



Migration profile

Democratic Republic of the Congo

A. Executive Summary

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is the largest country in Sub-Saharan Africa and is located in central Africa. It gained its independence from Belgium in 1960.ⁱ It is a country rich in natural resources like minerals and has significant arable land, hydropower potential, immense biodiversity, and the world's largest rainforest. Over the years, the country has suffered from civil wars, corruption, and widespread civilian suffering. From 1998 to 2003 the Second Congo War took place claiming up to six million lives as a result of violence, as well as diseases and malnutrition.ⁱⁱ

Until the 1980s, the DRC was the main destination for economic migrants, mostly coming from the Central African Republic, Rwanda, Angola, South Sudan, and Burundi.ⁱⁱⁱ However, armed conflicts and the economic downturn also turned the DRC into an emigrant country.^{iv} The foreign population is mostly made up of refugees, asylum seekers and other displaced communities. In 2022, 515,800 persons with refugee status and 2,701 asylum seekers were registered in the DRC. Their leading countries of origin were Rwanda, the Central African Republic, South Sudan, Burundi, and the Republic of the Congo.^v Most of them lived in precarious conditions in border areas near the Ubangi River. They also lacked shelter and access to clean water, sufficient food or sanitation facilities.^{vi}

The DRC's conflicts produced thousands of internally displaced persons. In 2022, 5,338,418 IDPs were registered in the eastern provinces of Ituri, North and South Kivu, and the Kasaid region.^{vii} Furthermore, in 2021 natural disasters caused the displacement of 888,136 people.^{viii} Many others have fled the country. In 2022, 909,850 asylum seekers crossed over to Angola, Burundi, the Republic of the Congo, and Rwanda.^{ix} In 2020, the United Nations registered 1,684,615 DRC emigrants abroad, mainly in Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, the Republic of the Congo, and Angola.^x

The DRC is among the five poorest nations in the world. In 2021, nearly 64% of Congolese lived on less than \$2.15 a day. The mining sector, investment, and exports remain the key-economy drivers, and its growth is also supported by improved mineral prices and higher public investment.^{xi} In 2021, the DRC's GDP amounted to US\$ 55,350,968,590, experiencing an annual growth rate of 6.2% compared to 1.7% in the previous year. According to the latest available data (2016), the inflation rate was 2.9% of its GDP. As far as foreign direct investment, in 2021 it represented 3% of the DRC's GDP.^{xii}

B. Country Profile

I. Basic Information

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is located at the centre of the African continent, sharing borders with Angola, the Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic, South Sudan, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania, and Zambia.^{xiii} It is the largest country in Sub-Saharan Africa. It also has the second-largest forest on earth and unique natural resources.^{xiv} It is administratively divided into 26 provinces.^{xv}

It has an area of 2,267,050 sq. km and a population of 101,301,484.^{xvi} Kinshasa is the capital and largest city.^{xvii} French is the official language, but there are four other national languages: Lingala, Kingwana, Kikongo, and Tshiluba. In addition, dozens of local languages and dialects are spoken.^{xviii} There is no official religion. About 90% of the population is Christian (mainly Catholic), and other religions include indigenous beliefs and Islam.^{xix xx} There are more than 200 ethnic groups, and Bantu is the major one. Within the Bantu population, the four largest groups are included: Mongo, Luba, Kongo, and Mangbetu-Azande. Other minor groups comprise Moru, Pygmies, and European Congolese.^{xxi xxii}

II. International and Internal Migration

According to the UN International Migrant Stock estimates, as of 2020, there were 952,871 foreigners (1.02% of the country's population) living in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Among them, 459,052 (48.18% of the stock) were male, and 493,819 (51.82% of the stock) were female. Their most represented countries of origin were the Central African Republic (323,269 people, 33.93% of the stock), Rwanda (251,333 people, 26.38% of the stock), Angola (177,028 people, 18.58% of the stock), South Sudan (90,971 people, 9.55% of the stock), and Burundi (59,145 people, 6.21% of the stock).^{xxiii}

These figures provide a global image of the DRC's migrant population: the first stock is formed by people arriving from neighbouring Centre or Eastern African countries, and then a second stock which is certainly limited in volume but not insignificant. The DRC has been, in recent history, an important destination for economic migrants arriving from other African nations up until the early 1980s. Since then, the country's economic downturn and several armed conflicts have made it a less attractive place and turned it from an immigration to an emigration country. As a matter of fact, the size of its migrant stock has decreased overtime.^{xxiv} In 1990 immigrants were 2.1% of the DRC's population; by 2005, they were 1.1%, and in 2020, they had further reduced to 1.02%.^{xxv} A significant majority of the aforementioned migrant stock is also composed of refugees and asylum seekers rather than proper economic or voluntary international migrants.^{xxvi}

Thus, international migration inflows are a reduced, not-so-relevant, largely unnoticed phenomenon in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and have been that way for quite some time now. There is no updated information available pertaining to the condition of the immigrant residents in the country.

Regarding internal migration, data is also scarce. There has been a consistent pattern of rural-to-urban migration, and the urbanisation process has also been remarkable in the country over the last decades. This phenomenon has especially affected Kinshasa, the capital city, in terms of population growth.^{xxvii} According to the World Development Indicators (WDI) estimates, the urban population of the DRC doubled from 16.5 million in 2000 to 35.7 million in 2017, showing an average of 1.1 million increase per year, with the urbanisation rate growing from 35% to 44%.^{xxviii}

III. Emigration and Skilled Migration

In 2020, there were 1,684,615 DRC citizens recorded abroad (1.9% of the total population). Their leading destination countries were Uganda (315,753), Rwanda (248,670), Burundi (185,833), Congo (175,608), and Angola (92,242). 50.6% were female emigrants.^{xxxix}

Although most of them moved within Africa, the DRC has also been experiencing significant movements to Belgium, France, and other European countries.^{xxx} In particular, Lubumbashi, a mining town situated close to the border with Zambia, has been a preferred destination of many different migration flows.^{xxxi}

In 2019 the total percentage of Congolese working-age migrants was 71.4%, with 1.7 million people potentially employed or self-employed, especially in the informal sector (where migrants mostly find an occupation), but also in other departments, like light and heavy industry, health care, and retail businesses.^{xxxii}

The main push factors were the lack of economic development and political instability, as well as humanitarian reasons.^{xxxiii} The Diaspora program was created to facilitate, support, and enhance the role of diasporas as effective agents of humanitarian assistance, recovery and development.^{xxxiv} In 2016, the Ministry of Employment, Labour and Social Security requested the support of the EC-funded MIEUX programme to develop a draft Diaspora Mobilisation Policy. However, it has yet to be endorsed by all of the other government institutions.^{xxxv}

IV. Forced Migrants (Internally Displaced Persons, Asylum Seekers, Refugees, and Climate Displaced Persons)

In 2022, 515,800 persons with refugee status and 2,701 asylum seekers were registered in the DRC. They mainly came from Rwanda (40.73%), the Central African Republic (CAR) (40.14%), South Sudan (10.92%), Burundi (7.99%), and the Republic of the Congo (0.12%).^{xxxvi} People flee their countries of origin because of violence and social unrest.^{xxxvii} Since December 2020, more than 92,000 refugees have fled the Central African Republic due to violent attacks.^{xxxviii} ^{xxxix} Most of the people coming from there were living in precarious conditions at the DRC border near the Ubangi River, although some of them have been relocated to safer areas. Riverside refugees lacked shelter, access to clean water, sanitation facilities, and sufficient food.^{xl} As of August 2022, more than 80% of the CAR refugees were biometrically registered, and many received refugee cards.^{xli}

The DRC law recognises refugee and asylum seeker status, and the government has established a system to protect refugees. Legislation also allows for some flexibility, granting the most basic rights to refugees and citizens on an equal footing. Between January and August 2022, the local government in collaboration with UNHCR helped 7,480 persons with their voluntary repatriation, including 1,402 refugees from Rwanda, 2,726 refugees from Burundi, and 3,350 refugees from the Central African Republic.^{xlii}

Furthermore, since 2021 the Democratic Republic of the Congo has been experiencing one of the longest crises in its history, with an alarming upsurge in violence carried out by armed groups, causing the death of civilians and triggering massive and repeated forced displacement of hundreds of thousands of people.^{xliii} ^{xliv} In 2022, 5,338,418 IDPs were

registered in the eastern provinces of Ituri, North and South Kivu, and the Kasaid region.^{xlvi} These figures have already increased to 6,618,704 by March 2023.^{xlvi xlvii}

In this context of conflict and violence, safety has substantially decreased, due to attacks, robberies, intimidation, and acts of violence, causing many humanitarian activities in these provinces to be suspended, endangering the Congolese population, and increasing food insecurity.^{xlvi}

Natural disasters related to floods, storms, volcanic activity, and wet mass movement have also caused the internal displacement of the population. By the end of 2021, 888,136 people were displaced because of these natural events.^{xlvi}

Finally, by 2022, 909,850 people moved out from the DRC seeking asylum in neighbouring countries. Most of them were hosted in Angola, Burundi, the Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania, and Zambia.^l By March 2023, this figure had already reached 520,951 people.^{li} In many countries, refugee settlements are over capacity, and basic services in refugee-hosting areas are stretched to the limit. Food insecurity is also a growing concern due to rising prices and funding shortages. As a result, refugees are increasingly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, and resort more frequently to harmful coping strategies to meet their basic needs.^{lii liii}

V. Victims of Human Trafficking

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is Tier 2 in the U.S. Trafficking in Persons Report because it does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking, but it is making significant efforts to do so. Most trafficking is internal and involves sex and forced labour in artisanal mining sites, agriculture, domestic servitude, and armed group recruitment of children in combat and support roles. Traffickers drug children and force them to beg in Kasai and Kinshasa. Armed groups recruit Congolese adults and children as soldiers and human shields. Some also force women and girls into marriage or sexual slavery. Other children are exploited by using them in espionage, as combatants and informants. Individuals associated with the mining sector abuse children in forced labour in the illegal extraction of gold, copper, diamonds, and other matters, as well as in the smuggling business of minerals to Uganda, Burundi, Rwanda, the United Arab Emirates, and Tanzania.^{liv}

Traffickers recruit children victims by promising them educational or employment opportunities and then exploit them in forced labour or sex trafficking. Community and family members also force children across the border to steal or commit other crimes. The Kinshasa region is a source for sex trafficking victims, with criminal networks and community members facilitating the movement of women and girls. The approximately five million Internally Displaced Persons in the country are vulnerable to trafficking due to their lack of financial stability and access to justice. Furthermore, Congolese women and children migrants are exploited in sex trafficking or forced labour in agriculture, diamond mines, or domestic servitude in other African countries, in the Middle East, and in Europe. Individuals associated with a construction company in Kinshasa may have even exploited Indian and Pakistani workers in forced labour in the DRC. Traffickers confiscated their passports, controlled their movements and withheld their salaries.^{lv}

In 2021, officials investigated five trafficking cases, initiated prosecution of at least one alleged trafficker, and convicted four traffickers and one complicit official. Two were sex traffickers coming from the People’s Republic of China, one was a police officer who was imprisoned for child sex trafficking, and another was an ex-rebel leader sentenced to life-in-prison for crimes against humanity, including child soldiering.

This year, the government identified 256 victims, including 15 forced labour victims, 86 sex trafficking victims, and 15 victims of an unknown form of trafficking. They all received attention and care: some received medical assistance, psycho-social support, legal aid, and socioeconomic reintegration services from the government. Victims usually accessed NGO-run shelters, providing professional services to them. Moreover, the government offered repatriation support to 12 potential trafficking victims. It continued implementing its 2020-2024 anti-trafficking national action plan and carrying out its national awareness-raising campaign to social workers, labour inspectors, and the general population about the dangers of human trafficking. It also established a hotline and trained government authorities on identification and referral procedures. However, on some occasions, officials fined trafficking victims for their irregular stay in the country or for unlawful acts traffickers forced them to commit. Corruption and government complicity in human trafficking remains a real concern in the country. During the Covid-19 pandemic, protection services and shelter were limited.^{lvi}

VI. National Legal Framework

The DRC Citizenship regime is regulated by provisions contained in the Constitution, the Congolese Nationality Code, and the Congolese Civil Code, as well as bilateral agreements and international treaties to which the country is a party.^{lvii} These provisions enlist the requirements needed to obtain the status of a DRC national. Section 32 of the Constitution recognises the rights of migrants, and section 33 grants further rights to asylum seekers and refugees.^{lviii} Nevertheless, the government has not yet developed a clear and efficient migration policy and lacks a solid legal framework on migratory issues.^{lix}

The Congolese Law criminalises all forms of sex trafficking and some forms of labour trafficking. However, the lack of a comprehensive anti-trafficking legal framework continues to exacerbate officials’ limited understanding of trafficking and their conflation of the offence with other crimes, such as illegal international adoption. Article 174 of the 2006 Sexual Violence Law criminalises child sex trafficking and prescribes against it jail-time charges.^{lx}

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is a party to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. However, it has not yet acceded to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. The DRC is a party to the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention, the 1993 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (1996), the Protocols against the Smuggling of Migrants and Human Trafficking (2005), and the Kampala Convention on IDPs in Africa (2016). Additionally, it has signed the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1976); and the 1990 Convention on the Rights of the Child.^{lxi}

VII. Main Actors

The State

The Ministry of the Interior and Security is responsible for the identification and census of the population, deals with border control policy and grants refugee status in collaboration with the National Refugee Commission. The National Refugee Commission processes asylum applications and ensures the protection of refugees.^{lxii}

The General Directorate for Migration (GDM) within the Ministry of the Interior and Security is the main government institution handling migration policies. It controls and regulates movements of the national and foreign population, issues passports and visas, and coordinates the border police. The GDM operates in reserved locations at border crossings and border areas, particularly in the sectors of counterintelligence and management of migratory flows.^{lxiii}

The Customs and Excise Office deals with customs clearance formalities for import and export goods, general surveillance of exits from the customs area as well as the unloading of goods, control at the outset of commercial exports made by migrants, formalities concerning the obligation to declare goods, the application and collection on the arrival of duties and taxes on goods, control aimed at detecting illicit traffic and forbidden imports, control of warehouses and customs clearance areas, and customs clearance of packages imported by individuals.^{lxiv}

The Congolese Control Office is responsible for checking the quality, quantity, and prices of goods and products exported and imported, as well as the certification of the condition of goods and products meant for consumption. The Public Hygiene Service oversees the border health control.^{lxv}

The Central Directorate of the Border Police to the National Police ensures the security and maintenance of public order at border crossing points, physical border surveillance to fight against the phenomena of irregular migration and organised cross-border crime, the channelling of migrants to official border crossing points, the support of all other services in case of problems threatening public order, and the search for common law offences. The Central Directorate of the Border Police of the Congolese National Police supports these services and ensures the protection and physical surveillance of the borders.^{lxvi}

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has created a Vice-Ministry for Congolese Nationals Abroad, which is responsible for monitoring emigration issues. The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare issues work permits for migrants and deals with employment policy. The Ministry of Justice regulates issues of nationality and naturalisation and collaborates with Interpol forces. The Ministry of Social Affairs deals with the reintegration of child soldiers and other vulnerable groups. It is also responsible for humanitarian issues.^{lxvii}

International Organisations

The UNHCR Democratic Republic of the Congo Country Office provides protection and assistance to all those forced to flee from their homeland and to people at risk of statelessness within the country. UNHCR works in close collaboration with the DRC government to find long-term solutions to forced displacement and strengthen refugees' self-reliance, and that of internally displaced people, and of the host communities. In collaboration with the National Refugee Commission, UNHCR assists asylum seekers who have recently arrived from the Central African Republic living in the Inke camp.^{lxviii} UNHCR and the International Committee for Emergency Aid and Development organise community awareness-raising

sensitisation for refugees and host communities in North and South Ubangi. Both actors built shelters, including transitional ones, in collaboration with local groups of artisans and carpenters coming from the refugee community and residing in the North and South Ubangi Territories. In North Ubangi, UNHCR, thanks to one of its partners, World Vision, repaired boreholes in the Inke camp.^{lxix}

Due to the crises and conflicts affecting DRC, IOM considers it a priority country. In close partnership with the Congolese authorities, the international community, and civil society, IOM has developed many programs and actions to improve migration management and the protection of migrants and internally displaced persons in the country. IOM manages a wide variety of activities that touch on all aspects of migratory movements and the protection of migrants and internally displaced persons: humanitarian assistance to vulnerable people, stabilisation and reconstruction of post-conflict areas, restoration of confidence between local populations and local and national authorities, fight against the spread of epidemics (including Ebola), monitoring population movements, fight against human trafficking, police training, legal and responsible trade in minerals, and disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration.^{lxx}

The crisis affecting Eastern DRC means that most children living in displacement camps are not able to attend school. Only a few of them are able to access UNICEF-supported Child-Friendly Spaces or Temporary Learning Centres. UNICEF is supporting the construction of Temporary Learning Spaces and providing school materials to students, in addition to training teachers on relevant topics and child psychosocial support.^{lxxi}

The Kanyaruchinya region hosts thousands of displaced people living in precarious conditions. At the *Medecins Sans Frontieres* (MSF)-supported Kanyaruchinya health centre, MSF provides free and quality healthcare to displaced people, including those displaced by the 2021 volcanic eruption and all the inhabitants of the area. In 2019 and 2020, MSF responded to the country's biggest-ever Ebola outbreak in the Ituri and North Kivu provinces.^{lxxii}

NGOs and Other Organisations

The Norwegian Refugee Council is a global NGO, and a leading organisation in providing assistance to refugees. According to their own records, in 2022, they assisted 351,319 people in the country. Their focus is on internally displaced people affected by current armed conflicts, as well as people that were displaced abroad and now are back as returnees. They support these vulnerable groups with different programmes, by providing quality education to children, youth and adults in safe and protected environments; information, counselling and legal assistance oriented at ensuring displaced people can exercise their housing, land and property rights, as well as access to civil documentation; shelter, including the construction of homes when necessary, and/or support in the (re)settlement processes; and sanitation, hygiene, and access to water.^{lxxiii}

Other global NGOs attending (internally or otherwise) forcibly displaced populations in the context of the DRC's conflict include the International Rescue Committee (IRC). This organisation has been providing emergency assistance and humanitarian aid to those affected by violence and uprooted from their homes in the DRC. Recently, it has been focusing its efforts on the areas of Tanganyika, Kasai Central, and North and South Kivu. Among many other vital intervention programmes, IRC is providing emergency health care, shelter, water,

sanitation, and emergency supplies to hundreds of thousands of people stranded in eastern and central Congo.^{lxxiv}

Another similar operation is provided by the War Child agency. This NGO, prominent at an international level in all matters related to protecting children recruited in wars, is very active in the DRC conflict. The organisation has three priority groups in its interventions in the country, and two of them are types of forcibly displaced populations: children who have been displaced away from their families and local communities, children who have been recruited by armed groups and need to be brought back and reintegrated into their communities, and children (mostly girls) who have been subjected to sexual violence. The lines of work War Child promotes in support of those children include: contributing at all levels to the establishment of “community and institutional child protection efforts providing children with an environment that is safer, more inclusive, and more engaged towards their social, economic, and cultural reintegration”; or improving access to education, life skills training, and support for the aforementioned categories of vulnerable children and youth.^{lxxv}

The Catholic Church

The Catholic Church in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has a Justice and Bread International Committee, which involves the Office of Justice and Bread International, as well as part of the Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development.^{lxxvi} The committee assists the bishops in advancing the church’s social mission of Justice and Peace, emphasising human dignity and protecting the most vulnerable communities, including migrants and refugees.^{lxxvii}

The Church in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is part of the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC).^{lxxviii} In this regard, an ICMC expert supports refugee resettlements in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The expert’s responsibility involves processing the cases of a protracted number of refugees and managing these resettlement requests. Another task carried out by the expert as ICMC representative was to train UNHCR and collaborate with staff to identify and refer cases of vulnerable people for resettlement. In cases when resettlement cannot be achieved, ICMC, in collaboration with UNHCR, prepared a report for the Protection Team to provide necessary assistance to this group of refugees in the DRC, focusing on an agricultural project that would allow them subsistence and access to medical care.^{lxxix}

The Jesuit Refugee Service supports national primary and secondary education in the North and South Kivu provinces by assisting with school fees, teacher training, and awareness raising on the importance and inclusiveness of education. JRS also provides formal and informal education for IDPs in the camps surrounding Goma, Masisi, and Mweso. In addition, JRS offers livelihood training, emergency relief, and activities such as sports and traditional dances to assist children in host communities and camps with their integration process into the DRC society.^{lxxx} Furthermore, JRS has implemented projects to support survivors with income-generating activities, targeted psychological support, and community capacity building.^{lxxxi}

The Sisters of Charity are also present in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, keeping informed the government about human rights violations and calling it to implement policies to end violent conflicts.¹

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) in the DRC addresses sudden-onset emergencies and long-term development problems in collaboration with church partners, government agencies, and other humanitarian actors. Its main areas of responsibility are nutrition, health, sanitation, and hygiene, as well as agricultural measures to respond to the many challenges affecting the country.²

Caritas in the DRC is also involved in many activities, mainly addressing emergencies, health care, sustainable development, and capacity building.³

Caritas Internationalis and Caritas Africa handle the 2020-2023 Strategic Plan of the National Episcopal Conference of Congo (CENCO). Through this plan, Caritas has provided humanitarian assistance to internally displaced people fleeing violence and disasters, including environmental protection, education, and protection from exploitation.⁴

Many other Catholic organisations assist Congolese migrants, including refugees and asylum seekers, such as Caritas Zambia's "Revolving input support project for refugee farmers for value chain development."⁵

It is worth noting that Catholic Relief Services and Caritas have used funds from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to provide emergency kits to 3,800 displaced families, including mats, blankets, kitchen utensils, and clothes. They also offered safe shelter to over 2,000 displaced families and hygiene kits to 3,800 women and girls.⁶

¹ Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati

² Catholic Relief Service

³ CARITAS

⁴ Caritas Internationalis

⁵ Catholic Diocese of Mansa, 2018

⁶ Richards, 2023

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