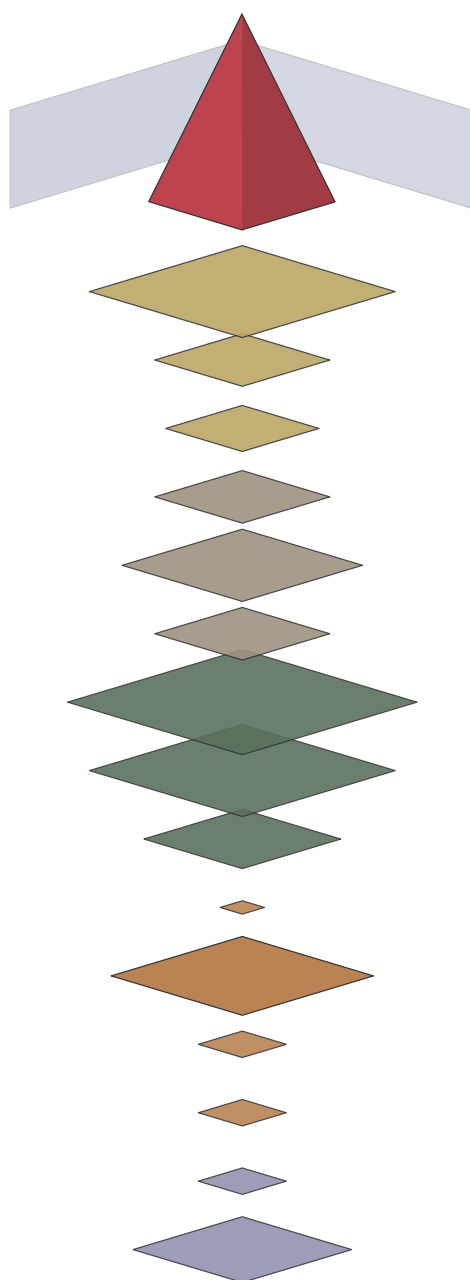
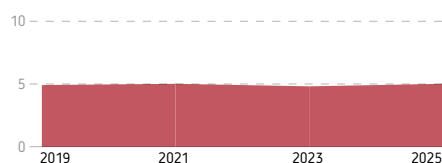


 **CONGO, REP.**



**5.03**  $\pm 0.25$   
**CRIMINALITY SCORE**

**32<sup>nd</sup>** of 54 African countries  $\pm 3$   
**6<sup>th</sup>** of 11 Central African countries  $\pm 2$



**CRIMINAL MARKETS** **4.37**  $\pm 0.10$

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	<b>7.00</b> $\pm 0.50$
HUMAN SMUGGLING	<b>4.00</b> $\pm 0.50$
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	<b>3.50</b> $\pm 0.50$
ARMS TRAFFICKING	<b>4.00</b> $\pm 1.00$
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	<b>5.50</b> 0.00
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	<b>4.00</b> $\pm 1.00$
FLORA CRIMES	<b>8.00</b> 0.00
FAUNA CRIMES	<b>7.00</b> 0.00
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	<b>4.50</b> $\pm 0.50$
HEROIN TRADE	<b>1.00</b> $\pm 1.00$
COCAINE TRADE	<b>6.00</b> 0.00
CANNABIS TRADE	<b>2.00</b> $\pm 2.00$
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	<b>2.00</b> 0.00
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	<b>2.00</b> $\pm 0.50$
FINANCIAL CRIMES	<b>5.00</b> $\pm 1.00$

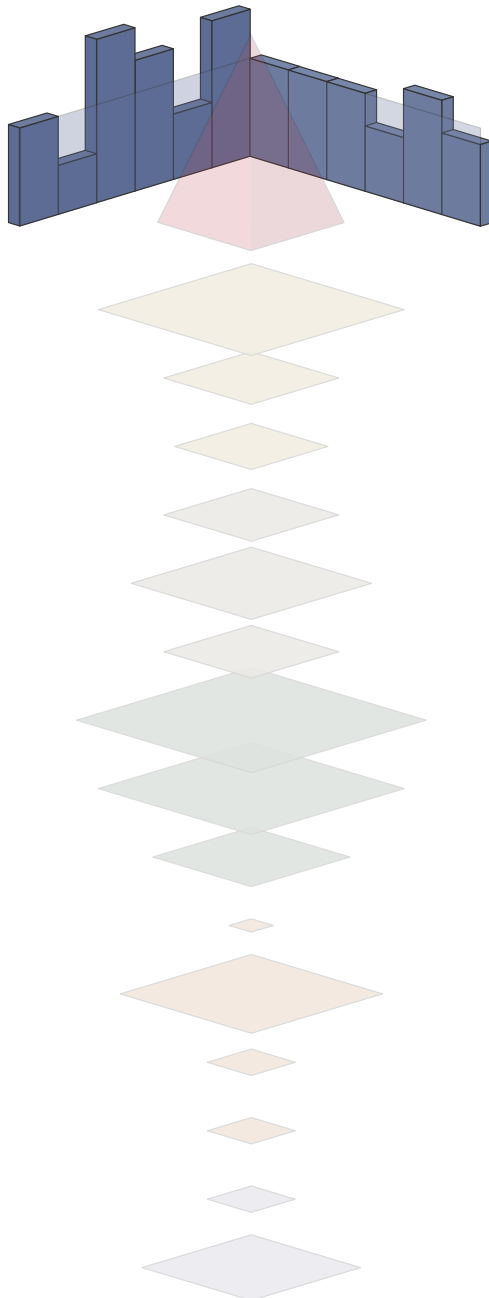


**CRIMINAL ACTORS** **5.70**  $\pm 0.60$

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	<b>3.50</b> $\pm 0.50$
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	<b>6.50</b> 0.00
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	<b>8.50</b> $\pm 0.50$
FOREIGN ACTORS	<b>6.00</b> $\pm 1.00$
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	<b>4.00</b> $\pm 1.00$



 **CONGO, REP.**



# CRIMINALITY

## Criminal markets

### PEOPLE

The Republic of the Congo is a significant destination for human trafficking, particularly for forced labour in sectors such as agriculture, fishing and market vending, as well as forced prostitution. Trafficking affects domestic and foreign victims – primarily from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Benin and Gabon – with children being exploited in domestic servitude. Instances of internal human trafficking have been observed, involving the recruitment in remote areas of vulnerable individuals – especially indigenous groups – for work in cities. Sex work is widespread and victims of human trafficking are often sexually exploited. Loose criminal networks and private sector actors engage in the trafficking market, and corruption in the government exacerbates the issue. Fraudulent recruitment agencies in neighbouring countries recruit victims for exploitation in Congo, while foreign and local businesses exploit victims in domestic service, market vending and the fishing sector.

As a transit point for migrants, Congo hosts a substantial number of refugees and asylum seekers, mostly from neighbouring countries. Small criminal organizations engage in human smuggling but recent disruptions, such as the cessation of visa issuance by several embassies, curtailed some illicit activities linked to corrupt officials and small gangs. Human smuggling activity from Congo to China emerged in 2024, leading to stricter border checks. Despite these issues, the human smuggling market is relatively small and most refugees arrive without professional smuggling assistance, limiting the scope of this criminal market.

While no new reports of extortion or kidnapping for ransom have been recorded in recent years, historically the porous borders between Central African Republic (CAR) and Congo have facilitated criminal gangs and militias engaging in such activities. Local gangs, such as the Bébés Noirs, have grown more active in extortion and racketeering, complicating the distinction between state agents and criminal groups. Urban gangs in Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire are involved in extortion, theft and kidnapping for ransom.

### TRADE

The arms trafficking market is minimal and only small illegal arms caches remaining since the civil war ended in the 1990s. Arms trafficking is linked to poaching, particularly by armed poachers from neighbouring countries such as Cameroon, CAR and the DRC, who target wildlife and sometimes attack park rangers.

The counterfeit goods market is stable, with a focus on luxury goods, food and increasingly medicines, especially after the pandemic. The presence of counterfeit electronics has risen. Congo faces challenges with illicit trade of excisable goods, particularly alcohol and tobacco, driven by porous borders, economic difficulties and limited enforcement capacity. Smuggling networks, facilitated by corruption, control distribution channels, especially in urban areas, and goods are smuggled primarily from the DRC and Gabon.

### ENVIRONMENT

Flora crimes have a significant environmental impact. Even though illegal logging accounts for a smaller part of deforestation than land use change, it is still prevalent, especially in protected national parks. Key areas affected include the Sangha Forest, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the Tri-National Dja-Odzala-Minkébé forest. Illegal logging is primarily carried out by Chinese firms, and timber exports – particularly for species such as teak, redwood and mahogany – are mainly directed to China. Congo plays a significant role in wildlife trafficking, particularly in exotic birds, pangolins, monkeys and ivory, and China and Europe are key destinations. Locals also hunt protected species for bushmeat. Corruption in the government impedes enforcement, as officials are often involved in the trade. Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, particularly targeting sharks, has worsened in the reporting period, and foreign vessels contribute to marine ecosystem damage.

Non-renewable resource crimes are moderately established, and illegal mining is a notable issue. Foreign firms, particularly Chinese, have been involved in unregulated gold mining, especially in the Sangha Forest. These operations reportedly violate environmental standards, causing deforestation and mercury contamination of water sources. Profits are mainly generated from foreign demand. Corruption in the oil sector, including mismanagement of revenues and illicit profit schemes, exacerbates financial losses. Since oil accounts for more than half of the country's exports, the impact of such illicit financial flows is significant. The non-renewable resource crimes market is interconnected with flora crimes, particularly illegal logging, and the areas affected by these markets substantially overlap.

### DRUGS

There is no evidence of significant heroin production or trafficking in Congo. The country has emerged as a secondary transit point for South American cocaine en route to Europe. Cocaine seizures have increased in number in recent years. The drug arrives primarily via Pointe-Noire harbour, hidden in



containers, and trafficking is often facilitated by local import/export companies. Significant issues with law enforcement corruption have been reported, and officers allegedly allow traffickers to evade justice, complicating efforts to curb the trade. Cannabis cultivation is widespread in the Pool, Plateaux and Likouala regions, particularly along the Congo River and near the DRC border. However, there is no indication of significant organized criminal activity related to cannabis trade. Most of the cannabis produced is consumed locally, with no notable exports or trafficking operations observed. Congo is not considered a major producer or transit country for synthetic drugs, and there is no significant presence of these substances. The popularity of tramadol-based drugs, particularly in neighbouring Gabon and the DRC, has made Congo vulnerable to related illicit activities. Sporadic reports indicate that tramadol is available in the country and local criminal groups are involved in its trade.

## CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Despite low internet penetration and inconsistent electricity supply, cyber-dependent crimes are present in Congo. The growing number of mobile users increases the risk of cybercrime amid insufficient oversight. However, evidence of organized crime involvement in this type of activity is limited and the government is starting to build its cybersecurity capacity.

## FINANCIAL CRIMES

Congo has a significant financial crimes market despite low banking penetration. In a predominantly cash-based economy, recent attempts to introduce electronic payment systems have facilitated financial inclusion while leading to a rise in financial fraud targeting citizens. Mobile money and banking frauds are increasingly common, schemes ranging from fraudulent transfers to the diversion of mobile network revenues. At the lower levels, financial scams are widespread, including the theft of deposits by microfinance executives. State-embedded actors are implicated in this market and there are documented cases of oil revenue diversion by the ruling elite, often in collusion with foreign companies. The lack of comprehensive reporting on these incidents makes it difficult to fully understand the scale and dynamics of financial crimes.

## Criminal actors

Congo faces rising youth gang activity, notably from the Bébés Noirs groups that operate primarily in Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire's impoverished neighbourhoods. These gangs are involved in violent crimes such as robbery, extortion, kidnappings and low-level drug trafficking, often clashing with rival groups in urban areas and institutions such as prisons and police stations. While some gangs have identifiable leadership, they generally lack formal structures or clear

objectives. Law enforcement efforts have included the arrest of gang leaders, and public lynchings of alleged members have become a troubling trend. The government has faced growing pressure to address gangs' escalating impact on public safety.

More loose criminal networks are also active in financial crimes, fauna trafficking and human smuggling, often engaging in low-level violence. These groups maintain transnational ties, and those involved in fauna crimes are linked to international actors, particularly in European and Asian financial hubs. Human trafficking networks operate more locally, as many foreign victims enter the country independently or with false job offers, reducing the need for extensive international coordination. Human smuggling operations that use the country as a transit route to Europe rely on broader international connections.

Corruption is widespread and state actors are involved in drug trafficking, wildlife crimes and financial crimes. Lower-level officials, including police officers, have been implicated in gang activity and the disappearance of seized cocaine. Corrupt officials in tax administration and forestry services facilitate financial crimes and illicit wildlife trade, sometimes alerting traffickers to enforcement actions. High-ranking officials, including political and military elites, engage in financial crimes, laundering proceeds from extractive industries through offshore accounts. High-level political figures have also been linked to international money laundering investigations, and assets and transactions are under scrutiny in many jurisdictions.

Foreign criminal actors operate in small groups, engaging primarily in drug trafficking, financial crimes and illegal resource extraction. Foreign companies in the extractive sector, including Chinese firms, have been implicated in illegal logging and mining, causing environmental damage while avoiding taxation. Corruption in the oil industry has led to international investigations involving foreign firms and political elites. French and Lebanese businessmen are linked to financial crimes, and pirate gangs from Nigeria have carried out attacks in Congolese waters. Brazilian organizations dominate the cocaine trade, using the country as a transit point to Europe, but their collaboration with local criminals is generally limited.

Private sector involvement in organized crime is primarily linked to financial crimes in the extractive industries. Foreign oil and logging companies, often operating through mandatory joint ventures with Congolese firms, have been implicated in corruption scandals involving ruling elites. These cases typically involve bribery, graft and kickbacks rather than direct collusion with organized criminal groups. Evidence suggests that import/export companies have played a role in drug trafficking. However, publicly available information on private sector complicity in broader organized criminal activities is limited. Most controversies centre on financial misconduct rather than direct collaboration with illicit networks.



# RESILIENCE

## LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Congo operates under an electoral autocracy, restricting political opposition and limiting campaign financing. Authorities have been accused of suppressing dissent, including imprisoning opposition figures. Political uncertainty is rising as Denis Sassou Nguesso, president since 1997, plans another term and concerns grow over succession. Governance indicators consistently reflect weak institutional effectiveness, corruption and limited political freedoms. Congo has made efforts to combat organized crime, particularly in addressing trade in counterfeit medical products and human trafficking. The government has promoted environmental initiatives such as national parks and wildlife protection conferences, though some view these as diplomatic strategies rather than genuine conservation attempts, and concerns persist about their effectiveness.

The country faces ongoing criticism for lacking transparency and accountability in managing natural resources, including oil, minerals and timber. The allocation of exploitation rights is opaque, and misreporting of external debt emerged during negotiations for financial assistance. Despite international pressure, anti-corruption initiatives have not led to significant improvements and allegations of misappropriated state revenue persist. An anti-corruption authority has been established, enforcing asset declarations for officials, and government information is increasingly available online. However, procurement contracts remain undisclosed and public transparency efforts have declined. Electronic payment systems have been introduced but have yet to replace cash transactions. Overall, corruption is a systemic issue and there has been little progress in governance indicators.

Congo participates in international efforts against organized crime but has inconsistent compliance with global standards. It has signed several key treaties, including the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, but has yet to ratify most fundamental agreements. It combats piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, hosting a regional maritime coordination centre. Efforts in human trafficking cooperation have increased, with regional extraditions and collaboration with foreign agencies. In environmental protection, Congo plays a leadership role in forest preservation and works with international partners to combat illegal logging. It maintains strong ties with China, influencing diplomatic positions. It engages in cybersecurity initiatives and is attempting to align trade-related intellectual property laws with regional frameworks.

The country has developed a legal framework targeting organized crime, focusing on wildlife trafficking, human trafficking and cybercrime. Key legislation includes laws

on arms trafficking, fauna protection, child protection and anti-trafficking measures. Recent legal reforms address cybersecurity, juvenile delinquency and forestry management. Congo and the EU expanded their partnership in the sustainable management of forests in 2024, and the country launched a partnership with the Wildlife Conservation Society to invest in 'high-integrity forest units', treating areas of forest ecosystems as an asset class to support conservation and law enforcement activity. The effectiveness of these partnerships is yet to be determined. Overall, however, enforcement is inconsistent. Gaps persist in drug trafficking legislation and there is no functional legal framework for intellectual property rights. There is no formal system for tracking and reporting counterfeit goods seizures, further weakening regulatory oversight in combating illicit trade.

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Congo's judiciary is underfunded, subject to executive influence and affected by corruption, and there are no specialized units for organized crime. Investigations and prosecutions for human trafficking and environmental crimes are rare, and judicial action against corruption in the oil sector occurs primarily abroad. Foreign actors involved in resource crimes face no legal consequences. The prison system suffers from overcrowding, inadequate funding and mismanagement, and prisoners often rely on families for food. Human rights violations, including torture and arbitrary detention, persist, and there are reports of increased abuse. Despite international commitments, government efforts to curb these abuses are inconsistent and limited.

Law enforcement consists of the National Police and the Gendarmerie, which face underfunding, low salaries and widespread corruption. Efforts to improve professionalism include international funding for training, but public distrust is undermined by reports of torture, extrajudicial killings and bribery. A leadership change in the police followed public concern over gang violence. Wildlife crime enforcement has strengthened through specialized units and international cooperation. However, local law enforcement is often linked to political repression. The armed forces focus on internal security but their effectiveness is undermined by outdated equipment and past internal conflicts. Maritime security efforts target piracy and illegal fishing.

Overall, Congo faces significant challenges in maintaining territorial integrity, primarily due to geographical barriers, weak border control and corruption, making its borders porous to criminal activities such as smuggling and wildlife trafficking. Wildlife poaching, particularly between Brazzaville and Kinshasa, contributes to cross-border illegal trade.



Political centralization and repression have kept political violence and ethnic strife at bay, while tensions with Rwanda over land rentals and relations with Angola over border issues further complicate territorial stability. Despite these challenges, Congo engages in regional security initiatives, including efforts to combat maritime piracy, though enforcement in its exclusive economic zone is limited.

## ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Congo is engaged in anti-money laundering efforts through its membership of the Groupe d'Action Contre le Blanchiment d'Argent en Afrique Centrale and the operation of the National Financial Investigation Agency. While it is not listed by the Financial Action Task Force for anti-money laundering deficiencies, the effectiveness of these efforts is uncertain due to a lack of recent evaluations. Increasing money laundering activities are linked to property investments and high-profile figures are implicated in illicit financial activities. Corruption and fraud, particularly in the oil sector, exacerbate the issue, and elite individuals reportedly benefit from illegal financial practices.

The country is facing an economic crisis. Despite its efforts to diversify from its heavy reliance on oil, growth is weak in non-oil sectors such as agriculture and timber. Debt sustainability is a concern, though the country has recorded a budget surplus and modest GDP growth. Economic reforms, including tax administration improvements, have been supported by international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. While the business environment is challenging, Congo is exploring cryptocurrency and blockchain solutions to improve its economy and resilience. Corruption hinders progress.

## CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

The government has made limited efforts to address human trafficking and only a few victims were identified during the reporting period. International organizations take the lead in victim care and the state's support is minimal. There is no systematic and proactive screening of vulnerable populations for trafficking indicators, and protection services are rarely used. Prevention efforts against organized crime focus primarily on wildlife trafficking, with support from international conservation organizations. Although there have been improvements in addressing human trafficking, including a public awareness campaign and coordination efforts, the government lacks a comprehensive national action plan and dedicated anti-trafficking entities. A federal interministerial committee to coordinate anti-trafficking efforts did not convene during the reporting period and has no formal agency to lead its efforts. There are no effective laws or policies to regulate labour recruiters and inspections of working conditions are irregular. While some sector-specific plans include provisions on trafficking, there is no national drug prevention strategy. The government faces criticism for weak rule of law, ineffective anti-corruption measures and a lack of whistle-blower protection. A 2023 plan for preventing juvenile delinquency has shown limited effectiveness.

Non-state actors, including civil society organizations and churches, play a significant role in addressing organized crime, especially environmental crimes such as wildlife trafficking. Despite government repression, civil society organizations contribute to independent forestry monitoring and corruption investigation. However, the state provides limited support to these efforts and civil society faces substantial restrictions. Media freedom is constrained and government influence over outlets leads to widespread self-censorship. The country also faces a lack of political freedoms, with opposition repression and threats to journalists. Local communities continue to organize despite restrictions, supporting refugee integration and fostering resilience.

