Democratic Republic of the Congo

Food crisis overview

The number of people in Crisis or worse (IPC Phase 3 or above) remained very high in the last six months of 2022 at 26.43 million (representing 26 percent of the analysed population). This figure marks a decline by 800,000 people compared with the peak of 27.26 million in February–July.

More marked was the decrease in the number of people in Emergency (IPC Phase 4), down by around 2.9 million between 2021 and 2022. While these decreases must be considered in the context of an almost 7 million increase in the population analysed, the percentage of people in IPC Phase 4 has also fallen from 7 percent to 4 percent, largely due to improving security in certain areas, the reopening of the border with Angola and rehabilitation of key roads favouring resumption of trade, as well as the easing of COVID-19 measures (IPC, December 2022).

The highest numbers of acutely food-insecure people in need of urgent assistance were in the provinces of Nord-Kivu, Kinshasa, Kasai-Central, Sud-Kivu and Tanganyika – each with more than 1.5 million people in IPC Phase 3 or above. In some territories and cities in Ituri, the Kasai provinces, Nord-Kivu and Sud-Kivu, Kwilu, Lomami, Maniema, Mongala, Tanganyika, Nord-Ubangi and Sud-Ubangi, 40–50 percent of the population was in IPC Phase 3 or above.

The most-affected populations were IDPs, returnees, households hosting displaced or returned families, and those living in conflict zones or zones affected by natural disasters, as well as the poorest populations in urban and peri-urban areas who have low purchasing power and high dependence on markets for food supplies. More than 6 million people – 21 percent of the population – living in urban areas were in IPC Phase 3 or above.

The territories of Beni and Masisi in Nord-Kivu had 15 percent of their populations in Emergency (IPC Phase 4), although this did not reach the threshold to classify the whole area in IPC Phase 4 (IPC, October 2022).

Improvement projected for 2023

In the first six months of 2023, the number of people in IPC Phase 3 or above was expected to decrease to 24.5 million and the number of areas classified in IPC Phase 3 to reduce from 124 to 102. Almost 1 million fewer people were expected to be in Emergency (IPC Phase 4) with the arrival of the harvests facilitating food availability and reducing pressure on food prices. A positive macroeconomic projection at the national level was expected to help stabilize the local currency and market prices, thereby improving households’ food access (IPC, October 2022).

Drivers of the crisis, 2022–23

Conflict/Insecurity Despite efforts to prevent and stabilize conflicts, areas of insecurity persist, particularly in the provinces of Ituri, Kasai, Nord-Kivu and Sud-Kivu, and Tanganyika, where more than 100 armed groups operate (IPC, December 2022). In 2022, Ituri and Nord-Kivu experienced a peak in violence and fatalities not seen since 2019, causing deaths, displacement, destruction of crops and loss of livelihoods (FEWS NET, August 2022). Conflict and mass displacement disrupted households’ participation in agricultural activities, contributing to lower season B harvests compared with the previous three-year average for the eastern zone, a trend already observed in previous seasons (IPC, December 2022).

Economic shocks Conflict and rising global energy and food prices due to the ongoing war in Ukraine put upward pressure on transport costs and food prices. These, twinned with poor access to employment opportunities, were the main contributory factors to food insecurity in urban areas, where most households depend on markets.

According to the June Bulletin of the Joint Market Monitoring Initiative, the cost of the Minimum Food Basket (MFB) increased nationally from January to June 2023, with a peak in April followed by a slight decrease in prices from May and the start of the season B harvests.
Acute food insecurity since 2016

For all seven editions of the GRFC, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has been among the countries with the highest number of people in Crisis or worse (IPC Phase 3 or above). As well as being a large and populous country, this has resulted from a combination of factors including one of the world’s longest-running armed conflicts, widespread increases in food prices and transport costs, weather extremes, crop diseases, pest attacks, and the impact of COVID-19 and other epidemics including Ebola, underpinned by widespread poverty.

Over 60 million people, or 64 percent of the population, are living on less than USD 2.15 a day (WB, March 2023). The coverage of IPC analyses has increased between 2018 and 2022, from 101 areas to a national coverage of 185 including 138 rural and 47 urban areas, of which 24 are already burdened by displacements (FEWS NET, December 2022). Around 5,000 households were affected by floods and landslides across five municipalities in Kinshasa in December 2022 (OCHA, December 2022).

The persisting conflict, further aggravated by the lingering impacts of COVID-19, Ebola and measles outbreaks, acute food insecurity, and natural disasters, are expected to worsen the displacement situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2023 (UNHCR, February 2023), both in terms of numbers of displaced people and the deterioration of food security and their living conditions.

Refugees mainly from Central African Republic and Rwanda

The country hosts over 520,000 refugees and asylum seekers. Most of them fled from violence in neighbouring countries, mainly the Central African Republic and Rwanda. They reside in 20 of the country’s 26 provinces, mainly in the north and east: Nord-Kivu, Sud-Kivu, Nord-Ubangi, Sud-Ubangi, Haut-Uélé and Ituri. These provinces are among the most underserved and insecure in the country with low access to healthcare and high levels of acute food insecurity, acute malnutrition, epidemics and natural disasters (HNO, January 2023).
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only 9 percent of households lived in permanent housing. Only 33 percent of households had acceptable food consumption. While almost all refugee heads of household were employed before arriving in the country, 71 percent were unemployed in displacement (UNHCR & WFP, May 2022).

**Drivers of undernutrition**

Inadequate maternal and child-feeding practices: The majority of children in analysed areas classified in Serious or worse (IPC AMN Phase 3 or above) do not have access to an adequate quality of diet, with only 5–15 percent of children aged 6–23 months receiving a Minimum Dietary Diversity (MDD).

Low rates of exclusive breastfeeding for infants under 6 months, continued breastfeeding and early introduction of adequate complementary foods are more marked in health zones in Kwango, Mai-Ndombe, Kieuilu, Sankuru, and Kasaï-Oriental and Kasaï-Central provinces (IPC, October 2022).

Limited access to health and nutrition services: The volatile security situation impacted the delivery of basic social services, nutrition services and humanitarian aid. Poor access and availability of health services persist, with only 0.28 doctors and 1.19 nurses and midwives per 10,000 people (IPC, October 2022).

Remote communities, vaccine hesitancy, and low measles vaccination coverage and vitamin A supplementation are barriers in Haut-Lomami, Tanganyika, Sud-Kivu, Tshuapa, Kwango, Kasaï-Oriental and Mai-Ndombe (IPC, October 2022).

High prevalence of infectious diseases: Diseases such as measles and malaria are prevalent, further increasing malnutrition risks among children. In July 2022, the country experienced its 14th outbreak of Ebola virus disease in 46 years, leading to movement restrictions that affected markets. Over the past four years, six outbreaks occurred in two provinces (Nord-Kivu and Equateur) and in April 2022, another case was confirmed in Mbandaka, Equateur province, raising fears of another outbreak. Sankuru province faced a cholera outbreak that started in mid-August while the cholera caseload in Tanganyika province in October 2022 was three times higher than the same period in 2021 (IPC, October 2022).

Around 40 percent of households do not have access to improved water points and more than 60 percent lack access to adequate sanitation facilities. Flooding in central and northern provinces affected the already weak health, water and sanitation infrastructure, contributing to degrading the nutritional status of the most vulnerable groups (IPC, October 2022).

**Food insecurity and lack of access to healthy diets**

Overall, high levels of acute malnutrition are consistently reported in areas where acute food insecurity was also high, suggesting that acute food insecurity contributes substantially to malnutrition, although it is not the only driver. Out of the 78 territories covered in both analyses, nearly half had a nutritional classification that was more severe than the IPC acute food insecurity classification: among these 38 territories, 31 had a Critical (IPC AMN Phase 4) malnutrition situation (IPC, October 2022).

According to the IPC AMN analysis covering July 2022 to June 2023, nearly half of the analysed areas covered in the IPC AMN analysis were classified in Serious or worse (IPC AMN Phase 3 or above) – 120 in Serious (IPC AMN Phase 3) and 46 in Critical (IPC AMN Phase 4) from July to December 2022. Between January and June 2023, a significant deterioration in the nutritional situation is expected, with 253 analysed areas projected to be in Serious or worse (IPC AMN Phase 3 or above) – including 50 in Critical (IPC AMN Phase 4) – unless urgent action is taken to address the local factors that aggravate acute malnutrition (IPC, October 2022).