

# Democratic Republic of Congo

**Overview:** Some 470,000 refugees from the DRC have taken refuge in the DRC's nine neighboring countries. The largest numbers are in Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Burundi. Conditions for the refugees vary greatly by country as well as within countries, but for most, conditions are harsh, unhealthy, and unsafe. The DR Congo has an abundance of natural riches including copper, cobalt, zinc, coltan, cassiterite, gold, bauxite, diamond, oil, and gas. As of 2020, DR Congo ranks 175 on the UN Human Development Index.



## Official Language: French

French is the official language, however, there are four national languages: Kikongo (Kituba), Lingala, Swahili, and Tshiluba.

## COMMON FRENCH & SWAHILI PHRASES

**Hello** – Bonjour/Hello (different pronunciation)

**Goodbye** - Au revoir/kwaheri

**How are you?** - Comment allez-vous/Habari yako?

**I am well** - Je vais bien/Mimi ni mzima

**What is your name?** - quel est ton nom/ Jina lako nani?

**My name is...** - mon nom est/ Jina langu ni

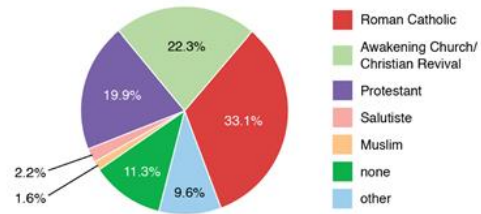
**Yes** – Oui/ ndio, **No** – Non/ Hapana

**Thank you** – Merci/ Asante, **Please** - S'il vous plait/ Tafadhali

## Facts:

- **FAMILY:** Congolese may often call a distant family member (or even someone not related by blood) their son, daughter, brother, or sister. This wider use of biological terms has created confusion both for overseas processing and for establishing legal relationships in the United States.
  - Men play a dominant role in Congolese families, and the male head of household may make decisions for the entire family. High rates of spousal abuse, particularly sexual violence, have been reported in the DRC, yet cultural norms can prevent women from speaking out.
  - Congolese often discipline their children physically and will need to understand U.S. norms and laws regarding child abuse. Traditional notions of community responsibility for childcare may conflict with Americans' parenting practices. Congolese children commonly care for younger children when parents are away.
  - Congolese parents may also benefit from discussion of strategies other than physical punishment for disciplining children. Alternatives to physical discipline such as time-outs and withdrawing privileges (for example, television and Internet) may be unfamiliar to refugee parents.
  - Inadequate supervision is an issue that is rooted both in culture and financial realities. What may be neglect in the United States—allowing children to roam about freely on their own—may be normal in the DRC. Children may also be left unsupervised at home or out in the community because both parents are working and cannot afford daycare.

- **FOOD AND DRINK:** A typical meal might include cassava leaves, beans, and a starch. This starch can be made of maize or cassava flour, or a mix of the two, and is referred to as ugali or fufu, depending on the location in the DRC. If a family has the resources, they may also serve meat like lamb or beef.
  - Many Congolese who are not Muslim drink alcohol. Beer (a traditional brew made from banana or sorghum) has important social value for the Congolese, who believe that it unites people and fosters friendship. No important ceremony is ended without drinking beer or sprinkling it on the ground to honor ancestors.
- **Religion** - For Congolese communities, churches can be tremendous resources, providing comfort and companionship. During times of turmoil in the DRC, the church was a place of sanctuary, and in the United States it is serving a similar function. A congregation may act as a new arrival's extended family, and it is not unusual for a person to attend church three or four times a week.



### Background Events

- The ongoing Congolese refugee crisis is the product of nearly 16 years of armed conflict and unrest in the DRC, with the eastern provinces of North Kivu and South Kivu bearing the brunt of the violence. By the end of 2012, more than 2.4 million Congolese were internally displaced and more than 460,000 had sought asylum in neighboring countries.
- The highly complex conflict, which at times has involved the armies of nine countries and dozens of other armed groups, was touched off in 1996 when Rwanda invaded the DRC in pursuit of the génocidaires, the perpetrators of the 1994 genocide who had taken refuge in eastern DRC and were regrouping in order to retake political leadership in Rwanda. Years of conflict followed, including the first and second Congo wars, in 1996 and 1998. The 1998 war is sometimes called "Africa's World War" because of the number of countries involved in the conflict.
- The 2018 election named Félix Tshisekedi the new president of DR Congo, however, this is a controversial win because there are claims that Tshisekedi's victory was the result of an agreement between him and Joseph Kabila so that Kabila can still influence the government.

Sources: <http://www.culturalorientation.net/learning/backgrounders>, Translators without Borders, [Britannica](#), World Travel Guide, Vagabond Journey, UNHCR, UN Human Development, Index, Providence Magazine

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