

Rwanda on Wednesday welcomed 328 citizens who voluntarily returned from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), including some who had spent more than 30 years in exile in the DRC's eastern forests.

The returnees arrived in 105 families via Grande Barrière border crossing linking Goma and Rubavu districts. The group included men, women, youths, and children. They joined more than 2,000 Rwandans who had returned earlier this year, 533 in August and 642 in May bringing the total number of returnees since January 2025 to over 4,000.

Many of the returnees said they fled to escape ongoing insecurity and attacks by the FDLR, an armed group founded by remnants of those who carried out the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. Some had been living in the Congolese forests for decades, often under threat and unable to safely return home.

The repatriation followed agreements reached in June 2025 in Addis Ababa between Rwanda, the DRC, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to facilitate voluntary returns. Upon arrival, the families were taken to Nyarushishi transit center in Rusizi District for temporary reception and registration before reuniting with relatives.

Nsengiyumva Alphonse, a returnee who had arrived in February, said the country's security and stability encouraged him to bring back his remaining family. "I found peace and development in Rwanda. You are given support to restart life—food, money, and agricultural resources. I now farm and raise livestock using the assistance I received," he said.



Other returnees cited the persistent conflict in eastern DRC as their main reason for coming home. One mother of two said, "We realized we needed to return because life in the DRC is unstable; the conflicts have exhausted us." Another added, "We decided to return because life there was unbearable, with no freedom and constant fear."

Rubavu District Mayor Prosper Mulindwa encouraged the returnees to share positive messages with those still in exile. "There is no reason for a Rwandan to remain displaced in a country where security exists. Come and see what Rwanda offers—freedom, services, and support for all citizens," he said.

At the transit center, returnees are registered for identification documents and receive essential services, including food, hygiene items, and social support.

According to Rwanda's Ministry of Emergency Management (MINEMA), the total number of Rwandans repatriated from the DRC since 1994 now stands at 3.5 million. Many returnees had been prevented from leaving eastern Congo by the FDLR, which conscripts youth into its ranks and forces others into agriculture, trade, and illegal activities.