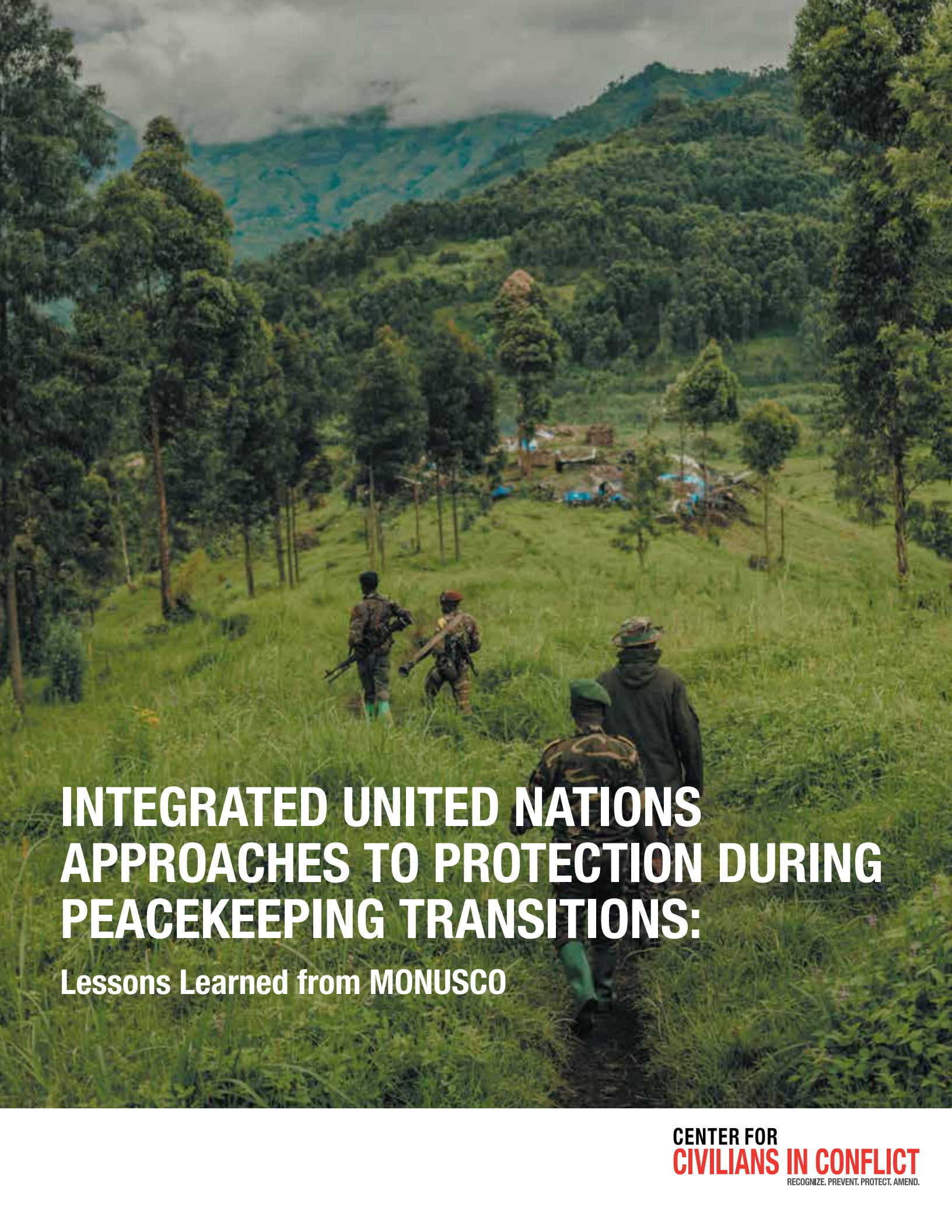


A photograph of four peacekeepers in camouflage uniforms and helmets walking through a lush green forest. They are carrying rifles and are seen from behind, moving towards a small cluster of buildings in the distance. The background features rolling hills and mountains under a cloudy sky.

INTEGRATED UNITED NATIONS APPROACHES TO PROTECTION DURING PEACEKEEPING TRANSITIONS:

Lessons Learned from MONUSCO

RECOGNIZE. PREVENT. PROTECT. AMEND.

November 2023

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Cover:

*Masisi Territory, North Kivu Province, DRC,
9 April 2023: Congolese Army troops patrol
close to the town of Kimoka and the frontline
with M23 rebel positions.*

Credit: Hugh Kinsella Cunningham

ORGANIZATIONAL MISSION AND VISION

Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC) is an international organization dedicated to promoting the protection of civilians in conflict. CIVIC envisions a world in which no civilian is harmed in conflict. Our mission is to support communities affected by conflict in their quest for protection and strengthen the resolve and capacity of armed actors to prevent and respond to civilian harm.

CIVIC was established in 2003 by Marla Ruzicka, a young humanitarian who advocated on behalf of civilians affected by the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. Honoring Marla's legacy, CIVIC has kept an unflinching focus on the protection of civilians in conflict. Today, CIVIC has a presence in conflicts and capitals throughout the world where it collaborates with civilians to bring their protection concerns directly to those in power, engages with armed actors to reduce the harm they cause to civilian populations, and advises governments, the United Nations and multinational bodies on how to make life-saving and lasting policy changes.

CIVIC's strength is its proven approach and record of improving protection outcomes for civilians by working directly with conflict-affected communities and armed actors and by drawing on research for evidence-based policy engagement and advocacy with decision makers, practitioners and influential actors. At CIVIC, we believe civilians are not "collateral damage" and civilian harm is not an unavoidable consequence of conflict — civilian harm can and must be prevented.

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ACRONYMS

ABA: American Bar Association

CAN: Community Alert Network

CAS: Civil Affairs Section

CIVIC: Center for Civilians in Conflict

CLA: Community Liaison Assistant

CPA: Child Protection Advisor

CRSV: Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

DCO: United Nations Development Coordination Office

DDR: Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration

DPO: United Nations Department of Peace Operations

DPPA: United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs

DRC: Democratic Republic of the Congo
(*République démocratique du Congo*)

DSRSG: Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General

DSRSG/RC/HC: Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General/Resident Coordinator/ Humanitarian Coordinator

EACRF: East African Community Regional Force

EW: Early Warning

FARDC: Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (*Force armées de la République démocratique du Congo*)

GBV: Gender-Based Violence

HC: Humanitarian Coordinator

HRDDP: United Nations Human Rights Due Diligence Policy

HRP: Humanitarian Response Plan

ICGLR: International Conference on the Great Lakes Region

IDP: Internally Displaced Persons

IFI: International Financial Institution

IHL: International Humanitarian Law

INGO: International Non-Governmental Organization

IOM: International Organization for Migration

JHRO: Joint Human Rights Office

JMAC: Joint Mission Analysis Center

MINUSMA: United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
(*Mission multidimensionnelle intégrée des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation au Mali*)

MONUSCO: United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (*Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation en République démocratique du Congo*)

MRM: Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism

NNGO: National Non-Governmental Organization

NSAGs: Non-State Armed Groups

OCHA: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

OHCHR: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

OSESG-GL: United Nations Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes

PAD: Political Affairs Division

PBF: Peacebuilding Fund

P-DDRCS: Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Program (*Programme de Désarmement, Démobilisation, Relèvement Communautaire et Stabilisation*)

PITT: Provincial Integrated Transition Team

PNC: Congolese National Police (*Police nationale congolaise*)

POC: Protection of Civilians

RC: Resident Coordinator

RCO: United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office

SADC: Southern African Development Community

SSR: Security Sector Reform

SSU: Stabilization Support Unit

UN: United Nations

UN AFPs: United Nations Agencies, Funds and Programmes

UNAMID: United Nations–African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur

UNCT: United Nations Country Team

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme

UNFPA: United Nations Population Fund

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund

UNITAMS: United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan

UNSC: United Nations Security Council

UNSDCF: United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework

WPA: Women Protection Advisor

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From Sudan to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Mali, many United Nations (UN) transitions are now taking place in complex and insecure environments. Peace operation transitions are inherently periods of uncertainty with destabilizing effects. Even in the best cases, well-organized transitions that have adequate time and planning can still involve disruption and transformation in the way UN actors operate and the protection they can offer civilians in areas emerging from conflict. In the worst cases, transitions can be rushed, result in a significant exodus of funding, occur while there are still high risks of violence against civilians, and leave civilians with few meaningful protection options.

Accelerated exits following the revocation of host state consent for an operation, as occurred with the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) in 2023, can compound risks of insecurity and governance challenges in acute ways, driving overlapping humanitarian and protection crises, which can reverse years of progress toward peace consolidation. Political disunity among UN Security Council (UNSC) members, as the authorizing body for peace operation mandates, to continue supporting a peace operation regardless of persistent, or rising security risks, can lead to potentially catastrophic relapses of violence. This was illustrated by the withdrawal of the United Nations–African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) in 2020 and the subsequent evacuation of the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) in 2023 together with renewed violence in Darfur.

Peace operations are often deployed alongside a variety of UN actors, both in country and in the region, including UN regional offices, Special Envoys, and humanitarian and development-focused agencies operating as part of the UN Country Team (UNCT). Many of these UN agencies predate the mission's arrival and will often remain long after its withdrawal. As outlined in the policies and guidance governing UN integration, in fragile and conflict-affected contexts where peace operations are deployed alongside other UN entities, a coordinated and cooperative approach has proven effective to realizing complimentary objectives across mandate areas, and at all stages of a peace operation's lifetime, but is particularly critical in the resource-constrained and fluid environment of peacekeeping transitions.

The purpose of this research is to better understand how UN integration, among other strategies, can help avoid or mitigate serious protection gaps during UN peace operation transitions, including how it may help avoid gaps in physical protection, sustain efforts to promote protection through dialogue and engagement, and support activities aimed at building a protective environment. Clearly, UN integration is not a panacea for all transition-related troubles. The success of UN transitions relies foremost on host nations, which bear primary responsibility for the protection of civilians, requiring political will most of all, as well as policies, functioning governance, oversight and accountability mechanisms, and capacity, particularly in the security sector, to address both immediate threats and root causes driving protection threats. However, because of this brief's specific focus, it does not cover in-depth transition-related concerns that do not have a strong link to questions about UN integration. Past CIVIC publications provide additional analysis on some of the broader protection concerns related to peacekeeping mission drawdowns.

This policy brief draws on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) drawdown as a case study. It focuses on developments over the past year, but also incorporates lessons from the Mission's earlier exit from the Kasai and Tanganyika provinces. The brief identifies successes that can be replicated as well as enduring challenges that require further support from the UN Secretariat, Member States, UN Agencies, Funds and Programmes (UN AFPs), host states, and other partners to overcome.

The UN system has distilled lessons from earlier peace operation transitions into directives, policies, guidance, and resolutions that create a framework for what safe and effective mission drawdown should entail. UNSC Resolution 2594 (2021) provides high-level priorities for UN stakeholders during transitions, emphasizing the importance of placing protection of civilians (PoC) at the core of the process, involving civil society, and ensuring integration among UN actors. The 2013 Policy on UN Transitions in the Context of Mission Drawdown or Withdrawal and the UN Department of Peace Operations (UN DPO) Policy on the Protection of Civilians in UN Peacekeeping (updated 2023) both emphasize early and integrated UN planning as a foundation for successful transitions. Broader efforts to harmonize the work of UN entities have been catalyzed under the banner of a “One UN” approach. In recent years, humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding actors inside and outside the UN have also recognized the need for stronger coordination of their efforts through what is often referred to as a “triple nexus approach.”

CIVIC’s research has determined that, over the past year, UN transition planning efforts in the DRC have become more inclusive of a wider range of UN actors than similar processes in past years, and that there has been a significant focus on protection of civilians during conversations about MONUSCO’s drawdown. However, political imperatives are currently taking precedence over protection benchmarks in government decision-making related to the transition. In July 2022, the Congolese government requested that MONUSCO accelerate its transition and revise a joint transition plan agreed upon by the UN and the Congolese government in September 2021—less than a year earlier. Practically, there has been a lack of clarity between MONUSCO and Congolese officials about what the Congolese government’s increasingly urgent and timebound calls for Mission drawdown would mean on the ground. This lack of clarity has made it difficult for other UN actors to plan concretely and move planning to more operational levels. MONUSCO’s efforts to invest in provincial-level technical planning to map and avoid protection gaps—which is greatly needed—have also been disrupted by the government’s resistance to a decentralized transition planning process.

This research supports a growing body of work on the way capabilities and mandates are defining issues in transitions. Stakeholders recognize that the Congolese government is the primary actor responsible for providing physical protection to civilians in the DRC and that MONUSCO’s transition will largely be a transfer of activities to the government, despite a lack of security sector reform (SSR) and serious gaps in the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo’s (FARDC) capabilities, doctrine, and procedures to protect civilians effectively. While a source of vital peacebuilding and development support, the UNCT is neither mandated nor resourced to replace MONUSCO in providing physical protection in response to escalating tensions or early warning alerts, but the UNCT can offer some early warning support when considered safe and appropriate to Congolese authorities. For example, after the Mission’s withdrawal from Tanganyika province in 2022, UN and NGO actors came together (after some delay) to ensure the continued functioning of a community alert network in the province that had previously been supported by MONUSCO. While it did require additional coordinated support, some, albeit limited dedicated capacity and external funding, including a remaining field presence of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the experience is instructive. In addition to its early lessons, including on funding arrangements and ‘triple nexus’ coordination, it highlights the important role of protection actors to identify synergies and collaborate as early as possible on threat warning and response efforts, and in ways that do not undermine humanitarian principles.

As measures for preventing and minimizing harm as well as functioning accountability mechanisms have proven essential elements to protect civilians, findings from this research revealed concerns about the readiness of national capacities in this regard. This includes conflict “early warning” response by government security forces, who lack trust and credibility as protection actors by some

communities, as they continue to be implicated in international humanitarian law (IHL) and human rights violations. As national security partners rotate, the deployment of regional security forces to eastern DRC has also raised the question of what role they might play in preventing and responding to early warning alerts. There is a further issue: the current system for mitigating risk when UN support is given to host nation security forces—through the UN Human Rights Due Diligence Policy (HRDDP)—will need to be reinforced with UNCT actors beyond JHRO/OHCHR applying this important accountability mechanism more consistently. Furthermore, a broader range of partners, including member states and regional organizations, will need to help address accountability gaps for troops deployed under regional bodies, which the HRDDP is not currently mandated or resourced to apply.

Then there are practical concerns about how the loss of MONUSCO's logistics and security support will affect the protection activities of humanitarian and UN actors, including UN human rights monitoring, investigation, and response to violations throughout the country. Likewise, unresolved questions about how non-Mission protection actors can and should work with national security forces linger, as well as how they will need to reconfigure their responses to protection risks in keeping with their capacities, mandates, and needs on the ground. These issues are especially stark for specific vulnerable groups: how the UN will maintain specialized protection functions like child protection and women protection also remained underdeveloped at the time of CIVIC's research.

While there have been more joined-up UN programming initiatives in the DRC in recent years, competition rather than collaboration can tend to involve a division of efforts based on comparative advantage rather than deeper integration of planning and implementation efforts. While not a new phenomenon, the impacts of these rivalries can be more pronounced during the fragile mission drawdown periods. Political tensions over the Mission's exit have also hindered joint UN programming, and they could continue to do so. During MONUSCO's withdrawal from the Kasai and Tanganyika provinces in 2021 and 2022, respectively, a nexus approach with new coordination structures helped prevent protection and programming gaps and has had some initial success at driving deeper integration among UN actors, provincial authorities, and non-UN partners. Reflecting on these experiences, interview participants emphasized the outsized role that donors can play in either driving competition or collaboration through their funding. They highlighted the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) as being particularly helpful in terms of existing support to nexus efforts, facilitating the peacekeeping transition, and fostering integration more broadly. Thus far, this funding has been utilized for projects in the Kasai and Tanganyika provinces, where MONUSCO has withdrawn all but a few residual staff. But it has not been available in Ituri, North Kivu, or South Kivu, where the Mission's remaining presence is currently concentrated.

Without its 'good offices' role, MONUSCO's drawdown threatens to leave the protection efforts of the UN AFPs and INGOs with depleted political backing at the local, national, and regional levels. Although many UN AFPs do engage with Congolese officials, the national stakeholders they engage—as well as the nature and frequency of the engagement—are different than what the Mission provides with its specialized political capacity, military and police liaison functions, and logistical enablers to convene actors. Currently, it seems unlikely that a special political mission will be deployed as part of the transition, and considerations for other ways to reinforce UN political engagement are still in initial stages. However, a number of political initiatives have been launched by regional leaders and organizations to promote peace and security. The UN supports many of these initiatives and can continue to do so as capacity allows during transition. Notably, interview participants suggested to CIVIC that the capacity and physical presence of the UN Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO) and the UN Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes (OESG-GL) should be enhanced, among other options for reinforcing the UN's political resources post-MONUSCO. The mandate of the Great Lakes Special Envoy's Office may also need to be updated to adjust or grow its role.

Experience in the DRC underscores the need for UN actors to substantively focus on integrated UN transition planning earlier in the peacekeeping lifecycle and to quickly advance this planning from the strategic level to the technical level. Such efforts should be reinforced by greater integration at UN headquarters and through surge transition capacity support. One transitions expert has been deployed to the DRC from UN headquarters. Their work has been pivotal but surge support is needed in additional areas.

Planning in particularly unpredictable conditions may require developing scenarios with associated prioritization plans that can be activated if host states increase pressure on missions to exit more quickly. Moreover, donors can drive better UN integration during transitions by building strong knowledge of the transition context, scaling up funding to critical UNCT efforts, prioritizing support to integrated approaches, and encouraging joint analysis, monitoring, and reporting. Otherwise, integration can be superficial even within joint projects. For their part, UN missions and UN AFPs can help prevent funding gaps by involving donors earlier in UN transition conversations and by strengthening their joint mission–UNCT–host state identification of protection priorities and gaps in transition settings. Where transition plans are in place, joint programming should be aligned with them in a way that anticipates that the peacekeeping operation’s role will decrease over time. These should progressively cede protection activities to other partners, particularly if a mission’s involvement becomes politicized.

As peacekeeping missions exit, UN actors will need to consider what transformed protection responses—tailored to the conflict realities—can best replace the physical protection offered by peacekeeping missions, including through support to host state protection initiatives and by supporting early warning mechanisms with enhanced dialogue and engagement to prevent violence. In addition, post-drawdown high-level political engagement should continue: UN and regional political initiatives can support protection priorities through high-level engagement with host nations on underlying or root causes of conflict.

Below, this policy brief outlines key priorities and recommendations for UN actors and host states during peace operation transitions. The recommendations are based on lessons emerging in the DRC, but, in keeping with the goals and focus of CIVIC’s research project, these recommendations are not DRC-specific. They are formulated to inform UN transitions more broadly and include some actions that MONUSCO is currently taking as part of its ongoing transition process. The brief then provides a background section summarizing relevant political and conflict dynamics in the DRC, MONUSCO’s history in the country, and UN guidance on transition processes. This background section is followed by four analytical sections that discuss: 1) the importance of aligning strategic-level planning processes and connecting these with technical-planning efforts across geographical divides; 2) how UN integration can support the sustainability of physical protection efforts as missions draw down by transforming their protection activities, including in support of host nation protection efforts; 3) factors enabling or undermining joint programming to create a protective environment; and 4) transforming political engagement that promotes protection during transitions.

II. KEY TAKEAWAYS

To support the transformation of the whole UN system during peacekeeping transitions and avoid protection gaps as missions draw down, host states should:

- Prioritize protection of civilians over political considerations when setting the parameters for peacekeeping transitions;
- Support and enable decentralized transition planning;
- Involve civil society groups in transition planning;
- Increase the capacity of national security forces to respond safely, effectively, and independently to protection threats through security sector reform and justice;
- Align transition with national and UN development planning addressing root causes of protection threats, as well as humanitarian protection strategies;
- Curtail corruption that could undermine efforts to build host nation capacity and prevent donor financing from shifting to national actors during transitions.

To enable integrated UN approaches that avoid protection gaps during peacekeeping transitions, the UN Secretariat and Member States should:

- Coordinate approaches and advocacy with the host government to prioritize protection during transitions and the sustainability of protection efforts as national security actors take up mechanisms and efforts previously led by international actors;
- When requested, provide surge capacity to mission transition planning;
- Promote integration both at headquarters and at country level across the UN system for better outcomes;
- Encourage early integration and transition planning through mandate language;
- Identify, develop, and share best practices for durable early warning systems, across the UN system and with relevant NGO and state actors;
- Augment the political capacity of UN regional offices and/or Special Envoy offices, UN Resident Coordinator (RC) offices and regional peace initiatives;
- Strengthen the role of the Peacebuilding Commission in transition contexts and provide more sustainable and predictable financing to peacebuilding from a variety of sources (e.g., assessed contributions, the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), the World Bank and other international financial institutions (IFIs)).

UN peacekeeping missions and UNCT actors should:

- Begin transition planning early with the host government and across the UN system;
- Align UN transition, humanitarian, development and peacebuilding strategies with national development plans where possible;
- Prioritize protection in 'triple nexus' programming during UN transitions;
- Develop scenario-based plans in fragile contexts with resource/staffing priorities;
- Map protection priorities, actors and gaps likely to arise during transition (e.g., withdrawal of peacekeeping logistics and security support will impact UNCT operations);

- Convene UN and partners in dialogue on aligning triple nexus programming to residual or anticipated protection threats;
- Resource and prioritize HRDDP implementation, with a focus on the national security sector and its partners. Build UN system-wide capacity on HRDDP requirements for any security force support, coordinated with JHRO/OHCHR;
- Adapt joined-up UN programming in transitions with gradual transfer of roles, capacities, staffing, and funding from peacekeeping to UNCT or local/national actors (e.g., support host nation protection capacity);
- Coordinate and collaborate early with protection actors involved in early warning;
- Factor how specialized protection functions (e.g., child protection, women protection) will be transformed after transitions and how the UNCT can better support important protection services such as radio programming;
- Invest in integrating conflict analysis, monitoring, and reporting, compatibility of databases, building efficiencies and preventing loss of institutional knowledge and data;
- Align and transform political engagement to mitigate physical protection gaps.

Donors should:

- Increase voluntary funding to non-mission protection actors during peacekeeping transitions to prevent financial and programmatic cliffs and, when possible, align funding with priorities identified during joint transition planning;
- Invest in funds and programs designed to support integrated or joint-UN initiatives alongside other donors, including the PBF;
- Prioritize multi-year funding and joined-up programming for transitions, especially targeting local, national, and regional drivers of insecurity and protection threats.
- Encourage joint conflict analysis, data systems, monitoring, and reporting efforts to drive deeper integration on joint initiatives.

III. METHODOLOGY

This policy brief is based on 116 qualitative semi-structured interviews carried out with UN officials, international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), civil society representatives, and DRC researchers and analysts. Some of the interviews were conducted remotely through telecommunications platforms; others were conducted in-person during a research trip to Kinshasa and Goma. All research interviews took place between June and September of 2023. Verbal consent was obtained from all interview participants for use of their insights in drafting this report. It also incorporates a review of documents relevant to the DRC, MONUSCO, and peacekeeping transitions—including UNSC resolutions, Secretary-General reports, statements issued by Congolese authorities, and UN policy and guidance documents.

In September 2023, CIVIC organized an expert roundtable in New York, hosted by the Permanent Mission of Ireland to the United Nations in partnership with UN DPO. Experts from MONUSCO, the UN Secretariat, UN AFPs, Member States, and civil society participated in the multi-stakeholder meeting to discuss UN coordination during peacekeeping transitions, including integrated assessments, capacities and resources for protection, and political support for protection during and after transition.

CIVIC's research took place at a time when transition planning for MONUSCO's drawdown was still ongoing. Therefore, it is not a retrospective assessment; rather, it extracts lessons at a specific moment in time. Additional developments in UN transition planning in the DRC were taking place throughout the research process, and it was not possible to continuously update data with all planning achievements made through the time of publication.

IV. BACKGROUND

Conflict Developments and MONUSCO Deployment

Since the start of 2022, more than 2,500 civilians have been killed by armed actors in the DRC.¹ The humanitarian crisis is perhaps the worst it has ever been. Around 5.3 million people have been displaced across the North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri provinces, including 3.3 million IDPs (internally displaced persons) newly displaced since a resurgence of armed group activity in March 2022.² Displacement due to armed group activity has been accompanied by a worrying increase in sexual violence, with gender-based violence (GBV) rates spiking by 73 percent in North Kivu last year even with likely high levels of under-reporting by survivors.³

Non-state armed groups (NSAGs) are responsible for the majority of the violence, and in particular for serious human rights abuses. According to the coordinator of the national Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Program (P-DDRCS), 252 NSAGs were operating in DRC in 2023, of which 68 were active.⁴ In the country's eastern provinces, armed group violence is fueled by competition over territory and resource extraction. NSAGs are deeply embedded in communities and exploit cross-border networks. Outside interventions to disrupt the cycles of violence have been largely unsuccessful, and the interests of neighboring countries and international corporations have compounded them at times.⁵ Congolese defense and security forces are also responsible for a significant proportion of violations committed against civilians and operate with widespread impunity despite considerable efforts and some progress advancing rule of law in the country.⁶



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30 March 2023: Aerial views of Mount Nyiragongo and Bulengo Displacement Camp, North Kivu Province, DRC.

Many of the protection challenges in the DRC are rooted in systemic political and governance failures. In spite of its extensive natural resources and economic potential, the DRC remains among the five poorest nations of the world. Corruption, underinvestment, low access to basic services, and poor infrastructure all plague the country and undermine development and peacebuilding efforts.

In May 2021, the Congolese government responded to the growing insecurity in the country's eastern provinces by declaring a "state of siege" and replacing the civilian governments in North Kivu and Ituri provinces with military administrations. The stated aim of this action was to "rapidly improve civilian protection, curb armed groups, and restore State authority."⁷ Human rights groups, however, have denounced the repeated extension of these military administrations and their contribution to a wider deterioration in the human rights situation in the country, including the repression of free speech and the suppression of journalists, activists, and protesters. On October 12, 2023, the Congolese President announced his intention to gradually ease some of the restrictions that have been put in place in the two provinces, but the state of siege was still in place at the time of this writing.⁸

UN peacekeepers have been continuously present on DRC soil since 2000, although the mission and mandate of these peacekeepers has shifted over time in response to changing needs, conflict dynamics, and UN Member State priorities. From 2014 onwards, the Security Council recognized

Many of the protection challenges in the DRC are rooted in systemic political and governance failures.

the need for MONUSCO to develop a clear exit strategy and, under budgetary pressure in 2017 and 2018, MONUSCO's footprint began to steadily decrease. MONUSCO consolidated its presence in hotspot areas, and its current activities are concentrated in the three most conflict-affected provinces: North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri. Its headquarters are in Kinshasa. In 2021, the UN drafted a joint transition plan in coordination with the Congolese government that included eighteen benchmarks for drawdown.⁹ A 2022 policy brief published by CIVIC on the 2021 MONUSCO transition planning process observed that although the process had been more PoC-focused, consultative, and inclusive than past transition discussions in both the DRC and other country contexts, it still failed to engage non-mission UN actors and civil society early enough and meaningfully enough.¹⁰ The policy brief also emphasized the need for peacekeeping transition planning to: 1) align national- and provincial-level processes; and 2) move beyond broad identification of protection concerns during transition and toward concretely mapping gaps that would emerge from peacekeeper drawdown—as well as addressing whether or how these gaps could be filled.¹¹

The increase in insecurity in eastern DRC over the last several years has provoked growing anti-MONUSCO sentiment that culminated in protests in July 2022. Mis- and disinformation played a role in stoking anger and instigating the protests, during which thirty-six people died (including four peacekeepers) and one hundred and seventy people were injured.¹² During subsequent protests against MONUSCO and other foreign troops present in the country in August 2023, a heavy-handed response from government security forces resulted in the deaths of forty-two civilians and one police officer. In addition, fifty-six people were injured and over two hundred and twenty arrested for organizing the protests.¹³ Although political manipulation played a role in provoking the protests, citizens remain frustrated by the continued presence of armed groups in eastern DRC—particularly the March 23 Movement (M23), which resurged in 2021 to capture territory in North Kivu Province. It has been responsible for a significant portion of the province's uptick in violence.¹⁴ Polling by a civil society group highlights how this security situation has stoked popular discontent against security actors, including MONUSCO and regional troops deployed to eastern DRC under the East African Community. The group found that 67 percent of civilians interviewed wanted MONUSCO to leave the DRC—up from 29 percent in 2016.¹⁵ However, civilian perspectives on MONUSCO can vary significantly from one area of the country to another.¹⁶ In the context of growing anti-MONUSCO sentiment and approaching presidential and legislative elections scheduled for December 2023, the Congolese government requested MONUSCO to accelerate its transition and revise the 2021 Joint Transition Strategy. Following consultations, the UN and Congolese authorities consolidated the original eighteen benchmarks into four benchmarks necessary to create the minimum conditions for MONUSCO's drawdown. These four benchmarks are: (1) the protection of civilians, (2) security sector reform, (3) disarmament, demobilization, reintegration, and stabilization, and (4) the electoral process.¹⁷ In addition, the UN released a report of the Secretary-General on August 2, 2023, offering options for the reconfiguration of MONUSCO—a report that the UNSC had requested be prepared by the SG in MONUSCO's 2022 mandate.¹⁸

On September 1, 2023, the DRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent a letter to the UNSC reiterating its request for an accelerated withdrawal of MONUSCO that would begin in earnest in 2023. The message of the letter was repeated by President Tshisekedi during his speech at the 78th UN General Assembly on September 20, 2023, during which he called for an accelerated withdrawal of the Mission to relieve tensions with Congolese civilians and create opportunities for exploring new forms of collaboration with the UN. The president of the UNSC acknowledged the letter from the DRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs in an October 16 statement that expressed the Council's readiness to decide on a course of action for MONUSCO's responsible withdrawal by the end of the year. The statement also asked the Congolese government and UN to develop a comprehensive disengagement plan for MONUSCO by the end of November 2023, and it encouraged the government to continue efforts to ensure its primary responsibility to protect civilians.¹⁹

Relevant UN Guidance on Transitions

Challenging as UN peacekeeping transitions can be, sources of UN guidance and lessons from past transitions continue to inform current processes. Notably, UNSC Resolution 2594, a landmark resolution on UN transitions, emphasizes protection of civilians and a rights-based approach as shared priorities. It underscores that transitions of peace operations are strategic processes that build toward a reconfiguration of the strategy, footprint, and capacity of the whole UN system and thus require a coherent and integrated planning approach at the earliest possible stage.²⁰ The resolution stresses that integrated planning and coordination should include the UNCT, other UN AFPs, and the UN Resident Coordinator (RC) as the highest-ranking representative of the UN development system in the country. In crisis-affected countries with multidimensional peacekeeping missions deployed, the UN RC is often triple-hatted as the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) and Deputy Special-Representative of the Secretary-General (DSRSG).²¹ This triple-hat arrangement exists in the DRC, and a transition team created to help facilitate coordination of the Mission's drawdown is housed under the DSRSG/RC/HC.

While lacking much specific guidance on peace operation transitions, an updated Policy on the Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping issued by UN DPO in March 2023 stresses the importance of integrated approaches to protection throughout the life cycle of a UN presence. It requires both internal coordination across the military, police, and civilian components of peacekeeping missions and external coordination with actors across all three tiers of protection: protection through dialogue and engagement, provision of physical protection, and establishment of a protective environment. The policy further notes the need for close and systematic coordination across the UN system, including information sharing.²²

A 2013 Policy on UN Transitions in the Context of Mission Drawdown or Withdrawal, endorsed by the UN Secretary-General, similarly highlights as key principles of UN transitions: early planning, UN integration, national ownership, national capacity development, and communication. As with Resolution 2594, the Policy on UN Transitions envisions an integrated UN approach to transitions that involves transforming the whole in-country UN system. It also emphasizes that planning for joint transitions is a shared responsibility of all UN leadership with support from UNHQ, that there should be coherence between different UN peacekeeping and development planning processes, and that planning should include different scenarios to avoid the UN being caught off-guard by unexpected political and funding shifts. On the important issue of financing, the 2013 Policy advises UN leadership to leverage possible funding sources such as the World Bank and the PBF to fill potential gaps. A decade of implementation has not been without significant challenges – joint programming, humanitarian space, funding arrangements and competition – but which also offer valuable lessons and experience on improving related policy, guidance, planning and practical arrangements.

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A 2018 Planning Directive from the UN Secretary-General on UN transition processes builds on this guidance. It asks UN entities to develop a resource-mobilization strategy to cover expected programmatic and financial gaps arising from mission withdrawals and to utilize the UN Development Assistance Framework (now the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, or UNSDCF) as a vehicle for transition planning. Moreover, a UN Policy on Integrated Assessment and Planning drafted in 2013 required missions to shift from an independent to an integrated UN system approach. A 2023 update to the policy underscores the importance of aligning planning processes during UN transitions and emphasizes context-specific complementarity and coherence.²³ A Joint Policy on Human Rights in UN Peace Operations and Political Missions (2011) similarly instructs the UN to ensure the integration of human rights in any UN follow-up strategy after mission withdrawal, as well as to ensure the continuity of human rights activities during transitions. Subsequent human rights guidance has built these.

This guidance co-evolved with a redoubled effort among humanitarian, development, and peace sectors to better address risks and leverage their comparative advantages through a coordinated and coherent approach—or the “triple nexus” or “nexus” approach. Recognition of the humanitarian–development–peace nexus originated with the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, where then-Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called for a new way of working to address the complex interplay between underdevelopment and conflict as well as the growing deficit between funds and resources available to address long-term, complex humanitarian emergencies. The approach prescribes that humanitarian, development, and peace actors work systematically on the basis of common analyses, to advance sustainable solutions and tackle the underlying factors and root causes of the crises that generate humanitarian needs, including protection needs. Nexus approaches have sometimes been leveraged more specifically to help mitigate risks arising during peacekeeping transitions. In parallel, there have been repeated calls for reinforcing a “One UN” approach based on policy developments since the 2005 World Summit, which called for more effective, efficient, coherent, coordinated, and better-performing UN country presences with a strengthened role for the senior resident official and a common management, programming, and monitoring framework.²⁴

V. ALIGNING PLANNING EFFORTS ACROSS UN ACTORS AND GEOGRAPHIC DIVIDES

Integrated analysis and planning between UN actors is the foundation of integrated action and a “One UN” approach. In the context of peacekeeping transitions, it is particularly important that integrated planning efforts move from the strategic and national level down to the detailed and local level. Government and leadership buy-in for the general direction and priorities need to be in place at the strategic level, while more detailed planning allows UN partners to operationalize an integrated approach, identify protection and programming gaps that will arise when peacekeepers depart, and determine how gaps will be minimized.²⁵

In the context of peacekeeping transitions, it is particularly important that integrated planning efforts move from the strategic and national level down to the detailed and local level.

UN actors across the peace and security, development, and humanitarian spectrum have distinct but overlapping strategic planning processes, including the results-based budgeting process that drives annual funding requests for UN peacekeeping missions, a multi-year United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), and the annual Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP). Integrated UN planning requires consistency between planning frameworks and harmonizing the underlying analytical and planning processes. Integration is likewise facilitated by aligning any transition plans drafted, as well as ensuring there are geographic linkages between planning in the capital and remoter areas of the country.

Over the last several years, the UN leadership in the DRC has increasingly recognized the transition as a whole-of-UN effort and transformation rather than a process primarily concerning MONUSCO.²⁶ According to stakeholders that CIVIC interviewed, transition planning over the past year has also been more inclusive across the spectrum of UN entities than were past transition planning processes.²⁷ Several credited MONUSCO’s current leadership with helping drive this change. One MONUSCO official explained, “The leadership makes a lot [of difference] for this cohesion to take place.”²⁸ Speaking about the efforts of the DSRSG/RC/HC to align these processes, a MONUSCO civilian official said, “The potential lies here because the transition planning under the triple hat is forward-looking, because it goes beyond MONUSCO’s exit. It is kind of a One-UN outlook at this.”²⁹



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November 2021: United Nations troops of the Uruguayan army are seen on patrol in Ituri Province. The area is the site of heavy fighting between the Congolese Army and CODECO rebels as army attempts to take back control of the zone, which is rich in gold and natural resources. The Ituri conflict is a complex humanitarian crisis that has caused massive displacement in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

PROVINCIAL INTEGRATED TRANSITION TEAMS

MONUSCO closed its offices in the Kasai provinces in 2021 and in Tanganyika Province in 2022 as part of a progressive geographic drawdown of its presence. A small residual presence of MONUSCO officials has remained in these provinces to ensure the continuity of human rights and justice support. These officials are co-located with the UNCT. Based on lessons learned from these closures and a desire to ensure its drawdown in Ituri, North Kivu, and South Kivu is an integrated UN process that minimizes protection gaps, MONUSCO established Provincial Integrated Transition Teams (PITTs). The PITTs were launched in all three provinces between May and June of 2023 to facilitate the more detailed and concrete joint planning at a local level that is critical during peacekeeping transitions.³⁰ The PITTs were intended to be inclusive mechanisms with buy-in and attendance from provincial Congolese authorities as well as UNCT officials operating in the provinces. Through the PITTs, stakeholders initiated joint conflict analysis and began identifying gaps likely to arise from MONUSCO's drawdown. They started prioritizing among identified gaps and deliberated over potential successor arrangements to fill those deemed priorities.³¹

Although the UN proposed including civil society participation in these PITTs, national authorities objected to civil society inclusion in North Kivu and South Kivu.³² Instead, MONUSCO attempted to consult civil society outside of these platforms and bring their perspective into PITT planning. Ituri Province was the exception, as the governor advocated for the inclusion of civil society directly in the PITT forum and secured their participation.³³

However, several interview participants observed that genuine recognition of the peacekeeping transition as a whole-of-UN transformation—and thus better integrated planning—came too late in the DRC. They saw it as a result of crisis situations rather than deep institutional buy-in at earlier stages of the transition planning process in past years.³⁴ As one MONUSCO civilian official commented, “It took a big crisis to have the transition in the minds of everyone as a serious agenda that we need to prepare for.”³⁵ Moreover, recognizing the peacekeeping transition as a whole-of-UN transformation has not fully trickled down from the leadership to the field level despite the creation of the PITTs.³⁶ Actors across the UN system are working together to update the Common Country Analysis (CCA), which can strengthen joint identification of the root causes of violence in the DRC and will serve as the basis for the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) planning. UN officials told CIVIC that MONUSCO's transition is being considered in this updated analysis.³⁷ Reportedly, however, more needs to be done to align the UNSDCF and other UN planning processes with the benchmarks and transition plan, and to ensure the programmatic framework created to take the UNSDCF forward reflects them.³⁸ Such an approach can help drive progress toward meeting the benchmarks that will allow a mission to transition, while also driving consensus between the government and UN AFPs around key priorities that will continue beyond a mission's lifespan.



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November 2021: A helicopter of the United Nations is seen dropping supplies to a unit in Kilo, Ituri Province. The area is the site of heavy fighting between the Congolese Army and CODECO rebels as army attempts to take back control of the zone, which is rich in gold and natural resources. The Ituri conflict is a complex humanitarian crisis that has caused massive displacement in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

But even the best laid plans must confront a more complicated reality. Integrated planning at all levels has been hindered by a lack of clarity between Congolese authorities and MONUSCO officials on the conditions and likely timelines for MONUSCO’s transition. With presidential elections looming—and scheduled for the same date in December 2023 as MONUSCO’s mandate renewal—questions about the Mission’s transformation have been especially unpredictable and politicized.³⁹ In particular, the government’s call in 2022 to revise MONUSCO’s transition plan, as well as the adjustment of its associated transition benchmarks, stalled their actual implementation.⁴⁰ At the heart of this challenge are tensions over whether MONUSCO’s drawdown will, in practice, be tied to achieving a clear “end-state” or to adhere to more time-bound commitments. Notably, the UNSC has maintained in its resolutions that the withdrawal is conditions-based, UN and INGO protection actors share the focus on end-states to avoid protection gaps amidst the deteriorating security situation in the Ituri and North Kivu provinces.⁴¹ However, many Congolese officials never fully embraced the end-states approach, openly espousing a 2024 withdrawal timeline publicly and in their meetings with MONUSCO – a sentiment expressed in frustration and based on popular perceptions, often fodder for political rhetoric, of a two-decade MONUSCO legacy with limited results. They wanted to see evidence of a progressive transformation over time, regardless of any benchmarks.⁴²

A six-month deadline to develop options for mission reconfiguration stipulated in the Security Council's 2022 mandate renewal, while broadly supported, may have invited unintended consequences by acting as a trigger around which Congolese Government views toward the UN began to harden. While its analysis and strategic guidance to the UNSC offered clear value, this period coincided with rapidly eroding host state political support for the UN's presence. Described as "an environment where the goalposts keep shifting from the government side"⁴³ leaving an uncertain Mission with eroding national confidence in a stalled state. The result has been a period of significant ambiguity, which seems to have hindered integrated UN planning for successor arrangements over the past year.⁴⁴ "It is really hard to plan concrete options without scenarios, and there are none," remarked a MONUSCO civilian official.⁴⁵ Another MONUSCO official also stressed that uncertainty made it difficult to communicate transition developments to Congolese communities.⁴⁶ Likewise, some non-UN protection actors noted a gap in MONUSCO communicating with them around shifting transition plans and timelines.⁴⁷

Reconciling the "end-states" versus timelines debate in often volatile, politicized, and fragile contexts is extremely difficult and can result in a premature withdrawal of host state consent for the operation, as occurred in Mali in 2023. Yet this dynamic is increasingly a feature of peacekeeping transitions, drawing down before political will, capacity, or conditions are suitable. Focusing early on strategic prioritization, scenario-based planning and sequenced drawdown and/or handover of activities can guide UN system-wide decision making, without repeatedly initiating new planning processes. Real-time integrated UN assessments and planning – outside of heavy quadrennial planning calendars – can improve joint understanding of and preparedness for crisis moments, enabling quicker joint UN responses.

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While field presences rightly lead these processes, they must be reinforced from UN headquarters in tandem.⁴⁸ "We have to start integration at HQ level," emphasized one UN official.⁴⁹ One important step is a UN Transitions Project created in 2014 of UN Secretariat focal points supporting special political missions (the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs), peacekeeping missions (DPO), UNCT bodies (Development Coordination Office), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has been a helpful source of expertise and best practice on transitions, advising UN field presences, the Secretariat, and Member States. The project also provides surge capacity to support UN integrated transition planning by request, as MONUSCO's, DSRSG/RC/HC Office has. As surge capacity needs may differ at different stages of transition planning, the Project includes protection specialists, peace and development advisors, political analysts, and those with logistical expertise. However, the modest project relies on uncertain "extrabudgetary" or voluntary funding by donors, risking diminished resources despite being capacity constrained, supporting multiple UN transition processes or withdrawal situations simultaneously. Nevertheless, missions could better leverage this capacity, particularly in reinforcing the office of the DSRSG/RC/HC as a critical actor in transition planning.⁵⁰

Linking Provincial and National Transition Planning

An oft repeated observation by visitors is that the vast scale of the Congo can be utterly daunting, with its limited infrastructure between regions presenting profound challenges for humanitarians, peacekeepers, and development actors in coordinating policies and programs between Kinshasa and the eastern provinces of the country. These geographical divides have been replicated during the transition process, a phenomenon that CIVIC documented in a 2022 policy brief. A growing awareness among Mission and UNCT officials of the need to better link national and provincial transition planning is emerging. As a MONUSCO civilian official observed, “There is a recognition about the need to have a closer link between the provincial and central level, with the latter leading on resource mobilization and strategic orientation.”⁵¹ Despite this recognition, the divides appear to have persisted in 2022 and 2023.⁵² Commenting on this dynamic, a UN Secretariat official told CIVIC, “While our counterpart to negotiate is always Kinshasa-based, implementation is not and has very little to do with it, and this is a challenge in practice.”⁵³

Efforts to drive integrated planning through the PITTs and to better connect strategic planning with provincial planning have been hindered, in part, by insistence from the national authorities that the process remain centralized in Kinshasa. As a result, integrated planning through the PITTs has stalled despite significant initial investment.⁵⁴ “The central government sees very much transition as a mandate from the central government, and that the provinces are the executors,” explained a UN official.⁵⁵ Issues of this nature are likely to arise in other peacekeeping transition settings as well. Resolving them to facilitate localized planning—which MONUSCO’s experience has demonstrated is critical for avoiding protection gaps—requires political engagement that should be supported by UN Member States in New York.

VI. INTEGRATED PHYSICAL PROTECTION POST MONUSCO'S DEPARTURE

A key part of transition planning is to ensure the protection gains from peacekeeping operations are sustained beyond their deployment. MONUSCO's drawdown benefits from a growing and shared recognition among key actors from UN headquarters in New York to Congo's Ituri Province that protection concerns should be at the core of MONUSCO's transition. MONUSCO and the UNCT have also increasingly emphasized during recent transition planning that the government has the primary responsibility to protect civilians.⁵⁶ They jointly recognize that, after the Mission's withdrawal, national security forces will be the only entity with the mandate to respond to physical protection threats in the way that MONUSCO has.⁵⁷ Building the capacity of national actors is also repeatedly highlighted in UN guidance as a priority during UN peacekeeping transitions in order to avoid gaps. While recognizing these realities and imperatives, however, stakeholders CIVIC interviewed repeatedly raised concerns about the government's weak political commitment and anemic institutional capacity to fulfill the state's primary responsibility to protect civilians following MONUSCO's departure.⁵⁸ Past CIVIC research and reports have also repeatedly highlighted that political will for security sector reform (SSR) in the DRC is insufficient and that—alongside reinvigorated support for SSR from a variety of national and multinational stakeholders—a shift in political will is needed in order to avoid a physical protection gap post drawdown.⁵⁹

Together, the Mission and UN agencies have collectively made some progress in sustaining early warning and response mechanisms created by MONUSCO – a cornerstone of its POC work. MONUSCO's Civil Affairs Section (CAS) pioneered the use of community alert networks (CANs) to identify imminent or ongoing threats to civilians. Community Liaison Assistants (CLAs)—national Mission staff within the Civil Affairs Division who serve as the main link between Congolese civilians and Mission personnel—play a key role in managing these networks and linking alerts to security responders. Over the last several years, MONUSCO has tried to augment national involvement in these mechanisms to avoid protection gaps as it reduces its presence. For example, MONUSCO hosted a national early warning and response symposium in 2021 under the auspices of the Ministry of the Interior and with other partners in Kinshasa. This forum assessed protection mechanisms and identified structures with the potential to help replace some of the protection tools led by the Mission, including early warning networks. It was at this forum that concrete discussions were held on how to reinforce the capacity of Protection Civile as the government counterpart to which some early warning and response protection functions in the DRC can be transferred.⁶⁰ However, continued funding and other support is needed to sustain them.

WHAT IS PROTECTION CIVILE?

Protection Civile was created in 2017 under the Ministry of the Interior. Their primary role was envisioned as supporting emergency preparedness and response for natural disasters, but they evolved to try to support early warning, evacuation, and response to conflict-related violence against civilians. Protection Civile has put in place their own early warning networks in some areas of the DRC, but their capacity and presence varies significantly from one province to another. On paper, their structure provides for one advisor to each provincial-level Minister of the Interior and one advisor to each administrator at the district level throughout the country. However, Protection Civile has been chronically underfunded and under-resourced throughout its existence. Ambiguity over whether advisor salaries are meant to be paid from national or provincial budgets has contributed to the entity's financial and resource gaps, leaving it understaffed. Existing staff have often gone unpaid and had operating costs uncovered for extended periods, undermining their ability to monitor threats and respond to early warning alerts.⁶¹



18-20 April 2023: Civil Affairs section of MONUSCO Bukavu led a Joint Assessment Mission to Kalonge groupment in South Kivu. The mission was a result of increasing reports from civil society and the community alert network focal points of Kalonge and Bitale commercial center about recurrent incursions by armed groups committing several human rights violations and various PoC threats against the civilian population.

Lessons from Tanganyika on Early Warning and Rapid Response Systems

MONUSCO's exit from Tanganyika Province, which happened in 2022 prior to the current phase of transition discussions, offers both positive prospects and sobering lessons on transitioning physical protection mechanisms from peacekeepers to other actors during transitions. To mitigate the impact of the Mission's withdrawal from Tanganyika, in 2022, it led a two-year provincial transition plan elaborated along four strategic priorities and focused on territories still holding some pockets of conflict. Before MONUSCO's departure, Mission officials were supporting both a free phone line (or "green line") for people to report concerns to the national police force (PNC) and a CAN managed by CLAs. When MONUSCO withdrew from the province, the plan was for the PNC to increase its deployment to the area and for Protection Civile to bolster its activities. Despite sustained MONUSCO advocacy, however, fewer than half of the 300 PNC officers initially planned for were deployed to Tanganyika, and the officers arrived with very limited logistics, capacity, and training. Only eight of more than one hundred Protection Civile staff originally envisioned were ultimately appointed, which threatened the collapse of the green line and early warning monitoring.⁶²

There has been engagement and some progress among UN and NGO actors to find successor support for the early warning mechanisms and avoid their disintegration. Protection Civile has received support from the American Bar Association (ABA) for several years, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UNDP have also stepped in to provide resources for their early warning work in Tanganyika. Additionally, UNHCR is launching a pilot project in collaboration with the Protection Cluster in Tanganyika to support and consolidate early warning mechanisms under the management of Protection Civile. This project will include helping Protection Civile develop an incident recording database. While discussions about a possible role for UNHCR in supporting Protection Civile's early warning mechanisms began before MONUSCO's withdrawal from Tanganyika, administrative and organizational challenges prevented a smooth transition from MONUSCO management to UNHCR assistance.⁶³ Notably, the shift from MONUSCO support to increased support by UN and INGO actors entails a shift from fairly reliable assessed UN contributions to relying on voluntary funding at a time when humanitarian activities in the DRC are significantly underfunded.⁶⁴

Building Durable and Credible Early Warning Systems

Looking beyond Tanganyika and moving into 2023, MONUSCO has focused on developing local-level capacity and infrastructure for Protection Civile to take over early warning tools. Dialogue among UN actors and NGO partners on their "willingness to take a larger role to support the protection and early warning mechanisms" has also continued.⁶⁵ The collaborative UN and NGO arrangement that was achieved in Tanganyika does not, however, answer the open question of how best to utilize MONUSCO's CLAs during and after transition. CLAs are widely valued and viewed as an asset. Failing to retain their institutional knowledge and engagement on monitoring and protection within the UN system in a residual capacity, state liaison function, or other capacity would be a serious loss.⁶⁶ Yet their role in monitoring early warning threats in remote areas was facilitated by their ability to operate safely from MONUSCO bases—a security assurance that will disappear with the Mission's shrinking footprint.⁶⁷

Arrangements for continued support to early warning mechanisms currently underpinned by MONUSCO are deeply complicated by the difficulty of relying on Congolese security forces for response, as these forces have limited capacity, continue to commit violations against civilians, and utilize proxy non-state armed groups.⁶⁸ Both the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) and the PNC are currently listed in the Secretary-General's report on conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) as being credibly implicated in serious violations. The FARDC is also listed in the Secretary-General's report on Children and Armed Conflict. One interview participant said, "In the

“In the DRC, PoC is the most sensitive handover because it is to national security forces that are part of the perpetrators of attacks against civilians.”

— MONUSCO civilian official

DRC, PoC is the most sensitive handover because it is to national security forces that are part of the perpetrators of attacks against civilians.” This participant demonstrated their concern by showing CIVIC a recent video of FARDC members looting a village.⁶⁹ Indeed, it is difficult for some UN development and humanitarian actors to share information with security forces because of their combatant status and track record of violations.

Additionally, the national security forces are not viewed as neutral actors by many Congolese civilians, who are reluctant to report on threats posed by these forces through government-managed early warning mechanisms due to fear of reprisals. Moreover, while it is easier for UN agencies and NGOs to engage with Protection Civile on early warning than to engage directly with national security forces, Protection Civile was also not viewed as a neutral actor by civil society leaders interviewed by CIVIC despite being a civilian entity within the government.⁷⁰ Finally, budgetary support to Protection Civile and the continuity of Protection Civile programming have been and continues to be disrupted when elections or appointments reshuffle political and institutional leadership.⁷¹ Such challenges threaten the sustainability and neutrality of early warning mechanisms, even if UN actors were to coordinate to identify follow-on support as MONUSCO withdraws.

These ongoing dilemmas highlight the need for stakeholders to consider further how response to early warning may need to be transformed alongside a shift in the organizations carrying out risk monitoring. Integrated UN response efforts may need to focus on increasing political engagement to prevent violence from erupting, a surge in support to community-based dialogue, or enhanced efforts at civil–military dialogue to prevent security force abuses. Such efforts could require a shift in mentality for UN agencies that are more accustomed to feeding protection-monitoring data into programmatic and relief efforts than rapid violence reduction mechanisms. It could also require collaboration between humanitarian and development actors, as the former may be better placed to respond to emerging crises and the latter to engage government officials. “CLAs are a good mechanism. Alerts [are] okay. It is good, but if you want a real response, there is a need for political engagement to look at the root cause of conflicts,” stated one civil society leader.⁷² This issue is discussed further in Section VIII of the brief.

Civilian Protection, Human Rights Compliance and Regional Security Forces

In recent years, conflict-affected countries have increasingly turned to ad-hoc and regional coalitions to address security concerns, making it likely that similar concerns will arise for UN actors in other countries and contexts—and that similar solutions may be needed.

Protecting civilians post-MONUSCO will need to adapt to the presence of additional regional security actors, many lacking an explicit POC mandate, doctrine, operational guidance, or accountability mechanism. Over the last year, troops from neighboring countries have deployed to eastern DRC under bi-lateral arrangements with the government, as well as under the banner of an East African Community Regional Force (EACRF). In May 2023, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) also agreed to send troops to the DRC at the Congolese government’s request, although these were not yet deployed at the



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time of CIVIC's research.⁷³ While some government officials have indicated the potential for the EACRF to serve as a physical protection actor for civilians in the DRC, there does not appear to be consensus among EACRF-contributing countries or between the EACRF and the Congolese government on the regional force's role. Its mandate is not easily accessible, widely understood, or uniformly interpreted by EAC actors.

Several civil society leaders interviewed for this research shared these concerns, with one noting that “no one, apart from the signatories, knows the content of agreements signed between the government and the EACRF.”⁷⁴ The lack of a community-based approach to protection and concerns over potential human rights violations were also raised by several community interlocutors.⁷⁵ The human rights records of armies deploying under the EACRF vary drastically, and unlike some other regional military deployments authorized by the African Union or supported by the European Union, there is not yet a human rights compliance framework for the EACRF or other regional forces to promote adherence to human rights requirements and mitigate risks that could emanate from their operations.⁷⁶

When UN actors provide support to non-UN security forces, they are required to implement steps outlined in a UN Human Rights Due Diligence Policy (HRDDP) to mitigate risks that UN support may potentially be used in association with violations of international humanitarian law, human rights law, or refugee law. In the DRC, the UN Joint Human Rights Office (JHRO) leads in supporting the UN's implementation of the

JHRO would need a mandate, resources, and time to pivot its HRDDP implementation role to include actors like the EACRF or SADC troops, should they deploy.

HRDDP and maintains a database on members of the national defense and security services that helps it assess the risk of supporting particular operations or activities.⁷⁷ Although JHRO will continue to operate in the DRC after MONUSCO's departure, its staffing will likely be reduced as it shifts from relying primarily on assessed Member State contributions through MONUSCO to relying increasingly on voluntary contributions as MONUSCO draws down. Its ability to collect information about violations from remote areas will almost certainly be reduced as it loses access to Mission enablers—an issue that is discussed further in the textbox below. These changes will have an impact on JHRO's ability to implement the HRDDP at a time when international actors and civilians are more reliant on the FARDC for response to protection threats.⁷⁸

In this context, accountability, guidance and resources gaps need to adapt to include these Congo's regional security partners. MONUSCO's current mandate only allows direct support to national security forces, not to actors like the EACRF. JHRO would need a mandate, resources, and time to pivot its HRDDP implementation role to include actors like the EACRF or SADC troops, should they deploy.⁷⁹ Moreover, although UN actors are meant to have a joined-up process for implementing the HRDDP in countries with integrated leadership between peacekeeping operations and the UNCT, awareness and use of the HRDDP among UN agencies beyond JHRO/OHCHR is very uneven, and they sometimes use alternative processes for considering risk.⁸⁰ With MONUSCO's departure, UN agencies should ensure their staff are fully aware of the requirements created under the UN HRDDP and consider how to strengthen their integration into the procedures that JHRO manages.

Integrated information management and tool development will need to be part of this effort. JHRO's HRDDP database—one of the Mission's major achievements according to DRC specialists interviewed for this research⁸¹—may need to be expanded to consider other regional and multinational actors. JHRO will need support from other UN actors to build this database. Additional staffing and resources could also be needed, as well as cross-country collaboration by OHCHR staff.

Human Rights Capacity, Investigations, Reporting and Access

Moreover, even though JHRO will continue to operate through the OHCHR country presence after MONUSCO's drawdown, its resources and ability to safely deploy to remote, conflict-affected areas to conduct in-person monitoring and investigations and support mobile courts will likely be greatly reduced. Currently, 74 percent of its budget is covered by MONUSCO.⁸² JHRO/OHCHR, like some other UNCT protection actors, also relies heavily on the Mission's enablers—including flights, security analysis provided by the UN Department of Safety and Security (UN DSS), and security support provided by the Mission's Force—to access remote and insecure areas.⁸³ Like JHRO, UN DSS is part of the wider UNCT, but most of its staff and resources are currently derived through assessed peacekeeping contributions, which will make it difficult for them to maintain the scope of their activities as the Mission draws down. Although some human rights monitoring can be done remotely without a need for MONUSCO enablers, doing so is challenging in the DRC both because of its limited telecommunications infrastructure and because the scale of displacement undermines the ability of protection actors to build the kind of interpersonal networks which usually facilitates such work.⁸⁴

CHILD PROTECTION AND WOMEN PROTECTION DURING PEACEKEEPING TRANSITIONS

In countries with multidimensional peacekeeping missions deployed alongside UNCT actors, child protection activities are often shared by the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and Child Protection Advisors (CPAs) within peacekeeping missions. Their shared responsibilities include monitoring for and preventing the six grave violations against children in armed conflict,⁸⁵ as well as reporting on violations through a process called the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM). Women Protection Advisors (WPAs) in MONUSCO, who are consolidated under the JHRO in the DRC, work jointly on prevention, tracking, and responding to incidents of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) alongside the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and other actors. Violations are reported through the Monitoring, Analysis and Reporting Arrangements on conflict-related sexual violence (MARA). These monitoring and reporting systems, as well as the roles of WPAs and CPAs, were established by UNSC resolutions.

While their efforts are collaborative, CPAs and UNICEF staff do not perform the same activities, nor do WPAs and UNFPA officials. CPAs and WPAs take the lead on investigating and reporting on violations in their respective protection fields. UNICEF and UNFPA have broader mandates—UNFPA, for example is concerned with all forms of gender-based violence, not only CRSV—and are more focused on programmatic interventions.

At the time of CIVIC's research, there did not appear to be advanced planning in place for how these specialized protection roles performed by MONUSCO would be covered during the peacekeeping transition.⁸⁶ Because WPAs are part of JHRO, their role could be maintained if voluntary funding can be secured and sustained for them post-transition. CPAs, however, are not part of JHRO, and the future of their function is less clear. While JHRO monitors and reports on all human rights violations and abuses, including those against children, JHRO does not currently have designated child protection capacity focused on the six grave violations against children in armed conflict (the focus of CPAs).

As with broader protection alert mechanisms, MONUSCO officials expressed concern to CIVIC about the fact that CPAs play a different role than their UNICEF colleagues. One MONUSCO official explained their role as being more of an operational rapid response to alerts of child soldiers seeking demobilization from armed groups. The official explained that they are able to do this only with assistance from MONUSCO troops and aviation assets.⁸⁷ Additionally, it is MONUSCO CPAs who engage directly with parties to the conflict to end and prevent grave violations against children, particularly child recruitment and use. This political role is often too sensitive for other UN AFPs. Indeed, it would be difficult for UNICEF to replicate this critical role in MONUSCO's absence. "It is complimentary in a perfect world, but once our capacity is reduced and they are called to come in, this will not be a handover, because they have a different approach," noted the MONUSCO official.⁸⁸ Another MONUSCO official pointed out that child protection monitoring was a difficult gap to fill during MONUSCO's withdrawal from Tanganyika.⁸⁹ UN officials should not assume that child protection functions will be easily absorbed by UNCT colleagues during peacekeeping transitions just because there is collaboration on the portfolios between missions and the UNCT prior to transition.

Strategic Communications and POC

Finally, UN strategic communications assets are a core mission capacity, essential for two-way communications and confidence-building with local communities, combating mis- and dis-information and many aspects of mandate implementation, including POC. In this study, several participants voiced concerns that additional attention should be devoted to considering how assistance to Radio Okapi—a radio station founded by MONUSCO’s predecessor Mission and supported by MONUSCO—could be sustained after MONUSCO’s exit.⁹⁰ This radio station is one of the few that covers the whole country, and it is sometimes the only independent broadcasting available in remote areas. As one civil society representative put it, Radio Okapi “is the only media people rely on in rural areas.”⁹¹ As such, it helps protect civic space in the DRC, and the value of access to information as a component of protection is being increasingly recognized by NGOs. Indeed, Radio Okapi is a cherished resource which could be leveraged in support of post-MONUSCO protection in the DRC.

Founded over two decades ago in 2002, the radio station already plays a role in helping identify and dispel disinformation that can trigger violence, and its radio towers supporting the transmission of other community radio signals. When CIVIC began its research in the DRC, stakeholders observed that although there had been some discussions on how the UNCT might help sustain Radio Okapi in the future, attention to this aspect of the transition had been insufficient. No concrete plans or proposals were in place.⁹² However, a MONUSCO consultant subsequently undertook a review and drafted options for the sustainability of the station following MONUSCO’s withdrawal. Progress on identifying a way forward was ongoing at the time of publication.⁹³

VII. ENABLING JOINT PROGRAMMING

Because UN and NGO entities have different priorities, cultures, management structures, and reporting lines, there are inherent challenges in asking them to work jointly on protection-related programming.⁹⁴ Yet it is clear that coordination and collaboration can drive efficiencies and increase the success of UN protection efforts, particularly in complex, fragile and resource-scarce environments. This logic has driven efforts to implement both “One UN” and nexus approaches. However, the level and type of coordination between peacekeeping missions and UN AFPs will vary from country to country, and it will likely be different for humanitarian actors than for development actors.

As noted, there have been improvements in the integration of UN planning in the DRC in recent years. These improvements in integrated planning have helped support the development of some joint programming aimed at helping build a protective environment in the DRC. Two areas of joint programming in the DRC have included a stabilization partnership between UNDP and MONUSCO’s Stabilization Support Unit and a Joint Justice Program between UNDP and MONUSCO’s Justice and Corrections, Rule of Law, and Human Rights sections. MONUSCO’s WPAs have also worked in close collaboration with UNFPA while MONUSCO CPAs and UNICEF collaborate to fulfill responsibilities monitoring the six grave violations against children. In the DRC, JHRO—as an entity that sits within both MONUSCO and the UNCT—is naturally suited to serve as a bridge between MONUSCO and the UNCT in several protection functions. In some geographic areas of the DRC, investment in nexus coordination structures is also beginning to drive meaningful integration.



November 2021: United Nations peacekeepers of the Uruguayan army are seen on patrol close to the town of Kilo, Ituri Province. A resurgence of violence has seen attacks and human rights violations committed by armed groups operating under the name CODECO and over 1.7 million people forced to flee their homes.

THE NEXUS APPROACH DURING UN TRANSITIONS

Conversations about adopting a nexus approach in the DRC began among humanitarian, development, and peace actors in 2018-2019, but stalled during the COVID-19 virus outbreak. When conversations were renewed in 2021, the nexus actors involved decided to focus initial efforts on three pilot areas in the Kasai and Tanganyika provinces. In keeping with the 2021 Joint Transition Plan, MONUSCO was, at that time, on course to close its offices in these provinces as part of its progressive drawdown in the country. The relative stability of the provinces and MONUSCO's impending drawdown made them attractive as pilot areas to implement a nexus approach. MONUSCO officials hoped the approach would attract attention and donors, allow the UNCT and NGOs to expand or create new programming in areas where gaps were identified as part of MONUSCO's drawdown, promote progress on peace gains, and avoid the regions backsliding into conflict.⁹⁵

Partners then scaled up capacity and several nexus coordination posts were established within the RC's Office, with UN supported workshops launching relevant programming. In Kinshasa, a nexus core team was created, while nexus provincial groups were established in the pilot provinces. Thematic working groups were established under each nexus provincial group to promote coordination around the four collective outcomes selected by nexus partners as DRC priorities: food security and malnutrition, access to social services, forced displacement, and GBV. Five types of stakeholders meet through the nexus coordination structures: UN officials, INGOs, NNGOs/civil society groups, donors, and government officials at the national and provincial levels. The structures have been endorsed by the Congolese authorities, who co-chair the thematic groups.⁹⁶

Once coordination structures and capacities were in place, teams focused on joint conflict analysis including root causes in areas of the country where the nexus approach is being implemented, as well as by identifying gaps between conflict drivers and programming priorities. The nexus provincial groups have also tried to establish a system for joint monitoring and evaluation of progress achieving the four collective outcomes. Some participants have crafted joined-up programs and applied collectively for funding under the aegis of the nexus.⁹⁷ Stakeholders who spoke with CIVIC credited the nexus approach with improving integration, allowing UN agencies to expand their programming in the Kasai and Tanganyika provinces during MONUSCO's withdrawal, facilitating more joint and collaborative programming, and helping prevent some protection gaps.⁹⁸ "There are still gaps," noted one UNCT official, "but... I know the donors increased their funding going to this [geographic] area to finance the nexus plan, which also helped."⁹⁹

However, these initiatives suffered from some of the same limitations as other efforts at joint and complimentary programming, in that they can support improved information and program coordination while stopping short of enabling deeper complementarity, integration, and joint programming which confront persistent institutional and other obstacles. One UN official told CIVIC, "We are having that positive impact of bringing all of the stakeholders to the table. We would like to improve the influence of the nexus in the programming of the different stakeholders. ... We are at the cross-border of business as usual and an innovative way of working together."¹⁰⁰ Additionally, there is still confusion among UN, INGO, and NNGO actors

over what the nexus approach entails, as well as a risk that stakeholders are describing their efforts as part of the nexus to attract donors without fully understanding it or embedding their projects into its coordination structures.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, government funding and resources have not materialized in adequate amounts to support progress.¹⁰² Nevertheless, the nexus approach represents a reinvigorated effort at integrating UN actors and other critical partners with foundational investments in some of the structures and processes needed to translate coordination and information-sharing into programs that are truly complementary or joined-up.

The possibilities for the nexus approach acting as an enabler for integration and avoiding protection gaps in the context of MONUSCO's continued drawdown are uncertain. With MONUSCO increasingly absent from nexus implementation in the areas from which it withdraws, there may be a gap in the peace side of the nexus triangle. Such a gap could deepen analytic, resourcing or programming gaps for protection, and with it, important bridges between humanitarian and development interventions. Furthermore, the North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri provinces are experiencing much higher levels of insecurity and conflict than were the Kasai and Tanganyika provinces where the nexus approach was piloted. This disparity could pose a challenge if stakeholders in the DRC were to consider applying the nexus model to these provinces alongside transition planning for MONUSCO's withdrawal. Moreover, given their need to maintain neutrality, it can be more difficult for humanitarians in acute conflict settings to work closely with peace and development actors, as well as on projects associated with the government.

Nexus provincial groups, which have substantive ownership and traction with government ministries and local government officials, currently only exist in the Kasai and Tanganyika provinces. However, if nexus provincial groups were extended to North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri, they could serve as the basis for identifying gaps and prioritizing protection efforts during transition planning in these provinces—while still engaging a broader set of actors on the goal of addressing root causes. If PITTs continue to be sidelined by Kinshasa-based politicians, such utilization of nexus provincial groups could help close the gap in ensuring transition planning progresses at provincial levels and is in line with national planning. This possibility is in line with efforts to focus on building host nation capacity during transitions, and it reflects the understanding that peacekeeping transitions are about the broader transformation of the UN system in addition to the process of mission withdrawal. However, if MONUSCO's transition becomes overly fraught and politicized, stakeholders will have to ensure the nexus approach is understood as something that can and should facilitate transition, rather than as an instrument of it.



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30 March 2023: *Displaced civilians fetching water in Bulengo Displacement camp, North Kivu Province, DRC.*

UN Integration: Theory vs. Practice

These initiatives demonstrate that closer collaboration can be achieved and that it comes with benefits for both programmatic coherence and facilitating peacekeeping transitions with fewer gaps. However, they also demonstrate that it can be difficult for UN entities to overcome institutional hurdles to deeper, strategic integration rather than defaulting to just information-sharing and coordination. Stakeholders noted to CIVIC that even in cases where UN staff had the intention to join up programming, they sometimes still struggle to deal with complicated administrative barriers to integration. Moreover, they sometimes exhibit rivalry rather than collaboration, they do not always have an awareness of what other programs are taking place in the same sector, and they can tend to carve up project pieces to complete in relative siloes. Joint monitoring of projects is an area where interview participants stressed that progress should be made.¹⁰³

In many cases, integration efforts have been more about identifying comparative advantages and dividing work along these lines than about redesigning programs to be truly complimentary or joined-up. Focusing on comparative advantages can have benefits and, in some cases, may be the most context-appropriate approach. However, superficial integration or defaulting to comparative

In many cases, integration efforts have been more about identifying comparative advantages and dividing work along these lines than about redesigning programs to be truly complimentary or joined-up.

advantages rather more joined-up, transformative programming is often the result of systemic weaknesses rather than intentionality. Adopting an approach of coordination rather than deeper integration increases the risk of losing institutional knowledge and data as peacekeeping missions withdraw because it often results in UN actors maintaining their own staff, conflict analysis, and databases that cannot be easily and quickly assimilated. This is true of both joint-programming efforts and the variety of protection-monitoring tools and forums that exist across the UN and NGO spheres.¹⁰⁴ One interview participant commented, “The question which has not been resolved yet is how to capitalize on lessons learned from past withdrawals and avoid losing all the knowledge of civilian components [in peacekeeping missions].”¹⁰⁵

Moreover, stakeholders who spoke with CIVIC observed a gap in aligning joint programs with the realities of peacekeeping transitions. For example, according to two UN officials, the Joint Justice Program (launched in 2020 with a four-year duration) did not take into account either a drawdown or a shift in MONUSCO’s capabilities over its lifespan.¹⁰⁶ For example, some interviewees noted that joint programming between MONUSCO’s Stabilization Support Unit (SSU) and UNDP did not adequately plan for the progressive transfer of responsibilities or capacities from MONUSCO to UNCT actors. Additionally, although MONUSCO’s program budget has shrunk in recent years, it has still maintained significant program budgets and portfolios at a level that some stakeholders felt were out of place in a transition environment.¹⁰⁷

Other complications derive from lack of national political support, particularly in the security sector. New UNCT-MONUSCO joint programming efforts leveraging MONUSCO’s comparative advantages in policing and targeting critical transition benchmarks have reportedly stalled because of some government officials’ resistance to approving projects that include MONUSCO beyond the timeline they envision the Mission remaining in the country.¹⁰⁸ While UN stakeholders acknowledged the unique value-add of having certain Mission components and sections involved in these initiatives, such challenges have left other UN stakeholders wary of closer integration with MONUSCO on projects at the current stage of transition planning.¹⁰⁹ This dynamic demonstrates that if integration happens too late, it can be harmful rather than helpful for UN AFPs.¹¹⁰

These complications in the DRC underscore the importance of peacekeeping missions and the UNCT aligning their joint programming efforts with transition planning at much earlier stages in the transition process. They also highlight the need for missions and the UNCT to consider how they progressively shift capacities, funding, and staffing to the UNCT throughout transition periods so UNCT actors can assume a larger role in programmatic activities that support national actors in creating a protective environment. Alternatively, through improved integration between UN AFPs and missions when peacekeeping missions are first deployed, UN actors can consider reducing the need to house program funds with missions altogether. This latter approach would require increased investment of voluntary funding, which has not always been forthcoming.

Spurring deeper and earlier programmatic integration among UN peacekeeping missions and the UNCT while ensuring there is enough distinction to maintain humanitarian principles—and that humanitarian action retains the independence it sometimes needs to fulfill its distinct protection roles—is a difficult and ongoing challenge. CIVIC’s research indicates that greater integration is driven by the creation of joint context analysis, work plans, monitoring, data streams, and reporting, as well as a strong mapping of capacities and actors in different protection sectors. Joined-up strategic planning processes can facilitate integration in these areas at the technical or implementation level and ideally avoid duplication, for example, in joint analysis having to be replicated multiple times and across different programs.

The UN Secretariat and Chief Executive Board also need to make progress in resolving administrative issues that make joint programming and flexible staffing arrangements more difficult. Furthermore, CIVIC found a perception among some UNCT and civil society actors that peacekeepers in the DRC were disincentivized from progressing a transition that would eliminate their job posts.¹¹¹ Although the UNSC ultimately determines whether and how long MONUSCO will continue to be deployed (with host state consent), the sheer number of staff at risk of having contracts terminated simultaneously across the multiple peacekeeping missions currently drawing down is significant, as is the risk of losing their institutional knowledge.¹¹² On a related issue, a MONUSCO official noted that staff lack opportunities to train or be exposed to work cultures across the different pillars of the UN’s work in such a way that could improve UN collaboration and make it easier for peacekeeping staff to transfer to UNCT roles during or after transitions.¹¹³

Necessary to avoid the “financial cliff” which occurs following the withdrawal of substantial UN mission resources, funding is a key factor that can either drive competition or integration among UN actors, particularly during UN peacekeeping transitions.

Resourcing Transitions

Necessary to avoid the “financial cliff” which occurs following the withdrawal of substantial UN mission resources, funding is a key factor that can either drive competition or integration among UN actors, particularly during UN peacekeeping transitions. Stakeholders described to CIVIC how, when funding is scarce, UN actors can default to more competitive footing rather than searching for ways to integrate and make collective use of smaller pots of money. Conversely, better integration can be spurred when donors express interest in increasing voluntary funding to the UNCT to avoid protection cliffs during times of transition.¹¹⁴ Early inclusion of donors in transition conversations can thus help ensure there is voluntary funding available to support the kinds of joint programming that enables transition and avoids financing and programmatic gaps as missions withdraw. Collective funding instruments oriented toward common objectives, like multi-donor trust funds, can also incentivize cooperation.

In the case of the DRC, MONUSCO facilitated early conversations among UN actors, INGOs, and international financial institutions (IFIs) to encourage investment in areas like SSR and DDR that could support the Congolese government’s capacity to respond to physical protection needs.¹¹⁵ There has been interest and even commitment from IFIs in funding some of these projects.¹¹⁶ However, this has been delayed by a dissolution and reformation of government structures needed to oversee fund disbursement, as well as more general concerns about government corruption in overseeing transition-related projects.¹¹⁷

Upstream coordination on resourcing decisions is as important as aligning incentives and outreach to partners outside the UN system. For this reason, donors are one stakeholder group central to nexus coordination. In June 2023, MONUSCO hosted a three-day workshop bringing together relevant UN and non-UN agencies with donors to discuss the UN transition and the programmatic and financial needs likely to emerge during it.¹¹⁸ The UN also engages some donors through a “partner coordination group” co-chaired by the DSRSG RC/HC, during which transition planning conversations have taken place.¹¹⁹ However, those interviewed observed that earlier engagement with donors is needed. Moreover, in a familiar “chicken and egg” dilemma, donors find it difficult to help avoid funding cliffs on protection priorities unless UN actors have a unified vision and complete capacity and gap mapping further in advance of peacekeeper drawdowns.¹²⁰

Finally, donors can play a pivotal role in supporting integration by prioritizing funding for integrated efforts rather than individual projects, including multi-year funding focused on transition. They can also require joined-up analysis, data streams, and reporting.¹²¹ “It is helpful to have donors who push people to work together and make these connections themselves,” underscored a UN Secretariat official.¹²²

THE PEACEBUILDING FUND: DRIVING INTEGRATION AND SUPPORTING TRANSITION THROUGH FINANCING

The PBF was established in 2006 to pool voluntary donor contributions into one fund under the Secretary-General to address peacebuilding priorities. It is uniquely positioned to promote UN integration and help prevent financial cliffs for protection efforts as peacekeeping missions draw down. This is because the PBF is more risk tolerant than some donors, prioritizes gender sensitivity, is designed to encourage consortiums of UN actors applying for funds collectively, and has a stated focus on supporting programming in settings where the UN’s presence is undergoing significant changes or transitions. Thirty-five percent of PBF allocations have been prioritized for facilitating transitions during the 2020–2024 period, and the funds are meant to be catalytic and bridging—taking on higher risk or filling gaps while other donor interventions can be mobilized.¹²³

In the DRC context, PBF funds were approved to support nexus and transition programming in the Kasai and Tanganyika provinces. Participants interviewed by CIVIC agreed that the PBF funds helped avoid funding gaps during MONUSCO’s withdrawal from these areas and served as a stop-gap until other donor interest emerged. They also agreed it was better set up to encourage integration than many other financing streams.¹²⁴ One UN official further noted that the PBF aligns its funding streams with the UNSCDF and identified government priorities—actions that further promote the alignment of efforts.¹²⁵

While alignment with national priorities can be an asset, it can also be a limitation. PBF projects need to be officially requested and approved by national authorities. The UN therefore has less flexibility in directing funds toward UN transition priorities—and on ideal UN timelines—if these priorities and timelines are not shared by host states or host state attention is focused elsewhere. Also, despite PBF recognition of the growing need for funds to be available in transition contexts, the PBF is already unable to meet demand for its resources.¹²⁶

VIII. SUSTAINING POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT ON PROTECTION THREATS

Supported by research on the ‘primacy of politics’ and POC in UN peacekeeping – POC can be better anchored in the UN’s political objectives, within missions and beyond to other UN and partner entities in the region.¹²⁷ Dialogue about MONUSCO’s drawdown focus on avoiding physical protection gaps. However, UN guidance also recognizes the importance of political interventions and engagement in promoting the protection of civilians and the establishment of a protective environment. Individuals CIVIC interviewed warned that, in addition to the focus on avoiding physical protection gaps in the DRC, stakeholders need to consider how political engagement will be adequately sustained during MONUSCO’s peacekeeping transition and during other future transitions.¹²⁸ This imperative is particularly pressing given the stress that civil society leaders and DRC researchers place on the importance of resolving root causes of violence such as land grabbing, corruption, and the political economy around natural resource extraction.¹²⁹

MONUSCO’s transition, like other missions, benefits from various UN system offices engaged in dialogue and political engagement at the regional, national, and local levels. In Kinshasa, the MONUSCO SRSG leads high-level political engagement with support from MONUSCO’s Political Affairs Division (PAD) which can facilitate peace processes, promote active and structured dialogue with and among conflict actors, and advocate with government officials for support to the protection of civilians – all essential ahead of and during its drawdown.¹³⁰ Using their good offices role, these diplomats and experts can help anchor POC in the UN’s political objectives and joint transition priorities as MONUSCO did in 2022, while trying to pre-empt political backstopping from the rest of the UN system to help fill the UN’s political capacity gap which follows mission drawdowns, particularly when not succeeded by a special political mission.

Leveraging Regional Support for Transitions

Congo further benefits from an array of UN political assets in the region. Among these is a UN Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region in Nairobi with two important aspects to its mandate: the “United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region,” which provides the “overarching political umbrella for UN interventions while creating synergies for stronger impact on the ground.”¹³¹ In July 2023, the Special Envoy’s Office hosted a meeting that brought together MONUSCO, UN regional offices, UNCHR, and UN OCHA, among others, to identify priorities for concerted UN action in support of regional peace initiatives.¹³²

A second aspect of this mandate is that the Special Envoy co-chairs, with the AU, a Regional Oversight Mechanism established to oversee the implementation of a Peace, Security, and Cooperation (PSC) Framework agreement signed in 2013 for the DRC and the wider region, which includes the protection of civilians. In 2023, the Special Envoy and regional bodies endeavored to reinvigorate implementation of the PSC Framework¹³³ with weekly coordination meetings between the Special Envoy’s Office (OESG-GL) and MONUSCO Political Affairs. The Special Envoy and the SRSG conduct regular meetings¹³⁴ and often attend regional meetings together to present a joint UN presence. While valuable, this increased coordination and activity could have begun earlier in the mission’s transition. Interview participants cited need for more clarity on the role of different actors, a lack of coherence between and collaboration on different peace initiatives, and limited buy-in from the DRC government for political efforts to resolve ongoing armed group violence.¹³⁵

Stakeholders need to consider how political engagement will be adequately sustained during MONUSCO's peacekeeping transition and during other future transitions.



1 August 2022: Goma, North Kivu, DRC, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, the United Nations Under-Secretary-General in charge of Peace Operations accompanied by MONUSCO SRSB Bintou Keita, UN Military Adviser General Biame Diop, UN Police Adviser Commissioner Luís Carrilho, visited Goma after MONUSCO was targeted by violent anti-UN protests the past week and there was a loss of life. The delegation attended a memorial service for those who lost their lives in the protest.

Regional offices like these can help consolidate political support outside the UN system, such as with the secretariat of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and various regional heads of state who have taken on prominent roles in trying to negotiate ceasefires and peace processes to resolve ongoing armed group activity both bilaterally and through the auspices of the African Union (AU), East African Community, and South African Development Community.

Given the prominent role regional politics play in determining the security environment in the DRC, as both security actors in country, directly or by proxy, and as sponsors of peace initiatives such as the Nairobi Process, the full capability of the UN system's regional expertise and partnerships should mobilize to support the people of DRC as MONUSCO draws down. By understanding civilian protection as a core of the UN's strategic regional approach, and as a shared responsibility and priority rather than a standalone technical activity led by MONUSCO alone, the UN can better create entry points for embedding POC into political agreements, protection plans, and regional strategies with greater, mutually reinforcing support from regional actors.

Consolidating Integrated Political Support for POC in Transitions

As the UN's physical protection capacities in Eastern DRC shrink, one of the most pressing questions is how the UN can use its political mechanisms – including MONUSCO's political affairs division in Kinshasa and the Special Envoy in Nairobi – to advocate for POC. It also means ensuring sufficient space for other UN actors and their partners, including those working on protection, to be fully empowered advocates for civilians at risk, included in strategic planning, resourcing, and coordination.

At the time of CIVIC's research, participants noted that efforts to consider how to reinforce the political engagement capabilities of UN actors during MONUSCO's transition were not very advanced and that there was a need for increased focus on sustaining and advancing political engagement for protection during transition planning.¹³⁶ The UNCT is not oriented toward political engagement on underlying protection concerns or concerns that arise from protection monitoring.¹³⁷ Commenting on this, a MONUSCO official observed: "For the UNCT, it will be also a change of approach."¹³⁸

However, UNCTs and HCTs tend to have more experience with human rights as a means for addressing protection vulnerabilities. While JHRO has more of a focus on linking protection concerns with good offices and OHCHR will remain in the DRC, part of their ability to mobilize political engagement has come from the direct line that JHRO officials have to MONUSCO's leadership in high-level coordination meetings—a tool that will disappear with the Mission's departure.¹³⁹ In this regard, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva could be more frequently leveraged to engage on human rights risks in the DRC. The UN Group of Experts, which for example in 2022, found that Rwanda launched military interventions inside Congolese territory to reinforce M23 operations, also have an important continuing role in informing political dialogue regarding instances or trends of civilian harm.¹⁴⁰

In other places, special political missions have succeeded peacekeeping missions to help address some of these potential gaps. There does not currently appear to be political will for such a follow-on special political mission in the DRC, but it remains a strong and viable option as part of peacekeeping transitions in other contexts. For the DRC, the capabilities and staffing of the OSESG-GL could be expanded to help it close some of the expected political gaps that could affect protection efforts. The Special Envoy is currently based in Nairobi, and his Office's regional orientation has benefits for addressing cross-border drivers and other aspects of the conflict. However, a strengthened political role for the Special Envoy's office in the DRC as part of the peacekeeping transition would likely necessitate an expanded presence

By understanding civilian protection as a core of the UN's strategic regional approach, and as a shared responsibility and priority rather than a standalone technical activity led by MONUSCO alone, the UN can better create entry points for embedding POC into political agreements, protection plans, and regional strategies with greater, mutually reinforcing support from regional actors.

of the Special Envoy's Office in Kinshasa and Goma, as well as an adjusted mandate.¹⁴¹

Moreover, CIVIC's research across peace operations countries and contexts indicates that building a more operational link between protection analysis and political engagement by an entity like the Special Envoy's Office will likely be challenging and require sustained engagement by Member States to help establish.

Practically, the UN Secretariat and Member States could also consider—in the DRC and similar transition scenarios—whether limited specialized capacities, such as political advisors, can be embedded in the RCOs. The Joint UNDP-DPPA Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention, which deploys peace and development advisors to RCOs in non-mission settings, could be relevant in this regard, and additional coordination capacity within the RCOs could facilitate integration and transition planning. Furthermore, the UN could consider seconding specialized advisors on issues like protection and gender to regional political initiatives like the ICGLR. MONUSCO's political engagement also benefits from strong Mission analysis on political and conflict dynamics, notably from the Mission's Joint Mission Analysis Center (JMAC). Empowering Special Envoys or RCOs to engage more actively around the root causes of protection concerns or emerging protection threats might also require building the analytical capacity of their offices.

The August 2, 2023, Secretary-General's report offering options for the future configuration of MONUSCO and other UN actors after the Mission's withdrawal identified similar concerns and recommendations. It noted, for example, that the UNCT could draw on the good offices of the OSESG-GL to support their work, but that the analytical capacity of the OSESG-GL might need to be enhanced. Additionally, it recommended that the RCO establish greater field presence.¹⁴²

UNCT members should consider how to enhance their own capacity to support and sustain dialogue among actors instigating violence at local levels, including by supporting civil–military dialogues in partnership with INGOs with expertise in this sector. These activities could be part of efforts to strengthen the peacebuilding component of integrated activities.

Finally, as CIVIC noted during MONUSCO's 2022 mandate renewal¹⁴³, the Security Council may also have a continuing role, even after MONUSCO's departure, in periodic updates to the Council, in considerations for follow on political or peacebuilding mission, or in coordinating attention and support with other UN bodies, such as the Peacebuilding Commission – proposals which have also been discussed in the UN's Common Agenda and New Agenda for Peace reform initiatives.

IX. CONCLUSION

Peace operation transitions are a critical moment for countries affected by or emerging from conflict. If they are not executed well, or there is inadequate will and capacity from host nations to strengthen their protection of civilians efforts, civilians can be left without needed protection from ongoing or resurging violence. Funding for protection interventions can drop dramatically, as well, and UNCT and humanitarian actors can rapidly lose access to insecure or remote areas of the country. The UN recognizes the importance of early transition planning and the need for the whole UN system to transform as missions exit to support host nation protection efforts and avoid, as much as possible, gaps in protection and programming that could have dire consequences for civilians. Strong integration among actors across the UN system can facilitate joint transition planning as well as progressive and successful transformation.

As the situation in the DRC demonstrates, UN actors are likely to encounter a range of challenges that make it difficult to achieve these overarching aims. Challenges can be driven by the political imperatives and priorities of the host state, capacity gaps at the UN headquarters or field level, and differences in the mandates and working cultures of UN actors. To leverage UN integration for protection in peacekeeping transitions, CIVIC's research indicates a need for earlier and more detailed efforts to map and resolve protection gaps and capacities—including in the specialized protection functions missions support, like child protection and women protection. Mapping should extend to understanding how the loss of mission logistical and security enablers will affect protection efforts after mission exit.

An increased focus on the sustainability of physical protection mechanisms should proceed in parallel, aiming to improve how the UN system responds to escalating violence against civilians in the absence of peacekeepers—including through political dialogue and engagement from the community level to national and regional capitals. Joint programming between UN actors too often stops at superficial levels and should take into account peace operation transitions in their planning phases. Donors can support better UN integration, and the Peacebuilding Fund can be an important vehicle for it in times of transition. The nexus approach can also complement transitions by supporting shared analysis and joined-up approaches to protection challenges across humanitarian, development, and peace actors.



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November 2021: Aerial views of gold mining areas in the region of the town of Kilo, Ituri Province, where fighting has renewed between Congolese Army troops and CODECO rebels. The Ituri conflict is a complex humanitarian crisis that has caused massive displacement in the Democratic Republic of Congo. A resurgence of violence has seen attacks and human rights violations committed by armed groups operating under the name CODECO and over 1.7 million people forced to flee their homes. The United Nations Joint Human Rights Office has said attacks in the region may constitute crimes against humanity.

ENDNOTES

- 1 "Kivu Security Tracker," <https://kivusecurity.org/map>, accessed October 26, 2023.
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- 33 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #10, remote call to Goma, June 2023; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #67, Kinshasa, September 2023; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #86, Goma, September 2023.
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- 38 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #5, remote call to Kinshasa, June 2023; CIVIC interview with UN official, #9, remote call, June 2023.
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- 40 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #24, remote call to Kinshasa, July 2023.
- 41 CIVIC interview with UN official, #1, New York, June 2023; CIVIC interview with UN official, #8, remote call to Kinshasa, June 2023; CIVIC interview with UN official, #73, Kinshasa, September 2023.
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- 44 In feedback on a draft version of this report, MONUSCO officials stressed that high-level dialogue with the government has been underway and that progress has been made on these fronts since the time of CIVIC's research and following the conclusion of the Secretary-General's report on Options for Adapting the Configuration of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Future of the United Nations Configuration in the Country Beyond the Current Mandate of the Mission (UN Doc. S/2023/574). However, given CIVIC's research process, which relies on in-depth interviews across stakeholder groups and triangulation, we were unable to continuously update our research to take into account these ongoing developments. Moreover, the lessons from this process for other missions remain important and relevant. CIVIC interview with UN official, #1, New York, June 2023; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #5, remote call to Kinshasa, June 2023; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #20, New York, July 2023; CIVIC interview with UN official, #30, remote call to Kinshasa, July 2023; CIVIC interview with UN official, #35, remote call to Kinshasa, July 2023; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #38, remote call to Kinshasa, July 2023; CIVIC interview with member of the protection cluster, #47, remote call to Goma, August 2023.
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- 46 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #41, remote call to Kalemie, July 2023.
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- 50 CIVIC interview with UN official, #6, remote to New York, June 2023; CIVIC interview with UN official, #12, remote call to New York, June 2023; CIVIC interview with UN official, #13, remote call to New York, June 2023; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #38, remote call to Kinshasa, July 2023; CIVIC interview with UN official, #51, remote call to New York, August 2023.
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- 52 CIVIC interview with UN official, #9, Remote, June 2023; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #26, remote to Bukavu, July 2023; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #29, remote to New York, July 2023; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #41, remote to Kalemie, July 2023.
- 53 CIVIC interview with UN official, #13, remote call to New York, June 2023.
- 54 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #38, remote call to Kinshasa, July 2023; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #67, Kinshasa, September 2023; CIVIC interview with diplomat, #75, Kinshasa, September 2023; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO

- civilian official, #87, Goma, September 2023; CIVIC interview with diplomat, #90, Goma, September 2023.
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- 56 See, for example, UNSC, Options for adapting the configuration of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the future United Nations configuration in the country beyond the current mandate of the Mission," UN Doc. S/2023/574 (August 2, 2023).
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- 62 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #10, remote call to Goma, June 2023; CIVIC interview with Congolese government official, #49, remote call to Kalemie, August 2023; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian officer, #61, Kinshasa, September 2023; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO uniformed official, #72, Kinshasa, September 2023; CIVIC interview with UN official, #92, Goma, September 2023; communication via e-mail with UN and MONUSCO officials, October 2023.
- 63 CIVIC interview with member of the protection cluster, #23, remote call to Kinshasa, July 2023; CIVIC interview with Congolese government official, #49, remote call to Kalemie, July 2023; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #87, Goma, September 2023.
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- 79 CIVIC interview with UN official, #1, New York, June 2023; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #20, New York, June 2023; CIVIC interview with UN official, #84, Kinshasa, September 2023.
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- 84 CIVIC interview with UN official, #1, New York June 2023; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #5, remote call to Kinshasa, June 2023; CIVIC interview with UN official, #14, remote call to Kinshasa, June 2023; CIVIC interview with researcher, #15, remote call to New York, June 2023; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #26, remote call to Bukavu, July 2023; CIVIC interview with UN official, #27, remote call to Kinshasa, July 2023; CIVIC interview with UN official, #29, remote call to New York, July 2023; CIVIC interview with humanitarian, #34, remote call to Goma, July 2023.
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- 86 CIVIC interview with interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #5, remote call to Kinshasa, June 2023; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #26, remote call to Bukavu, July 2023; CIVIC interview with UN official, #27, remote call to Kinshasa, July 2023; CIVIC interview with UN official, #51, remote call to New York, August 2023.
- 87 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #5, remote call to Kinshasa, June 2023.
- 88 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #26, remote call to Bukavu, July 2023.
- 89 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #41, remote call to Kalemie, July 2023.
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- 92 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #5, remote call to Kinshasa, June 2023; CIVIC interview with UN official, #30, remote call to Kinshasa, July 2023; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #88, Goma, September 2023; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #94, Goma, September 2023.
- 93 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #88, remote to Kinshasa, September 2023; CIVIC communication via e-mail with UN officials.
- 94 CIVIC interview with UN official, #6, remote call to New York, June 2023; CIVIC interview with UN official, #51, remote call to New York, August 2023; CIVIC interview with former MONUSCO civilian official, #58, remote call to Geneva, August 2023.
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- 96 Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "Country Brief on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus: Democratic Republic of the Congo," August 16, 2021.
- 97 CIVIC interview with UN officials, #17 and #25, remote calls, July 2023.
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- 103 CIVIC interviews UN officials, #12 and #13, remote calls to New York, June 2023; CIVIC interview with UN official, #30, remote call to Kinshasa, July 2023; CIVIC interview with researcher, #32, remote call to London, July 2023; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #38, remote call to Kinshasa, July 2023.
- 104 CIVIC interview with UN official, #1, New York, June 2023; CIVIC interview with UN official #9, remote call, June 2023; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #10, remote call to Goma, June 2023.
- 105 CIVIC interview with UN official, #48, remote call to Goma, August 2023.
- 106 CIVIC interview with UN official, #12, remote call to New York, June 2023; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #28, remote call to Kinshasa, July 2023.
- 107 CIVIC interview with UN official, #6, remote call to New York, June 2023; CIVIC interview with researcher, #15, remote call to New York, June 2023; CIVIC interview with UN official, #30, remote call to Kinshasa, July 2023; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #83, Kinshasa, September 2023.
- 108 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #10, remote call to Goma, June 2023; CIVIC interview with UN official, #30, remote call to Kinshasa, July 2023.

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- 110 CIVIC interview with UN official, #35, remote call to Kinshasa, July 2023; CIVIC interview with UN official, #73, Kinshasa, September 2023; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #93, Goma, September 2023.
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- 114 CIVIC interview with UN official, #1, New York, June 2023; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #5, remote to Kinshasa, June 2023; CIVIC interview with researcher, #15, remote call to New York, June 2023; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #39, remote call to Goma, July 2023; CIVIC interview with former MONUSCO civilian official, #58, remote call to Geneva, July 2023.
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19 November 2021: Beni, North Kivu, DR Congo. MONUSCO handed over to the FARDC a military camp built in the locality of Kididiwe, once a stronghold of ADF rebels. The Congolese army will now hold a permanent position there as it conducts operations against armed groups in the Beni region with the support of MONUSCO.