

The country

THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

To the rhythm
of Congo



The Democratic Republic of the Congo is the second largest country in Africa, with a population of around 78 million people made up of hundreds of ethnic groups. Its capital and largest city is Kinshasa. It borders nine other countries (South Sudan, the Central African Republic, Burundi, Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania, the Republic of the Congo, Angola and Zambia).

The last census was carried out in 1984, and it is estimated that there are currently around 77.8 million inhabitants. In the country there are hundreds of ethnic groups. The official language is French which shares the status of national language with four Bantu languages (Lingala, Kikongo, Swahili and Tshiluba).

The country is also known as the Congo, or more often the DRC, Congo-Kinshasa or DR Congo in order to distinguish it from its neighboring country, the Republic of the Congo, which is also known as Congo-Brazzaville for the same reason. The country changed its name several times during the 20th century: Belgian Congo (1908-1960); Congo-Léopoldville (1960-1971); Zaire (1971-1997) and, finally, the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The DRC's topography varies greatly, and is rich in vegetation across its savannas and dense forests. It has 502,000 square miles of arable land. The DRC stretches from the Atlantic Ocean to the eastern plateau of the African continent, and the Congo River crosses practically the entire country.

Since it became independent, a series of political crises have hindered the DRC's development. The most recent of these started at the end of 2016, in what was supposed to be the last year of the President Joseph Kabila's mandate. The elections didn't take place, perpetuating Kabila's position in power until today, with increasing protests from the opposition, the civil society and the bishops of the Congo. Kabila found himself forced to call elections for the 23rd of December 2018. Political stability will depend, to a great extent, on whether they are held or delayed again.



HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

Over 1.7 million people have been displaced

The humanitarian crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has lasted so long that its severity is almost forgotten. More than 1.7 million of people were displaced from their homes in the year 2016 and approximately 40% of those people are women and girls.



BIODIVERSITY, WATER, SUBSOIL, its great resources

Forests cover 173,745 square miles of the DRC, or half of the Congolese territory.. The other half, near the tropics, is predominantly savanna plateaus. Its forests make up almost 62% of the national territory and 10% of the world's tropical forest reserves. It is, therefore, the second largest tropical forest in the world after the Amazon.

The DRC is considered to be the country with the fifth greatest biodiversity in the world, and the first in terms of its great variety of mammals and birds. Its 11,000 identified plant species and almost 1,000 fish species make it an essential element in the regulation of climate change. Some of the most symbolic species of the country are elephants, gorillas, bonobos and okapis.

The Congo River is the eighth longest river in the world with a length of 2,920 miles. It is also the second largest, reaching a discharge of 2,825,170 ft³/s at certain times of year. It is also considered the deepest river in the world: in some areas it reaches a depth of over 720 feet.

Some stretches of the Congo River are navigable, notably the 1,550 mile stretch between Kinshasa and Kisanгани. Nowadays, railways run over the three main waterfalls, and a huge part of the country's trade is carried out through the river.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo has a wide variety of mineral products, heightening its mining potential. Diamonds, copper, cobalt, gold, manganese, zinc, cassiterite, coltan, wolframite, niobium, germanium are among the minerals which can be found. These raw materials are exported uncut, which generates a rise in the DRC's unemployment situation and, in contrast, many jobs abroad. Transforming these raw materials into semi-finished and manufactured products within the country itself would facilitate an increase in wealth and employment. In addition, it would reduce the issues regarding trafficking, mafias and armed conflicts it currently generates.

Despite the wealth produced by the Congo River, the country's biodiversity and its subsoil rich in resources...

The political crises that started with President Kabila and the armed conflict in the east of the country, in the region of Kasai, have caused serious economic instability and new difficulties for the population's living conditions..

The DRC is a poor country that, in 2017, was ranked 176th of the 188 countries on the United Nations Human Development Index. 87.7% of its population live below the poverty line (\$1.25 a day) and in a situation of immense inequality in spite of its abundant array of resources. Around 44% of women have no income. Its poverty is reflected in the malnutrition that affects between 30% and 50% of women and children. On top of this situation, caused by the many past and current conflicts, we must add the infringement of human rights with an especially severe impact on women and children.

Both the population's health and the situation surrounding the country's healthcare are alarming: 43% of under five-year-olds suffer from chronic malnutrition, which causes 160,000 infant deaths per year; just 50% of the population has access to water and just 18% has access to adequate sanitation. The most recurrent diseases are tuberculosis, malaria, diarrhea, typhoid fever and cholera, all of which are caused by the lack of sanitation and hygiene processes.

In terms of education, the State covers just 22% of its cost. As such, families have to shoulder the rest, in a social context marked by unemployment and a low standard of living. 80% of children attend primary school. However, this percentage decreases as they grow older, dropping to 50% for boys and 47% for girls (40% of girls get married under the age of 18 and quit school).

To the rhythm of Congo



To the Rhythm of Congo

For decades, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has spread its music to the rest of the African continent. The linguistic diversity of the DRC is the main source of inspiration for many musicians in the country. The main musical exponent that makes the whole continent dance is the soukous, a popular dance music genre. It emerged in the 60s in the current Congo Kinshasa and Congo Brazzaville. It is an African version of the Cuban "rumba". Nowadays, the ndombolo, an adapted rhythm of the soukous genre, is enjoying great popularity. The biggest exponent of this rhythm is the Congolese superstar Fally Ipupa, as well as international celebrities such as rappers Maitre Gims or Yousoupha. In addition, there are many Congolese bands and singers whose rhythm goes beyond borders: Ferre Gola, JB mpiana, Werrason, Fabregas, Koffi Olomide, and Bill Clinton, among others.



More information: <http://www.itakaescolapios.org>