



Aerial view of Bweru site, 19 December 2025



Rumonge, former stadium

Burundi

Flash Update # 1

DRC Refugees

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UNICEF Burundi | Conflict upsurge in Eastern DR Congo – Refugee influx into Burundi

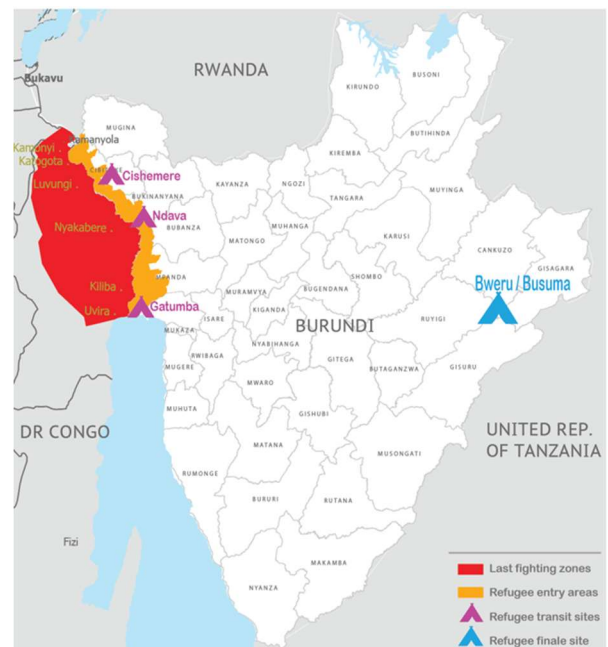
Highlights

Escalating violence linked to the M23 offensive in eastern DRC has sharply increased refugee inflows into Burundi since 5 December. As of 21 December, an estimated 94,808 people have crossed into Burundi through Buganda, Gatumba and Rumonge, including 88,548 Congolese refugees and 6,260 spontaneous Burundian returnees. The pace and scale of arrivals indicate an urgent need to accelerate assistance.

The Bweru/Busuma refugee settlement has expanded rapidly and now hosts over 40,000 refugees, following large-scale transfers from transit sites, particularly Gatumba, which has been officially closed, although limited transfers are ongoing.

Worsening insecurity along the Uvira–Baraka axis has triggered new lake crossings, causing a sharp influx into Rumonge, where more than 30,000 refugees are hosted across the stadium, port area and Makombe transit site under severely congested conditions. Transfers to Bweru are underway.

The rapid influx has intensified protection, health, WASH and nutrition risks, especially for children and women. UNICEF Burundi has scaled up emergency assessments and life-saving interventions across WASH, Health, Nutrition, Child Protection and Education, in close coordination with the Government, UN agencies and partners. The inter-agency response plan for this influx was officially launched on 18 December 2025.



Situation Overview & Humanitarian Needs update

Reception and hosting conditions remain insufficient due to the scale, speed and geographic spread of arrivals. While Gatumba has closed, severe congestion persists in Ndava and Rumonge, where infrastructure and essential services remain insufficient. In Rumonge, the spontaneous settlement of over 30,000 refugees across multiple sites has created acute gaps in shelter, WASH, health, child protection and education.

Health and nutrition risks are high. Overcrowding, poor sanitation and limited access to safe water increase the risk of cholera, Mpox, measles and malaria. A significant cholera outbreak was recorded, linked to the refugee influx, with an increase of more than **200% in a week's time** (from **88 cases** in epidemiological week 50 to **297 cases** in week 51). This surge is primarily attributed to the precarious conditions in the refugee sites, especially in **Bweru, Makombe, and Kibrizi**.

Children under five, pregnant and breastfeeding women face elevated malnutrition risks due to disrupted feeding practices and limited health coverage. Efforts to curb the outbreak include increased surveillance, the deployment of rapid response teams, and treatment centers. However, continued vigilance and improved living conditions in the affected sites are essential to further reduce the spread of the disease.

Protection concerns are rising across all sites, including GBV and family separation, amid limited psychosocial services. Access to education remains severely constrained due to overcrowding, language barriers and lack of learning spaces.

Humanitarian partners continue to scale up lifesaving, child-focused interventions, prioritizing decongestion, disease prevention, psychosocial support and emergency education, particularly in Bweru/Busuma and Rumonge, where needs are most acute.

Preliminary Funding Requirement

Area of intervention	Funding requirements (US\$) ¹	Funds available (US\$)	Total Funding Gap (US\$)
Wash	\$1,423,967	\$150,300	\$1,273,667
Child Protection	\$960,000	\$76,800	\$883,200
Health	\$902,400	\$0	\$902,400
Nutrition	\$481,379	\$32,000	\$449,379
Education	\$320,000	\$0	\$320,000
Social Protection	\$960,000	32,000	\$928,000
Inclusion, SBC, EA & AAP	\$584,320	\$20480	\$584,320
Total	\$5,632,066	\$311,580	\$5,320,486

Strategic priorities – Inter Agency Coordination

UNICEF Burundi, as the sector lead for WASH, Education, and Child Protection, and co-lead for Nutrition, is collaborating with the Government and humanitarian partners to implement inter-agency strategic priorities in response to the refugee influx. The main objectives are as follows:

Protection: ensure a safe and differentiated environment for all population groups, with a focus on children and other vulnerable populations (women and girls at risk, unaccompanied/separated children, older persons, persons with disabilities, GBV survivors). This includes border monitoring and household registration to identify and support those most at risk.

Life-saving assistance: provide safe water, emergency latrines and shelters, hot meals, and health/nutrition screening to the most vulnerable, in line with UNICEF-led WASH and Nutrition interventions.

Decongestion & site development: reduce overcrowding in Ndava, Cishemere, Makombe, and Musenyi through orderly relocations, while operationalizing Bweru/Busuma as a permanent reception site, ensuring minimum standards in WASH, health, and child-friendly spaces.

Coordination & resource mobilization: support ONPRA and DGRRR leadership, strengthen information management and monitoring tools (5W, common statistics, sitreps), and intensify advocacy with donors to rapidly fund priority response activities, ensuring effective inter-agency coordination across all sectors.

¹ UNICEF Burundi Response Plan for significant influx of refugees from the DRC, December 2025 – March 2026

UNICEF's Response – Sectoral Overview

UNICEF Burundi has kept the functioning of its emergency management team on high alert, and is coordinating closely with the Government of Burundi, UN agencies and NGOs to plan for the response and ensure inter-agency alignment. Immediate actions include:

Wash:

UNICEF has deployed **4 emergency water bladders** (10,000 and 5,000 liters) which will be installed this week, and **50 latrines** (20 in Ndava, 20 in Gatumba and 10 in Bweru). 10 additional latrines will be deployed in Bweru in the coming days. UNICEF is also preparing the deployment of **additional water systems and latrines, and the distribution of hygiene kits** for the most affected families. A rapid analysis was conducted at the transit site and the port of Rumonge on 17 December to identify essential WASH needs and initiate the deployment of 20 mobiles latrines. **Cholera prevention and response** activities are coordinated with health partners, with **CATI teams** are ready for rapid deployment if needed.

Child Protection and GBViE:

UNICEF initiated **identification and referral of unaccompanied and separated children** (UASC). Child-friendly spaces and **psychosocial support** are provided via the distribution of 11 tarpaulins (8 at Kansega and 3 at Gatumba) and 3 socio-recreational kits (2 at Kansega and 1 to Gatumba) to partner NGOs. The provision of psychosocial support through a **child-friendly space** has been started up at Bweru, through implementing partner Spring Communities.

Health & Nutrition:

Based on the health assessments conducted at Bweru, Makombe, and Gatumba, measures have been put in place to support cholera prevention initiatives and the prevention of hand-transmitted diseases. **Event-based surveillance** is now operational, with **rapid response teams ready to intervene** in the event of potential outbreaks. UNICEF has deployed four tents at the Bweru and Makombe sites to serve as cholera treatment centers. The **routine vaccination** campaign at these sites, as well as at the Gatumba site, is ongoing, in collaboration with teams from WHO and UNICEF. 2,783 women and children have already been vaccinated. At the same time, UNICEF is providing **supplies for the treatment of severe acute malnutrition** and preparing an integrated nutrition package for children, pregnant and breastfeeding women, as well as adolescent girls.

Education:

UNICEF is working to ensure safe and protective learning environments for 8,700 children including 4,500 preschool children and 4,200 children in basic school in the final settlement sites, mainly Bweru, through **temporary rehabilitation of classrooms, provision of learning materials, and teacher training** on psychosocial support and inclusive education. Efforts also focus on strengthening child protection and gender-sensitive approaches and promoting continuity of learning through catch-up and remedial classes, with support from ONPRA and UNHCR to identify children in need of schooling.

SBC/RCCE:

In coordination with the MoH Emergency Operations Centre, UNICEF is supporting the implementation of risk communication and community engagement activities in refugee sites. This includes the **broadcasting of radio messages** to raise awareness, and the **production and distribution of more than 2500 posters and 300 picture boxes** to support the implementation of community dialogues in the refugee transit sites of Gatumba and Kansega. In Bweru, UNICEF is working with the Burundi Red Cross to set up a **community information and disease prevention kiosk**. This intervention will reach more than 10,000 refugees with awareness-raising messages, demonstration activities on good hygiene practices, prevention, and event-based surveillance for early detection of diseases.

Human Interest Stories and External Media

Links to publications on the new wave of refugees:

1. UNICEF has installed 40 latrines and three emergency water bladders for the new wave of Congolese refugees.
 - <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/1L83M9UbUx/>
 - https://x.com/UNICEF_Burundi/status/1999932306224763209
2. Child-friendly spaces have been set up to keep young refugees who have recently arrived from the DRC occupied.
 - https://www.facebook.com/UNICEFBurundi/?locale=fr_FR
 - https://x.com/UNICEF_Burundi/status/2000621991099838789

Activities continued at the Musenyi refugee site:

1. Celebration of International Day of Persons with Disabilities under the theme: "Promoting inclusive societies for persons with disabilities to achieve social progress."
 - https://x.com/UNICEF_Burundi/status/1996587797239476423
 - <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1BdX6BX7o3/>
 - <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1JwMofc8NY/>
 - https://x.com/UNICEF_Burundi/status/1999758691130642687
2. A delegation led by the Deputy Director General of Fonarev visited Musenyi I and Musenyi II to assess the actions carried out in the field
 - <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1DXVF9mdqR/>
 - https://x.com/UNICEF_Burundi/status/1996891067963379768
3. The official handover ceremony for the Musenyi II Health Centre
 - <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1FWrk9tYFr/>
 - https://x.com/UNICEF_Burundi/status/2001929268805406982

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