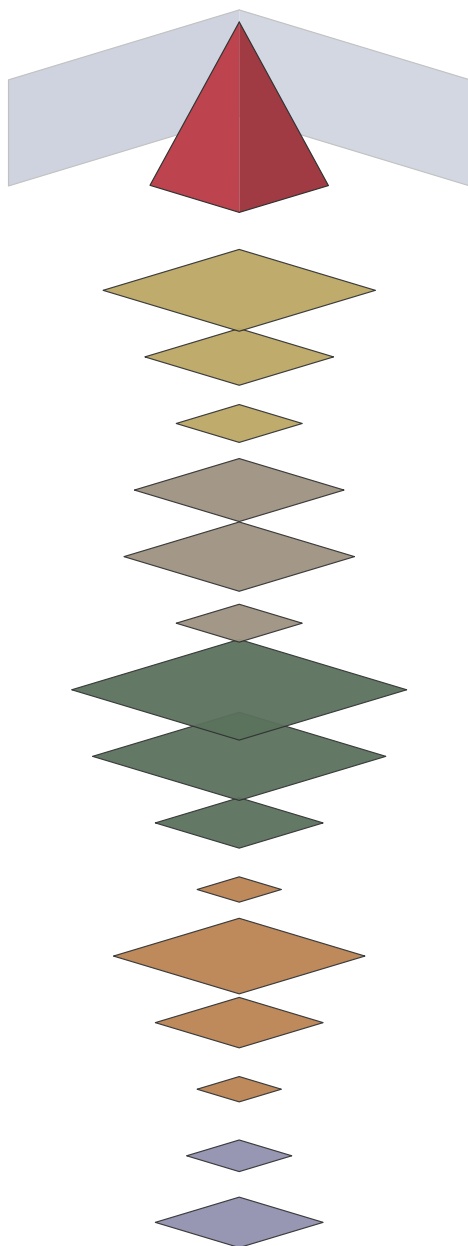




CONGO, REP.



4.78 CRIMINALITY SCORE

35th of 54 African countries
8th of 11 Central African countries



CRIMINAL MARKETS **4.47**

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	6.5
HUMAN SMUGGLING	4.5
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	3
ARMS TRAFFICKING	5
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	5.5
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	3
FLORA CRIMES	8
FAUNA CRIMES	7
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	4
HEROIN TRADE	2
COCAINE TRADE	6
CANNABIS TRADE	4
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	2
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	2.5
FINANCIAL CRIMES	4



CRIMINAL ACTORS **5.1**

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	3
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	6.5
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	8
FOREIGN ACTORS	5
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	5

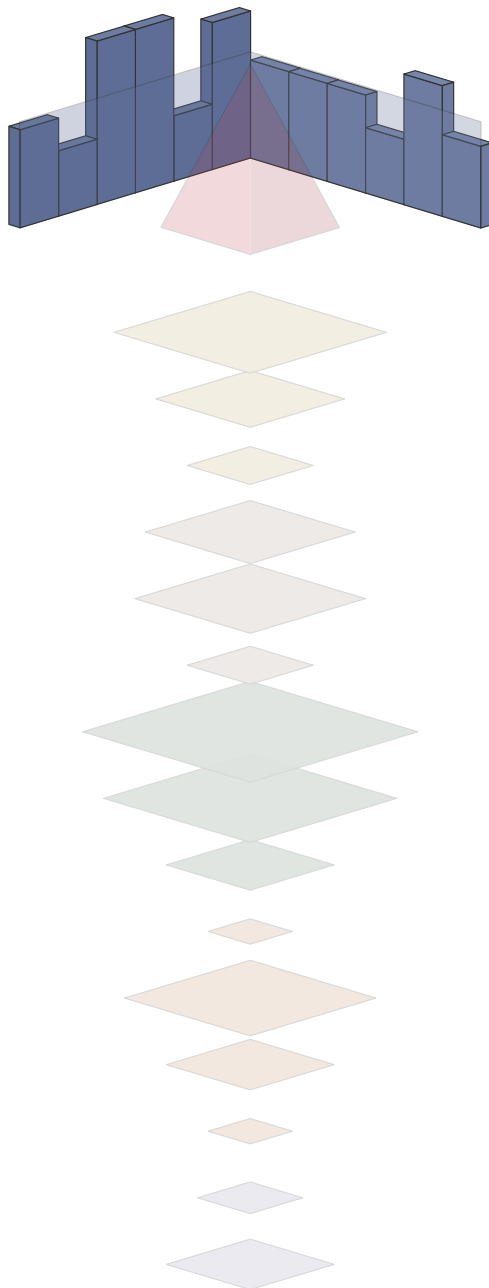


3.25 RESILIENCE SCORE





CONGO, REP.



3.25

RESILIENCE SCORE

35th of 54 African countries

4th of 11 Central African countries

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	3
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	2
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	5
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	5
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	2
LAW ENFORCEMENT	4.5
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	3
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	3
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	3
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	2
PREVENTION	4
NON-STATE ACTORS	2.5



4.78

CRIMINALITY SCORE



CRIMINAL MARKETS **4.47**



CRIMINAL ACTORS **5.1**



CRIMINALITY

Criminal Markets

PEOPLE

The Republic of the Congo (Congo) continues to be a source and destination country for children, men, and women subjected to sexual exploitation and forced labour. Sex trafficking primarily occurs domestically, with victims being recruited in rural areas and later exploited in urban cities. However, Beninese women and girls make up the majority of identified foreign trafficking victims, along with victims from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and to a lesser extent, other neighbouring countries, who are mostly being subjected to domestic servitude or forced labour. Human traffickers also exploit indigenous people in the agricultural sector, and there is alleged complicity of government officials in this market.

Congo is home to thousands of internally displaced persons and refugees, mostly from neighbouring DRC, the Central African Republic (CAR), and Rwanda. Amid conflict, violence, and displacement, human smuggling is perceived to be a crucial means for vulnerable individuals to move within the country and beyond. Nevertheless, in many cases, migrants travel to or through Congo without the assistance of professional smugglers. While human smuggling is not considered to be a particularly lucrative or high-profile crime in Congo, the practice is known to have been taxed by local territorial actors. Many irregular migrants in Congo are also vulnerable to human trafficking. Even though extortion and protection racketeering are not widespread in the country, porous borders between the CAR and Congo create conditions exploited by criminal gangs and armed militias for kidnap for ransom.

TRADE

Arms trafficking played a large part in Congo's civil war and the conflicts in the DRC and Angola, but it is now residual. After the conflicts, formal weapon surrender and decommissioning efforts did not wholly prevent ex-combatants from holding weapons and caches, which are thought to bolster small-scale criminality. A domestic market for illicit weapons also exists, which is driven by poaching in wildlife reserves throughout Congo. Even though these weapons are supplied by private arms dealers, rather than larger arms trafficking networks, they are becoming more active in the country. Weapons originating in Congo are reportedly smuggled out of

the country to be used by poachers and in the CAR's civil war. It is also alleged that the Congo has historically been acquiring weapons from Azerbaijan to be used in internal repression.

Cheap counterfeits of luxury brands and foodstuffs are prevalent in local markets and popular consumer goods in Congo. The country is also susceptible to counterfeit medicines and medical goods, and the COVID-19 pandemic probably exposed the country to some counterfeit goods designed to help counter the virus, although little information about the scale and volume of the trade is available. There are also allegations pertaining to the complicity of the country's customs administrations in the trade of counterfeit goods. There is little open-source information to suggest the economy is vulnerable to organized crime targeting excise goods for illicit revenues or profit. However, it is assumed that a nexus of corrupt state officials and members of the ruling elite together with corrupt business interests, who otherwise are engaged in legitimate commerce, seek to benefit from circumventing compulsory excise duties on a range of imported items, including tobacco and alcohol.

ENVIRONMENT

Even though the main drivers of deforestation are subsistence agriculture through slash-and-burn, artisanal forestry, timber-fuel production, and illegal logging continue to be an issue in the country. Most timber exports from the country are reported to be illegal, particularly exports destined for China, which is facilitated by the government's attitude. Even though regulations on forest resources have become stricter through recent legislation, illegal logging continues to be carried out by large companies, through illegally obtained forest concessions, routine overharvesting or tax evasion, and individuals engaging in small-scale illegal logging.

Poaching persists in protected regions of Congo and is primarily driven by bushmeat consumption and ivory trafficking. In particular, pangolins, parrots, and other protected species are trafficked from Congo to neighbouring countries. Given rising rates of poverty, an economic crisis, and demographic growth, local villagers are increasingly involved in poaching in tropical forests, and the bushmeat market is rapidly expanding. Less protected species, such as chimpanzees, gorillas, water buffaloes, and certain monkeys, have been increasingly targeted,



given lax protection regimes and the apparent legality of hunting them, for both bushmeat and use as export commodities to the same overseas markets. Moreover, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, specifically by foreign trawlers is also prevalent in the country.

Congo is one of Africa's largest oil-producing countries, and while there is little evidence to suggest a consolidated criminal economy, recent investigations have shown major indicators of corruption involving a number of foreign oil companies. There is little to suggest illegal diamond smuggling is a big concern following the Congo's readmission to the Kimberley Process in 2007.

DRUGS

Congo recently became involved in the global cocaine trade due to a budget crisis resulting from dropping oil prices and the establishment of a direct airway line between Brazil and Pointe-Noire. Congo serves primarily as a transit zone for South American cocaine trafficked to Europe, Angola, or the DRC. Evidence has suggested that the dark web has been increasingly used in Congo to purchase cocaine online since 2020. With regard to the heroin trade, however, there are no indications that the market is significant in the country.

The production of cannabis continues to occur in the country's Pool, Plateau, and Likouala regions. Additionally, cannabis trafficking also takes place along the Congo River into DRC. Domestic cannabis consumption is still common, and most drug traffickers arrested by Congolese police are involved in cannabis trafficking. Conversely, no evidence points to the existence of a considerable synthetic-drug trade in the country, except for the presence of Tramadol.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

The country has emerging broadband internet, making it a potential market for cyber-dependent crimes. However, cyber-dependent crimes are not a big feature of the Congo's overall crime picture because of the inconsistent electricity supply, low internet penetration and computer ownership as well as tight government internet and telecommunications control and access.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

The country is not a large regional financial centre, and its economy is largely cash-dependent, relying very little on electronic transfers. However, mobile money services are becoming more widespread in major cities

in Congo, therefore new forms of fraudulent activities based on such services are becoming more common and are affecting a considerable number of people. Moreover, corruption, tax evasion and embezzlement are also widespread in almost every sector, particularly in the energy sector and extractive industries.

Criminal Actors

Corruption runs rampant in the Congolese public sector. The ruling elite continued to be accused of corruption and to have diverted and misused public funds, and members of the Congolese security forces have been accused of involvement in drug and wildlife trafficking. The Congo's forestry and biodiversity, wildlife, and petroleum resources all continue to be prey to economic crimes and criminal involvement by state officials, and public servants. There are many criminal networks operating in the Congo that are in charge of drug, wildlife and human trafficking operations, suggesting their international character. These networks are often based on family ties and long-standing relations between veterans of the civil war. Criminal networks such as the Ninja and Cobra militiamen underwent disarmament processes after Congo's civil war ended in 2003. However, after reforming, and disbanding again in 2018, the groups allegedly kept most of their weapons, and many militiamen are suspected to be involved in, or responsible for, the so-called Bébés Noirs gangs.

Foreign actors are still active in the country. The French-Corsican mafia, Chinese nationals and companies, and criminals from neighbouring countries (Cameroon, Gabon, DRC, CAR) have been active in Congo. Given the importance of its petroleum sector, allegations of corruption are commonly levelled at those involved in the industry. Mafia-style structures are also present in Congo, but to a lesser extent, in the form of local youth gangs referred to as Bébés Noirs, or Black Babies. The latter operate in the Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire slums. These gangs are involved in petty crime and low-level drug trafficking, including cannabis and synthetic drugs, however, they lack organization and a clear goal. There is no open-source information to suggest that private sector actors are colluding with corrupt state agents and/or organized criminal gangs in the country. The main controversies have centered on bribery, graft, kick-back, and corruption allegations involving companies and their alleged links to ruling elites.



RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

The Congo government fails to address organized crimes other than human trafficking, wildlife trafficking, and maritime crime. The government also allegedly feigns environmental consciousness and concern for wildlife to garner diplomatic support from the West. International conferences are hosted and national parks established, but the issue is not tackled seriously. President Denis Sassou Nguesso who has maintained almost uninterrupted power for over 40 years, is accused of repressing the opposition and disregarding basic rights and freedoms. Corruption and decades of political instability have contributed to poor economic performance and high levels of poverty, making the country a fragile state. The government's management of the country's natural wealth, primarily consisting of oil and timber, lacks transparency and accountability with exploration and exploitation rights being allocated opaquely. High-profile corruption scandals related to the oil sector occur frequently, and the government's debt crisis has allegedly triggered the revelation of hidden debts and embezzlement involving high-level state officials and their relatives. Although the government established an anti-corruption strategy and a related observatory, it is reportedly regarded as a political tool to discard disgraced politicians. There have been further steps taken by the government to improve transparency and accountability such as the establishment of websites to publicize information about the Congolese government, such as the General Secretariat of the Government where one can follow new laws and other information published in *le Journal officiel*.

At the international level, the country is a signatory to several international agreements and treaties, however many of these agreements are yet to be ratified. Aside from those aimed at combating wildlife and maritime crime, the Congo government fails to engage in significant international cooperation to combat organized crime. In recent years, the Congo has also boosted its attempts to cooperate internationally and regionally in the fight against human trafficking. The country has continued to be proactive in the exchange of contacts and information regarding people trafficking. The Congolese government is also willing to try to adopt international cybersecurity best practices and align national legislation with the Budapest Convention. Congo is also working with its regional counterparts to tackle falsified and substandard pharmaceutical products that were increased in the

region following the pandemic. At a national level, Congo has an extensive legal and regulatory framework aimed at fighting various types of organized crime. International support has aided in the development of a comprehensive legislative framework against wildlife crime. The government also recently implemented a human trafficking law, which criminalizes sex, labour trafficking and laws against cybercrime.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Congo's judiciary lacks independence and resources and suffers from widespread corruption and political interference. Prosecutions in human-trafficking cases are often delayed for years. Since 2010, the country's courts have failed to either prosecute or convict suspected traffickers. Although criminals have been sentenced for wildlife crimes, they often receive amnesty later, which means many poachers are not first-time offenders and continue to engage in poaching with impunity. Defendants, including the government's political opponents, are routinely denied due process.

Operational distinctions between security forces remain blurred. Crime prevention is further undermined by low pay and a culture of impunity that permeates the security services, transforming undisciplined police elements into vectors of criminal activity – from extortion at police roadblocks to looting of property and premises in the capital. There have been reports of arbitrary arrests and human rights violations carried out by law enforcement officials, which are not generally investigated by the government. Congo's law enforcement is also plagued by corruption but, with the support of international organizations, the government has boosted its training for law enforcement officials. Law enforcement efforts against wildlife trafficking and human trafficking have reportedly led to rising rates of convictions. Nevertheless, the implementation of punitive sentences is a challenge.

Congo's capacity to monitor its land and sea borders is low, largely attributed to rampant corruption in state security agencies. Smuggling of contraband and wildlife between Congo and the DRC is commonplace, particularly between Brazzaville and Kinshasa. Due to the regional nature of the bushmeat market, wildlife poached in Congo is also trafficked out of the country to the DRC, Gabon and Cameroon. Moreover, the Angolan army is known to have infiltrated southern regions of Congo in its attempts to attack Cabinda rebels.



ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Few banks operate in Congo; however, the country is still a member of the Anti-Money Laundering Task Force or GABAC. Money laundering through domestic and foreign real estate investments is reportedly on the rise, involving ruling elites. There are also files revealing suspicious bank transfers between the Congo, the UK, and Switzerland. The economic crisis continues to threaten Congo, with a high risk of debt default. The Congo is experiencing an economic recession due to the oil sector underperforming because of a decline in production and world oil prices, as the economy is still heavily dependent on oil revenues. However, as a result of the Russia-Ukraine war, the recent high prices of oil bolstered the country's economy. The country's weak economic regulatory protections and the severe economic crisis put Congo among the worst countries worldwide in which to do business.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

The government's efforts to aid trafficking victims are focused solely on West African children subjected to forced labour in Pointe-Noire. There have been no efforts to identify or assist victims in other cities or of any forms of exploitation other than forced labour. The government lacks systematic identification and referral procedures and fails to provide any residency status to trafficking victims. Moreover, Congo relies on many international organizations to provide food and help to refugees, such as the World Food Programme.

With the exception of bids to curb wildlife trafficking, organized crime prevention remains extremely limited in Congo. Wildlife trafficking prevention activities are implemented by government entities and international conservation organizations, and while government attempts to prevent human trafficking have improved in recent years, they stay inadequate. Nevertheless, an anti-trafficking coordination committee in Pointe-Noire has been established and the government has conducted public awareness campaigns on human trafficking. Regardless, the Congo government lacks a comprehensive and adequate national action plan against human trafficking. The government of Congo is accused of whitewashing its rhetoric, especially when seeking IMF bailouts and loans or restructuring with creditors but not in delivering anti-corruption or transparency measures.

NGOs and civil society organizations still exist and function to a certain degree in the Congo. However, their activities are largely restricted by government dependence and repression at the national level. As such, civil-society activists often face intimidation, threats and arbitrary arrests. Although the Congo's legacy of state repression and ethno-regional division limits the extent to which social organizations can order themselves on the national stage, local groupings serve an important role in self-organization. Some civil society organizations are supported by international entities to help fight against human, wildlife and financial crime. However, they are closely monitored by the government. The Catholic Church has often served as an important critic of the government's lack of transparency and corrupt nature though it is often prone to self-censorship. The Congolese Observatory of Human Rights arguably serves as the most valuable domestic monitor, although government actions limit the effectiveness of such groups. The government wields influence over a media landscape that performs self-censorship. Arbitrary imprisonment of journalists continues, and it is the head of state that personally appoints the head of the media regulator.