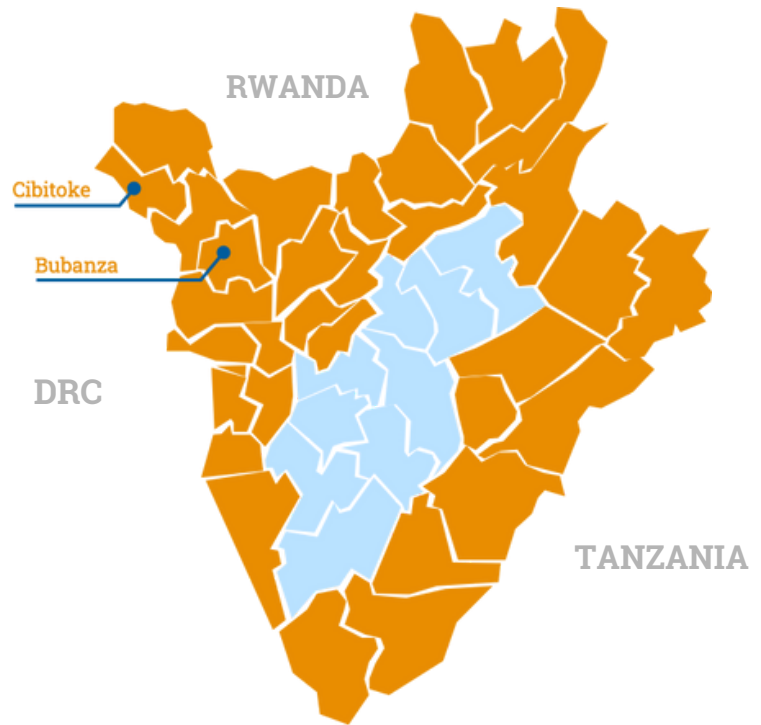
WeWorld participated in the multi-sector assessment with UN agencies and other NGOs.

40,000 people currently sheltered at the Kansega site, mostly women and children from rural backgrounds.

8,000 people currently sheltered at the Gatumba police camp, largely from urban areas.

5,000 people currently sheltered at the Cishemere transit center.

To ease overcrowding, some relocation has begun: by December 11, the National Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (ONPRA) reported that 2,500 refugees had been transferred from Kansega to the Bweru site.



In orange: areas where WeWorld operates, including Cibitoke and Bubanza, where we are delivering vital WASH support.

WEWORLD INTERVENTION

Refugee arrival zones, where the first reception and transit camps are located, are also areas at the highest risk of cholera. In Cibitoke and Bubanza, **WeWorld is delivering vital support through its program on water, hygiene, and sanitation.** Funded by the EU, the initiative protects and develops **240 water sources**, rehabilitates **13 drinking-water systems**, and builds over **1,400 agro-ecological latrines.**

It also **strengthens community engagement**, trains local operators, and enhances governance over water services—helping rural villages move toward sustainable access to clean water and healthier environments.

These integrated efforts - combining improved water access, hygiene infrastructure, nutritional screening, and **community-led health education** - bolster the resilience of vulnerable rural families in Bubanza and Cibitoke.

This year **WeWorld has responded to the cholera outbreak by distributing WASH kits** to communities. Few other organizations are working in the area; however, as a consequence of the shrinking of humanitarian aid, they were all forced to scale down interventions.

WEWORLD OPERATIONAL CAPACITY DRC-BURUNDI

5	Number of offices
+100	Number of staff members
8	Number of current donors

PROPOSED WAY FORWARD

WeWorld is actively **monitoring population movements on both sides of the DRC-Burundi border to anticipate needs** and adapt its response. In Burundi, our presence enables us to adjust ongoing activities quickly if the situation changes, while also reinforcing advocacy efforts to secure additional humanitarian funding for a crisis that remains both chronic and largely forgotten.

On the DRC side, new waves of displacement risk triggering a massive influx into South Kivu, similar to what occurred in North Kivu, toward areas almost entirely lacking basic services such as water, health care, and shelter.

WEWORLD CONTACTS

Stefania Piccinelli

Head of International Programmes
stefania.piccinelli@weworld.it

Andrea Comollo

Head of Communication
andrea.comollo@weworld.it

WeWorld is closely tracking these developments to ensure timely interventions and coordinate with partners, aiming to mitigate the impact on vulnerable communities and prevent further deterioration of living conditions.

WeWorld is present in both DRC and Burundi, with ongoing operations to respond to the crisis. Nevertheless, needs are widespread and remain mainly unmet. WeWorld is actively fundraising, and it will be able to draw on its expertise to provide a comprehensive multi-sectorial response based on:

- **Management of moderate acute malnutrition (MAM):** case detection among children under 5 and pregnant and breastfeeding women, distribution of local fortified flour, follow-up of MAM cases. Referral of cases with complications, community awareness-raising.
- **Water and sanitation:** emergency water supply (water trucking, storage, treatment and distribution), distribution of WASH kits (soap, jerry cans), mobile latrines, waste management, setting up hygiene and sanitation committees among refugees, raising awareness among the population.
- **Gender-based violence and protection:** provision of psychosocial support through listening centres and discussion groups.

USEFUL LINKS

- [CORE Burundi: Afflux de personnes en provenance de l'est de la RD Congo \(au 15 décembre 2025\)](#)
- [Conflict in DRC, massive displacement in Burundi \(March 2025\)](#)