The Democratic Republic of Congo

**Facts & Figures**

- Ranked **186** in the Human Development Index (2014)
- Some 7 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance (UNOCHA)

**Number of IDPs/Refugees**

- Almost 3 million Internally Displaced People since 2009 (UNOCHA)
- More than 516,000 Congolese refugees in other African countries (UNHCR)

**European Commission humanitarian assistance:**

**In 2014**

- €63 million (including €7 million for ECHO flight)
- Aid funded by ECHO is delivered by 31 partner organisations, including UN agencies, international NGOs and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

**In 2015**

- €54.5 million (including €2 million for refugees from the Central African Republic and ECHO flight).

**Key messages**

- The chronic and complex humanitarian crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) persists. At least 40 armed groups continue to commit human rights abuses in the eastern provinces of the country.
- Almost 3 million people have been displaced within the DRC since 2009. Armed groups continue to cause displacements in the eastern DRC. More than half a million Congolese have sought refuge outside of their country.
- Abuses of power and violence, including looting, rape, abductions, and forced recruitment of children by armed groups and the Congolese army continue to be a major concern.
- Lack of basic services and infrastructure in eastern DRC is exacerbated by the conflicts causing enormous humanitarian needs. An estimated 6.5 million people are at crisis or emergency levels of food insecurity and according to Unicef, around 2.5 million children under the age of 5 are acutely malnourished. Cholera and measles outbreaks are repeatedly reported and malaria is endemic.
- ECHO’s aid efforts are focused on the consequences of population displacements, on providing protection and assistance in conflict affected areas, and on addressing acute needs related to epidemics, malnutrition beyond emergency levels and natural disasters.
**Humanitarian situation and needs**

**Situation in the Country**

The DRC is one of the poorest countries in the world. Despite its abundance in natural resources, it is ranked second last in the latest Human Development Index.

For more than 15 years, the DRC has been facing an on-going, complex and multifactor humanitarian crisis. It is characterised by violent armed conflicts in several regions (often with ethinical dimensions to control access to natural resources and land, and to gain political or traditional power), vast numbers of internally displaced people (IDPs) and refugees, various epidemics and epizooties and a general context of poverty and precariousness. Moreover, political instability at a local level and the recurrence of natural disasters are observed in some regions.

Out of the 77 million citizens of the DRC, some three million people are currently displaced within the country. In addition, over half a million Congolese have found refuge in neighbouring countries. The humanitarian situation remains precarious due to serious problems relating to indiscriminate violence, access to basic services, and a significant reduction in harvests connected to access difficulties and insecurity.

**Major needs and related problems**

Given the size of the country and the complex nature of the crisis, priority needs vary from one region to another. In the conflict affected areas, the overarching need is protection from violence. All armed groups, including the DRC Armed Forces (FARDC), frequently commit violations of human rights against civilians; this includes acts of sexual and gender-based violence against women and young girls, but also against men and boys. Other frequent incidents related to the need for protection include arbitrary arrests, pillaging and forced labour. Conflict and fear have driven several millions people out of their homes and their fields: this generates needs in terms of livelihoods, nutrition and access to services – notably health. All over the country, epidemics are recurrent, and the exposure to natural disasters (such as floods) increases the fragility of the population.

Around 2.5 million children under 5 suffer from acute malnutrition mostly in the central provinces of the DRC, which are spared by the conflict, but have no or limited humanitarian presence.

**The European Union's humanitarian response**

The strategy of the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department (ECHO) is to focus on the consequences of population displacements, on matters relating to protection and assistance in conflict affected areas, and to address acute emergency needs related to epidemics, malnutrition beyond emergency levels and natural disasters. Given the prevalence of the conflict, most recipients of the European Commission's humanitarian assistance in the DRC are direct victims of the recent or ongoing conflicts, displaced or repatriated persons and the communities hosting IDP's or refugees. In 2014, ECHO allocated €63 million for live-saving assistance in DRC and the refugee situations in neighbouring countries. This included €7 million for ECHO Flight in the DRC. In 2015, the figure has so far been €49 million, including €2 million following an influx of refugees from the Central African Republic.

**Examples of ECHO funded projects**

**Protection** – The lack of protection for civilian populations is the overarching problem in all conflict-affected areas. Armed forces and armed groups frequently commit abuses against civilians: arbitrary arrests, extortion, looting and forced labour, acts of violence (sexual and other) and executions. More than a decade of living in a conflict situation has also given rise to acute levels of violence within the communities. ECHO seeks to reduce protection risks by funding actions integrated and mainstreamed with other sectors, as well as stand-alone protection interventions. Examples of the latter include medical, psychological and legal aid to victims of violence, child protection also through education, strengthening self-protective capacities of communities, monitoring of human rights violations, and advocacy.
Health – The lack of access to health care is a major problem contributing to widespread disease and high mortality rates for common and treatable diseases. The problems which limit access to appropriate care are linked to displacement, very low quality of medical services, remoteness, and lack of financial means to pay for treatment. ECHO is committed to provide an integrated health package to the most vulnerable Congolese affected by conflict and displacement. This also includes help for survivors of sexual violence. In addition, ECHO funds a rapid response mechanism for medical emergencies, notably epidemics. © ECHO

Water and sanitation – Access to clean water and sanitation services is a huge problem in the country and a large contributor to poor health conditions. Certain parts of the DRC are prone to recurrent cholera outbreaks. ECHO, through its partner organisations, is implementing a cholera strategy involving provision of clean drinking water, sanitation facilities and medical treatment for uprooted populations, with the aim to reduce mortality due to water-borne diseases. © ECHO

Food insecurity is linked to the general security situation, poor infrastructure and lack of investment in agriculture/livestock. Insecurity and displacements limit the capacity to cultivate and rear animals. Access to food is compromised by the resulting low production. Little variety in diets leads to malnutrition. Moreover, care and feeding practices are poor in many areas. ECHO responds to food insecurity that is caused by displacement through the use of cash transfer programmes, which allow beneficiaries to access food and support local markets at the same time. When stability returns ECHO supports populations to restore their self-reliance, primarily through support to agriculture. © ECHO

Coordination and logistics – The transport of humanitarian goods and personnel by land or air is risky, very difficult and extremely expensive throughout the country. Military operations and repeated attacks against the local population and humanitarian workers, as well as the fighting extending into the most remote areas, makes the provision of humanitarian aid even more complex. The Commission runs a humanitarian air service, called ECHO Flight, which operates three airplanes. This air service enables the timely delivery of highly needed humanitarian relief in some of the most remote regions of the country. © ECHO

After receiving the 2012 Nobel Peace Prize, the EU decided to dedicate the prize money to the most vulnerable, and often the hardest hit by wars: children. The DRC is one of the countries in which projects financed through the EU Children of Peace initiative allow children to continue their education despite the conflict, and benefit from protection activities. After helping rebuild schools and create safe education spaces for over 9 000 conflict-affected children in the North Kivu region in 2013, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) is currently working in the areas of Masisi and Pinga to grant children affected by conflict quality education in a safe environment. © NRC