



World Food Programme

SAVING LIVES
CHANGING LIVES

It has been nearly a year since Clarice was forced to take flight from her village, Kitchanga, in North Kivu, and find shelter in Sake due to unceasing attacks. Clarice receives food and nutrition support monthly from WFP to help support her family's food and nutrition needs. Credit: Benjamin Anguandia

WOMEN, GIRLS AND THE PROTECTION CRISIS IN EASTERN DRC

Context

Eastern DRC is one of the most dangerous places in the world for women and girls, the IRC has found.¹

As conflict intensifies, so do the atrocious violations and crimes perpetrated against women and children, notably sexual violence, child recruitment into armed groups and abductions.

Women and children in the camps around Goma are subjected to dangerous conditions. The camps are overcrowded, shelters are makeshift, there is no lighting at night and hygiene facilities are inadequate, exposing women and girls to abuse. Additionally, civil protection and security measures are minimal.

50 cases of sexual abuse recorded daily in camps around Goma²

Outside of the camps, women and girls face sexual violence when travelling in search of income opportunities and firewood for cooking and to generate an income.

In times of crisis, women and girls suffer. When resources are scarce, women and girls are more likely to be subjected to gender-based violence at home, are denied access to essentials, and are forced to

engage in negative coping mechanisms to generate income for the family. Girls are forced into marriage to reduce the number of mouths to feed in the household and to gain income from another household.

49% of women engage in negative survival coping mechanisms³

37% of girls are forcibly married before 18 years old⁴

Loss of income and high food insecurity can lead to spiking violence, abuse and exploitation of women and girls.

The high prevalence of gender-based violence across DRC is an indication of underlying gender inequality and discriminatory gender norms that existed prior to the conflict.

Nevertheless, women are important actors in the food security practices and decisions of the household. They tend to hold the responsibility of purchasing and cooking food for the household and are the primary feeders and caretakers of children but continue to face significant hurdles to participation in the formal workforce and access resources, assets and education.

1. IRC Press Release (November 2023)

2. MSF (9 May, 2023)

3,4. WFP data

LIFE IN RUSAYO CAMP



ESPERANCE

Esperance and her family fled from Kitchanga (Masisi territory) in February 2023 when the March 23 non-state armed group attacked her village. She has been living in Rusayo camp on the outskirts of Goma ever since. She has ten children under her care.

She recounts how long and treacherous the journey to safety was, many did not make it amongst the gunfire and bombs.

In Kitchanga, they farmed and sold the potatoes, beans, sorghum, maize and other crops to provide for the family.

When Esperance arrived in the camp she had few options to make money. The family searched for daily labour opportunities such as farming or being porters in order to feed the children. As a porter you could earn up to CDF 2,000. By the end of a day Amini and her husband could make CDF 5,000. They would use this to buy food to fill their family's stomachs before bed.

WFP's food assistance prevents her and her family from going to bed with an empty stomach.

WFP's cash assistance in the past year

has allowed her to buy essential food items, and she uses the rest to run a small business selling fish and other items in the camp in order to generate further income for essentials.

“The most challenging situation I faced in the camp was the lack of opportunity to work and make money. You are lucky if you land a daily labour job opportunity. Several times, my husband has failed to land any. Living in this camp under these circumstances is daunting. We struggle to cope.”

She also notes that the living conditions for her and other displaced families are dire. Everyone faces the same struggles, and people can hardly help each other.

In the makeshift tent, the family crams together. Some children sleep on leaves and others on fabric on the floor. The children sleep better when they have eaten.

Esperance also reveals that she gave birth one week ago. She worries that if her diet is not sufficiently diverse she cannot produce milk for her newborn baby which will stunt her baby's growth. She is also unable to go out and find work.



MAYIMUNA

Mayimuna fled from her village, Bihambwe, in Masisi territory to seek refuge with her eight children in Rusayo camp. There she used to run a restaurant specialising in goat meat recipes, and she sold milk and cheese.

The living conditions in the camp are different from the comfort of home. When it rains, the roof of the tent leaks and the family get soaked.

They have one mattress placed on the volcanic rocks of the camp, which cause her back and chest pains. She points out how the lousy conditions are also causing her and her family psychological suffering.

What pains Mayimuna the most is that her children are no longer attending school. She has a daughter, Kimboti, who had been studying at university. She paid the school fees through the business she ran. She can no longer afford them and Kimboti can no longer attend.

Mayimuna can see her daughter is mentally troubled by their situation, while her classmates can still pursue their studies.

The other children attend overcrowded schools where the

education quality is very poor.

Before the family received WFP assistance, they would collect firewood from the park to make ends meet. This exposed them to violence and people are either raped or physically abused. If women managed to bring the firewood safely, two small piles of firewood would earn you 1,000 CDF, with which you could buy some sweet potatoes.

She also laments that many girls are forced into prostitution, desperate to make 500 CDF or 1,000 CDF to buy food.

“All these sad experiences happen in this displacement camp. Young girls' lives have been ruined because of 500 Francs. All of these are mentally disturbing.”

Food assistance is a relief. When the family receive in-kind food such as wheat flour, they bake, and sell some to buy other produce, such as cassava flour or maize meal.

When the family receive cash, they buy a variety of foods, such as rice, flour and dried fish.

Mayimuna shares that a lack of assistance results in deaths from hunger.



As the conflict in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo intensifies, thousands of people have fled. 42,000 newly displaced have received emergency High-Energy Biscuits, and biometric registrations are underway for food assistance in camps around Goma. Credit: WFP/Ben Anguandia

HOW WFP MAINSTREAMS PROTECTION ACROSS ITS FOOD ASSISTANCE

WFP DRC has a dedicated Protection and Accountability to Affected People (AAP) team made up of **10 individuals** including protection officers both at the country office level and field level. The country office also has a dedicated Preventing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse advisor.

WFP provides **predictable and reliable assistance** which helps to prevent women and girls from being forced to adopt negative coping mechanisms to buy essential items. Equitable assistance encourages gender equality and reduces the extreme levels of crisis families face whilst displaced due to conflict.

A pilot is also underway in Bulengo camp, on the outskirts of Goma, to support survivors of gender-based violence and women and girls at risk of violence with **income-generating activities**. WFP also prioritises women empowerment in its livelihood and resilience programmes.

Community engagement, and consultation and participation of women is built into assistance programmes. This ensures women and girls have safe and meaningful access to assistance.

Protection mainstreaming ensures that partners and relevant stakeholders are familiar with the humanitarian principles and that the design of the activity including the choice of transfer modality considers the preferences of women, men,

girls and boys. Protection mainstreaming also defines mitigation measures with the community to address any potential risks and barriers to assistance.

WFP's **community feedback mechanism** consists of a hotline, community complaints committees, help and feedback desks and suggestion boxes to allow people to report concerns they encounter, so that WFP and partners can respond to any barriers they face to safe access to assistance. The hotline can receive anonymous complaints. Partners have dedicated Protection and AAP Assistants for community consultations.

WFP and partner staff are all **trained** on mainstreaming protection awareness into implementing humanitarian assistance, preventing sexual exploitation and abuse and gender-based violence. In 2023, 530 people were trained, and 87 partners participated in preventing sexual exploitation and abuse assessments.

Strategic partnerships and collaboration and coordination with protection and GBV actors are essential to WFP's programmes. WFP has a working framework with the Protection Cluster to support the referral of protection cases within the context of WFP activities and works closely with gender-based violence actors and gender actors on contributing to gender equality.