

World Watch Research

Democratic Republic of the Congo: Background Information

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sweden@od.org | 019-31 05 00 | www.open-doors.se

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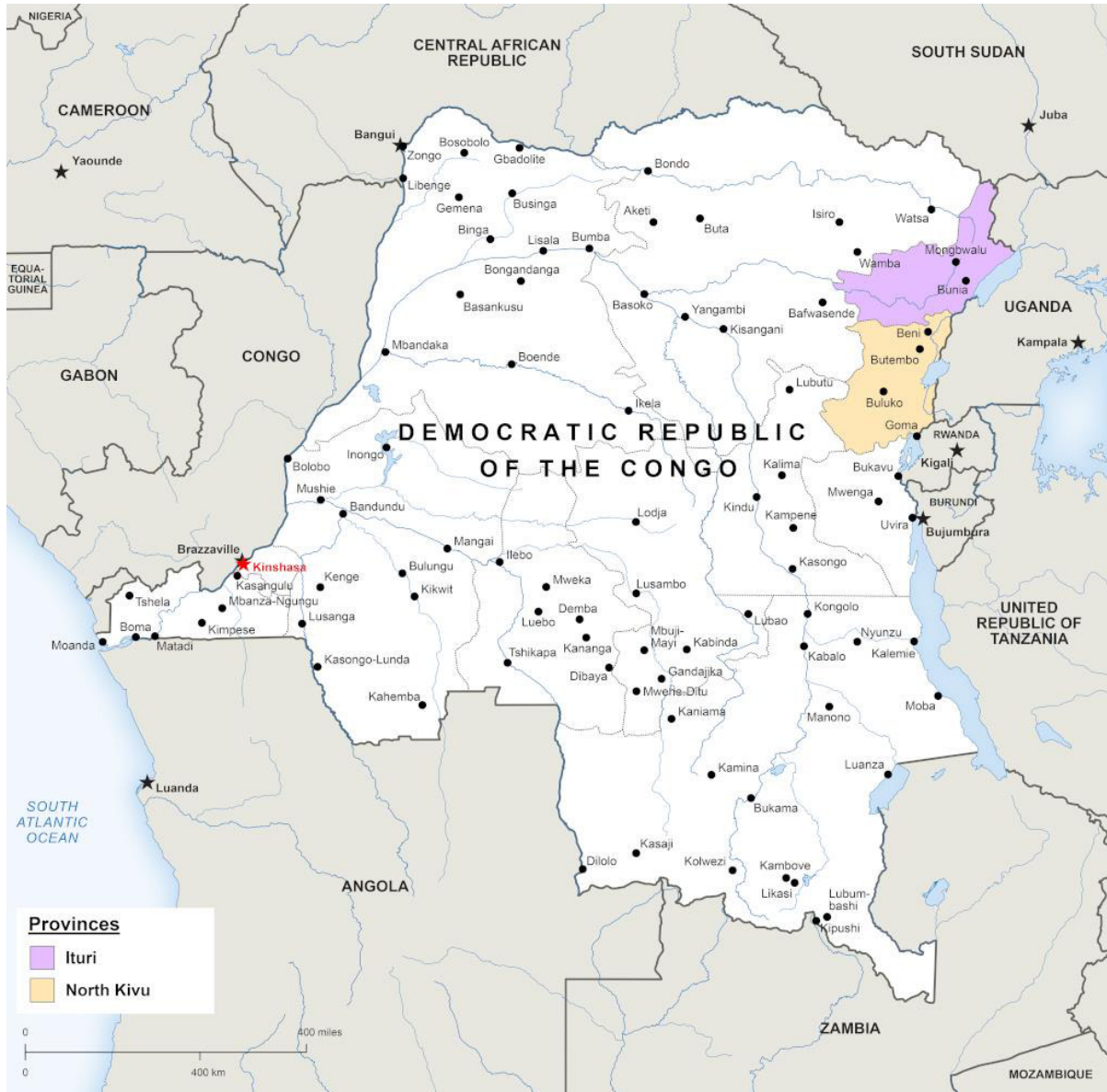
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World Watch Research has divided up the previously named Full Country Dossier into two separate documents:

- Background country information (published annually in summer)
- Persecution dynamics (published annually in January).

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Map of country



Democratic Republic of the Congo: Population (UN estimate for 2024)	Christians	Chr%
105,625,000	100,566,000	95.2

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., *World Christian Database*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

Recent history

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) was a Belgian colony, which, along with other African countries, declared independence in 1960. However, civil war followed and the secession of some provinces which led to a fragmentation of the country. The country was caught up in a [proxy war](#) between the West (headed by the USA) and the Soviet Union (Source: US State Department, Office of Historian, accessed 9 September 2020). The election of Joseph Kasavubu as president and Patrice Lumumba as prime minister did not bring peace and the latter was arrested and [killed](#) on 17 January 1961 (The Guardian, 17 January 2011).

On 24 November 1965, Mobutu seized power with the help of the CIA and created an environment where only one party could flourish, namely the Popular Revolutionary Movement. The Constitution gave him unlimited power, he accumulated great wealth and supported guerrilla fighters in neighboring countries such as Angola. The rule of Mobutu was not unchallenged. Riots, protests and guerrilla fighters supported by Angola put pressure on Mobutu.

In 1994, the World Bank declared the country bankrupt. The 1994 atrocities in Rwanda had a spillover effect. Finally, with mainly Tutsi soldiers trained by Rwanda and Uganda, Laurent Kabila overthrew Mobutu in 1997. Kabila was assassinated by his own bodyguard and was replaced by his son, Joseph Kabila, who remained in power until January 2019.

The wars in DRC returned to the spotlight in 2003 when the president of the country requested the International Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate the [crimes](#) committed by various rebel groups (ICC Press Release, 19 April 2004). After an extensive investigation the Court indicted Thomas Lubanga Dyilo, Germain Katanga, Mathieu Ngudjolo Chui, Bosco Ntaganda, Callixte Mbarushimana, and Sylvestre Mudacumura.

The situation in DRC has been exacerbated by the continual interference of neighboring countries. According to a report by [The Guardian](#) on 18 October 2012, the United Nations officially stated that the Rwandan defense minister was the de facto leader of rebels in DRC. Later UN reports (in 2014) also implicated Uganda and Burundi.

After years of speculation, President Kabila decided to [step down](#) and not run for a third term in the presidential elections held in December 2018 (France 24, 8 August 2018). [Newly elected President](#) Felix Tshisekedi was sworn in as successor to Joseph Kabila in January 2019 in the country's first transfer of power via democratic election in 59 years of independence. The country's electoral commission declared him winner despite credible evidence of election fraud (The Guardian, 24 January 2019).

In 2022, the global community has closely observed the ideology and activities of the ADF and the UN has indicated that [links](#) exist with the Islamic State group (Bloomberg, 18 June 2022). In 2022 and 2023, armed groups, including the M23 (Rwandan backed) and the ADF, carried out atrocities in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The government's authority in this region remains weak, allowing these groups to operate with relative impunity. Christians in particular bore the brunt of the jihadist attacks, some of which were claimed by IS. The ongoing violence and insecurity have created a dire situation for civilians, with Christians facing targeted pressure and violence. Brutal attacks have continued throughout 2024, perpetrated most notably by the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) and IS-affiliated militants. The conflict has led to massive displacement, with over 450,000 civilians forced to flee their homes in Rutshuru and Masisi territories by early December ([UN Refugees, 7 December 2023](#)).

In June 2023, opposition leader Franck Diongo was detained by the Republican Guard under dubious charges, only to be released weeks later without any formal accusations being made ([Human Rights Watch 2024 DRC country chapter](#)). Adding to the chaos, government troops killed at least 57 people in Goma in August 2023 while enforcing a demonstration ban, reflecting the state's harsh stance against dissent ([Amnesty International, DRC 2023](#)). In December 2023, President Tshisekedi won a second term in office and his Union Sacrée coalition won most of the seats in parliament. Despite

Tshisekedi's [wide margin of victory](#) - over 70% - , the polls were marked by chaos and accusations of rigging. The political landscape remains deeply divided (Al-Jazeera, 31 December 2023).

Political and legal landscape

DRC is a unitary multiparty republic with two legislative houses - the Senate with 108 members and the National Assembly with 500 members. The president is the head of state and the prime minister is head of the government. With 26 justices, the Supreme Court is the highest judicial organ in the country, while the country also has a Constitutional Court with nine judges.

Although President Kabila's term in office ended in 2016, the country failed to hold elections, which caused great tension. Presidential elections did not take place until December 2018 (without President Kabila running for a third term). Under Kabila, political corruption, weak rule of law and violence remained prevalent.

According to Freedom House's [Freedom in the World Index 2024 DRC](#):

- DRC is ranked as "Not Free," with a score of 19 out of 100, indicating severe limitations in political rights and civil liberties.
- The political system is paralyzed by the manipulation of the electoral process by political elites. Presidential and legislative elections held in December 2023 were marred by significant logistical and security problems, preventing over one million citizens from voting. The results, which saw incumbent Felix Tshisekedi declared the winner, were contested by opposition figures citing a lack of transparency and numerous irregularities, underscoring the endemic issues within the country's electoral framework.
- Violence and human rights abuses remain rampant, particularly in the eastern regions of the DRC. Armed groups, including the March 23 Movement (M23), have continued to launch offensives, causing severe disruptions and displacements. The government's efforts to control the situation, such as the partial lifting of the "state of siege," have been ineffective and have often led to further human rights violations by security forces. The withdrawal by the end of 2024 of the UN Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) and the East African Community (EAC) forces at the government's request highlights the ongoing challenges in maintaining peace and security (see also: [Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 20 May 2024](#)).
- There are severe restrictions on freedom of expression and press freedom in the DRC. The media landscape is dominated by political interests, with journalists frequently facing threats, arrests, and violence. The arrest of prominent journalist Stanis Bujakera in September 2023 exemplifies the severe repression of free speech under the current administration. Civil society activists and opposition members are also routinely intimidated and obstructed, further stifling political dissent and civic engagement. These issues collectively highlight the severe challenges facing the DRC in its pursuit of stability and democratic governance.

According to Human Rights Watch ([HRW 2024 DRC country chapter](#)):

- Repression against journalists, activists, government critics and peaceful protesters has continued. Authorities have targeted opposition leaders, restricting their fundamental liberties and arresting party officials. Notable incidents include the arrest and detention of prominent journalist Stanis Bujakera in September 2023 and the killing of Chérubin Okende, a member of

parliament and spokesman for Moïse Katumbi’s political party, in July 2023. These actions sparked international outcry and highlight the increasing suppression of freedom of expression and peaceful assembly in the country.

- In terms of accountability and justice, President Félix Tshisekedi’s administration has made little progress on promised systemic reforms to address cycles of violence, abuse, corruption, and impunity. Although the government reaffirmed its commitment to accountability for serious crimes through national consultations on a new transitional justice initiative, concrete steps to advance justice domestically remain lacking.
- Several militia leaders and individuals involved in serious crimes continue to operate with impunity, underscoring the ongoing challenges in achieving justice and accountability in DRC.

New government since June 2024

According to the [International Crisis Group's June 2024](#) Crisis Watch Report, DRC's political landscape has seen significant changes. After months of delay, a new government took office on 11 June 2024, endorsed by the National Assembly. The new 54-member government, led by Prime Minister Suminwa, is dominated by President Tshisekedi’s Union for Democracy and Social Progress and close associates. The sidelining of senior ruling-coalition figures, including National Assembly head Vital Kamerhe and Foreign Minister Lutundula, incited discontent over perceived power grabs by Tshisekedi. Additionally, a church observation mission published a final report on 17 June 2024, severely criticizing the electoral commission’s handling of the December 2023 general elections ([The Tablet, 24 June 2024](#)).

Gender perspective

The legal landscape of the DRC is restrictive towards women and girls in several regards; in particular, many harmful practices relating to marriage remain pervasive. These include child marriage, polygamy and levirate marriages. As highlighted in an [ACHPR report \(2015\)](#), men are often pressured into practicing polygamy to demonstrate their power. Child marriage is high - in spite of the legal age of marriage being set at 18 (Law 2016-008, Art. 352, 2016) - with 29% of girls and 6% of boys marrying by the age of 18 ([Girls Not Brides DRC](#), accessed 22 August 2024). Whilst sexual violence and rape are outlawed, there is insufficient legislation addressing domestic violence. Men and women have equal rights in relation to divorce and child guardianship, although in the event of a divorce, a woman must repay the dowry she received at the point of marriage (Family Code, 1987).

Religious landscape

Democratic Republic of the Congo: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	100,566,000	95.2
Muslim	1,531,000	1.4
Hindu	161,000	0.2
Buddhist	6,100	0.0
Ethnic religionist	2,512,000	2.4
Jewish	420	0.0
Bahai	442,000	0.4
Atheist	22,600	0.0
Agnostic	374,000	0.4
Other	9,200	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., *World Christian Database*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

DRC is a Christian-majority country. A significant number of people mix Christianity with elements of ethno-religionist belief systems. Some Evangelical groups reject this practice, which can cause tension as a result. Geographically, there are no specific areas where religious affiliation is concentrated.

Economic landscape

DRC is one of the richest countries in Africa in terms of minerals and natural resources. It has vast deposits of industrial diamonds, cobalt and copper. The country also has one of the largest forest reserves in Africa. In the Congo River - the biggest river in Africa - it has half of the hydroelectric potential of the continent. The country has been struggling with inflation and decelerating economic growth. This was mainly due to declining prices and shrinking global demand for raw materials such as copper and cobalt which account for 80% of DRC's export revenue. The national currency is expected to continue its decline against the dollar as the rate of inflation increases.

According to the [African Development Bank Group's 2024 DRC Economic Outlook](#):

- **Economic growth:** DRC experienced a slight decline in economic growth, from 8.8% in 2022 to 7.5% in 2023. This decline was primarily due to underperformance in the extractive industries. However, growth in non-extractive sectors, such as agriculture, construction, public works, transport, and telecommunications, showed modest increases. The growth was also bolstered by a significant rise in exports (17.3%) and investment (9.2%).

- **Poverty:** DRC has a high poverty rate of 56.2% and a Gini coefficient of 0.511 as of 2020, indicating high income inequality. Underemployment stands at 15.1%, reflecting the challenges in the labor market. The government aims to target inclusive growth to reduce inequality, but these efforts are hampered by systemic issues.
- **Inflation:** Inflation rose sharply from 9.3% in 2022 to 19.9% in 2023. This increase was driven by the depreciation of the Congolese franc against the US dollar by 21.8% and constraints on food and energy supplies. To curb this inflation, the central bank has maintained a prime rate of 25% since August 2023.
- **Foreign exchange, Import/Export:** The country's current account deficit widened from 4.9% of GDP in 2022 to 6.3% in 2023 due to deteriorating terms of trade and high imports. Despite this, international reserves increased by 18%, providing 2.8 months of import cover. The export sector, particularly in minerals, continues to be a significant contributor to the economy, and efforts are being made to enhance trade and investment flows.
- **Future outlook:** The economic outlook for the DRC remains cautiously optimistic. Growth prospects for 2024 and 2025 are projected at 5.7% and 5.6%, respectively, driven by the mining sector, construction, public works, and trade. Inflation is expected to decrease to an average of 13.5% over this period, aligned with the central bank's restrictive policies. The budget deficit is projected to rise slightly to 2% of GDP in 2024 due to post-electoral expenses but is expected to decrease to 1.1% in 2025. The government plans to improve the current account deficit to an average of 4% of GDP, bolstered by foreign direct investment, and to increase international reserves to \$6.1 billion, equivalent to 2.3 months of import cover.

According to the [Index of Economic Freedom 2024](#), the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has an economic freedom score of 47.6, ranking it 160th out of 184 countries worldwide. This score places the DRC in the "repressed" category, reflecting significant challenges in economic freedom. Regionally, the DRC ranks 40th out of 47 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, indicating that its economic freedom is lower than both the world and regional averages. Despite being a major producer of copper and cobalt, the DRC's economic development is hindered by instability, violence, and poor governance, which discourage international investment and economic growth.

Gender perspective

Within the DRC, women and girls are predominately economically dependent on their families. Despite having equal inheritance rights under law, customary and traditional practices continue to deny women their due inheritance. The DRC performs poorly on Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index, which is heavily due to poor rates of financial inclusion for women, although this has improved in recent years ([GIWPS DRC, accessed 22 August 2024](#)). Representing a positive trend however, it was recently in the top ten countries where financial inclusion had risen the most. According to [UNDP Human Development Report DRC](#) (data updates as of 13 March 2024), the female labor force participation is 60.0% (compared to 66.4% for men). Despite this relatively high participation rate for women, it is usual that men are the head of the household and in charge of financial decisions.

Social and cultural landscape

DRC is the largest country in the Great Lakes region. It was part of the old Kongo Kingdom and has more than 200 ethnic groups. It shares borders with Congo Brazzaville, Angola, Zambia, Rwanda,

Tanzania, Burundi, Uganda, South Sudan, and the Central African Republic (CAR). DRC is the fourth most populous country in Africa. Its size is equal to Western Europe.

According to [UNDP Human Development Report DRC](#) (data updates as of 13 March 2024) and [World Factbook DRC](#), accessed 22 August 2024:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Mongo, Luba, Kongo (all Bantu), and the Mangbetu-Azande (Hamitic) which make up about 45% of the total population
- **Main languages:** French (official), Lingala (a lingua franca trade language), Kingwana (a dialect of Kiswahili or Swahili), Kikongo, Tshiluba
- **Urban population:** 45% of the total population
- **Rate of urbanization:** 4.33% (2020-2025 est.)
- **Population growth rate:** 3.16 % (2021 est.)
- **Median age:** 17.0 years
- **Expected years of schooling:** 9.7 years
- **Literacy rate, adult (15 years and older):** 77.0%
- **Employment population ratio (15 years and older):** 60.8%
- **Unemployment, total (% of labor force):** 4.2%
- **Unemployment, youth (ages 15-24):** 8.0%

Refugees/IDPs

- According to the [UNHCR](#) (accessed 22 August 2024): "The DRC is home to over 529,000 refugees and asylum-seekers who have fled violence in neighboring countries, mainly the Central African Republic, Rwanda, Burundi and South Sudan. The majority (72%) live outside refugee camps or settlements, and only 3% live in urban areas. ... Over 990,000 refugees and asylum-seekers from the DRC are currently sheltered across the African continent."
- According to the [Norwegian Refugee Council \(NRC\)](#), as of June 2024, DRC is experiencing the second-largest internal displacement crisis in Africa. The ongoing conflict in the eastern provinces of South Kivu, North Kivu, and Ituri has resulted in 7.2 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), with more than 738,000 newly displaced since the beginning of 2024. This crisis, characterized by extreme violence and repeated displacements, has severely impacted vulnerable populations, leading to weakened community ties, loss of income, and limited access to essential services. Nearly 25.4 million people, or 23% of the population, face severe food insecurity, with the situation being even more critical in conflict zones. Land disputes, exacerbated by rapid population growth and massive displacements, further intensify the crisis, causing tensions between displaced people and host communities. Despite the scale of this humanitarian disaster, it remains one of the most neglected crises globally.

According to [UNDP Human Development Report DRC](#) (data updates as of 13 March 2024):

- **Human Development Index:** The HDI value for 2022 is 0.481— which put the country in the Low human development category—positioning it at #180 out of 193 countries and territories. Between 1990 and 2022, DRC's HDI value changed from 0.377 to 0.481, a change of 27.6%.
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 62.1 years (female), 57.5 years (male)
- **Gender Development index (GDI):** 0.891

- **Gender Inequality index (GII):** 0.605

Gender perspective

As highlighted in [OECD Gender Index reporting](#) (accessed 22 August 2024), daughters are often viewed as temporary members of the family unit, as they can be wedded off. This notion also continues into marriage; it is common for a deceased husband's family to take all of his wealth and property, leaving her and her children destitute. This exemplifies the underlying social and cultural norms in the DRC that discriminate against women. In light of these norms, female converts can be married off to an older Muslim with relative ease. Within such marriages, women and girls are commonly exposed to domestic violence and sexual violence; it is generally accepted by both men and women that a woman's failings in marriage (e.g. burning a meal or refusing sex) is a legitimate reason for domestic violence ([UK Home Office, 2018](#)). Within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, domestic violence reportedly worsened ([GNWP, 22 February 2021](#)).

Technological landscape

According to [DataReportal Digital 2024: DRC](#) (23 February 2024) / survey date - January 2024:

- **Internet usage:** In DRC there were 28.31 million internet users at the start of 2024, representing an internet penetration rate of 27.2%. This indicates a 3.3% increase from the previous year, though a significant portion of the population, approximately 72.8%, remains offline.
- **Social media usage:** 6.45 million social media users, which is 6.2% of the total population. Social media user growth was substantial, with a 37.2% increase (1.8 million new users) compared to the previous year. This indicates a growing but still limited adoption of social media platforms among the population.
- **Active cellular mobile connections:** 51.4% of the population, showing a 5.6% increase from the previous year. The high number of mobile connections compared to the total population suggests that many individuals use multiple SIM cards.

An indication of the existence of a gender gap in relation to social media access is provided by [Napoleon Cat](#) (July 2024) which revealed that 62.8% of Facebook users were men, compared to 37.2% of women.

Although DRC is one of the wealthiest countries in Africa in terms of natural resources, internal conflicts (since independence) have made progress elusive. Corporations and neighboring countries have been [fueling the \(mineral-related\) conflict](#) and Uganda and Rwanda have been sending in troops (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 29 June 2022). As a result, the country has failed to live up to its potential: Infrastructure is poor, educational facilities are not well-equipped; hospitals and clinics often lack professional staff and medical equipment.

Security situation

The Democratic Republic of the Congo stands out as one of the most tumultuous and volatile countries in Africa, where the safety and security of its citizens remain precarious. The crisis in the country started more than 60 years ago and has continued into 2024. The conflict in the eastern part of the country continues to derail the peace process. Foreign countries like Rwanda have also been interfering in the country and making the situation worse. Much of the violence in North Kivu, Kisangani and in

Kasai has an ethnic dimension. DRC has great ethnic diversity, some estimating the total number of ethnic groups as being as high as 450. However, one of the most serious threats is that the eastern part of the country has become a safe haven for the radical Islamic group ADF-NALU, which is seeking to create an Islamic State in Uganda and has been targeting churches and Christians in north-eastern DRC for several years, ever since its attempt to overthrow the Ugandan government failed.

According to the United Nations, security in eastern DRC has continued to worsen, despite a coalition of forces from Uganda, Burundi and the UN (prior to its planned withdrawal) present in the country as peacekeepers. According to UN Assistant Secretary-General for Africa Martha Pobe reporting in June 2023, [more than 600 people were killed by armed groups](#) in the preceding three months (UN News, 26 June 2023). CODECO, the Zairean militia, M23 rebels and Islamist ADF are reported as being the main perpetrators. This has caused a massive displacement of civilians. An example of the [spiralling cycle of intercommunal violence](#) was reported by Human Rights Watch on 29 June 2023: An armed group (calling themselves “Mobondo” after mystical amulets) ambushed a truck carrying mostly Teke traders, killing twenty. Since June 2022 hundreds have been killed in a dispute over land and customary royalties.

Examples of the growing insecurity

- Civilians in eastern DRC are being [targeted](#) on a regular basis, as reported by the Global Center for the Responsibility to Protect on 31 May 2023. On 3 June 2023, the North Kivu Security Tracker reported that suspected ADF militants (who are affiliated with the Islamic State group) [killed](#) at least nine villagers in Museya Kanyamutsutsa village in Beni territory, and International Christian Concern reported on 5 June 2023, that another ten Christians had been [targeted and killed](#) by ADF militants. Earlier in May 2023, at least 20 civilians were [discovered killed](#) by suspected ADF militants in Ndoma village in Kivu (Africa News, 9 May 2023).
- On the evening of 11 June 2023, CODECO militants claimed responsibility for an [attack on an IDP camp](#) at Lala displacement site in Djugu territory, which killed at least 45 civilians, 23 of whom were children (Al-Jazeera, 12 June 2023). According to a report by the Kivu Security Tracker on 13 June 2023, the massacre may have been a [reprisal](#) for acts of violence by other armed groups. A day later, on 12 June 2023, ADF militants attacked Kasindi town on the border to Uganda in eastern DRC, as reported by VOA on 14 June 2023. At least 10 people were killed and many others fled across the border to Uganda for refuge. In these attacks, the weapons used have reportedly often been hammers and machetes to avoid being heard. Earlier in the year, in January, at least [12 Christians were killed](#) and 50 injured when ADF militants detonated a bomb at a church in Kasindi where hundreds of Christians had gathered for a Sunday church service (CNN, 16 January 2023).
- According to [HRW 2023 DRC country chapter](#), the human rights and security conditions deteriorated in 2022, especially in eastern provinces, despite promises of reform from President Félix Tshisekedi's administration. Military rule in North Kivu and Ituri failed to stem violence by various armed groups, resulting in over 2,000 civilian deaths between January and October [2022]. The resurgent M23 rebels, supported by Rwanda, intensified conflict by seizing territory in North Kivu. This conflict exacerbated the already dire humanitarian crisis, displacing millions. Additionally, an East African military force entered eastern Congo amid regional tensions, while the UN peacekeeping mission, MONUSCO, faced criticism for failing to protect civilians and ex-

periencing violence against its bases.

- According to various sources, the security situation in DRC has significantly deteriorated since October 2023. The intended withdrawal of MONUSCO, the United Nations peacekeeping mission, has been a focal point, as the UN and Congolese authorities attempt a phased disengagement. This has left gaps in security, particularly in North Kivu and Ituri provinces, where the resurgence of armed groups like the M23 and the Islamic State-affiliated ADF has escalated violence. The eastern DRC remains a hotspot of conflict, with over 500,000 people displaced in North Kivu since late 2023 due to ongoing clashes and attacks on civilians by various militant groups ([UN Press, 8 July 2024](#)).
- Despite a brief humanitarian truce, the M23 rebels have continued their offensives, seizing strategic towns and exacerbating the humanitarian crisis. The violence has not only displaced millions but also strained local resources and infrastructure. Attacks on MONUSCO and other critical infrastructure have increased, further complicating efforts to stabilize the region. The UN Security Council has expressed concerns over the potential for regional spillover of the conflict, emphasizing the need for a responsible and gradual withdrawal of peacekeeping forces to avoid a security vacuum ([UN Press, 27 March 2024](#)).
- According to the [International Crisis Group's June 2024](#) Crisis Watch Report, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) experienced a significant escalation in violence and political tensions. Islamic State-linked groups sharply escalated attacks, killing hundreds in the east, while M23 rebels continued their advance amid political tensions following the appointment of a new government. Jihadist violence surged in Beni and Lubero territories in North Kivu province. The Islamic State-affiliated Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) intensified their attacks with a series of deadly assaults. From June 4-7, the ADF reportedly killed close to 100 civilians in several villages in Baswagha-Madiwe locality, Beni territory. The group extended its attacks to Lubero territory on June 12-13, killing at least 40 civilians in Maikengo village. Civil society groups reported on June 15 that militants might have killed at least 200 people in the previous month in Beni and Lubero. Violence also continued in neighboring Ituri province, with the ADF attacking Masongo town in Mambasa territory on June 11, killing six civilians. In Djugu territory, ethnic Lendu militia CODECO killed 25 civilians in Bianda village and at least 36 in Lodjo village on June 20. M23 rebels extended their offensive northward in North Kivu. From early June onwards, the M23 seized strategic locations, including Kanyabayonga town on June 28 and Kirumba town two days later, opening access to Lubero territory. The fighting displaced tens of thousands, with many seeking refuge in provincial capital Goma and neighboring South Kivu province, exacerbating security and humanitarian conditions there. The report adds that The DRC's political landscape also saw significant changes.

DRC's complex and long-standing conflicts have led to severe humanitarian consequences. As of early 2024, the country hosts the second-largest internal displacement crisis in Africa, with 7.2 million people displaced due to armed conflicts and communal tensions. The humanitarian situation remains dire, with millions lacking access to basic services, food, and shelter. International organizations continue to call for more robust efforts to address the crisis, including the need for increased funding and support for displaced populations and ongoing peacebuilding initiatives ([Council on Foreign Relations, Global Conflict Tracker, updated 20 June 2024](#)).

Gender perspective

Within this context of insecurity, women and girls remain especially vulnerable to incidences of sexual and gender-based violence at the hands of armed groups ([UNHR, 2020](#)). As recognized in a [2020 Institute for Development Studies report](#), the justice system is fragile (K4D, 21 December 2020). Women who report sexual violence encounter major obstacles in attaining justice and high levels of impunity: “[T]his reinforces the pre-existing norms and patterns of discrimination against women, both inside and outside of the conflict.”

Efforts have been made to engage more women in the peace-building process, in recognition of the positive role that they could play ([OCHA, 17 May 2019](#); [International Alert, March 2018](#)). Men and boys are vulnerable to forced recruitment into militias, as well as abductions and killings. Pastors in particular are targeted by jihadists.

Christian origins

Christianity has a long history in DRC and can be traced back to 1491 when Roman Catholic priests arrived after Portuguese merchants had discovered the Congo River in 1482. However, as the main focus was the slave trade, Christian mission did not go deep inside the country. Not until the 19th century could Christianity become properly established.

- Catholic missionaries arrived in 1865. King Leopold II of Belgium was keen on establishing Belgium as a colonial power and helped missionaries by giving them land grants.
- Protestants entered the country in 1878 when British Baptists built their own mission stations along the Congo River.
- In 1891, Presbyterians came from the USA.
- In 1915 Pentecostals arrived from the UK. These were followed by Mennonites, Seventh-day Adventists and other denominations.

Church spectrum today

Democratic Republic of the Congo: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	34,500	0.0
Catholic	56,374,000	56.1
Protestant	18,400,000	18.3
Independent	27,301,000	27.1
Unaffiliated	518,000	0.5
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-2,061,000	-2.0
Total <i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>	100,566,500	100.0

	Christians	%
Evangelical movement	6,863,000	6.8
Pentecostal-Charismatic	31,904,000	31.7

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., *World Christian Database*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

Orthodox: Eastern (Chalcedonian), Oriental (Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Monophysite), Nestorian (Assyrian), and non-historical Orthodox. **Roman Catholics:** All Christians in communion with the Church of Rome. **Protestants:** Christians in churches originating in or in communion with the Western world's 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Includes Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists nor independent Charismatics. **Independents:** Christians who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant). **Unaffiliated Christians:** Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches. **Doubly-affiliated Christians:** Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once. **Evangelical movement:** Churches, denominations, and individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls. **Pentecostal-Charismatic:** Church members involved in renewal in the Holy Spirit, sometimes known collectively as "Renewalists".

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website:

- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/>.

These are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom):

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Democratic Republic of the Congo>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>.
- [DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO – Mapping the conflict – 2018](#)

External Links

- Recent history: proxy war - <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1961-1968/congo-decolonization>
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