Nearly half a million people have fled their homes in eastern Congo since April 2012 due to renewed insecurity and violent conflict.

In the past few months, a surge in violence in eastern DRC has forced nearly half a million people from their homes, with severe humanitarian consequences across the region. Civilians face killings, forced recruitment, extortion, pillaging and sexual violence at the hand of numerous armed groups and even the Congolese security forces.

Hundreds of thousands of people – inside DRC and across the border in neighbouring Uganda and Rwanda – are in urgent need of clean water, healthcare, food, shelter and protection from violence. Oxfam is scaling up its response in all three countries and aims to reach around 230,000 people affected by this new crisis.

The new displacement in North and South Kivu has brought the number of displaced people in DRC to more than 2 million, the highest figure since 2009. In April, former fighters from the rebel CNDP group, who had been integrated into the Congolese army (FARDC), mutinied and took control of an area close to the Uganda and Rwanda borders. In response the FARDC deployed troops from across eastern Congo to fight the "M23" rebellion and protect major towns. Tens of thousands of people have fled the resulting conflict, but the redeployment of the army has also left a massive security vacuum in other areas, which has allowed other rebel groups and militia to reassert their control, often attacking and abusing civilians, many of whom have been left without any protection.

People in North and South Kivu have lived for months with constant instability, and decades of conflict and marginalisation have eroded people’s ability to cope with cyclical crises. The most urgent needs now are to get humanitarian assistance to people affected by the conflict, and for ordinary people to be better protected by the Congolese army and UN peacekeepers. But the underlying causes of conflict – such as poverty, the need for army reform, tensions over land and resources, and international responses that do not take local opinions and solutions into account – must also be addressed so that people can live in peace.
HELPING AFFECTED COMMUNITIES IN DRC

Oxfam teams are providing clean water and sanitation to around 55,000 people who have fled the violence and are now sheltering in desperate conditions in Kanyaruchinya on the edge of Goma, the capital of North Kivu. People have walked to get to this barren patch of volcanic land and many were robbed on their journey. New arrivals say that at home they were unable to go to their fields and make a living because armed men would attack them and take everything they have.

The porous volcanic lava in the area means there is little water available in the ground, so Oxfam teams are bringing water into the camp by trucks as a short term solution – while also lobbying for people to be moved to a more secure and sustainable location. Oxfam workers are constructing around 700 latrines and 120 showers to improve sanitation in the camp, and our public health teams are conducting mass information campaigns to reduce the risk of diseases such as cholera.

Oxfam is also responding in the Mugunga 1 camp, where several thousand people have arrived following an increase in inter-ethnic violence in the southern Masisi area at the start of September. Our response focuses on providing clean water and sanitation in the camp, and supporting the most vulnerable residents by providing cash to help them get back on their feet.

Oxfam has ongoing programmes in other conflict affected parts of North and South Kivu. In Mweso we are providing clean water and lobbying for people to be moved to a more secure and sustainable location. Oxfam workers are constructing around 700 latrines and 120 showers to improve sanitation in the camp, and our public health teams are conducting mass information campaigns to reduce the risk of diseases such as cholera.

SUPPORTING REFUGEES IN RWANDA

About 20,000 refugees have fled DRC into Rwanda. Oxfam is providing clean water and sanitation to more than 14,000 of them.

Refugees initially took shelter in Nkamira transit camp, close to the DRC border, where Oxfam built latrines, set up washing stations, supported health campaigns using drama and songs, and distributed sanitary kits and jerry cans. With the transit camp rapidly exceeding its capacity, refugees were then moved to a larger camp at Kigeme, in the southwest of Rwanda, and Oxfam handed our work in Nkamira over to a local partner organisation whilst continuing to provide technical support. In the Kigeme camp, Oxfam provides water and sanitation infrastructure – including installing water tanks, pumps and tap-stands, and constructing latrines and showers – and works closely with hygiene groups to improve public health in the camp.

SUPPORTING REFUGEES IN UGANDA

Over 37,000 refugees from DRC have fled across the border into southwest Uganda. Oxfam, which works primarily in the north and east of the country, has begun a new emergency response in Rwamwanja camp, where 22,500 people are sheltering, to provide clean water and sanitation to recently arrived families.

Oxfam teams in Rwamwanja have begun drilling boreholes to ensure camp residents have a source of safe water. We are also working with communities to construct latrines, distributing hygiene items such as soap and training public health promoters to spread messages of good health practices.

Because there are limited opportunities for people in the camp to make a living, Oxfam is starting special ‘cash-for-work’ programmes, paying residents to rehabilitate roads which will both benefit the local community and give participants the opportunity to earn an income. We are also starting an unconditional cash transfer programme, working with a local mobile phone company to provide a vital injection of funds to some of the most vulnerable families in the camp.