

## **Research topic:**

DisplacedLink: Designing an Inclusive, Multilingual Family Reconnection and Emotional Support Platform for Displaced Communities in Eastern DRC

## **Problem Statement**

As of early, over 7 million people are internally displaced in the Democratic Republic of Congo, with many others having fled to neighboring countries due to insecurity (UNHCR, 2025). The instability of security has resulted in family separation, emotional trauma, and long-term psychological and social consequences, especially among youth. Although reconnecting the family members and supporting the emotional recovery of those affected, the existing solutions did not effectively address the harsh realities faced by vulnerable populations.

Existing platforms such as REFUNITE (REFUNITE, 2024) and Trace the Face (ICRC, 2022) focus primarily on tracing and connecting families. However, they fall short in some areas. They both offer limited local language options. Importantly, none of the apps have psychological or emotional support features, leaving displaced individuals, especially youth, without emotional care or access to emotional care as they navigate the trauma of separation and loss.

DisplacedLink aims to bridge this gap by providing a user-friendly, multilingual platform that reconnects separated families and provides basic emotional support to the displaced communities in eastern DRC.

## **Casual Map**

The casual map below shows how the war in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) led to the separation of families and how this separation affects people's mental health. It helps to understand the interconnections between these problems. Therefore, understanding the connections between problems will help us to design a better solution, like building a platform that will help in reuniting families and providing mental health support.

The armed conflict in eastern DRC has caused many people to flee their homes because of violence, destroyed homes, and fear for their lives. As people escape, families are separated; some are killed, and others run in different directions. When families are separated like this, the loss of family members and the loss of support they normally rely on make them more likely to suffer from stress, sadness, depression, and trauma. Beyond the pain of separation, war survivors find it hard to heal due to the lack of mental health care and family reunion options, especially in isolated danger zones.

Figure 1: Causal Map Showing the Impact of Armed Conflict on Family Separation and Mental Health in Eastern DRC.



This diagram shows how armed groups in eastern DRC cause displacement of many people and family separation and how it contributes to mental health disorders such as PTSD, anxiety, and depression. It shows the chain of cause-and-effect relationships that deepen individual vulnerability and reduce social reintegration.

This causal map shows a clear picture of how war in Eastern DRC triggers a series of events that cause serious mental health problems, mainly due to the separation of families. Therefore, it shows clearly why it's urgent to find solutions that support both family reunification and mental health healing. In response to this, the DisplacedLink platform seeks to break this chain by using technology to reconnect family members and provide mental health support that respects local culture and beliefs.

## Literature

This section reviews ten carefully selected sources that inform the design and development of an inclusive digital platform to reunite separated families and support their emotional well-being. The amount of information from these resources shows clearly why this matter needs an urgent solution.

Source Link	Publication year	Author(s)	Title	Strengths	Area for Improvement
<a href="#">Link</a>	May 6, 2025	UNHCR	UNHCR and partners seek funding as Congolese refugee numbers soar	<p>This resource provides current statistics (as of May) on displacement in the DRC.</p> <p>This article shows the cause of displacement, funding gaps, which shows the urgency of the matter.</p>	<p>This article focuses on the need for funding rather than individual experiences or localized trauma.</p> <p>This article didn't explore the mental health of displaced people.</p>
<a href="#">Link</a>	2025	UNHCR	Democratic Republic of the Congo situation	<p>This resource provides various aspects of the displacement problem, including internal and external migration.</p> <p>This resource provides detailed insights specific to the DRC, which aligns with my research</p>	<p>This resource lacks personal stories and psychological impact assessments.</p> <p>This article talked about displacement in general; however, it did not talk about the harsh reality of the refugees, like trauma and violence.</p>

				topic of displaced communities in eastern DRC.	
<a href="#">Link</a>	October 16, 2024	Sam Mednick and Ruth Alonga	Years of war in Congo have created a dire mental health crisis. But little support is available.	<p>This resource offers recent insights into the mental health crisis in eastern DRC.</p> <p>Furthermore, the resource includes real stories and quotes from the affected individuals.</p>	<p>This resource didn't show a deep statistical analysis of peer-reviewed references.</p> <p>Furthermore, it focuses on a few regions and personal narratives.</p>
<a href="#">Link</a>	October 2010	Cindy Mels, Ilse Derluyn, Eric Broekaert, Yves Rosseel	The psychological impact of forced displacement and related risk factors on Eastern Congolese adolescents affected by war	<p>This resource provides data-driven insights into the mental health of adolescents in conflict areas.</p> <p>The study in this resource focuses on the eastern DRC and provides highly relevant findings to my research.</p>	<p>The study in this resource focused on adolescents only, instead of focusing on different gender groups.</p> <p>The participants are young, and their answers may not be accurate due to the sensitivity of the topic.</p>
<a href="#">Link</a>	January 5, 2024	Paulin Beya Wa Bitadi Mutombo, Genese Lolimo Lobukulu, Rebecca Walker	Mental healthcare among displaced Congolese: policy and stakeholders' analysis	This resource focuses on provinces heavily affected by displacement, ensuring the findings are based on the realities of the	Although it offers advice on improving mental health, it didn't go deep into the barriers to putting into action that advice, like political will.

				<p>most impacted regions.</p> <p>It contains statistical data and citations, which increase its reliability.</p> <p>It offers advice on how to improve mental health, like training community workers.</p>	<p>Findings are from specific provinces, which may not be generalizable to other provinces.</p>
<a href="#">Link</a>	April 18, 2023	Stephan Taylor, Laurent Mavinga, Moise Bashiga	Unbracketing the multiplicity of trauma in North Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo	<p>This resource shows clearly how people experience and deal with trauma, making the findings very relevant to that area.</p> <p>It questions the general approaches to trauma and suggests the need for solutions that better fit the local cultures and situations.</p>	<p>This resource provides more complex ideas and theories that require a high level of academic thinking.</p> <p>It is more about ideas and stories than examples and data from the field.</p>
<a href="#">Link</a>	November 8, 2021	UNICEF DRC	Reuniting Families Split by Violence	<p>It shows the difficulties faced by humanitarian workers in finding and reuniting family members, which aligns</p>	<p>There is no information on the well-being of the reunited families.</p>

				with my research.	
<a href="#">Link</a>	September 14, 2017	International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).	Democratic Republic of Congo: Children enduring war and family Separation	The use of personal stories affected by family separation deepens the understanding of challenges faced by affected children.	It focuses on individual cases without statistical data, limiting the understanding of the overall scale of the family separations in the DRC.
<a href="#">Link</a>	November 29, 2023	Kateryna Karhina, Tormod Bøe, Mari Hysing, Sondre Aasen Nilsen	Parental separation, negative life events, and mental health problems in adolescence	The study used information from many younger people, making the findings more useful and trustworthy.	The research was conducted in Norway, a country with good social support. The results may not be the same in other countries with low social support.
<a href="#">Link</a>	2023	Omar Ali-Naqvi, Tameem A. Alburak, Kavi Selvan, Hoda Abdelmeguid, and Manisha S.	Exploring the Impact of Family Separation on Refugee Mental Health: A Systematic Review and Meta-narrative Analysis.	It looks at multiple mental health problems instead of looking at one.  It includes a lot of data from different countries and refugee situations.	It didn't focus on eastern DRC, which makes its findings more general instead of being local.  It excludes children under 15 years old, yet younger children are highly affected by family separation.