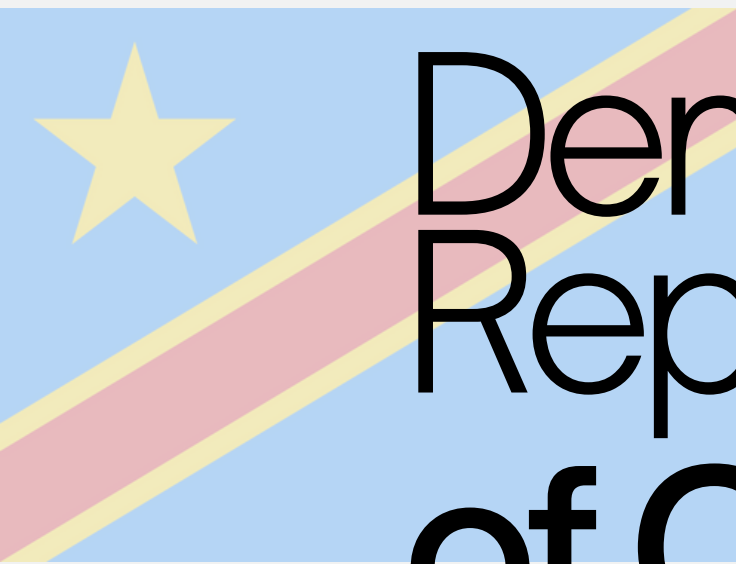




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DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

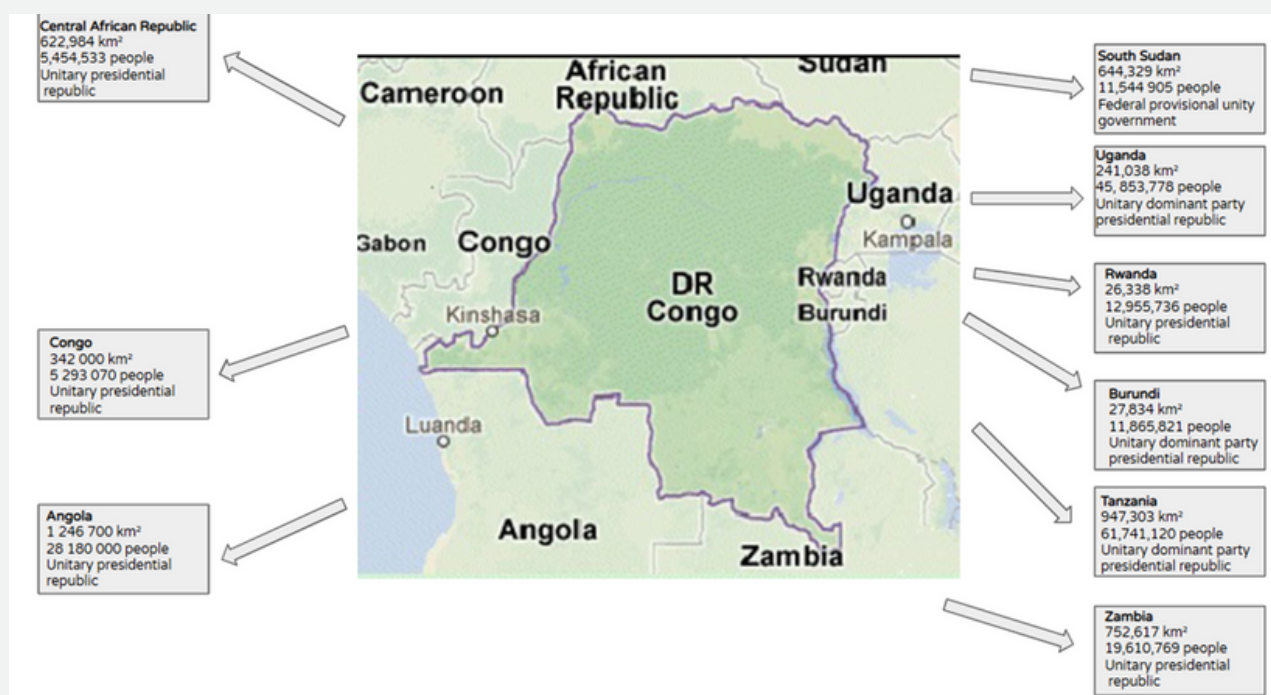
UNSUNG HEROES FOUNDATION



Democratic Republic of Congo

2,344,858 km² of land, 101,780,000 people, 250 ethnic groups, amazing culture and an abundance of natural resources - let's get to know Democratic Republic of Congo.

Most people don't hear much about this country, despite the fact that it is the second largest and third populated country in Africa. In addition, it is one of the richest countries when it comes to natural resources. DRC lies in its central part, in the basin of the Congo River, bordering as many as 9 countries. These are Angola, Zambia, Tanzania, Burundi, Uganda, Rwanda, South Sudan, Central African Republic and Congo.



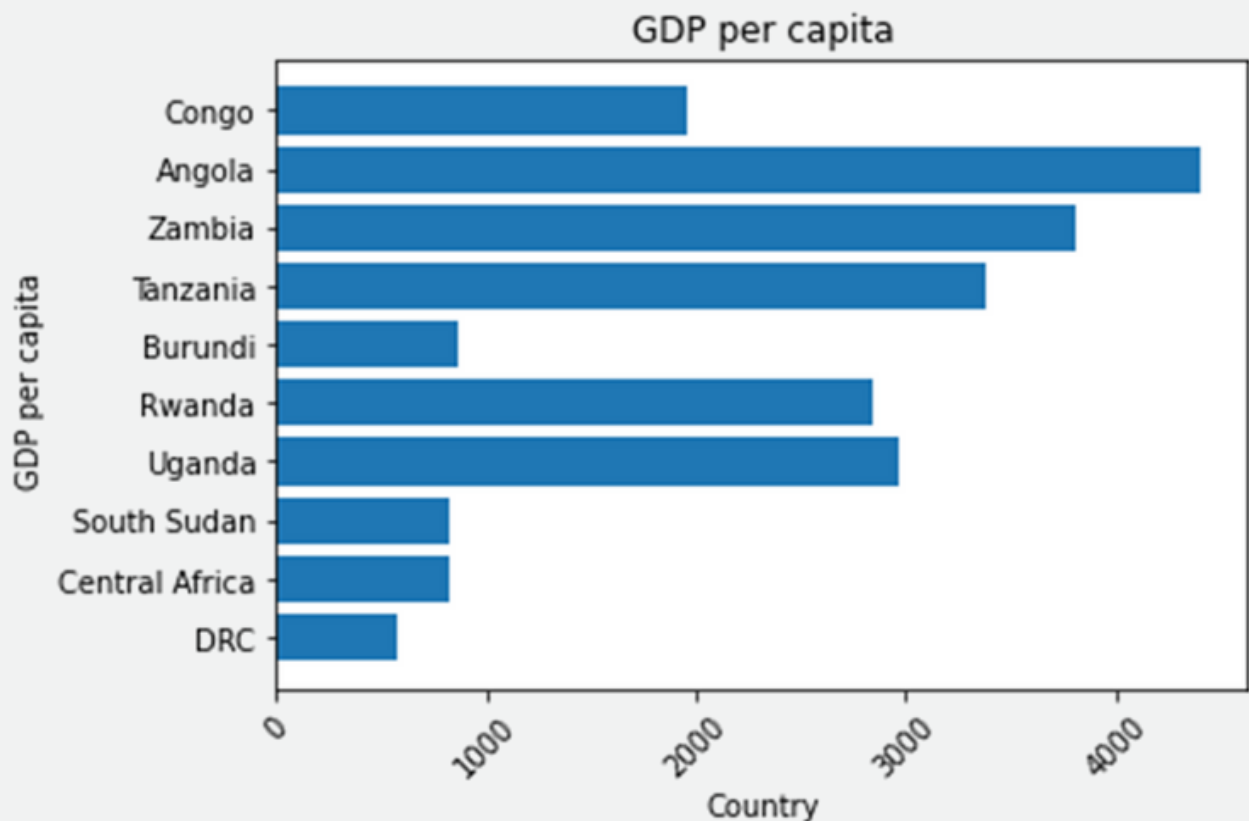
Most of the Democratic Republic of Congo is situated in a low-lying valley, covered with jungle. Only on the eastern edge of the country there are high mountains. The climate is tropical - hot and humid, except for the southern areas where it is drier and cooler.



Source: The size of the Democratic Republic of Congo.... - Maps on the Web (zoom-maps.com)

The map above shows the territory of the DRC compared to European countries. This allows you to imagine the real territory of the country.

In spite of the considerable development opportunities, the country's GDP in 2021 was USD 55.35 billion, and GDP per capita only - USD 577.21, which is one of the lowest figures in the world.



A graph showing GDP per capita in the DRC and its neighbors.

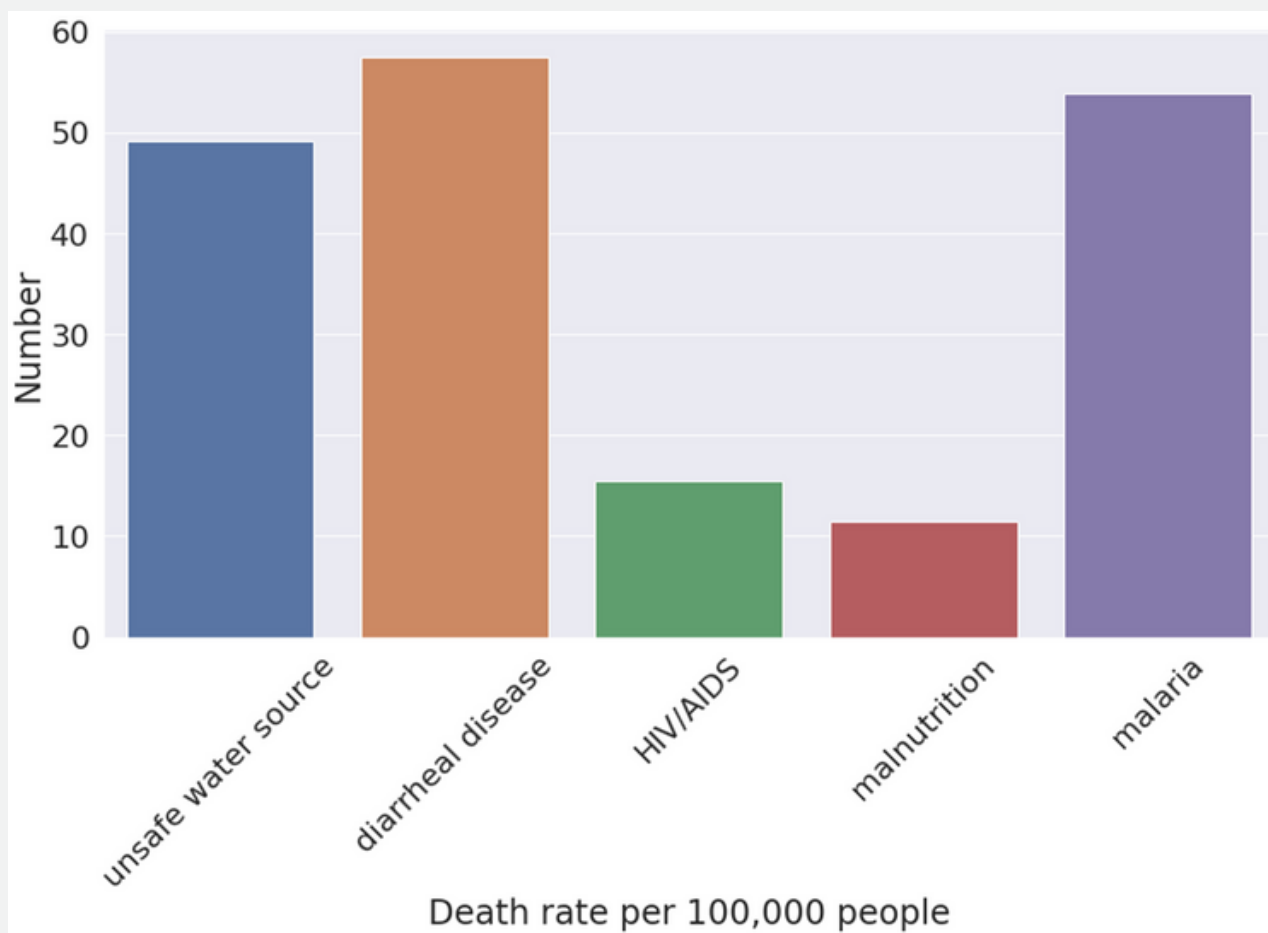
As we can see, the Democratic Republic of the Congo performs disastrously in terms of GDP per capita even compared to its poor neighbors, which are still among the poorest countries in the world. Most Westerners find it hard to imagine, but **the average DRC resident lives on \$2 a day or less.**



The Democratic Republic of the Congo is struggling not only with urgent economic problems but also social ones. Health care there is at a catastrophic level. The country has a very high risk of transmitting infectious diseases. Hepatitis A and typhus are common. Malaria, dengue, African sleeping sickness and rabies are pervasive. In 2013, there were 0.9 doctors per 10,000 inhabitants. In addition, access to vaccinations and all sanitary facilities is very limited.

Only about 2% of the drugs used in Africa are visible on the continent.

As mentioned above, countries are heavily dependent on imports of essential, often even life-saving, supplies. The DRC also has a very high infant mortality rate (58.4 deaths/1,000 live births in 2020) and maternal mortality (473 deaths/100,000 live births in 2020). What's more, as many as 30% of children under the age of 5 are malnourished.



Graph showing the number of deaths from selected causes in DRC, 2019.

On the graph we see the death rate from selected cases per 100,000 people. It must be said that all these figures are among the highest in the world.

When it comes to the Happiness Index, in 2019, Democratic Republic of the Congo had a 4.31 score. For comparison, the average result based on 141 countries was 5.57 points. This indicator measures happiness on a scale of 0 (unhappy) to 10 (happy). As we can see, DRC residents fall well below average. Considering the problems they face on a daily basis, this fact is not surprising at all.

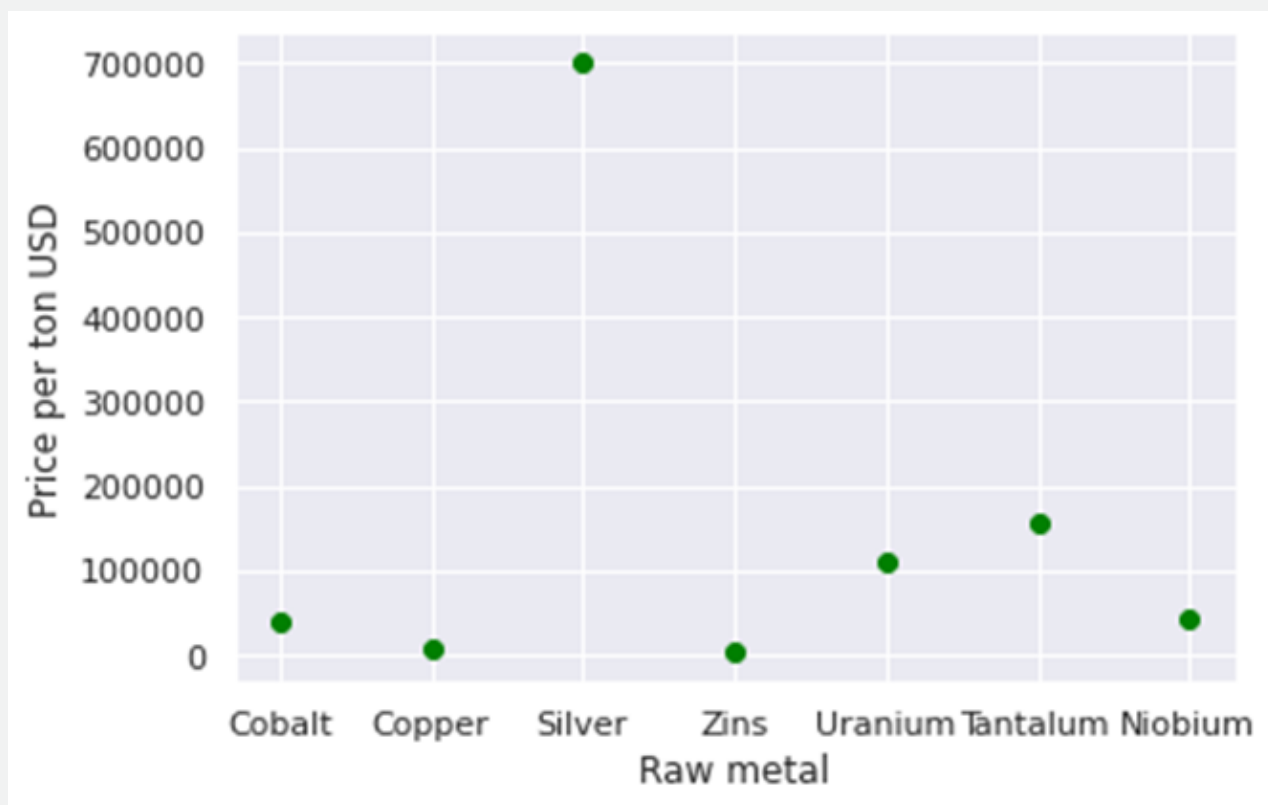


Abundance of natural resources

Democratic Republic of Congo hides enormous wealth - from gold and diamonds to copper, cobalt and oil. Especially recently, the importance of the mentioned cobalt on the international market has increased. It is most widely used in the production of electronics - mobile phones, iPhones, mp3 players, laptops or computer game consoles. Considering the fact that two-thirds of humanity uses mobile phones, the demand for it will be even greater. Only in Japan every four days a new model of a mobile phone is launched on the market. Does the country and its people benefit from it? No way, on the contrary.

1 kilogram of coltan costs around USD 400 in Europe and only USD 3 in the mining area.

Corruption is the main reason for this. The proceeds go only to influential individuals, undermining the opportunities of ordinary citizens. The country is among the most corrupt in the world. According to the Corruption Perceptions Index, in 2020 it was ranked 170th out of 180 countries participating in the ranking.



Prices of selected natural resources per ton in 2022 (USD).

The chart shows the average prices per ton of selected raw materials that the Democratic Republic of the Congo has in abundance. In addition to the resources mentioned above, the country also has significant gold and diamond reserves, which fetch even higher prices. If the DRC could realize its potential, it could be a significant economy on the international stage.

The data cited above is very unsettling, let's take a closer look at the DRC, what exactly led to this tragic situation.



History

The destabilization of the region facilitated the European invasion of the area. After the Berlin Conference (1884–1885), Leopold II - King of Belgium - was recognized as the sovereign of the Congo Free State. From 1908, this area became his official colony - under the name of the Belgian Congo. The Belgians pursued such a repressive policy that it led to the death of 5 to 15 million inhabitants of the Congo. This met with strikes and resistance from the inhabitants, which meant that Belgium began to lose control over the colony. This led to a conference and in 1960 it was decided to grant independence to the country. However, in the next period, the country will be seized by chaos caused by the secession of individual regions, inspired by the Belgians. Since then, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has been in a state of constant political instability and civil war.

On 10 January, Félix Tshisekedi took power in the first transfer of power between opposition candidates without major violence or a coup d'état since DRC independence.

Unfortunately, the country is still struggling with numerous socio-political and economic problems described in the article.



Current socio- humanitarian problems

For more than twenty years now, the East of the DRC has been facing multiple crises, specifically those of a social-security nature. The provinces of North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri are the most affected. Repeated wars, diseases, natural disasters, intra and inter-community conflicts have affected thousands of people, including women and children. Since 2017, several territories in Ituri and Kivu, particularly those of Djugu (Ituri), Beni, Rutshuru, Masisi and WAlikale (North Kivu), have been facing multiple human rights violations, including sexual violence against women, murders, and the destruction and looting of villages, caused by repeated clashes between government forces and armed groups, as well as between the militiamen themselves.

Among foreign armed groups include: Red Tabara from Burundi, FNL from Burundi, FDLR from Rwanda, ADF Nalu from Uganda.


Among local armed groups there are : Mai-Mai Malaika, Mai-Mai Mazembe, Mai-Mai Yakutumba, Mai-Mai Buhirwa, Mai-Mai Kapapa, Mai-Mai Kijangala, Mai-Mai Mutetezi, Raia Mutomboki, Gumino.

In Ituri province alone, more than 2.8 million people, including about 1,645,000 war-displaced persons and 803,000 returnees (CMP report, 2021), are without aid (housing, electricity, water, food, medicine, etc.), in addition to thousands of deaths.





Administrative division of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

A photograph of a woman with dark hair, wearing a blue shirt, holding a baby wrapped in a patterned cloth. They are outdoors, with a wooden lattice fence and some greenery in the background. The image is slightly faded to serve as a background for the title.

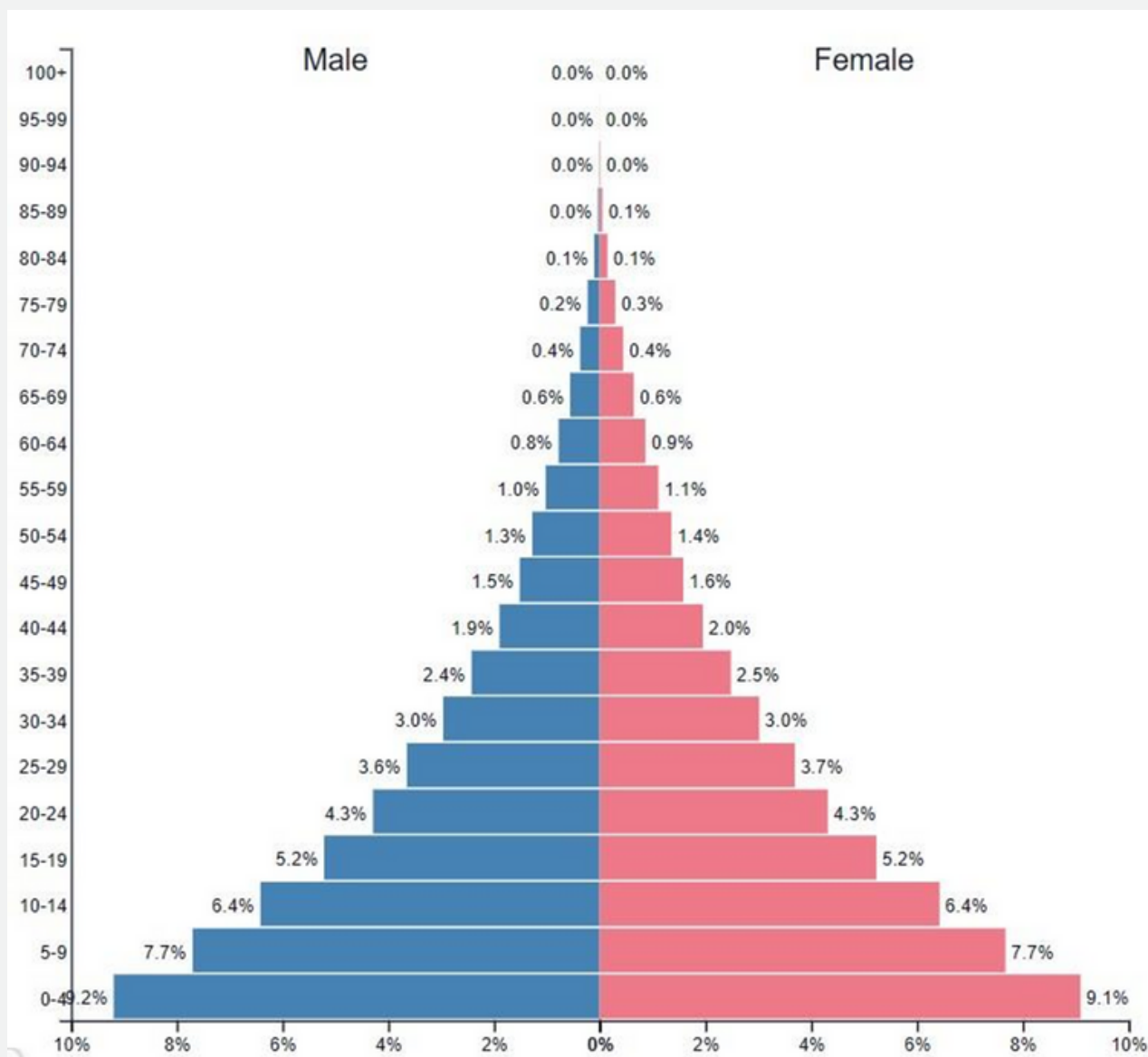
Age structure of population

A major obstacle in the development of DRC, as in many both developed and developing countries, is the unfavorable age structure. It can be modified by natural increase, mortality rate or migration.

Demographers express the share of the dependent age-groups using a metric called the 'age dependency ratio'. This measures the ratio between 'dependents' (the sum of young and old) to the working-age population (aged 15 to 64 years old). It's given as the number of dependents per 100 people of working-age. A value of 100% means that the number of dependents was exactly the same as the number of people in the working-age bracket. A higher number means there are more 'dependents' relative to the working-age population; a lower number means fewer.

In DRC it amounts to 98% which is one of the highest values in the world.

Worth noticing that, for example in South Korea it is 40% - this country is a rapidly growing economy.



Graph showing pyramid types of age pyramids in DRC, source: Population Pyramids of the World from 1950 to 2100 - PopulationPyramid.net

The age structure varies significantly from country to country. In highly developed countries, the regressive model is most common, while in developing countries - progressive model. Surely, Democratic Republic of Congo has got progressive pyramid type which is undesirable because it results in a small number of people of working age. The population under 15 constitutes even 40-50% of the population here. This is a large natural increase, which is a barrier to economic development, the number of people is growing faster than GDP and food production. This consequently leads to deterioration of living conditions, poverty and hunger. In addition, more children per woman leads to poorer health and higher mortality.



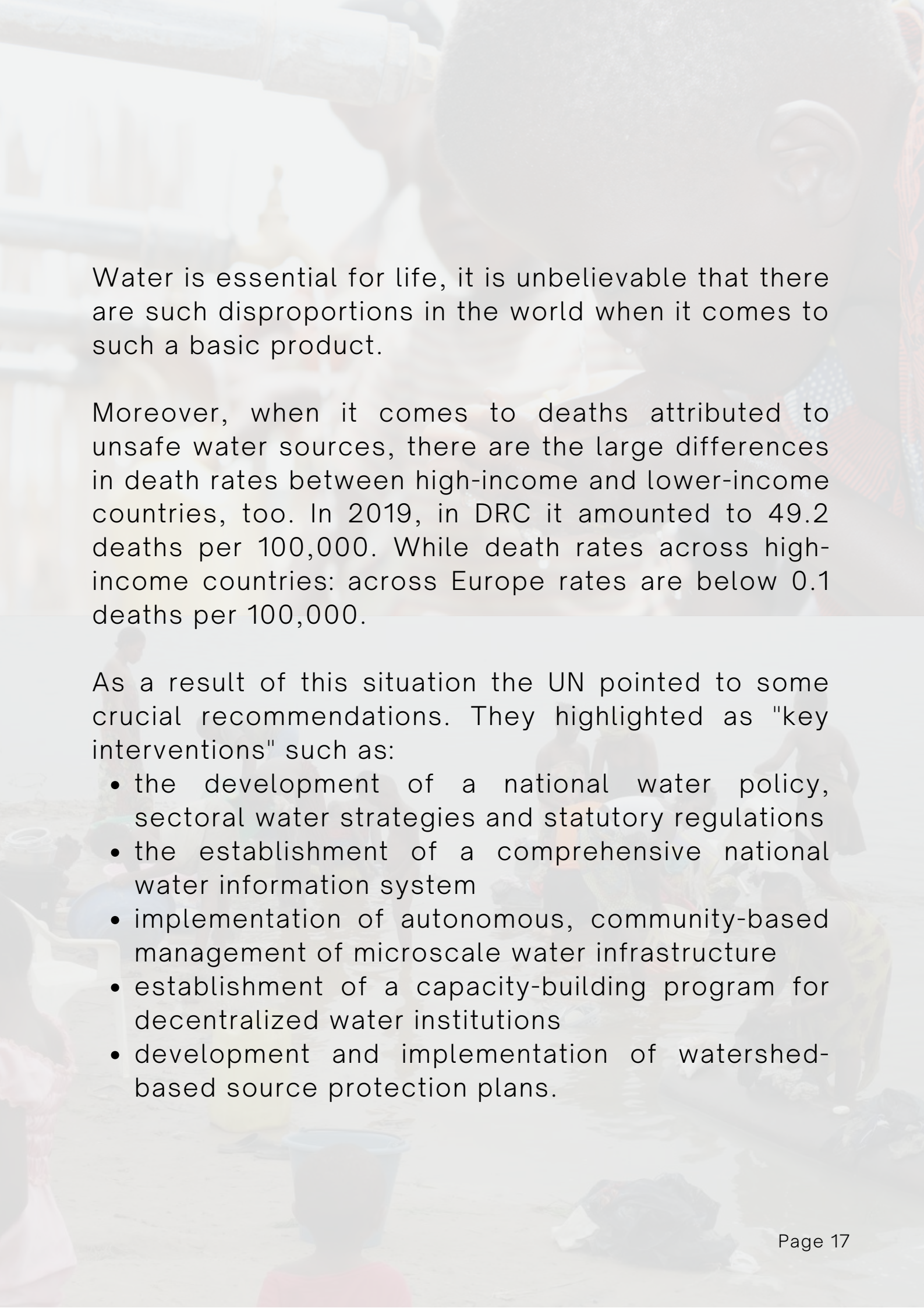


Water shortage

Although the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has Africa's largest freshwater resources, it is suffering from an acute drinking water supply crisis. Water withdrawals per person were estimated at 7 m³/person/year in 2014, which indicate only a small level of water resource mobilization (less than 1 percent). As a result of inadequate water supply and sanitation services, many inhabitants are suffering from waterborne diseases, including diarrhea, typhoid, and cholera. Diarrhea among children under 5 is especially dangerous. It is the third leading cause of child mortality globally, falling just behind pneumonia and preterm birth complications. The current water crisis is mainly a result of:

- the deteriorated state of the water infrastructure
- underinvestment in the water sector
- conflict-related destruction
- the rapid growth of the population, which was estimated at 4 percent in urban areas and 2.5 percent in rural areas.

In 2020, only less than 19% of the population of DRC had access to safely managed drinking water, while the global average was 74%!

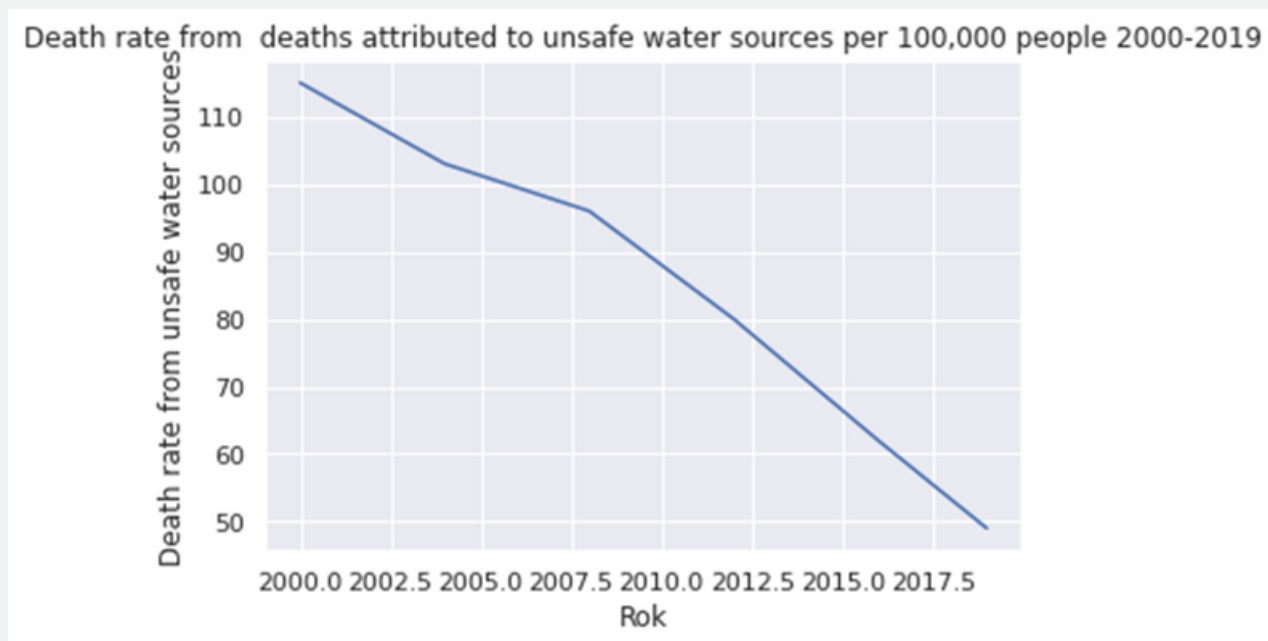


Water is essential for life, it is unbelievable that there are such disproportions in the world when it comes to such a basic product.

Moreover, when it comes to deaths attributed to unsafe water sources, there are the large differences in death rates between high-income and lower-income countries, too. In 2019, in DRC it amounted to 49.2 deaths per 100,000. While death rates across high-income countries: across Europe rates are below 0.1 deaths per 100,000.

As a result of this situation the UN pointed to some crucial recommendations. They highlighted as "key interventions" such as:

- the development of a national water policy, sectoral water strategies and statutory regulations
- the establishment of a comprehensive national water information system
- implementation of autonomous, community-based management of microscale water infrastructure
- establishment of a capacity-building program for decentralized water institutions
- development and implementation of watershed-based source protection plans.



Graph showing death rate from unsafe water sources per 100,000 people w DRC, 2000-2019

Despite the enormous number of deaths due to unsafe water sources in DRC, compared to 2000, their number has fallen by more than half! Of course, there is still a lot of work to be done and this indicator is still one of the highest in the world, but you can see progress and a silver lining.



Food shortage

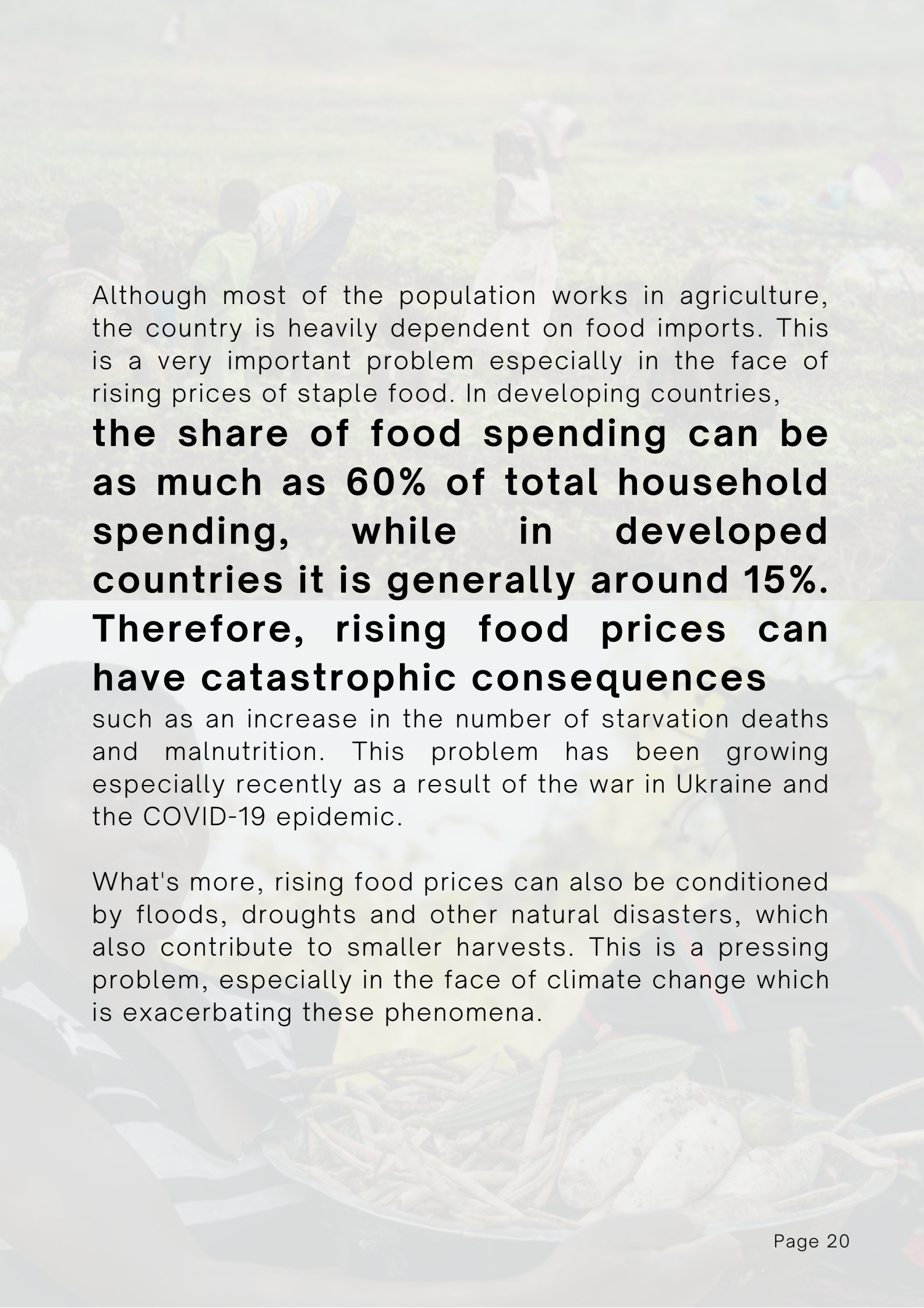
Conflict and hunger fuel one another in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, one of the largest hunger crises in the world.

Approximately 26.4 million Congolese are acutely food insecure, which is the largest value across the world,

according to the Integrated food security Phase Classification (IPC) for the period of July to December 2022. This problem is also directly related to the lack of water - its shortage means smaller harvests and consequently less availability of food products.

The very high number of hungry people in the DRC is a result of a combination of factors, such as:

- mentioned above persistent conflict,
- insecurity and massive displacement,
- chronic under-development,
- widespread poverty,
- low agricultural production,
- lack of basic infrastructure,
- increased food and fuel prices.

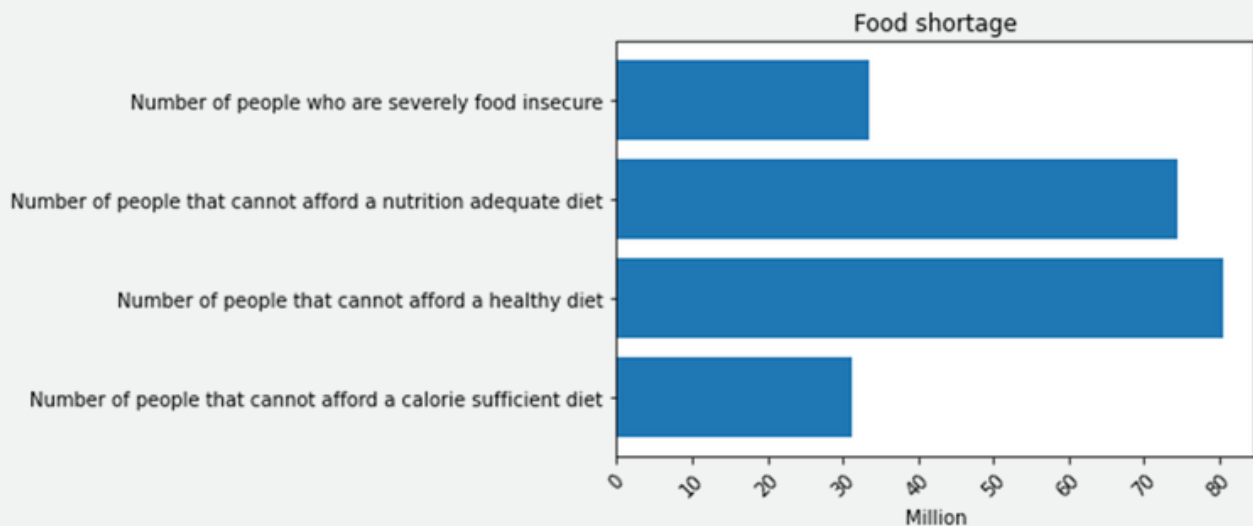


Although most of the population works in agriculture, the country is heavily dependent on food imports. This is a very important problem especially in the face of rising prices of staple food. In developing countries,

the share of food spending can be as much as 60% of total household spending, while in developed countries it is generally around 15%. Therefore, rising food prices can have catastrophic consequences

such as an increase in the number of starvation deaths and malnutrition. This problem has been growing especially recently as a result of the war in Ukraine and the COVID-19 epidemic.

What's more, rising food prices can also be conditioned by floods, droughts and other natural disasters, which also contribute to smaller harvests. This is a pressing problem, especially in the face of climate change which is exacerbating these phenomena.



Graph showing the number of people suffering from food shortage by different categories in DRC, 2017.

The graph above shows the number of people suffering from food shortages by different categories such as lack of a calorie sufficient diet, a healthy diet, a nutrition adequate diet or who are severely food insecure.

The scale of this phenomenon is terrifying and hard to imagine. For example, the number of people who are severely food insecure amount to over 31 million. This is 6 million more than live in all of Australia. Imagine that all of Australia is struggling with food insecurity.

In turn, the annual number of deaths from protein-energy malnutrition per 100,000 people in 2019 was equal to 11,5 whereas average value in the world - only 3.

Another indicator that tells about the occurrence of the level of hunger in a given country is Global Hunger Index. The index score comprises of four key hunger indicators: prevalence of undernourishment; childhood wasting; childhood stunting; and child mortality. It is measured on a 100-point scale where 0 is the best score (no hunger) and 100 the worst. In 2021, in DRC it amounted to 39 which means alarming.

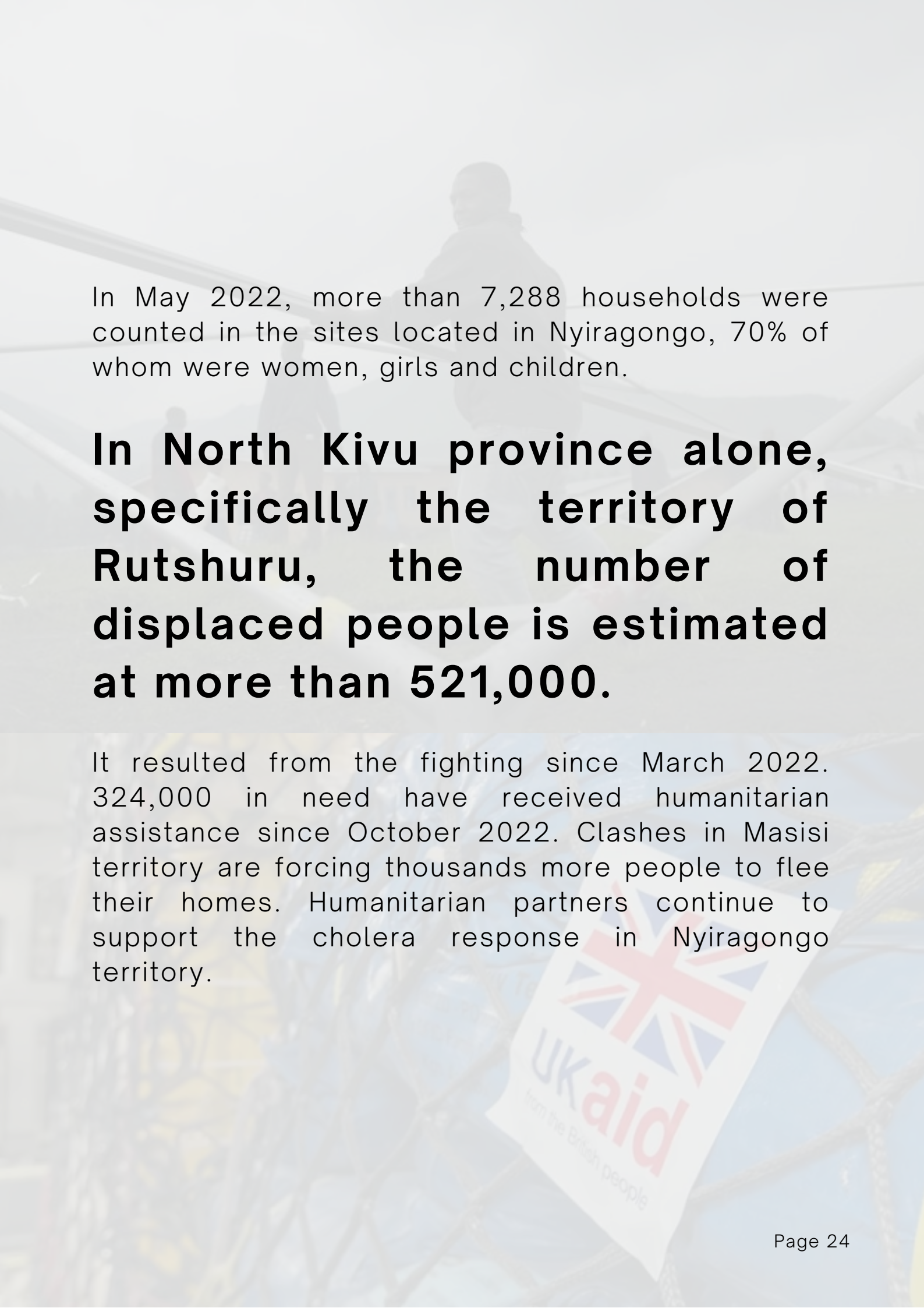
The data cited are terrifying, therefore it is necessary to take immediate action to change the current situation. International assistance is needed for this.



Attempts at international aid

In response to these different crises, with the objective of reducing morbidity and mortality due to acute malnutrition, promoting nutritional security among the most vulnerable populations, particularly children under 5 years of age and pregnant and lactating women, humanitarian actors (NGOs) made a move. They applied multisectoral approaches in nutrition and health, food security and livelihoods, water, hygiene and sanitation (WASH), mental health and care practices, gender and protection (MCHP-GP), and advocacy are implementing projects in the DRC with the financial support of various donors (UNICEF, SWEDEN, FH, FFP, CDCS, ECHO, USAID, UKAID...). Despite these efforts, the humanitarian situation in the 3 provinces remains worrying and requires more efforts from different donors.

The case of North Kivu province is becoming very worrying with the escalating war and armed groups activities, including the terrorist group ADF-NALU, which operates in the Beni area. On May 24, 2022, the M23 rebel group launched attacks against FARDC army positions in the groups of Rugari, Kisigari, Bweza, Busanza, Jomba, Bukoma in Rutshuru territory and Buhumba and Kibumba in Nyiragongo territory. Today, the rebellion is also advancing in Masisi territory and has managed to seize several villages that are now almost deserted because of the sound of bombs and artillery. The clashes have plunged the region into a very deplorable humanitarian situation, causing the massive displacement of populations, most of whom have found refuge in temporary cantonments set up in different areas (Kanyarutshinya in Nyiragongo territory, Mugunga in the city of Goma, Sake and Mweso in Masisi territory, etc.), while others have taken refuge in host families in neighboring areas of their respective environments.) Note that in all three provinces, incursions by armed groups are regularly reported, destabilizing the peace of the local communities, and leading the majority of the population to seek refuge in somewhat peaceful environments for some and in IDP camps for the most vulnerable. Due to the inaccessibility of certain areas as a result of ongoing clashes and the impracticality of roads, many people remain without humanitarian assistance, which remains a major challenge for humanitarian actors in the area.



In May 2022, more than 7,288 households were counted in the sites located in Nyiragongo, 70% of whom were women, girls and children.

In North Kivu province alone, specifically the territory of Rutshuru, the number of displaced people is estimated at more than 521,000.

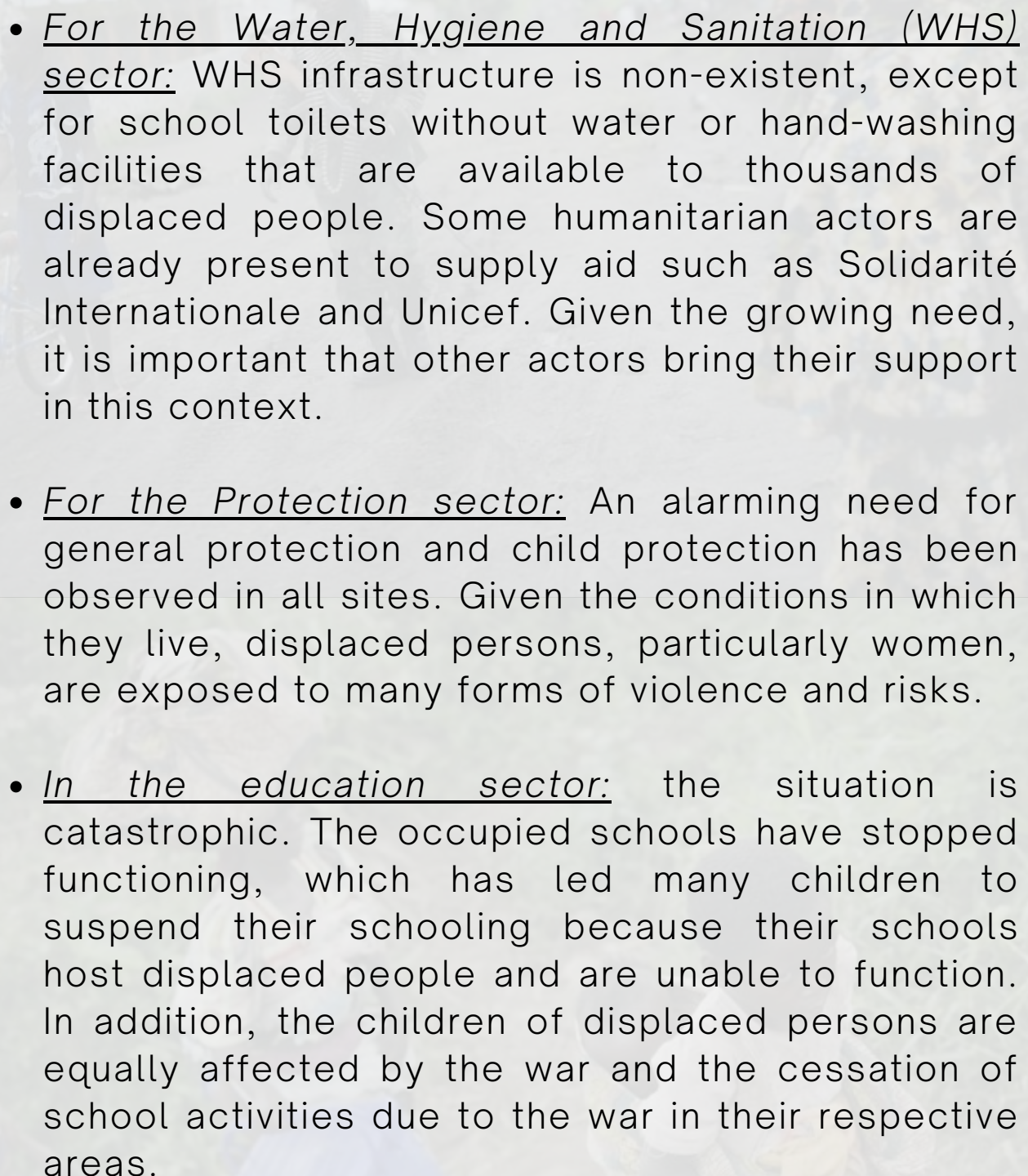
It resulted from the fighting since March 2022. 324,000 in need have received humanitarian assistance since October 2022. Clashes in Masisi territory are forcing thousands more people to flee their homes. Humanitarian partners continue to support the cholera response in Nyiragongo territory.



Humanitarian challenges

All the events mentioned above led the country to ruin and international aid is not enough. DRC faces numerous socio-economic problems. These are specifically:

- For the health sector: Medical needs are still enormous; the health structures present do not have the proper medication for the various cases of illness and the risk of epidemics. Displaced people, and particularly pregnant women, do not have access to the most basic health services. There is a lack of toilets and showers, which exposes the displaced to various diseases, including cholera, infections, and epidemics. During this period of COVID19, there are no measures to prevent this disease in the various IDP sites.
- For the nutrition sector: Malnutrition is still a fundamental problem in all the sites visited. Without food assistance, displaced persons, including women and children, are exposed to an increase in malnutrition, a shortage of food, and some cases of illness related to malnutrition have been observed in the field. The people most affected by this situation are children, pregnant and lactating women.

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- For the Water, Hygiene and Sanitation (WHS) sector: WHS infrastructure is non-existent, except for school toilets without water or hand-washing facilities that are available to thousands of displaced people. Some humanitarian actors are already present to supply aid such as Solidarité Internationale and Unicef. Given the growing need, it is important that other actors bring their support in this context.
 - For the Protection sector: An alarming need for general protection and child protection has been observed in all sites. Given the conditions in which they live, displaced persons, particularly women, are exposed to many forms of violence and risks.
 - In the education sector: the situation is catastrophic. The occupied schools have stopped functioning, which has led many children to suspend their schooling because their schools host displaced people and are unable to function. In addition, the children of displaced persons are equally affected by the war and the cessation of school activities due to the war in their respective areas.



Conclusions and recommendations

The situation on the ground continues to worsen. Armed fighting continues and is spreading in several villages, including Kitshanga, Kingi, Makombo, Kabati, Kilolirwe, Kausa and the area around the town of Sake in Masisi territory. On the other front line, fighting continues in the territory of Rutshuru. All of these villages have been abandoned by the population, most of whom have taken refuge in the IDP camps north of the city of Goma in Nyiragongo and west of Goma, precisely in Mugunga. On the ground, as the clashes continue, more refugees are arriving in the various sites and others in host families. The humanitarian needs are enormous; children, pregnant women, people living with disabilities, the elderly and other social strata are deprived of all means to satisfy their basic needs. For those who have found refuge in host families, the low standard of living of the host families does not allow them to provide for their own needs and the needs of the displaced. To date, many needs remain unmet in the various sites, all sectors of water, hygiene and sanitation, nutrition, protection, shelter and education require adequate assistance.

Following this difficult situation in which the displaced people are living, we alert all people of good will, NGOs, Associations, Foundations, Governments and people of good faith to bring their contribution in order to save human lives that are exposed to multiple risks in the Eastern part of the DRC.

Join your efforts with the Unsung Heroes team on the ground in DRC to bring an effective humanitarian response to the vulnerable people suffering as a result of the war in Eastern DRC.

In the emergency it is important to:

1. Ensure availability of water at various school sites and the provision of handwashing facilities to prevent disease
2. Build or rehabilitate latrines with handwashing facilities and hygiene materials
3. Setting up a waste management system in the various IDP sites
4. Support existing structures in the free care of displaced persons
5. Supporting the comprehensive management of childbirth cases and the monitoring of pregnant women
6. Supply health structures with essential medicines adapted to the diseases
7. Make available doctors and nurse supervisors to support health structures in case of emergency;
8. Provide a balanced diet to displaced persons and host families, accompanied by sensitization and guidance in good nutrition
9. Advocate with the protection cluster and the government to strengthen security in IDP sites
10. Organize protection monitoring and identification of human rights violations in real time
11. Establish support services and a referral and care system for victims of sexual and gender-based violence
12. Establish a child protection framework in the IDP sites and ensure their functioning.



Feel free to contact us for further inquiries.

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