

# INSIGHT REPORT

## Ebola outbreak in Congo (DRC): Security risks, implications

JUNE 2026

### KEY JUDGEMENTS



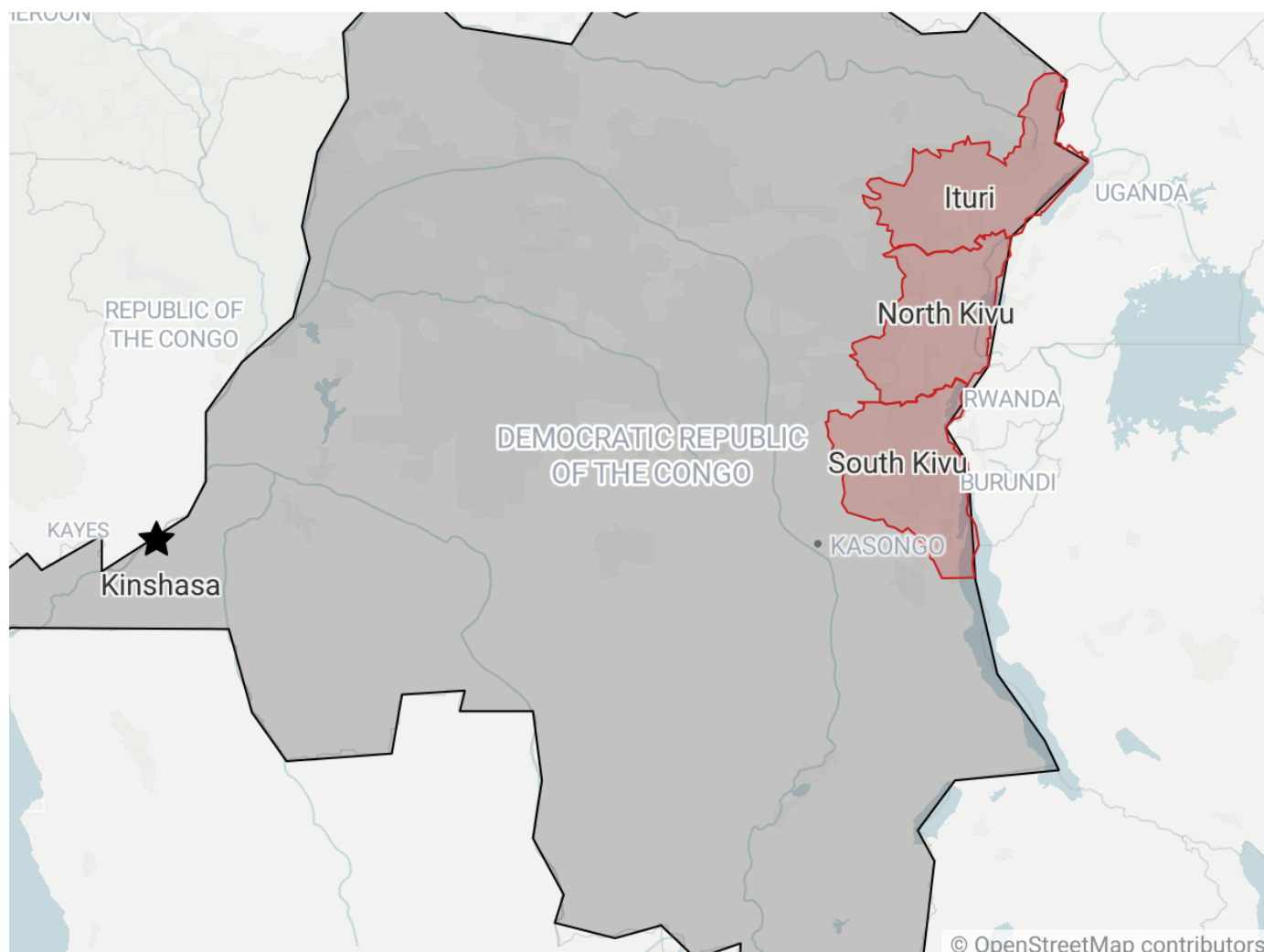
- The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared an ongoing Ebola outbreak in several provinces in Congo (DRC) a public health emergency of international concern. In addition to health risks, the outbreak is likely to pose various security and operational threats.
- The security and operational environment in Congo is diverse and underpinned by several factors, including recurring conflict and violence, limited state capacity and a lack of public trust in government institutions. These factors are likely to continue to shape conditions in Ebola-affected regions over the medium term.
- The full extent of security and operational impacts is highly dependent on the outbreak's scale and spread. They are likely to include shifts in armed group and criminal activity, border and movement restrictions, socio-economic disruption, and increased levels of violence against healthcare workers and facilities. It is critical to monitor indicators that these security risks are escalating.
- Travellers to Congo and in-country workforce should keep abreast of the latest developments. Managers should engage in scenario planning, proactive stakeholder engagement and exposure mapping to best safeguard workforce in the country.



### OVERVIEW

The WHO declared the Ebola outbreak a public health emergency in May. Hundreds of suspected cases have emerged in Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu provinces so far. The current outbreak is the latest of many in recent years. Health authorities face significant challenges in implementing control measures and contact tracing is limited.

### Congo (DRC): Capital city and areas with confirmed Ebola cases as of mid-June 2026



★ Kinshasa, capital of Congo (DRC)

▭ Regions with confirmed Ebola cases

Source: International SOS • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 1: Regions with confirmed Ebola cases as of June

## ASSESSMENT

### Key security considerations

Security implications of the outbreak will depend largely on its scale, duration and geographic spread. However, the outbreak is occurring within an operating environment already characterised by conflict, humanitarian pressures, limited state capacity and low levels of public trust. As a result, the most significant security risks are likely to stem from secondary effects associated with response measures and existing instability.

### Armed groups and insecurity

The presence of numerous armed groups across eastern Congo creates opportunities for non-state actors to exploit instability generated by public health emergencies. While armed groups may not directly seek to influence outbreak dynamics, they may benefit from disruption to governance, reduced state presence, restrictions on movement or the diversion of government resources towards response efforts.

The Congolese army (FARDC) and the Rwandan-backed March 23 (M23) rebel group have been engaged in conflict for several years. An escalation in fighting in January and February 2025 resulted in M23 capturing several key cities in North and South Kivu, including Bukavu (South Kivu) and Goma (North Kivu). Although FARDC has slowed some M23 advances, it has been unable to significantly counter the group's operations or recapture territory. The conflict has generated significant humanitarian and socio-economic pressures, including widespread displacement, reported abuses against civilians and disruption to economic activity throughout affected regions.

Several peace negotiations have been ongoing since the escalation between the Congolese and Rwandan governments and M23. However, despite some agreements, talks thus far have yet to translate into a sustained ceasefire or improved humanitarian conditions. A lack of trust between the parties, incompatible core demands and repeated violations of deals make an agreement in the short-to-medium term unlikely.

The conflict is occurring within a broader security environment characterised by weak state control in parts of the east, recurring humanitarian crises and the presence of other armed groups. This includes the Islamic State-affiliated militant Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) group.

Armed actors, including M23, will use the outbreak and increase in aid for economic gain. Unverified reports suggest that M23 has already increased its taxes and the cost of housing and visas for healthcare or humanitarian groups operating in the region. Opportunistic criminal actors could employ similar tactics in affected areas, further increasing operating costs for organisations.

Armed groups may also use the outbreak to attempt to expand and consolidate their control. The government is likely to redeploy its forces to locations where unrest breaks out, leaving potential



gaps in territorial control and defence. Rising anti-government sentiment and declining confidence in state institutions could provide opportunities for armed groups to strengthen local support networks, increase recruitment or position themselves as alternative providers of security, governance or assistance in areas where state presence is limited.

## Border closures and movement restrictions

Outbreak response measures are likely to result in varying levels of travel disruption, including border closures and movement restrictions. Several measures have already been reported, including Rwanda closing all border crossings with Congo.

However, border regions in eastern Congo are highly porous, with significant levels of both formal and informal cross-border movement. As a result, even where the authorities implement formal restrictions or screening measures, movement may continue through unofficial routes, reducing the effectiveness of border controls and complicating monitoring and response efforts.

The authorities may impose curfews in outbreak-affected areas to manage civilian movement. However, enforcement challenges and uneven application will limit their effectiveness and, in some contexts, increase tensions between communities and the security forces.

From an operational perspective, these measures are likely to increase travel times, complicate planning and create uncertainty around the movement of workforce and supplies. They may also affect evacuation planning and restrict access for organisations operating in or near affected areas. Reduced visibility over informal movement routes will further complicate monitoring and response co-ordination in border regions.

## Socio-economic disruption

The outbreak is likely to place additional pressure on communities already affected by conflict, displacement and economic disruption. Secondary economic effects may increase local grievances and contribute to instability in affected areas.

Previous outbreaks have led to significant socio-economic impacts, including a decline in GDP and cross-border trade and labour shortages. Although the current outbreak's widespread impacts have yet to be seen, an increase in the number of cases and geographical spread may lead to price hikes or shortages of essential goods and food staples.

This risk is especially heightened in areas that are already experiencing economic disruption, such as Bukavu and Goma, where shortages of cash have been reported since M23's takeover. Tensions in the Middle East have also reportedly led to fuel shortages in the region, further compounding economic impacts.

A sharp increase in prices could lead to heightened tensions and unrest, including protests and looting. The security forces are likely to disperse any demonstrators, which may worsen tensions between local communities and the authorities.



## Violence against healthcare workers and facilities

Healthcare workers and facilities, humanitarian personnel, government representatives and other individuals associated with outbreak response efforts may face heightened security risks during public health emergencies such as the current outbreak.

Mismanagement and high levels of corruption exacerbate poor governance throughout Congo. This contributes to weakened public health systems and lessened capacity to manage outbreaks. In addition, public trust in the government is low. During public health emergencies, these factors have historically hindered engagement between the authorities and affected communities.

A lack of trust also extends to healthcare and aid groups. Previous Ebola outbreaks have demonstrated that communities can view response measures and healthcare treatment with suspicion, particularly when administered by foreign groups.

Disinformation and misinformation are rampant across the region, contributing to a lack of compliance with public health measures and increased tensions within communities. Differing cultural beliefs and traditional funeral and burial practices can also conflict with outbreak control measures, worsening tensions between communities and response teams and potentially leading to bouts of violence.

Exacerbated by these factors, the latest outbreak has resulted in several violent incidents towards healthcare workers and facilities. Although the government has deployed additional security in impacted areas, the continued lack of trust in the authorities and a possible heavy-handed response from the police could reduce their effectiveness and increase tensions among local communities. As a result, continued violence and the harassment of healthcare workers and facilities are likely throughout the outbreak. This may manifest in threats and intimidation of healthcare workers, as well as targeted violence against them or their operations, and attempted removal of patients or bodies from treatment facilities.

## Risk indicators

The outbreak is unlikely to fundamentally alter the underlying drivers of insecurity in eastern Congo. It is likely to interact with and potentially worsen existing conflict dynamics, governance challenges, humanitarian pressures and socio-economic vulnerabilities instead.

As a result, the trajectory of the security and operational environment will depend not only on the scale of the outbreak but also on the ability of the authorities and humanitarian and healthcare actors to manage its secondary effects while operating in an already fragile environment. The following indicators may provide early warnings of either deteriorating or improving security conditions related to the outbreak.



### Escalatory indicators

- An increase in the frequency and intensity of unrest and attacks targeting healthcare workers and facilities, hindering effective response operations and reducing access to essential health services.
- Targeted attacks, kidnappings or intimidation directed at humanitarian personnel, international workforce or Western organisations associated with the Ebola response.
- The looting, occupation or destruction of humanitarian bases, warehouses, clinics, laboratories or supply chain facilities supporting outbreak response.
- Socio-economic impacts related to the outbreak, including shortages of essential supplies and food staples, resulting in civil unrest and looting.
- The closure of or disruption to critical transport infrastructure, including airports, border crossings and major supply routes, hindering evacuation options and restricting the movement of workforce/critical supplies.
- Communications disruption affecting operational co-ordination, including prolonged internet shutdowns, cellular outages or government-imposed information controls.
- Worsening civil unrest driven by political or economic grievances that become linked to outbreak response.
- The imposition of movement restrictions and/or curfews by the government or rebel groups.
- The expansion of armed group operations into new geographical areas, reflected in increased attacks and territorial gains.

### Stabilisation indicators

- A reduced frequency of attacks and threats targeting healthcare workers and facilities.
- Increased levels of public trust and co-operation with the authorities, indicated by lower levels of disinformation and misinformation and the avoidance of treatment services.
- Reduced levels of civil unrest, particularly in locations where it was previously linked to perceptions of outbreak response measures or associated governance actions.
- Limited disruption to local supply chains and the pricing of essential goods, with signs of stabilisation.
- Reduced levels of activity by armed groups, including M23, allowing for the ease of access for aid and humanitarian supplies to support response efforts.



## RECOMMENDATIONS TO MANAGERS

- Closely monitor the outbreak and its security implications. Given the fluid nature of the situation, inbound travellers and those already in-country should consult International SOS' alerts, platforms and app for the most up-to-date and relevant travel advice.
- Expect travel disruption, related delays and a heightened security force presence near border-crossing checkpoints. Instruct workforce not to attempt to cross any roadblocks or cordons established by the security forces. Closely follow all official directives.
- Monitor our medical alerts for health-related advice and information.

### **Crisis planning and business continuity**

- Be prepared to respond to a possible deterioration in the security environment and understand the triggers that would indicate this. Ensure that your in-country workforce is well informed of these plans and escalatory triggers. Contingency and evacuation planning should include identifying and preparing to relocate workforce to secure stand-fast locations or to shelter in place with little notice. These locations should have supplies and provisions for at least 72 hours in case access to essential goods becomes compromised. Supplies and provisions should include spare fuel, water, food, medicine and access to reliable means of communication.
- Make necessary preparations to enable the evacuation of workforce at short notice if required. This includes ensuring that passports and travel documentation remain valid, evacuation manifests are current and readily accessible, and workforce has feasible means of reaching designated assembly points. Your workforce should be informed of evacuation procedures, individual preparedness requirements and the possibility of delays or restrictions affecting departures from affected provinces.
- Those considering overland evacuation routes should regularly reconfirm the operational status of border crossings and transport availability. Account for potential travel restrictions on those travelling from Congo or other countries in the region. Alternative evacuation routes and shelter-in-place contingencies should also be considered in the event of sudden border closures or access restrictions.

### **Access to verified information**

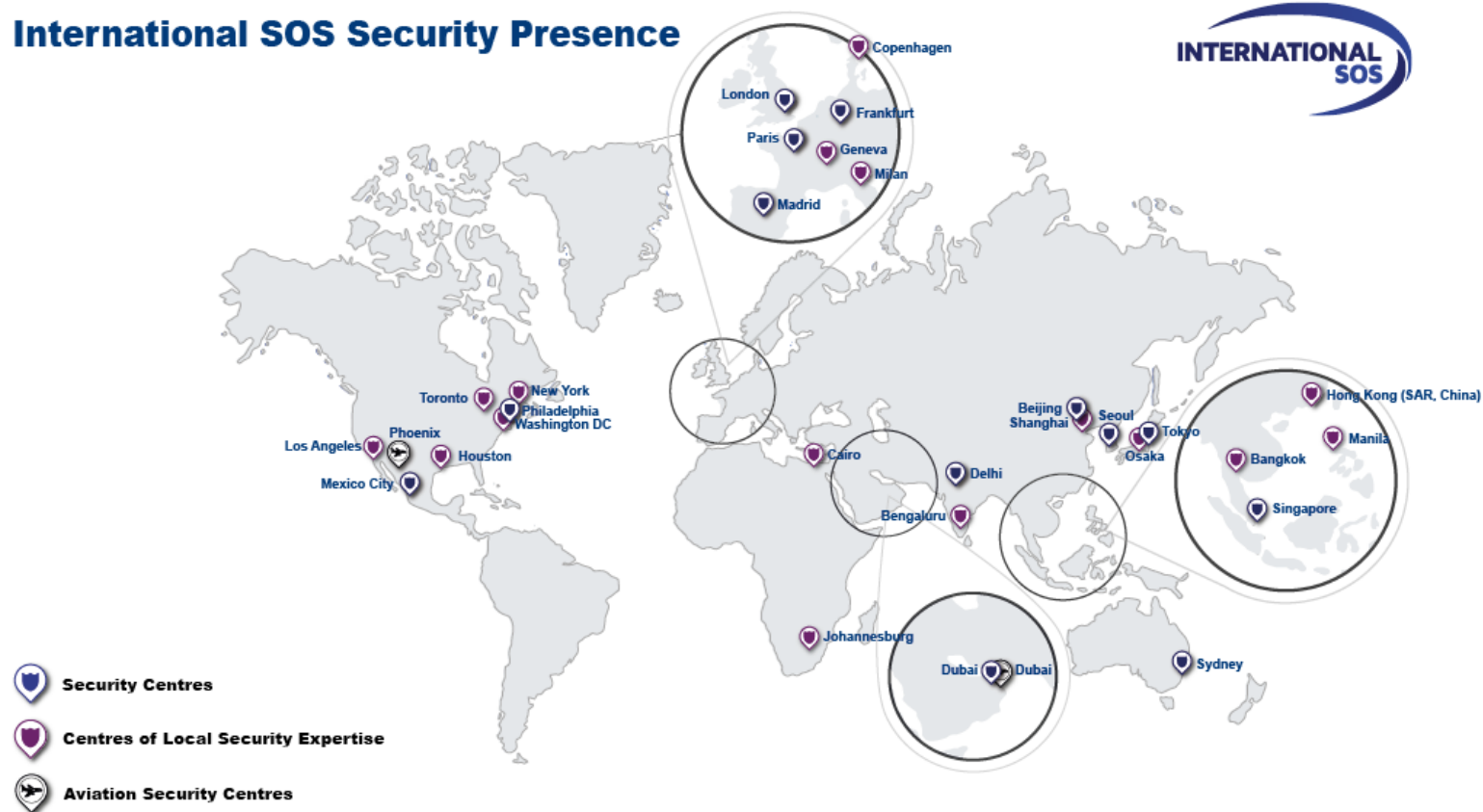
- Disinformation and misinformation are rampant. Ensure access to reliable, verified information through trusted sources. This includes International SOS products, along with local contacts, open-source feeds, reliable news outlets and official statements. Be mindful of the sources you access because of the potential for biased reporting. Do not act on unverified information.



### ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS AND UNPARALLELED SERVICES

International SOS and its network of partners combine the world's leading security and medical risk specialists. With access to more than 3,200 security specialists led by our 200 dedicated security experts based in our Assistance Centres and offices around the world, we provide a comprehensive suite of integrated security risk services for the global workforce and managers tasked with keeping people safe, secure and healthy. We deliver timely, actionable security intelligence, analysis, advice and on-the-ground assistance.

### International SOS Security Presence



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