



Beyond IDPs

How Displacement Shapes
Broader Narratives of Blame,
Aid, and Identity in the DRC

February-March 2025

Introduction

Displacement in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) remains a major concern, generating urgent humanitarian needs, raising civilian protection challenges, and fueling expectations toward the DRC government, aid agencies, MONUSCO, and other international actors. This brief explores how these stakeholders are discussed on social media in relation to the displacement crisis. It examines public sentiment from February to March 2025 based on posts containing IDP-related terms, aiming to understand how displacement is perceived and how these perceptions may affect humanitarian action.

The analysis is based on 1,425 comments left by social media users in response to 33 posts, mainly from edited media, that mentioned IDPs. The initial research identified roughly 500 public posts that referred to IDPs in some form but the analysis was limited to the comments to the 33 posts that had generated the highest engagement by social media users. Most comments did not focus directly on displacement, but rather revealed sentiments that users associated with displacement highlighting wider frustration with political leadership, regional insecurity, and the humanitarian response.

While relatively few in number, those comments that referenced IDPs directly often reflected anger about their situation. This included frustration about the lack of attention being paid when returnees found their homes or lands occupied. Reactions to concerns facing returnee often triggered narratives of foreign occupation, demographic manipulation, and ethnic scapegoating—highlighting how displacement, when discussed, is frequently linked to hate speech, conspiracy theories, and accusations against political actors. In doing so, it highlights the emergence of hate speech within these interactions. Although not a comprehensive assessment of hate speech, this approach offers valuable insight into how inflammatory narratives appear within the context of civilian protection and aid delivery.

Aid organisations and the UN were the most frequently criticised actors in the discussion around displacement concerns, often seen as ineffective or complicit—though they also received the highest number of positive mentions, likely due to the visibility of their posts. Two local media platforms, including one associated to the aid sector attracted notable discontent, with commenters accusing the outlet of concealing the truth or promoting biased narratives. This reflects broader frustration with how information is conveyed and who is seen as shaping public discourse.

By focusing on posts mentioning IDPs, this method highlights how displacement is linked to broader narratives of blame, distrust, as well as frustrations about unmet expectations from the aid actors and MONUSCO. This analysis does not offer a comprehensive view of public perceptions about these stakeholders. Rather, it provides a focused snapshot of how they are perceived specifically in relation to displacement—highlighting the connections drawn in public discourse between humanitarian action, blame, identity, and protection.

Key findings

The majority of the comments under IDP-related posts did not directly address displacement, instead reflecting broader political frustration and regional insecurity. While there were some expressions of sympathy for displaced people, most comments were dominated by anger toward the Congolese government, and hostility toward Rwanda. Displacement was often referenced indirectly, through criticism of military failure, calls for regional retaliation, and accusations that the government and international actors had failed to protect civilians. The humanitarian crisis served as a backdrop to larger political grievances, with many commenters calling for war, denouncing perceived betrayal, and questioning the motives of foreign powers.

What Insecurity Insight analyses on social media

What is social media data?

Social media data includes original user-generated content (posts by individuals, NGOs, journalists, or media platforms) and the responses to them—comments, shares, and likes. This analysis considers both the narrative set by the original posts and the public's reaction through the comment sections.

How was the data collected?

Between 1 February and 31 March 2025, Insecurity Insight used AI-enabled tools to collect and analyse public posts and associated comments on Facebook and X that referenced IDPs in the DRC. Given the high volume of content containing keywords related to displacement during this period, only the 33 posts with the most engagement (measured by likes and comments) were selected for in-depth analysis.

27 of these high-engagement posts were published by three different local media outlets on Facebook, including one radio station. These accounts significantly shaped public discourse, attracting the majority of comment activity. Posts shared via private channels such as WhatsApp, Telegram, or private Facebook groups were not included in this analysis.

Key terms:

- **Misinformation:** False or misleading information shared without the intention to deceive.
- **Disinformation:** Intentionally false or manipulative content shared to mislead or cause harm.
- **Hate speech:** Language that incites discrimination, hostility, or violence.

All comments were categorised by sentiment—positive, neutral, negative or political opinion (non-neutral comment about the conflict or the government but unrelated to IDPs)—to better understand public attitudes towards IDPs, humanitarian actors, and related authorities.

Regional Politics and Security-related discourses: blame, approval and hate speech

Hate speech

Hate speech dehumanises its targets, fuels division, and can incite or justify violence—especially in conflict-affected settings. The term IDP is typically used in a humanitarian context, invoking protection for civilians uprooted by crisis. It is relatively rare that hate speech surfaced in connection with the neutral or technical term ‘IDP’ making these comments stand out.

Hate speech in connection with IDPs is not representative or typical of the broader hate speech landscape in the DRC. However, where it did emerge—mostly in the context of return movements, aid distribution, and political blame—it offers useful insights into how inflammatory narratives intersect with displacement-related issues. Most examples seem to be related to eastern DRC ethnic groups, but at least one comment targeted individuals from Brazzaville, underscoring the need to monitor how wider grievances can gain traction amid a national crisis.

Some of the comments dehumanise displaced populations or frame them as invaders, especially when returnees are seen as ethnically or politically aligned with perceived foreign powers. Others express resentment toward those receiving aid, or frustration with humanitarian actors believed to be complicit or absent. These dynamics reveal how perceptions around displacement and aid provision can feed into, or be shaped by, broader patterns of polarisation and mistrust.

The table below presents examples of hate speech identified in the dataset, alongside brief explanations:

<p>"Je me demande toujours si S@tan avait utilisé quoi pour créer balubas"</p> <p>"I always wonder what S@tan used to create balubas."</p>	<p>Dehumanising the Luba</p> <p>Targets the Luba (also known as Baluba), a major Bantu ethnic group mainly found in Kasai and parts of Katanga.</p> <p>The comment dehumanises the group, contributing to entrenched ethnic animosity.</p>
<p>"Voilà, les remplacement de la population c est ça et ça va créer des nouvelles conflits, et ils diront la haine contre les Banyaaa mais les Banyaaa volent qlq chose qui n est pas les leurs."</p> <p>"That's it, replacing the population is what it is, and it will create new conflicts, and they will say they hate the Banyaaa, but the Banyaaa steal things that aren't theirs."</p>	<p>Population Replacement Conspiracy</p> <p>"Banyaaa" likely refers to the Banyamulenge, a Tutsi-speaking community in eastern DRC, often accused of being Rwandan agents.</p> <p>The comment propagates the "population replacement" conspiracy, falsely framing Banyamulenge as foreigners who are stealing land or identity.</p>

<p>"Venue d'ailleurs où ? On a réimplanté une autre population, de tutsi, la guerre sera longue et populaire."</p> <p>"Come from where? We've resettled another population, the Tutsi, the war will be long and popular."</p>	<p>Tutsis as Foreign Invaders</p> <p>References the Tutsi, an ethnic group native to the Great Lakes region, especially Rwanda and Burundi, with populations in eastern DRC (e.g., South Kivu), described as a foreign "implanted" population.</p> <p>This rhetoric plays into the foreign invader narrative, frequently used to delegitimise Congolese Tutsis or Banyamulenge, and it normalises violent conflict as a response.</p>
<p>"Enfermez un rat dans une Cage, privé lui la nourriture une semaine, ça sera le carnage qu'il va créé"</p> <p>"Lock a rat in a cage, deprive it of food for a week, and it will create carnage."</p>	<p>Violence Justified by Desperation</p> <p>While not naming a group directly, though the comment in response to a post about aid which was to be allocated to IDPs was looted, the metaphor ("rat in a cage") is a dehumanising justification for violence, likely aimed at a group perceived to be oppressed or marginalised.</p>
<p>"Biso Awa tozo bongama mukie mukie pona KO Bengana ba brazzavilois nionso baza Awa. Il est temps que les brazzavilois retourne chez eux avant qu'ils soient expulser en désordre. Bientôt l'opération bengana brazzavilois ezo banda. Merci à tout nos étudiants de soutenir l'initiative bazela bakozua mama n'a surprise on ne dévoile pas la date."</p> <p>"Here, we are preparing quietly to expel all Brazzaville people who are here. It's time for them to return home before they are thrown out chaotically. The "Bengana Brazzavilois" operation is starting soon. Thanks to all our students supporting the initiative – surprise awaits, but we won't reveal the date."</p>	<p>Nationalist Threat Against 'Foreigners'</p> <p>Comment in response to a post about regional instability and perceived foreign occupation. This comment stands out from the rest as it targets people from Brazzaville, the capital of the neighbouring Republic of the Congo, not eastern DRC.</p> <p>While the context is unclear, it likely reflects broader anti-foreigner or nationalist sentiment unrelated to the M23 crisis. It illustrates how discussions about displacement can at times intersect with other political grievances.</p>
<p>Tous nous sommes suffisamment avertis... Liguons-nous efficacement pour couper la tête à ce sale serpent 🐍</p> <p>"We have all been sufficiently warned... Let's unite effectively to cut off the head of that filthy snake 🐍"</p>	<p>Call for Violence Against Rwanda's Leadership</p> <p>Call for violence against Rwanda's president, reacting to Burundian President Ndayishimiye's warning about regional instability</p>
<p>"Il faut directement le neutralisé. Quand il n'a pas encore envoyé les métastases."</p> <p>"He must be neutralised immediately—before he spreads his metastases."</p>	<p>Call for Violence Against Rwanda's Leadership</p> <p>Advocacy for military action against Rwanda, also in response to the same post</p>

These examples above highlight how hate speech connects to three broader themes identified in this brief:

- **Root causes:** Some comments reflect grievances linked to perceived foreign occupation or ethnic manipulation, especially in relation to return movements.
- **Expectations of aid:** Where aid is seen as misdirected or unavailable, frustration can escalate into rhetoric that justifies looting or hostility toward aid agencies.
- **Perceived complicity:** Humanitarian actors supporting displaced groups—especially those seen as “favoured” or “foreign”—may be accused of political bias, making aid provision appear partisan.

For humanitarian actors, these dynamics underscore a significant risk: support to displaced populations, even when driven by needs-based principles, can be politicised and contested. In polarised environments, aid delivery becomes a symbol of alignment—shaping how agencies are perceived and, in some cases, targeted. This is particularly relevant in online spaces, where narratives spread quickly and echo chambers can amplify mistrust.

While rare in absolute terms, hate speech linked to displacement demonstrates how closely the IDP issue is embedded in the broader conflict. It reveals that support to displaced groups is not always viewed as neutral, and that in the eyes of some, it can justify aggression or deepen grievances. Understanding these perceptions is critical for conflict-sensitive, principled humanitarian action.

Blame and approval of political leadership

In the face of a crisis, it is human nature to seek someone to blame. On social media, these expressions of blame are often direct, emotionally charged, and shaped by personal or collective experiences.

In this analysis, we examined two sets of highly engaged posts that—while mentioning IDPs—quickly drew attention to broader political grievances. The first set focused on the worsening security situation in eastern DRC and the regional political reactions it provoked. The second addressed the return of displaced populations to areas such as Masisi and Rutshuru—framed in official discourse as a positive development, but met with widespread public distrust.

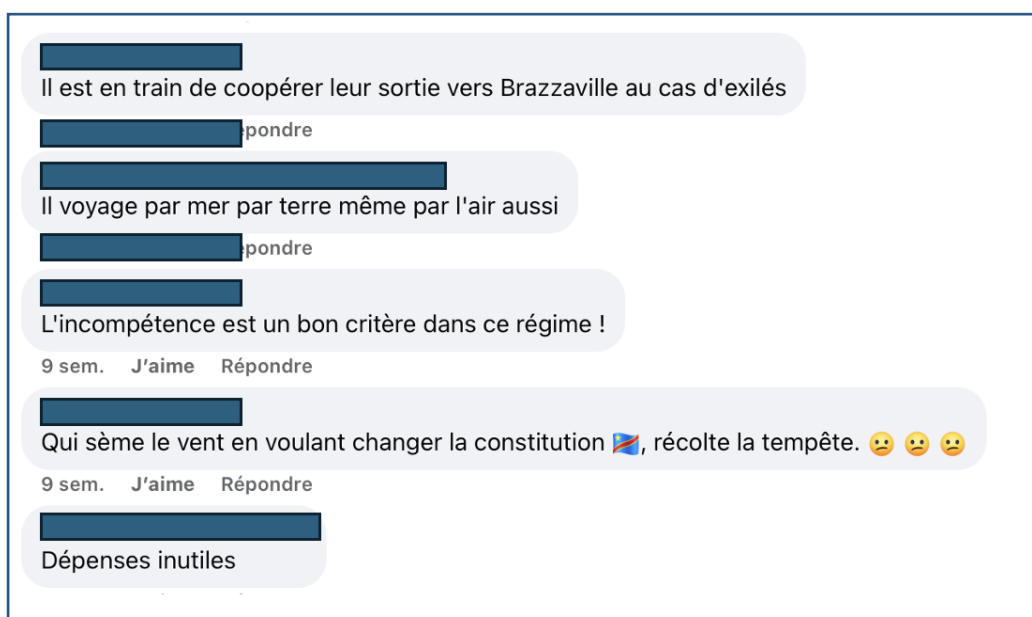
These discussions surfaced deep-rooted fears around identity, territory, and leadership, reflecting how displacement is embedded in broader narratives of state failure, ethnic manipulation, and foreign interference. Understanding these perceptions—however partial—is essential for operational actors, not only to grasp the political terrain they work in, but also to avoid association with actors perceived to be causing harm.

It is important to note that this analysis highlights only some public perceptions of blame; it is not a comprehensive representation of political opinion. However, it does reveal how posts that mention IDPs often serve as an entry point for wider commentary on governance, legitimacy, and regional dynamics. These narratives are relevant for aid agencies navigating return processes, negotiating access, or responding to insecurity in contested areas. Key narratives include:

- **Criticism of Congolese Leadership:** President Tshisekedi and his government are heavily criticised. Commenters express frustration over perceived incompetence and detachment, particularly regarding foreign travel amid national crisis. Strong condemnation of the state's failure to protect civilians was also expressed in the context of discussions of mass displacement.
 - **Accusations Against Political Figures:** Corneille Nangaa¹ and Joseph Kabila² are repeatedly accused of facilitating foreign settlement
- **Perceived Ethnic Engineering:** There were frequent fears of orchestrated ethnic replacement and manipulation from Rwanda in eastern DRC.
- **Anti-Rwandan and Anti-Tutsi Sentiment:** Hatred towards Rwanda feature prominently, underscoring deep-rooted ethnic tensions. Rwanda was the second most-targeted actor in the negative comments, highlighting the intensity of regional blame narratives and the persistence of cross-border grievances (see hate speech section for examples).
- **Calls for Mobilisation and Resistance:** Suggestions range from forced eviction to full-scale war to advocating for national unity and military readiness

Screenshot of conversations under a post about a bilateral government meeting between CAR and DRC to address the population displacement due to insecurity.

- “He is cooperating their exit towards Brazzaville in case of exile”
- “He travels by sea, by land, even by air”
- “Incompetence is a key qualification in this regime!”
- “Whoever sows the wind by wanting to change the constitution 🇷🇺, will reap the storm. 😞 😞 😞”
- “Useless spending”



Screenshot of conversations under a post about IDPs returning to their villages to find their homes occupied by “unknown” groups coming from “elsewhere”.

- “These people, who came from elsewhere, will be chased out.”
- “These people who came from elsewhere!! What do they look like? Aren’t they Tutsi?”
- “Nanga 🙄🙄🙄 CPI”
- “Unfortunately for Mr. Kabila, who today becomes the spokesperson for M23. Surprising.”
- “So they replaced our fellow citizens with their own people. Pre Kanabe has just told us we must support M23—look at the level of witchcraft.”
- “And in all this, Kabila and Naanga are complicit. My heart bleeds.”
- “A former president told us yesterday that M23 is the inspiration of Congolese. Does that mean some Congolese came from elsewhere to live in other Congolese people’s homes?”
- “Ambongo, Shole and Muteba cannot denounce such situations. They are there to divide Congolese people and inflame tribal hatred.”
- “Where did these people come from?”



Screenshot of conversations under a post about IDPs returning to their Masisi and Nyiragongo after the fall of Goma to M23, featuring congratulatory comments to M23 and one negative comment against IDPs labelling them “lazy” and “thieves”.

- Rwandan channel, what spontaneous return? They gave a 72-hour ultimatum to the population to return without their consent. Mislead others who don’t follow the news.”
- “Congratulations AFC/M23. Courage for the liberation of the Kivu people.”
- “All you know how to do is talk about stories that discredit the government. When the FARDC recovers some villages in South Kivu, you stay silent. You were the first to say here that SAMIRDC forces were leaving the DRC...”
- “Most of them were bandits and lazy people—they should come work in the fields.”
- “It’s what Corneille Nangaa did well.”
- “Really good news.”



Humanitarian Needs and Service Delivery: Sentiments towards aid agencies in relation to IDP support

Humanitarian aid actors are central to public conversation around displacement in the DRC. While political opinions and neutral comments made up the majority of social media responses, aid agencies were the stakeholder group that received the highest number of both negative and positive comments in relation to internally displaced persons (IDPs). This visibility highlights the strong expectations placed on the aid sector to respond—expectations that are increasingly difficult to meet amid high levels of insecurity, restricted access, and funding constraints.

Type of Negative Comment	Count	Percentage (%)
Aid sector / UN agencies	186	30.15%
Rwanda	113	18.31%
DRC government	82	13.29%
Media	61	9.89%
IDP	42	6.81%
Armed groups	29	4.70%
MONUSCO	26	4.21%
General	28	4.54%
M23	23	3.73%
"Groups occupying" IDP homes	13	2.11%
Hate speech towards ethnic group	12	1.94%
Uganda	2	0.32%
Type of Positive Comment	Count	Percentage (%)
Aid sector / UN	23	44.23%
General	15	28.85%
IDPs requesting help	8	15.38%
Support for armed group	6	11.54%

Understanding these perceptions matters. Public sentiment—whether supportive or critical—can shape the operating space for humanitarian organisations, influencing trust, access, and security. Out of all negative comments, 30 percent (186 comments) targeted the aid sector or UN humanitarian agencies, making criticisms about the attempts to help them the most criticised group—well ahead of the DRC government and Rwanda who are seen as responsible for the root causes.

Commenters frequently expressed deep scepticism towards humanitarian assistance, questioning its effectiveness, fairness, and intent. Many believed that aid was either hoarded, expired, or deliberately misused. Accusations included favouritism towards M23 or Rwanda, with some users suggesting that aid convoys were not reaching Congolese civilians at all. Others viewed aid as a distraction from what was really needed—peace or military defence. Multiple comments referenced support to Ukraine as a comparison, arguing that the DRC deserved weapons and protection, not handouts.

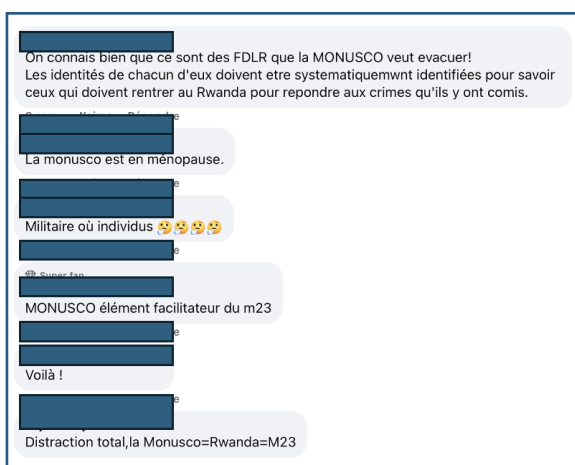
However, aid agencies were also the most positively mentioned group, with 44.23 percent of all positive comments referring to them—mainly in response to media posts announcing new deliveries or appeals. This suggests that while trust is low overall, visible aid efforts still elicit appreciation from parts of the public, especially when tied to immediate relief.

Perceptions on peacekeeping

In contrast, MONUSCO received far fewer negative comments (4.21 percent, or 26 in total), but the tone was sharply critical. While the aid sector was accused of corruption or manipulation, criticism of MONUSCO often revolved around incompetence and failure to protect civilians. Several comments also questioned MONUSCO’s mandate and purpose, reflecting a broader lack of understanding or awareness about the mission’s role in the DRC.

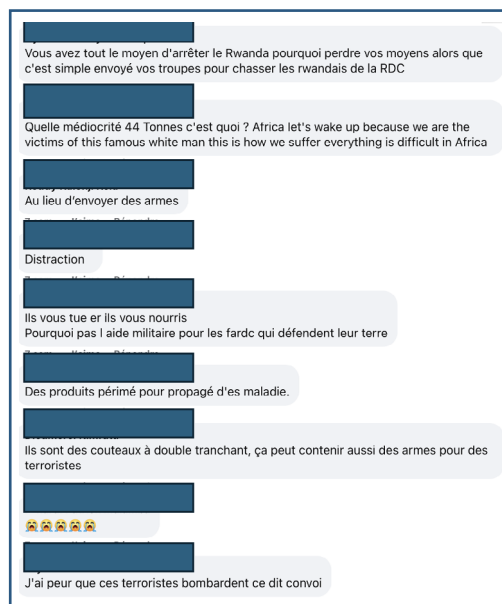
Screenshot of conversations under a post about a call by MONUSCO requesting support with the IDPs housed in their camps in Goma after it fell to M23.

- “We all know it’s the FDLR that MONUSCO wants to evacuate! The identity of each of them must be systematically verified to know who should return to Rwanda to answer for the crimes they committed there.”
- “MONUSCO is in menopause.”
- “Military or civilians? 🤔🤔🤔”
- “MONUSCO is a facilitating element of M23.”
- “There you go!”
- “Total distraction, MONUSCO = Rwanda = M23”



Screenshot of conversations under a post about an announcement by the EU of an aid convoy from Kenya to North Kivu.

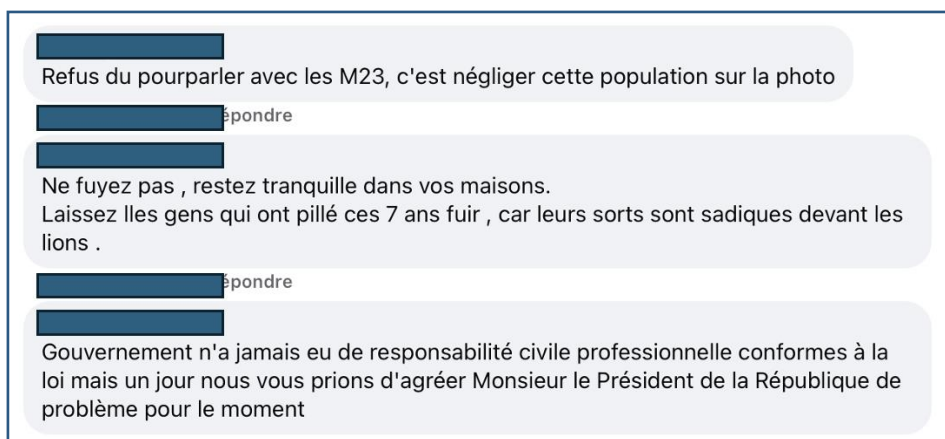
- “You have all the means to stop Rwanda—why waste your resources when it’s simple? Send your troops to drive the Rwandans out of the DRC.”
- “What mediocrity is 44 tonnes? Africa, let’s wake up because we are the victims of this famous white man—this is why we suffer, everything is difficult in Africa.”
- “Instead of sending weapons.”
- “Distraction.”
- “They kill you and they feed you. Why not military aid for the FARDC who are defending their land?”



- “Expired products to spread diseases.”
- “They are double-edged knives—it could also contain weapons for terrorists.” 😞😞😞😞
- “I’m afraid these terrorists will bomb that convoy.”

Screenshot of conversations under a post about active fighting in North Kivu resulting in population displacements.

- “Refusing to negotiate with M23 is neglecting the population shown in the photo.”
- “Do not flee, stay calm in your homes. Let those who have looted for the past 7 years flee—for their fate will be cruel before the lions.”
- “The government has never had professional civil responsibility in accordance with the law, but one day we beg you to accept, Mr. President of the Republic, that the problem lies with you for now.”



Social media comments in response to the reported looting of a UN Warehouse in Goma

A media post reporting the looting of a UN warehouse in Goma prompted a wide range of reactions. Many commenters did not frame the event as criminal looting, but rather as a legitimate response to urgent need. Across the responses, there was a notable absence of sympathy for the losses incurred by the agency. Instead, users expressed frustration, justification, and in some cases, outright support for the looting—viewing it as a necessary act in the face of hunger and prolonged neglect.

Numerous commenters stated that those who took food were simply accessing what was rightfully theirs. Given the scale of violence and displacement affecting the population of Goma—where many feel abandoned or overlooked—this perspective is difficult to dismiss from a community-based, needs-driven standpoint.

- “Les déplacés mourraient de fin”. **"The displaced were dying of hunger"**
- “Que le XX arrête avec une telle magouille ! Il n'a rien à regretter pcq la population gomatracienne contient actuellement 50% de déplacés. Ses vivres on fait le travail qu'ils devront toujours faire”. **"The PAM must stop this kind of scheming! It has nothing to regret because 50% of the population of Gomatra is currently displaced. Its food supplies have done the job they were always meant to do."**
- “Soyez quand même raisonnable. Cette nourriture était destinée à la population d'après tout. Et la population, dans le besoin s'en est servie. C'est l'argent du peuple, le pays dépense pour ça. Nous mourons pour ça depuis plus de 30 ans maintenant.” **"Be reasonable. This food was intended for the population, after all. And the population, in need, used it. It's the people's money; the country spends it on this. We've been dying for this for over 30 years now."**
- “D'ailleurs Le PAM devrait être condamné, parce que c'est n'est pas possible de garder les aliments dans les entrepôts au moment où les habitants ont faim , pourtant dans les entrepôts on a rencontré dans les sacs des haricots était déjà pourri à cause de tarder dans leurs entrepôts. presque tout le monde à trouver quelque chose dans la ville de Goma et ses environs. Pour les gens qui n'ont pas entrée de dans , ils ont acheté un sac de 50Kilos à 10000FC , Et d'autres ont pris gratuite leurs biens. En bref toutes la population de Goma est déplace de guerre. Il y a pas de condamnation. Le PAM devrait toujours rester calme. 😊😊 😊🙏😊”. **"In fact, the WFP should be condemned, because it is unacceptable to keep food in warehouses when people are hungry. Yet in the warehouses, we found bags of beans that had already gone bad because they had been left there for too long. Almost everyone found something in the city of Goma and its surroundings. People who couldn't get in bought a 50-kilogram bag for 10,000 FC, and others took their belongings for free. In short, the entire population of Goma has been displaced by war. There is no condemnation. The WFP should always remain calm 😊😊😊🙏😊"**
- “Nous sommes venus nous servir Nou même notre nourriture”. **"We came to serve ourselves our own food."**
- “C'est sont les rebelles du M23 qui pillent et non la population de Goma”. **"It is the M23 rebels who are looting, not the people of Goma."**

Some commenters viewed the incident as a consequence of delayed aid distribution and a lack of visible support. Several pointed out that food had been stored for a long period while displaced populations were experiencing hunger, and questioned why distribution had not occurred earlier. A few referred to the action as an "instinct of survival" and criticised the handling of aid as inadequate under current conditions. A small number of users accused humanitarian organisations of acting in alignment with political or foreign interests, particularly in relation to Rwanda and M23, although these views were not universally held.

Overall, the comments reflect a mixture of perspectives, including:

- Aid was seen as a right, not a favour, particularly by displaced populations.
- The lack of sympathy for aid losses reflects both emotional fatigue and broader distrust in the humanitarian system.
- Criticism of aid operations was driven not only by logistical failures, but by deeper frustrations about prolonged suffering and the lack of protection.
- The absence of public concern for security incidents involving aid actors highlights a potential disconnect between community perceptions and humanitarian risk narratives.

The social media discussion highlights key considerations for acceptance-based security risk management during crises. Perceived inaction—often symbolised by [staff evacuations](#)—can erode trust in aid agencies. In highly volatile contexts, trust is not only fragile—it is conditional. Where communities see themselves as consistently neglected or marginalised, actions such as looting may be rationalised as legitimate redress, particularly when humanitarian responses fall short of visible need.

Final key insights and implications:

How we are interpreting what we are seeing on social media

- On social media, aid actors and institutions are met with profound distrust.** Despite some expressions of appreciation, particularly for a small number of NGOs, the majority of aid-related commentary on social media is negative. Accusations of bias, collusion with M23 or Rwanda, and failure to deliver basic services were widespread. In some cases, looting of aid convoys was defended as justified, while conspiracy theories about poisoned or expired supplies point to dangerously eroded trust in the humanitarian system.

 - See [here](#) a report about social media reactions to the USAID freeze in the DRC outlining growing anti-aid sentiment.**
 - This approach—analysing what issues are most commonly associated with IDP-related discussions—highlights a significant gap between how aid agencies aim to provide support, in line with humanitarian principles, and how these efforts are perceived publicly among vocal social media users. On social media, users often associate displacement not with humanitarian need but with broader political failures and contested allegiances.
- Public sentiment on social media is shaped more by political frustration and regional insecurity than by direct concern for IDPs.** Displacement is often viewed as a consequence of deeper structural failures—such as poor governance, foreign interference, or conflict—rather than as a humanitarian crisis in its own right. Even posts explicitly mentioning IDPs often prompted comments focused on blame, government failure, or calls for armed resistance. Rwanda is a dominant focus of blame, fuelling anti-Tutsi sentiment, while Congolese leaders are accused of enabling displacement through inaction or complicity. This contrast in framing matters for aid agencies. While humanitarian actors aim to support IDPs based on need and remain neutral, public discourse often interprets displacement through a political lens. This gap in perception can fuel mistrust, misinterpretation of intent, or assumptions of complicity—especially when aid is seen as delayed, selective, or favouring certain groups. Understanding this dynamic is crucial for maintaining acceptance, legitimacy, and operational safety.
- Unmet expectations as justification for violence.** The response to the Goma warehouse looting highlights how unmet expectations of aid can lead to public justification of violence, with little sympathy for the risks faced by humanitarian actors. In such contexts, looting is often framed not as a crime but as legitimate redress—underscoring the need for security risk management strategies that recognise how perceived failure to deliver aid can erode trust and acceptance.

The data at a glance

- Total comments analysed: 1,425**
- Platforms: Facebook (93% of the comments), X (6% of the comments), Instagram (1% of the comments)**
- Estimated Reach: 2.4 million social media users were reached through the 33 posts analysed**

- **Hate speech and calls for violence are increasingly normalised.** A notable volume of comments included explicit threats, incitement to violence—particularly against Rwandans, Tutsis, and Congolese perceived as collaborators. Posts called for armed retaliation, ethnic expulsion, and the destruction of Kigali. Some users openly advocated attacking Rwanda. Others referred to Congolese ethnic groups with dehumanising or slur-filled language. While some comments were framed as patriotic defence or mobilisation, many crossed into dangerous territory—suggesting that violent rhetoric is gaining traction and public legitimacy online. These trends indicate a deepening radicalisation of public discourse, which could further escalate tensions on the ground.

Social media is revealing strong opinions in public discourse, with humanitarian aid increasingly framed through lenses of political frustration, suspicion, and identity-based grievance. Rarely do online discussions engage with the humanitarian principles of neutrality, independence, or impartiality. Instead, aid is often perceived as politically motivated or inequitably delivered. As social media use grows, this perception gap risks undermining the legitimacy of the humanitarian system and increasing security threats to aid workers on the ground.

As changes in the communication architecture shift how we consume information and engage in discussions, there is a need to reignite the fundamentals of the humanitarian principles across the social media space. Defence of humanitarian principles within the limited humanitarian universe is unlikely to change public perceptions.. This includes embedding inclusive, participatory storytelling not as a communications afterthought but as a core part of aid delivery and program design. In an era of polarised and contested narratives, building trust requires not just better messaging—but active listening.

Should you wish to provide us with any feedback or to get in touch, kindly write to: info@insecurityinsight.org

Endnotes

1 Corneille Nangaa, the former head of the DRC's Independent National Electoral Commission, now leads the Congo River Alliance (AFC), a coalition that includes political actors and rebel forces such as M23. His transformation from electoral official to rebel figurehead has intensified tensions in the region, especially given the alliance's alleged ties to [Rwanda](#).

2 Joseph Kabila, the former president of the DRC (2001–2019), has faced renewed scrutiny for his alleged connections to rebel movements in eastern DRC following his return to Goma in April 2025. His arrival in M23-held territory and the government's subsequent suspension of his party, the PPRD, have raised concerns about his influence on the ongoing conflict and possible affiliations with armed [groups](#).

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