



# POLICY BRIEF

## Recalibrating MONUSCO Mandate limits vs. political realities in eastern DRC

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The mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) to protect civilians and stabilise the region is constrained by operational limitations, regional fragmentation and political complexities. As violence between the national army and armed groups escalates and regional political tensions rise, this policy brief calls for a mandate reassessment. The emphasis should be on flexibility, better regional cooperation, clear transition benchmarks, and stronger support for local forces.

## Key findings

- ▶ United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions face several challenges, including geopolitical tensions, fragile consent in complex environments, and unreliable political support, which cause gaps between capability and expectations.
- ▶ Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has long been characterised by weak state institutions, corruption and limited territorial control, amid complex regional political dynamics. The scapegoating of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) and calls for its withdrawal have impacted the mission's legitimacy and operational ability.
- ▶ Although MONUSCO remains crucial in the DRC, the March 23 Movement's (M23) escalation has raised questions about the mission's mandate to protect civilians. This shows the limitations of a rigid, universal and territorially bound mandate.
- ▶ MONUSCO's approach to civilian protection is reactive rather than preventive, limiting its capacity to effectively protect civilians. Without more flexibility, implementing preventive measures is difficult.
- ▶ The situation since January 2025 shows the profound challenges facing MONUSCO, and necessitates a fundamental readjustment.

## Recommendations

### UN Security Council:

- ▶ Define a robust, flexible plan incorporating enhanced intelligence sharing and adaptive rules of engagement
- ▶ Develop an integrated civilian-military early warning mechanism in coordination with regional stakeholders (African Union (AU), East African Community (EAC), Economic Community of Central African States, Southern African Development Community (SADC), and International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR)) to address evolving security threats, especially where armed groups exploit vacuums
- ▶ Provide the MONUSCO Force Intervention Brigade with a clear mandate and sufficient resources to neutralise aggressive armed factions, while carefully managing risks of escalation and mission overreach
- ▶ To avoid political challenges, base military engagement mandates on armed groups

identified consensually through regional diplomatic engagement

### MONUSCO and local institutions:

- ▶ To ensure stability, link MONUSCO's withdrawal and transition strategy to benchmarks and local readiness rather than fixed timelines
- ▶ Prioritise local capacity building and ensure that the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) and police receive accelerated training and equipping, with human rights respect as a precondition
- ▶ Establish a clear enforcement mechanism to prevent FARDC complicity in abuses

### Regional actors (AU, ICGLR, EAC, SADC):

- ▶ Re-anchor MONUSCO within a revitalised regional political strategy focusing on diplomacy, itinerant mediation, and coordinated sanctions alongside troop deployment

## Introduction

United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions worldwide face several challenges, including geopolitical tensions, fragile consent in complex environments, and unreliable political support to mandate implementation.<sup>1</sup> This often leads to a gap between capability and expectations.<sup>2</sup> An example is the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), which is stuck between its prescribed mandate and what it can accomplish in practice.

This raises questions about the transition and future of UN peacekeeping operations, calling for more contextualised and flexible approaches, as well as the use of all available tools to achieve greater effectiveness.<sup>3</sup> This includes ensuring close alignment with initiatives such as the Action for Peacekeeping Agenda, New Agenda for Peace, and 2024 Pact for the Future, all of which call for realistic and politically grounded mandates.

### Peace missions worldwide face unreliable political support and fragile consent in complex environments

Violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and MONUSCO's ongoing challenges, including movement restrictions, criticism of inaction, regional interference, and funding shortfalls, underscore the need to reassess the mission's mandate and interventions. The role and capacity of international peacekeeping in protracted and politically complex conflicts, particularly when armed groups gain the power to operate as de facto authorities in contested territories, must be reviewed.

Given the evolving security, political and regional realities, MONUSCO's mandate was renewed in December 2024 to enhance its focus on civilian protection and support of state authorities. But rising violence since January 2025 reveals ongoing limitations. The dynamics induced by ongoing clashes question the effectiveness and efficiency of civilian protection, on one hand, and the transfer of responsibility to a national counterpart, overtaken by security developments, on the other.

This policy brief draws lessons from MONUSCO's barriers in eastern DRC, specifically by examining the links

between national and regional political dynamics and their direct implications for the mission's effectiveness in protecting civilians and stabilisation. It highlights the need to adjust MONUSCO's mandate to ensure protection of civilians in a deteriorating security context, and recalibrate its transition plan.

## Methodology

This policy brief combines secondary data from desk research, and ongoing monitoring of MONUSCO and the eastern DRC crisis with data collected in Goma, Beni and Butembo (2023–25). The desk research included consistent analysis of UN reports, local media and academic publications.

Interviews were conducted with humanitarian actors, civil society, researchers, experts, media and community members. In addition to key informant interviews, an online focus group (September 2024) and hybrid workshop (February 2025) deepened discussions with local and international stakeholders. Though planned earlier, the workshop focused on the sudden escalation since January 2025, with participants discussing immediate protection needs and strategic responses. Continuous monitoring of the situation was conducted throughout the process.

## Volatile national and regional context

For decades, the eastern DRC has endured severe political and security crises with immense human and material repercussions. The security situation is characterised by a complex interplay of internal and external factors including weak state institutions, corruption, and limited territorial control in a complex regional political climate. This has led to decades of instability, violence, and humanitarian crises particularly in South Kivu, North Kivu, and Ituri provinces, displacing millions and leading to significant loss of life and livelihoods.

This justified the deployment of one of the longest and costliest<sup>4</sup> UN peacekeeping missions. Originally called the UN Organization Mission in the DRC (MONUC), in 2010 it evolved from its role in observing the ceasefire and maintaining peace to a robust and multidimensional mandate (MONUSCO, Security Council Resolution 1925).

MONUSCO is an integrated force tasked with neutralising armed groups and stabilising the country, through an initial mandate focused on protecting civilians, supporting peacebuilding and disarmament. The protracted conflict and increasingly complex context have necessitated several changes, notably with the 2013 creation of the UN Force Intervention Brigade (Security Council Resolution 2098), tasked with ‘neutralising armed groups’ through offensive force.<sup>5</sup>

Subsequent renewals have maintained this dual priority of protection and stabilisation, the latter accompanied by a transition plan and a refocus on support and advice to the Congolese forces, increased political engagement, and civilian protection. This marks a conditional turning point in its transition plan. Despite these renewals, the eastern DRC’s political and security situation has exposed MONUSCO’s limitations in fulfilling its mandate.

### Support given to armed groups by states in the region worsens the conflict and undermines MONUSCO’s ability to protect civilians

The conflict has created fertile ground for state and non-state actors, such as the March 23 Movement (M23), to take advantage of the resulting power vacuum in the region.

In 2013, a defeated M23 rebel group fled to the Virunga Mountains, along the Rwanda and Uganda borders. The rebel group relaunched its offensive in 2021, with enhanced military capability enabling it to gradually gain ground over a fragmented and divided Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC).<sup>6</sup> Insecurity worsened with violence escalating in January 2025, and the capture of cities like Goma and Bukavu.

The crisis has deep regional dimensions, largely due to the involvement of regional players like Burundi, Rwanda, and Uganda. The UN established that Rwanda was supporting M23 in its conquest of eastern DRC and Uganda at some points through logistical and military aid, driven by complex geopolitical interests.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, the DRC is accused of supporting the Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda (FDLR), a Rwandan rebel group opposed to Kigali’s regime, based in eastern DRC.<sup>8</sup>

The consequence of these intersecting local, national, and regional dynamics is an inextricable regional security crisis. Tensions between neighbours, notably the DRC and Rwanda, complicate any attempt at resolution. The DRC holds Rwanda primarily responsible for the situation in the east because of its M23 support and resource exploitation. Meanwhile Rwanda highlights the FARDC-FDLR link as a security threat. There is also friction between Rwanda and Burundi, the latter accusing Rwanda of an imminent attack earlier this year.<sup>9</sup>



MONUSCO’S FUTURE  
AGENDA SHOULD  
CONSIDER REGIONAL  
POLITICAL DYNAMICS

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The support given to non-state armed groups by states like the DRC, Rwanda and Uganda amplifies instability that directly worsens the conflict and undermines the capacity and ability of MONUSCO to protect civilians. Rwanda's military support of M23 has given the rebels superior firepower compared to that of FARDC and MONUSCO troops in their mission to protect civilians. This complexity deepens the mission's operational constraints, rendering its efforts reactive rather than preventive.<sup>10</sup>

Though MONUSCO remains a crucial actor in the DRC, M23's territorial gains and intensifying violence since 2021 remain key concerns regarding the value of peacekeeping, given its waning influence in armed conflicts. It also raises questions about how MONUSCO is scapegoated, and how its mandate to protect civilians while ensuring sustained peace and security is impacted. This also brings political primacy back to the fore. MONUSCO's future agenda should consider the political dynamics at play in the DRC and broader region to avoid them undermining its efforts to protect civilians and promote peace.

## Politicisation and host state limitations

Before the recent escalation, MONUSCO faced several internal constraints to its ability to fulfil its mandate, in addition to the complex security and diplomatic context in the DRC and region. These include inefficiencies in responding to local crises, troops unwilling to engage with armed groups, and deficient communication. Limited resources amplify these issues.<sup>11</sup>

For years, MONUSCO has been criticised by communities and politicians for its ineffective responses to armed groups, notably M23 and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF). The ADF was formed in 1995 as a merger of two Ugandan rebel groups. It was initially located in North Kivu but has since expanded operations into Ituri and Lubero.<sup>12</sup> This situation worsened with the return of M23 in 2021. Several activists and civil society organisations mobilised demonstrations calling for MONUSCO's unconditional withdrawal, arguing that the mission failed to protect civilians. This anti-MONUSCO sentiment remains prevalent among some segments of the population.

Congolese authorities, under pressure and unable to resolve the worsening crisis, have also resorted to the anti-MONUSCO narrative. Statements from parliamentary members and government calls for withdrawal have signalled this shift in blame for security failures to the UN mission.<sup>13</sup> This became more pronounced in the run-up to the January 2024 elections, increasing the pressure on MONUSCO as an internal political lever for legitimising power or diverting attention from state weakness.

## Pressure on MONUSCO to protect civilians is rising, while the DRC absolves itself of this responsibility

The responsibility for securing the territory and protecting civilians lies primarily with the national authorities. In eastern DRC, state authorities are unable to ensure effective control of the territory, leading to the presence of armed groups and militias. FARDC faces enormous organisational, tactical, and material weaknesses in fulfilling its legal duty to protect civilians and preserve the integrity of the national territory.<sup>14</sup>

These forces are regularly accused of abusing citizens. Moreover, their alliance with the militias grouped under the Wazalendo<sup>15</sup> banner is problematic because of their systematic abuse of civilians. Consequently, the pressure on MONUSCO to protect civilians is increasing, while the state absolves itself from this responsibility.

Deployed in North Kivu in 2022, following the Nairobi summit to stabilise the region by interposing itself between the belligerents and ensuring M23's withdrawal, the East African Community Regional Force (EACRF)<sup>16</sup> was forced to leave the DRC towards the end of 2023 following pressure from Kinshasa.<sup>17</sup> The DRC had expected the force to take a more offensive stance against M23, and was unhappy with the tensions and diverging interests of the countries making up the force.

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) Mission in the DRC took over from December 2023, with an offensive mandate to combat armed groups, notably M23.<sup>18</sup> Despite support from MONUSCO, a lack of funding, troops and equipment, and political divergences within SADC, rendered this force ineffective, as with

others before it, causing it to withdraw at the height of the conflict.<sup>19</sup>

Like MONUSCO, these missions suffered from mandates that grew impossible to implement due to regional political divisions and political fragmentation within regional blocs, and limited logistical and military resources.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, there was a lack of coordination due to diverging political interests in the deployment of regional troops between MONUSCO and these two initiatives, especially the EACRF.<sup>21</sup>

Rwanda and Uganda are both members of the EAC, with obligations to resolve disputes peacefully and maintain stability within the region. However, their dual role as both a counter-insurgency partner and economic actor with interests in the country's minerals complicates any efforts towards ceasefires by groups like M23 and state actors.

### MONUSCO's mandate is primarily defensive, with no authority for hot pursuit or cross-border operations

The ongoing conflict in eastern DRC reflects a complex web of intersecting local, national, and regional interests, particularly those linked to the control of natural resources. Consequently, the involvement of various armed groups, coupled with regional intervention, complicates stabilisation efforts. The January 2025 escalation reveals the limitations of a universal mandate, a territorially bound mandate, and siloed peace enforcement.

### One-size-fits-all approach

Despite the UN reviewing and adapting its peacekeeping mandate to the changing dynamics of conflicts, it has been criticised for its one-size-fits-all approach to peacekeeping.<sup>22</sup> As with other UN peacekeeping mandates, MONUSCO's mandate has fallen into the trap of replicating broader peacekeeping goals – stabilisation, civilian protection, and support to states – with little if any adaptation to the DRC situation.<sup>23</sup>

Similarly, periodic changes to its mandate have not resulted in operational approaches tailored to local contexts; instead, the list of tasks has been expanded,

which not only dilutes the mission's focus but also limits its resources. ISS research reveals that the general crisis of confidence in UN operations arises when rigid, template-style mandates are applied in diverse contexts, lacking innovation that responds directly to local needs and priorities.<sup>24</sup>

### Territorially bound mandate

MONUSCO's territorially bound mandate, which respects host state sovereignty and requires the DRC's consent, limits its operational capacity to effectively address armed groups whose activities cross national borders. Such territorial constraints mean peacekeepers lack the authority for hot pursuit or cross-border operations. This restricts their ability to follow, monitor, or neutralise armed dissidents as they move between the DRC and its neighbours.

The absence of robust regional cooperation and political compromise further complicates efforts to reconfigure MONUSCO's intervention forces, including the replication of the 2013 Force Intervention Brigade operation that previously defeated M23.<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, MONUSCO's mandate remains primarily defensive rather than offensive, focusing on protecting civilians and stabilisation through deterrence and rapid response, rather than direct combat engagements. This results in a limited level of engagement with both local and foreign armed groups. Budget cuts also hinder MONUSCO's operational effectiveness and undermine its capacity to adapt to complex conflict dynamics.

### Siloed peace enforcement

Due to the lack of joint planning and competition over legitimacy among international actors, peace enforcement in the DRC is fragmented and uncoordinated. This has resulted in inefficiencies and mistrust among civilians, thereby thwarting efforts at achieving sustainable peace. The lack of an intelligence-sharing mechanism between key actors<sup>26</sup> (UN, SADC, EAC, and AU) has led to operational vacuums that are exploited by armed groups, further contributing to instability.

These operational challenges highlight rigidities in MONUSCO's mandate design and implementation, particularly the mandate's goals of protecting civilians against real-world constraints (see box on pg 7), which

impede implementation of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and Protection of Civilians (POC) principles. This results in reactive rather than preventive responses, often yielding temporary gains over sustainable peace, as preventive measures are difficult to implement without flexibility.

### **Mandate ambitions vs real-world constraints**

MONUSCO's current mandate focuses on civilian protection and assistance to stabilisation efforts. However, it operates under host state consent and sovereignty restrictions that limit its ability to combat armed groups operating across borders. The mission is then blamed for state failures, while regional politics and a deteriorating peace restrict its effectiveness. Scapegoating of the mission and subsequent calls for its withdrawal amid political instability and an increasingly militarised political and security environment reveal the trade-offs between political legitimacy, operational feasibility, and civilian protection.

### **Abuses perpetrated against civilians**

Due to the complexity and volatility of the eastern DRC context and the extent of atrocities against civilians, MONUSCO has adopted a multi-tiered POC approach.<sup>27</sup> This combines dialogue to prevent conflict, robust and proactive physical protection through military and police action, and support to the state to reform the justice sector and address the root causes of insecurity. This should, in principle, reduce civilian suffering, but reality and principles don't always converge.

Low confidence in UN operations arises when rigid mandates are applied in diverse contexts, lacking innovation that responds to local needs

In territories across eastern DRC, the abuses levelled against civilians reveal the failures of the POC mandate and further expose the limitations of reactive vs preventive peacekeeping. This year's escalation of violence by M23 and its capture of Goma and Bukavu have led to worsening abuses against civilians, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and humanitarian actors across eastern DRC – notably North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri.<sup>28</sup>

In North Kivu, especially in and around Goma, in Masisi, Walikale, Lubero and Rutshuru territories, civilians are trapped between warring factions. The capture of Goma, for example, resulted in over 1 000<sup>29</sup> deaths, while more than 7 000 fatalities have been documented across the three provinces since January.<sup>30</sup>

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DURING 5 MONTHS IN 2024

> 17 000

VICTIMS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE  
WERE TREATED IN EAST DRC

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Conflict-related sexual violence has reached unprecedented levels. In 2024, UN reports revealed that healthcare providers in eastern DRC had treated more than 17 000 victims of sexual violence over five months.<sup>31</sup> Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) reported that between January and April 2025 they treated nearly 7 400 patients in Goma, and over 2 400 in Saké.<sup>32</sup>

In the territories of Kalehe and Uvira in South Kivu, the response team has reportedly treated nearly 700 victims this year.<sup>33</sup> The number is however probably higher, as victims may not always access care due to stigma, geographical remoteness, and lack of treatment.

## The scale and systematic nature of violence in eastern DRC points to the deliberate targeting of women and girls as part of a war tactic

These figures are indicative of both the scale and systematic nature of this violence and reflect power dynamics where transactional sex and coercion play a key role in the violation of women in exchange for survival. These patterns point to deliberate targeting of women and girls as part of a broader war tactic. The absence of effective prevention, accountability, and protection mechanisms for survivors remains a critical policy gap.

In North Kivu, mainly Masisi, Nyiragongo and Rutshuru territories, armed groups such as M23 and Wazalendo have a long history of forcefully recruiting children and youth as combatants.<sup>34</sup> M23 rebels have abducted hundreds<sup>35</sup> of children and young men since their occupation of the region before the 2025 escalation.

At least 4 006 children were recruited or used by armed groups in 2024, often through abductions, according to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).<sup>36</sup> In addition to being a violation of their rights, this perpetuates the conflict.

Furthermore, despite spiralling humanitarian needs, civilians are not able to access aid. During their offensive towards Goma in January, M23 forcibly dismantled, looted and destroyed many IDP sites around the city.<sup>37</sup>

As of August 2025, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported that 3 635 036 people were displaced in eastern DRC. There were approximately 3 530 940 returnees from an initial seven million displaced.<sup>38</sup> North Kivu accounts for 1 011 335 displaced individuals, South Kivu 1 466 462, Ituri 903 282, and Tanganyika 253 957. Ninety-six percent of IDPs in the east are displaced due to conflict.<sup>39</sup>

Meanwhile, increasing attacks, mainly by M23 rebels, on hospitals and clinics have been reported, with the abduction,<sup>40</sup> murder and torture of patients and health workers,<sup>41</sup> and looting of hospitals.<sup>42, 43</sup>

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IN 2024, AT LEAST

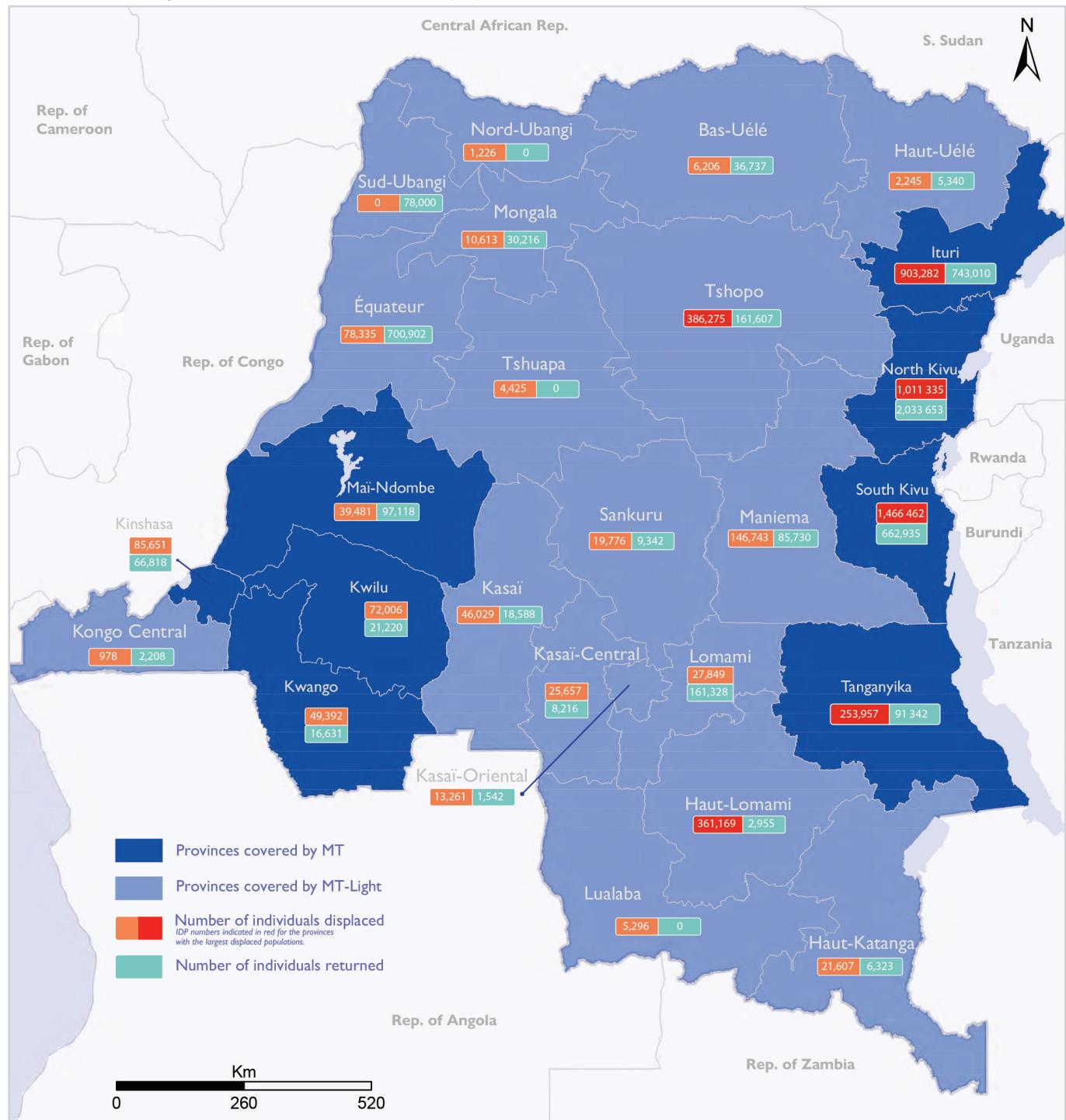
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CHILDREN WERE RECRUITED  
OR USED BY ARMED GROUPS

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Chart 1: Internally displaced and IDP returnee population



Source: IOM<sup>44</sup>

The humanitarian situation and the abuses documented reveal three types of thematic failures.

### Prevention

The scale and impact of M23's abuses and territorial claims expose a fundamental weakness in eastern

DRC peacekeeping mechanisms. The shortcomings of MONUSCO and FARDC in anticipating and forestalling threats reflect a reactive operational framework, rooted in their interpretation and implementation of the mission's mandate, rather than a preventive strategy. The former is focused on stabilisation and confrontation over

existing threats, while the latter would employ early warning mechanisms and preventive action. Mandate reviews should prioritise prevention, early threat detection and rapid intervention to limit the scale and impact of M23 abuses while ensuring fulfilment of the POC and stabilisation mandate.

### **Reactive peacekeeping limitations**

Following the January 2025 escalation of violence, MONUSCO and humanitarian actors, such as MSF, faced challenges in accessing and maintaining operational capacity. The dismantling and looting of IDP camps, attacks on humanitarian personnel and healthcare facilities, and civilians being caught between state forces and armed groups, limit the timely delivery of aid and protection. Reactive peacekeeping sometimes faces operational and implementation challenges as it often comes too late to deter or counter violence, rendering MONUSCO unable to protect civilians against M23 and other armed groups.

### **Structural and mandate challenges**

Broader political and military challenges in eastern DRC further undermine peacekeeping efforts. MONUSCO's POC design automatically assumes cooperation and political will from local and regional actors. However, the conflict is embedded in resource exploitation, ethnic tensions, and regional intervention, complicating peacekeeping implementation. Without a political redress and accountability mechanism, MONUSCO's mandate is insufficient.

MONUSCO's failures in conceptualising and operationalising its POC mandate indicate the need for a strategic recalibration that reframes its role from peacekeeper to crisis containment actor.

### **Need for adjustment**

Aimed at extending MONUSCO's mandate, UNSC Resolution 2765 highlights the need to protect civilians and support stabilisation, institution building, and governance and security reforms. Under civilian protection, the resolution focuses on 'civilian populations threatened by physical violence, taking all necessary measures to ensure effective, rapid, dynamic and integrated protection.'

Practically, the mission was to deploy all means to prevent, dissuade and deter atrocities against civilians, including refugees and IDPs. It was to carry out targeted and energetic offensives if needed to guarantee this protection. This was the case a decade ago with the Force Intervention Brigade.

Authorised by the UN in March 2013 through Resolution 2098,<sup>45</sup> it was tasked with conducting targeted offensive operations to neutralise and disarm groups posing a threat to the authority of the Congolese state and civilians' safety.

UNSC Resolution 2765 shifted MONUSCO from an offensive to a defensive posture. The mission pivoted from proactively neutralising armed groups to reactive deterrence and rapid response, while gradually strengthening the DRC's security forces to take over the POC. Since M23's 2021 resurgence,

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96%

OF > 3.5 MILLION IDPs IN  
EAST DRC ARE DISPLACED  
DUE TO CONFLICT

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however, this has been almost impossible due to the rebel group's enhanced capacity and advanced weaponry gained through external support (in violation of the UNSC arms embargo). MONUSCO's limited resources compound the situation making it difficult for the mission to deliver on its mandate.

M23 has taken extreme measures to further limit the mission's movements and activities since taking control of Goma, Bukavu and surrounding areas. In January 2025, it destroyed part of Goma's airport, hindering the movement of aid and directly affecting humanitarian efforts. The airport remains closed, with no timeline for its reopening.

### MONUSCO's mandate reviews should prioritise prevention, early threat detection and rapid intervention

The mission's inability to operate and protect civilians in M23-controlled areas adds another layer of complexity. MONUSCO cannot fully protect civilians in these areas with its movement restricted. In rural areas, fighting continues between M23 and some Wazalendo militias, further complicating the situation.

Also, the transition plan, approved by the UNSC and agreed on with the DRC government in November 2023, saw MONUSCO withdraw from South Kivu, despite persistent threats from armed groups and limited FARDC capacity to fill the resulting security gaps. Since January, worsening violence in the retaken zones has rendered the transition plan obsolete, with state forces facing several challenges in taking over, and MONUSCO remaining limited in its ability to act.

MONUSCO operates in a complex context in which the Congolese state and army are struggling to maintain territorial integrity and protect civilians. Similarly, the region is marked by fragmentation and intense security and diplomatic tensions.

The situation's constant deterioration and the ambivalence of political positions are increasing pressure on the mission. The nature of the conflict, with its multitude of stakeholders, adds to the strain. This context has undermined most diplomatic and military initiatives aimed at bringing peace and ending civilian suffering.

### Conclusion and recommendations

The current security crisis necessitates an in-depth reassessment that examines evolving conflict dynamics, regional interests, and the host country's capacity.

Given that the environment in which the transition and withdrawal plans were formulated has changed, such an assessment could see these plans become better calibrated and adjusted to the needs of the national and sub-regional security and political context.

MONUSCO is caught between a rigid mandate and a complex reality marked by the fragility of its host state, regional tensions, and powerful armed groups. The mission's reactive posture and rigid mandate limit its capacity to effectively protect civilians. A fundamental readjustment is necessary. To this end, some measures should be taken:

- The UNSC should define a more robust and flexible plan that includes enhanced intelligence sharing, provisions for adaptive rules of engagement, and an integrated civilian-military protection early warning mechanism, in coordination with regional stakeholders such as the AU, EAC, Economic Community of Central African States, SADC, and International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR). This plan should address evolving security threats, especially in areas where armed groups continue to exploit security vacuums to wreak havoc on communities.
- Better civilian protection goes hand in hand with increased deterrence capabilities and military offensives against armed groups. To this end, a clear mandate and sufficient military resources must be provided to MONUSCO's Force Intervention Brigade to help neutralise the most aggressive armed factions. This approach is not without risks, however, and should be managed carefully to avoid escalation and mission overreach. Basing this mandate on specific armed groups identified by consensus, notably through diplomatic engagement at the regional level, could enable MONUSCO to circumscribe its tasks and protect it from political hurdles.
- MONUSCO's withdrawal and transition plan should be based on benchmarks and milestones, not predetermined timelines. This would ensure the mission's departure is based on tangible progress

and local institutions' readiness to take over and maintain stability. Key objectives rather than rigid scheduling could mitigate the risk of a hasty exit that jeopardises progress and leaves the country and region vulnerable to renewed conflict. This would ensure a more flexible and responsive approach, adapting to evolving contexts, while developing local capacities to sustain peace and security independently before MONUSCO's withdrawal.

- Stabilisation in eastern DRC, along with POC, must remain key to MONUSCO's goals. For this, local forces should be reinforced so they can take over security

responsibilities. MONUSCO must speed up the training and equipping of the FARDC and police forces. Respect for human rights must be central to this. A mechanism for monitoring and enforcing this could prevent state forces' complicity in abuses.

- Fragmentation within regional blocs and their lack of collaboration with MONUSCO are problematic. It is important to re-anchor the mission within regional political strategies. This places MONUSCO within a revitalised regional political process (AU, ICGLR, EAC, SADC), supporting diplomacy, itinerant mediation, and coordinated sanctions, and not just deploying troops.

## Notes

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**POLICY BRIEF**

## Demand-driven operations: a new approach to UN peacekeeping

Eugene Chen, Dawit Yohannes, Meressa K Dessu, Emmaculate Liaga and Tsion Belay

United Nations (UN) peace operations need to shift from rigid, one-size-fits-all models to flexible, context-specific approaches. The increasing complexity of mandates often overburdens missions and dilutes their focus. Stronger partnerships with regional organisations are needed, along with better coordination within the UN system and proactive planning for mission transitions. Securing adequate and predictable resources to ensure peace operations meet their objectives is also vital.





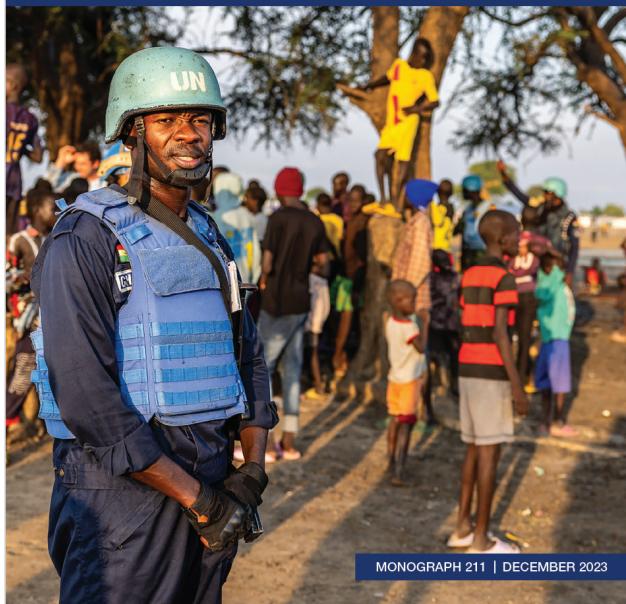
**POLICY BRIEF**

## Regionalisation of peacekeeping in Africa Towards the end of collective security?

Paul-Simon Handy and Félicité Djilo

Peace support operations in Africa increasingly tend to involve troops from neighbouring countries. While it is assumed that these countries have a better understanding of a crisis, their involvement often comes with challenges. This breach of an unwritten rule of United Nations peacekeeping indicates a transformation of peace operations from instruments for collective security to vehicles for collective defence.



**How effective is policing in protecting civilians in peace operations?**  
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Meressa Kahsu Dessu, Dawit Yohannes and Charles T Hunt

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**Will the DRC's 'sacred union' deliver electoral reform?**

David Zounmenou

The so-called 'sacred union' (union sacrée) coalition decreed by Democratic Republic of the Congo President Félix Tshisekedi has shifted the balance of power in his favour, at least for now. The crucial question is whether he will seize the moment and take advantage of the sacred union to reform the country's electoral system and improve security ahead of the 2023 election.

CENTRAL AFRICA REPORT 20 | AUGUST 2021

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The ISS is grateful for support from the members of the ISS Partnership Forum: the Hanns Seidel Foundation, the European Union, the Open Society Foundations and the governments of Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden.

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ISSN 2617-829X Print  
ISSN 2617-8303 Digital

