

Between the Lines:

Ambiguity and Leverage in the DRC–Rwanda Peace Accord

Kübra Aktaş



As the ink dries on the DRC–Rwanda Peace Accord, a fundamental question looms: is this a genuine blueprint for stability, or merely a framework designed to secure resource access? For Congo’s dis-placed millions, peace is only as real as their ability to return home safely. Beyond the political fanfare, the true test of this agreement lies in whether it can transform promises into protection, and frame-works into futures.

A Deal Signed, But for Whom?

On paper, the June 2025 DRC–Rwanda Peace Agreement was historic. It promised an end to decades of bloodshed, the withdrawal of foreign troops, and a pathway home for millions uprooted by conflict. Brokered in Washington with Qatar’s quiet facilitation, the deal was hailed by leaders as a “milestone for regional peace.” Yet, for the millions of Congolese refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) scattered across Central Africa, peace agreements have been signed before. Few have delivered.

Over 6.9 million people remain [displaced](#) within the DRC. Another half a million Congolese [live as refugees](#) in neighbouring states. The human toll of this conflict is staggering. Entire generations have grown up in limbo, stranded between diplomatic summits and the brutal realities of eastern Congo’s lawless territories.

This time, the agreement boldly calls for the facilitation of refugee and IDP returns. But it leaves critical questions unanswered: Who guarantees their safety? How will reintegration be funded? What happens if powerful armed groups like M23 and FDLR refuse to disarm?

The DRC–Rwanda Peace Agreement sits at the uneasy intersection of humanitarian aspiration and resource geopolitics. While it is presented as a vehicle for stability and the safe return of millions of displaced Congolese, its provisions and omissions suggest that the securitisation of lu-

crative mineral corridors may be an equally—if not more—pressing driver for the signatories. This duality matters: the pursuit of resource security, if allowed to overshadow humanitarian priorities, risks undermining the very conditions needed for sustainable peace. By interrogating both the human consequences of displacement and the political economy of extraction, this analysis argues that any peace worth the name must align geopolitical and economic interests with the lived realities and rights of affected communities, rather than treating them as secondary to strategic gain.

At its core, this is not just a diplomatic exercise. It is a human story of families waiting to rebuild their lives. The success of this agreement will be measured not in press releases but in safe returns, rebuilt communities, and restored dignity. And yet, as the ink dries on the signatures, glaring ambiguities and geopolitical trade-offs threaten to derail these humanitarian goals.

This is not accidental. Throughout the history of peace processes in the Great Lakes region, ambiguity has often been a deliberate tool, allowing powerholders to retain leverage and postpone hard compromises. The DRC–Rwanda accord appears to follow this pattern, embedding provisions that can be flexibly interpreted by the most influential actors.

The following policy outlook examines whether this deal can break the cycle of displacement or whether, like many before it, it will remain a promise unfulfilled.



Some Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) army forces, who fled the region due to the clashes crossed into Rwanda through the Corniche border crossing between the DRC and Rwanda, surrender to Rwandan forces in Kigali, Rwanda on January 27, 2025. Civilians and some United Nations (UN) officials who fled the region due to the clashes crossed into Rwanda through the Corniche border crossing between the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Rwanda. More than 400,000 people have been displaced since the beginning of the year due to ongoing violent clashes between the March 23 Movement (M23) rebel group and security forces near Goma, the capital of North-Kivu province in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). (Cyrille Ndegeya - Anadolu Agency)

The Scale of Displacement: A Protracted Emergency

Eastern Congo is home to one of the world's longest running and most complex displacement crises. As of mid-2025, over 6.9 million Congolese are internally displaced, while 528,000 [live as refugees](#) in neighbouring countries. These figures are not mere statistics; they represent lives interrupted, families fragmented, and communities torn apart by cycles of violence that have outlasted political regimes and international interventions.

The most recent escalation, fuelled by the resurgence of the M23 rebellion and counter-operations against the FDLR, [has displaced](#) hundreds of thousands since January alone. Camps in Ituri, North Kivu, and South Kivu provinces are operating beyond capacity, while border towns in Uganda and Rwanda struggle to accommodate new arrivals.

Despite the magnitude of this humanitarian emergency, past peace agreements have consistently sidelined displacement as a secondary issue. The focus has often been on ceasefires and military withdrawals, neglecting the long-term socio-economic reintegration of returnees. This omission has turned displacement into a chronic, generational condition.

The current agreement, for all its promises, risks repeating these mistakes. Without robust guarantees on safe, voluntary, and dignified return—and a clear framework for reintegration—the prospect of durable peace remains tenuous.

Ambiguities and Gaps in the Peace Deal

While the agreement's headline commitments are ambitious, its operational details remain opaque. Crucial provisions such as the disarmament and reintegration of M23 and the dismantling of FDLR militias are framed in vague language, lacking binding timelines or enforcement mechanisms. This ambiguity is not incidental; it reflects the competing agendas of signatories who view peace through different lenses.

For the DRC, the priority is the restoration of territorial integrity and the safe return of its displaced citizens. For Rwanda, security concerns linked to the FDLR and the ethnic dynamics of eastern Congo remain paramount. The [agreement](#) mentions the “withdrawal of Rwandan forces” but carefully avoids defining the scope, sequencing, or verification measures of such a withdrawal.

Moreover, the deal's silence on transitional justice—accountability for human rights abuses, war crimes, and gender-based violence—undermines its credibility. With-

out addressing these grievances, the cycles of retribution and displacement risk perpetuation.

The DRC-Rwanda Peace Agreement embodies a familiar paradox in conflict resolution: it promises humanitarian relief and stability while cloaking its most consequential provisions in intentional vagueness. Such ambiguity is rarely accidental—it is a calculated tool that allows powerholders to retain strategic leverage, defer contentious issues, and keep future courses of action open. This calculated vagueness is not unique to this agreement; it mirrors a broader pattern in which peace accords serve as frameworks for political manoeuvring as much as for conflict resolution.

Yet this raises critical questions: Who benefits from this lack of clarity? And how do elite political and economic interests shape the humanitarian outcomes of such agreements? In the case of the DRC-Rwanda accord, the absence of enforceable timelines, concrete accountability mechanisms, and transparent resource governance creates space for competing actors to interpret the deal in ways that serve their priorities—often at the expense of displaced communities and local populations. By interrogating how ambiguity functions as a form of political capital, this analysis exposes the ways in which the pursuit of resource security can quietly erode the humanitarian commitments that peace agreements are meant to uphold.

Compounding these concerns is the geopolitical overlay. The inclusion of a regional economic integration framework, while essential for long-term development, [has been critiqued](#) for prioritising mineral access over human security. The DRC holds vast reserves of cobalt, tantalum, and rare earth elements—materials critical to powering the global AI revolution. As demand for these resources surges, the peace agreement risks becoming a vehicle for stabilising extraction zones rather than safeguarding displaced populations.

In this context, humanitarian guarantees must not become a footnote in a broader commercial strategy. The success of this agreement will depend on whether displaced Congolese communities see tangible benefits, not just for foreign investors.

Can DRC Absorb the Returning Populations?

The question of absorption capacity itself is left unresolved in the accord, illustrating once again how deliberate omissions can shift responsibility away from signatories and into a grey zone where accountability is diffuse.

The DRC's capacity to reintegrate returning refugees and IDPs remains deeply [constrained](#). Years of institutional fragility, underfunded social services, and local governance vacuums have left the state ill-equipped to manage large-scale returns.



Ammunition and uniforms of the Armed Forces of the DRC (FARDC) are seen on the streets following the clashes between the rebel group March 23 Movement (M23) and anti-Rwandan protests in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo on January 30, 2025. (Cyrile Ndegeya - Anadolu Agency)

Although the peace agreement outlines ambitious economic cooperation frameworks, including energy infrastructure and mineral supply chains, it [remains silent](#) on how these initiatives will strengthen local reintegration capacity. Investments are channelled towards macro-level projects—such as the US-backed Lobito Corridor and the Ruzizi III hydropower project—while community-level housing, healthcare, and livelihood support for returnees receive scant attention.

This disconnect is not new. The region's history shows how external economic shocks, such as the collapse of the International Coffee [Agreement](#) in the late 1980s, destabilised rural livelihoods in Rwanda, fuelling socio-political tensions that later escalated into violence. The same risk persists if resource-driven development bypasses local populations.

Moreover, humanitarian agencies have flagged the DRC's reception capacity as critically overstretched. In border provinces like North Kivu and Ituri, the ratio of humanitarian aid per displaced person has plummeted, with less than 20% of identified needs being met. Without a concerted effort to build localised reintegration hubs, there is a real danger of returnees facing secondary displacement, urban overcrowding, and renewed insecurity.

For the peace agreement to translate into a durable solution, reintegration must be elevated as a strategic priority—not an afterthought.

A Framework for Sustainable Returns: What Needs to be Done

For this peace agreement to succeed where others have failed, a decisive shift in priorities is needed. The international community must ensure that the humanitarian dimensions of the deal are treated with the same urgency as its geopolitical and economic ambitions. Three immediate steps are essential:

1. Establish Enforceable Timelines and Monitoring Mechanisms: Vague commitments must be replaced with concrete timelines for refugee and IDP returns, verified by independent monitors such as UNHCR and African Union observers.

2. Create a Regional Reintegration Support Fund: Spearheaded by key donors like the EU, Gulf states, and the United States, this fund should directly finance community-level reintegration hubs, focusing on housing, healthcare, and livelihoods in high-return provinces.

3. Ensure Inclusive Dialogue with Affected Communities: Sustainable reintegration cannot be designed in conference rooms alone. The voices of displaced populations, local civil society, and community leaders must shape the design and implementation of return programs.

Additionally, regional frameworks like the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) should be adapted to the Great Lakes context, promoting shared responsibility among host countries and ensuring that repatriation is both voluntary and dignified.

Ultimately, the peace agreement must deliver more than symbolic gestures. It should lay the foundation for displaced Congolese families to return not just to their homes, but to lives of safety, opportunity, and dignity.

Conclusion: A Peace Measured in Human Lives

The DRC–Rwanda Peace Agreement holds promise, but its success will not be defined by diplomatic fanfare or investment deals. Its real legacy will be written in the lives of the displaced—whether they return home to stability and dignity or remain trapped in the margins of unkept promises.

From the first page to the last, the accord's reliance on vague formulations raises a consistent concern: that ambiguity is not a weakness to be fixed, but a structural feature serving the interests of those at the negotiating table.

Ultimately, the DRC–Rwanda Peace Agreement illustrates that the real fault line in post-conflict arrangements often lies not in their stated aspirations, but in the deliberate

spaces left undefined. These ambiguities—whether in security provisions, resource governance, or humanitarian guarantees—operate less as oversights and more as instruments of control for those positioned to exploit them. The question of who benefits from ambiguity is not rhetorical; it points squarely to a political economy in which elite actors, both domestic and regional, can recalibrate the agreement to secure their strategic and economic interests. For affected communities, this means that the humanitarian dividends of peace remain contingent, fragile, and easily subordinated to resource imperatives. Without mechanisms to close these interpretive gaps, the accord risks becoming less a blueprint for reconciliation and more a flexible contract in the hands of those least invested in its humanitarian promises.

For too long, peace processes in the Great Lakes region have prioritised geopolitical arrangements over human realities. This must change. The opportunity exists to craft a durable solution that places displaced communities at the centre of peacebuilding. But it requires more than signatures; it demands enforceable action, sustained political will, and a collective commitment to putting people before resources.

In the end, the question remains: will this be another paper peace, or a turning point where the humanitarian dimension finally takes precedence? The answer depends on what happens next.