

Childhood

AND ADOLESCENCE IN THE CONGO

To the rhythm
of Congo



Population: **77.8 million** / Population aged 18 or under: **44.4%**
Life expectancy: **59 years**

Of every 1,000 new-born children, 94 will die before reaching the age of 5

The child mortality rate for children under five years of age has decreased worldwide by almost 50% over the last thirty years, while in the DRC the rate remains at 94 deaths per thousand births. Child deaths due to especially dangerous diseases such as measles and malaria were reduced by almost 70% between 2000 and 2015. The immunization coverage against measles increased from 63% to 72% during the same period. Poliomyelitis, which was one of the main causes of disability in both children and adults, has been eradicated in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months of life increased between 36 and 48 percent.

80% of children between 6 and 11 years old attend primary school

In basic education, the number of children enrolled in primary school doubled between the school years 2001-2002 and 2012-2013, from 5.47 million to 12.6 million. There is virtually no difference between the number of girls and boys upon entering primary school, although the gender gap does later widen, with 6 in 10 girls finishing primary school, compared to 8 in 10 boys.

Despite these important advances, many challenges remain. Almost 40% of girls get married before the age of 18, the legal age for marriage. These girls almost always go on to drop out of school, have high-risk pregnancies and suffer abuse.

CHILDREN WORK

A total of 40,000 children extract minerals for 1 or 2 dollars per day

Since the State takes care of just 22% of education costs, parents take their children to work with them, and this plays an important role in the family's economy. In general, the largest number of child workers is recorded in mining operations in the east of the DRC. It is estimated that 40,000 children work in the mines (2014, UNICEF), mostly in the extraction of cobalt. In these mining operations, child labor conditions are atrocious. Just like adults, they work endlessly and without any measure of protection or security. Under unbearably hot conditions, in clouds of red dust and in dim lighting conditions, these children are made to dig tunnels 656 to 984 feet (200 to 300 meters) deep, exposing themselves constantly to the risk of death by suffocation from tunnel collapse and other fatal accidents. In return they are paid a salary of 1 to 2 US dollars per day.



Six million children suffer from chronic malnutrition

More than 2 million very young children suffer from chronic malnutrition in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, compromising their development to adult life. The implications this can have on their later life heightens the severity of this situation, especially in the east of the country due to the armed conflict in the Kasai region. In this region one in ten children suffer from chronic malnutrition.

Only 25% of children are registered with the Civil Registry.

The right to an identity is recognised as part of a child's right, yet only 25% of children are registered in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The State recognises the existence of a child upon his or her registry, which is the first and an essential step towards being able to claim his or her rights.

21% of girls between the ages of 15 and 19 have already given birth

There is a high number of early pregnancies. 27% of Congolese girls between the ages of 15 and 19 are, or have been, pregnant, with the majority of these pregnancies being unwanted. Although there is still need for improvement, access to maternity care is quite good. In fact, 9 out of 10 girls have received antenatal care by qualified personnel. The majority of girls give birth in hospitals or in health facilities attended by healthcare workers. Just a few of them receive post-natal care or any type of psychological or social support, however.

They are subject to violence...

Violence towards girls, both physical and psychological, is a very real hurdle for their development, which also greatly hinders the progression of the country itself. One in two girls has been subject to sexual or emotional abuse, and approximately one in five girls between the ages of 15 and 19 has fallen victim to rape (4% before the age of



15). Although a downward trend in this type of crime is evident in the DRC, due to the fact that a greater number of girls are seeking help to put an end to the violence and break the cycle, the problem is far from being eradicated.

... and they weren't involved in the decisions

23% of girls between the ages of 15 and 19 are already married. 55% of these girls are subject to some form of abuse by their husbands. In the face of this domestic violence, the majority of them justify being hit by their husbands on the grounds of poor cooking or arguments. On the other hand, only one in four women participates in decision making as a couple, or decides for herself how to use her income.

12,500 child soldiers

They are minors, and they are soldiers in the conflict in the east of the country. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo they are known as "Kadogos". They are armed with Kalashnikovs and they get drunk on spirits. Many of these children were snatched from their villages, though some enlisted in the service to

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make a living. It is estimated that the Democratic Republic of the Congo is the country with most child soldiers in the world. More than 30,000 child soldiers are incorporated into armed groups, which use them as spies or forwarding agents, and, in the case of girls, mostly as sex slaves. In the male-dominated world of war, the reality of girl soldiers is often invisible. However, almost half of the minors associated with armed groups in the world are girls. It is estimated that in the Democratic Republic of the Congo there are around 12,500 girl soldiers.

20,000 children live on the streets in Kinshasa

In the DRC, a vast number of children live on the streets, and are exposed to innumerable dangers. It is estimated that just in the capital, Kinshasa, there are 20,000 children living on the street, of which 26% are girls. Family poverty leads children to seek out food in the city centers, to such an extent that some get so used to it that they do not return to their families, where they would also be starving. In other cases, the child is accused of witchcraft and expelled from the community, something which is very common given the strength of magic and witchcraft in popular culture. On many occasions, single mothers, victims of abuse or those in extreme poverty end up simply abandoning their children.

The severity of the situation experienced by some girls living on the streets is especially concerning. While the boys make a "living" begging, through street robbery and carrying out small jobs, girls do so mainly through the prostitution which takes place in and around numerous clubs in the leisure areas. There are times when these girls are partners of boys living on the streets who also benefit from their income through prostitution, and some have children who are born on the street.



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