



Trócaire

Romero Fund: Democratic Republic of Congo

Urgent need in DRC: Giving women control over their lives

A country devastated by civil war

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has experienced war since 1994, with an estimated 5.4 million losing their lives between 1996 and 2002. The Eastern Region, where Trócaire is based, continues to be plagued by violence prompted by the many rebel groups that operate there and despite a 2013 peace treaty signed between government and rebels.

The vast majority of the population live below the extreme poverty line of \$1.25 per day and rely on subsistence farming to feed themselves.

Although the country has many natural resources available for mining, poor infrastructure and weak governance have held back the country's economic progress.

Women and girls suffer the most

The continued violence, along with extreme poverty, has exposed women and girls to a very high risk of rape and sexual violence. Research suggests that over 1.9 million women in the DRC experience rape during their life.



"One of the most disturbing impacts of the war is the use of sexual violence against women – this has become a norm. While it is hard to get accurate data - due to under-reporting, isolation of communities, and, at times, cultural acceptance of rape - it is estimated that more than a 1,000 women a day are raped in the Eastern DRC.

We have heard of cases of girls as young as five years of age having been abused. The absolute absence of the State and the presence of so many different armed groups have created an environment of impunity where men are not held to account for these atrocious actions."

Sorcha Fennell, Head of Region for Trócaire in Central, West & Southern Africa

Photo: Mugoli Muhamiri and her two year old son Stephen in Panzi Hospital, Bukova, Democratic Republic of Congo. Mugoli became HIV positive after suffering sexual violence at the hands of militia, who also killed some of her family members.

What is the Romero Fund? The Romero Fund aims to raise €2.1 million over three years to tackle urgent human rights abuses and humanitarian needs in DRC, Pakistan, Guatemala and Gaza.



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Photo above: Dzve Tsolesi at a literacy training course for women. "We learned that women can lead," she says. (Photo: Virginie Vuylsteke / Trócaire)

What we can do

Due to the ongoing instability in Eastern DRC, Trócaire's work has focused on basic needs: providing emergency food aid and ensuring people have access to clean water and sanitation. An important part of our work is addressing violence against women and girls by supporting women to have more control over their lives and seeking justice when they have been abused, including prosecuting those who have abused them.



Trócaire supports many women-led organisations in DRC, including a number of local groups who monitor and report cases of sexual violence and who refer women and girls for medical support, provide them with legal support, counselling and psychosocial support.

Photo: Esther Mgumbe, a care worker, leads a morning meeting of victims of rape in Panzi hospital, Bukova, DRC.

With your help we can reach even more people in DRC by:

- **Empowering Women:** Providing assistance for victims of sexual violence, literacy tutoring and training to take part in decision-making structures.
- **Emergency Aid:** Distributing basic food, seeds, tools and re-building water points and sanitation systems.
- **Livelihoods:** Reconstructing irrigation systems and supporting farmers organisations and women's associations.

€5,000 will set up 12 small business groups, helping 100 women to earn an independent living in DR Congo

DRC Facts			Trócaire in DRC since: early 1990s
Population: 67.5 million Population living below the poverty line: 87.7% Human Development rank: 176 out of 187 countries			
	Ireland	DRC	
Life Expectancy	80.9 years	58.7 years	Over 9,450 families are helped through our livelihoods programme which supports people to earn a living.
Average Years of Schooling	11.6 years	3.1 years	
(Source: UNDP Human Development Index)			
			No. of partner organisations: 10