

Sharp rise in refugee arrivals to Uganda as fresh violence flares in DR Congo – UN agency

22 December 2017 – Fresh violence in the Ituri province of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) forced over 2,650 refugees to cross over into neighbouring Uganda this week, five times the usual number of arrivals, according to the United Nations refugee agency.

The new arrivals to Uganda, who are mostly women and children, are reportedly fleeing intercommunal violence in Djugu territory in Ituri province, Cécile Pouilly, spokesperson for the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)), told reporters in Geneva.

“Since Monday, there were reports of [houses being scorched](#) in the area, and people attacked with machetes and firearms,” Ms. Pouilly said.

“More than 20 villages were abandoned due to the fear of reprisals. Services have been paralysed and panic engulfed the population.”

The majority of refugees cross Lake Albert on rickety fishing vessels to arrive to Sebagoro, a village some 270 kilometres northwest of the Ugandan capital, Kampala. About 650 refugees arrived in two boats this morning. This route is being used by a large number of refugees for the first time after a tragic shipwreck in 2014 that left over 200 dead.

“Refugees report that many more people are gathering on the Congolese side of Lake Albert waiting for their turn to cross, despite the journey’s high cost,” stated Ms. Pouilly.

UNHCR is stepping up its capacity inside Uganda to meet the refugees’ needs. “We are supporting the authorities to receive the new arrivals and transfer them to Kyangwali settlement, some 50 kilometers to the east. There, refugees are registered, medically screened and provided with hot meals and basic relief items,” Ms. Pouilly said.

However, the agency’s operation in Uganda is currently only 39 per cent funded, and more resources are urgently needed to upgrade the reception capacity and assist the new arrivals.