

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	1042
Land:	Den Demokratiske Republik Congo
Kilde:	US Department of State
Titel:	2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Democratic Republic of the Congo
Udgivet:	29. September 2025
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	8. oktober 2025

2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Democratic Republic of the Congo

CONGO, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE (Tier 2 Watch List)

The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. Despite making significant efforts to do so, it did not demonstrate overall increasing efforts compared with the previous reporting period. Therefore, the Democratic Republic of the Congo was downgraded to Tier 2 Watchlist. Significant efforts included convicting more traffickers and cooperating with a foreign government on anti-trafficking law enforcement activities. The government continued screening to prevent the recruitment and use of children in the military. The government also drafted a new NAP, which remained pending approval at the end of the reporting period. However, the government investigated significantly fewer trafficking cases, initiated fewer prosecutions, and identified fewer victims. Corruption and complicity in trafficking crimes remained significant concerns, which contributed to ongoing impunity for traffickers. Congolese National Army (FARDC) officials continued collaborating with and providing material support to armed groups despite widespread reports they unlawfully recruited and used child soldiers, including sometimes forcibly. Insecurity across the country, weak case management and data collection, and conflation of trafficking with other crimes hindered overall anti-trafficking efforts. Shelter and services for victims, especially outside the capital, remained inadequate. Despite reports of forced labor in mining sites, the government lacked the capacity to conduct effective inspections.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Increase efforts to investigate and prosecute suspected traffickers, including complicit officials, and seek adequate penalties for convicted traffickers, which should involve significant prison terms.
- Cease support to non-state armed groups that unlawfully recruit or use child soldiers, including in support roles, and provide appropriate protection and reintegration services to demobilized children.
- Investigate allegations of official complicity in human trafficking, including corruption within enforcement and oversight agencies, and hold complicit officials criminally accountable through prosecution and conviction.
- Improve victim identification, including by training front-line officials on implementation of SOPs to proactively identify trafficking victims, especially among vulnerable populations such as individuals in commercial sex, begging, and artisanal mining, and children affiliated with non-state armed groups, and refer trafficking victims to appropriate care.
- Increase care available to victims, including by partnering with civil society organizations providing shelter and victim services.
- Allocate resources to capacitate the Ministry of Labor's labor inspectorate to carry out its mandated functions.
- Regularly train labor inspectors to identify forced labor and refer cases to law enforcement for criminal investigation and prosecution, and increase labor inspections of informal mining operations, including artisanal and small-scale mines (ASM).
- Enhance the Ministry of Labor's and Ministry of Mines' oversight of subcontractors providing labor and services to the industrial mining sector and investigate all allegations of labor rights violations among subcontracting firms.

- Institutionalize training for judicial officials on prosecuting cases using the 2022 anti-trafficking law.
- Translate the anti-trafficking law into Lingala, Kikongo, Tshiluba, and Swahili – the national languages – to increase awareness and improve implementation across provinces.
- Allocate sufficient financial and human resources, including dedicated personnel, for the Coordination for Youth and the Fight Against Sexual Violence and Trafficking in Persons (CJVFFT), and strengthen connections with provincial and local officials to improve efforts to collect, aggregate, and share comprehensive victim identification and law enforcement data on sex trafficking – as distinct from other sexual violence crimes – and forced labor.
- Adopt and implement the 2025-2029 anti-trafficking NAP.
- Amend the definition of trafficking in persons in the penal code to ensure a demonstration of force, fraud, or coercion is not required for sex trafficking offenses involving child victims.

PROSECUTION

The government decreased law enforcement efforts.

Congolese law criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking. Law No. 22/067 amended the penal code to criminalize all forms of labor trafficking and some forms of sex trafficking. Article 3 of the law prescribed penalties of 10 to 20 years and a fine of 30 million to 60 million Congolese francs (CDF) (\$10,550-\$21,100), which increased to a minimum of 15 years' imprisonment and a fine of 150 million CDF (\$52,760) if the offense involves abduction, threat or use of force, or other forms of coercion. These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with those penalties prescribed for other grave crimes, such as rape. The law required a demonstration of force, fraud, or coercion in order to constitute a child sex trafficking offense and therefore did not criminalize all forms of child sex trafficking. However, Articles 174(j) and 174(n) of the 2006 Sexual Violence Law as well as Articles 182 and 183 of the 2009 Child Protection law together criminalized all forms of child sex trafficking and prescribed penalties of 5 to 20 years' imprisonment and a fine of between 200,000 and 1 million CDF (\$70 to \$350), thereby addressing this gap. These penalties were sufficiently stringent and commensurate with those prescribed for other grave crimes, such as rape. Congolese law also criminalized the enlistment of persons younger than 18 years into the armed forces and the police, which carried penalties of 10 to 20 years' imprisonment. Observers noted the law was not translated into Lingala, Kikongo, Tshiluba, and Swahili, which impeded its full implementation across the DRC's 26 provinces.

In 2024, the government initiated six investigations, including two for sex trafficking, three for forced labor, and one for an unspecified form of trafficking, a significant decrease compared with initiating 90 investigations during the previous year. The government reported initiating prosecutions of at least four defendants – including two sex trafficking, one forced labor, and one for an unspecified form of trafficking – and continuing one ongoing prosecution for sex trafficking. This was a decrease compared with initiating prosecutions of 21 alleged traffickers during the previous year. Courts convicted 12 traffickers, compared with convicting two traffickers during the previous year. The government did not provide sentencing data for the convicted traffickers. In one of these cases, the government convicted under trafficking charges a provincial minister of education for kidnapping and sexually exploiting a minor, although it was unclear if the case constituted trafficking crimes as defined in international law. Insecurity across the country and conflation of trafficking with other crimes hindered law enforcement efforts and the collection of statistics, and officials may have reported other crimes, such as sexual abuse, as trafficking crimes. Police and prosecutors lacked adequate resources to effectively cover all jurisdictions and hold timely trials of trafficking cases.

The Congolese National Police (PNC) had primary responsibility for investigating trafficking cases; its Child Protection and Sexual Violence Directorate was headquartered in Kinshasa and had

units in 15 provinces that received specialized training on child protection, human trafficking, and sexual violence crimes. Provincial high and lower courts heard trafficking cases based on the potential length of sentences. Labor courts could hear trafficking cases identified by the labor inspectorate during work site visits. However, law enforcement and judicial officials frequently lacked a basic understanding of human trafficking, including the national anti-trafficking law; and did not receive sufficient training, which hindered overall anti-trafficking efforts. The government, in collaboration with foreign governments, international NGOs, and civil society, continued to train law enforcement and judicial officials on anti-trafficking legal frameworks, investigative techniques, and victim referral mechanisms. The government reported cooperating with the Republic of the Congo on anti-trafficking law enforcement activities. The government had anti-trafficking MOUs with the Republic of the Congo and Morocco, but it did not report efforts to implement the agreements.

Corruption and official complicity in trafficking crimes remained significant concerns, impeding law enforcement and judicial action. Sources reported widespread complicity, including allegations government officials directly engaged in trafficking, helped facilitate the crime, and obstructed justice. Government officials accepted bribes to overlook labor abuses, including forced labor and the worst forms of child labor, in the mining sector. Perpetrators of sexual violence, including sex trafficking, were rarely held accountable; and security forces continued to sexually abuse and exploit victims, including children, with impunity. The FARDC collaborated with and provided material support to Alliance of Patriots for a Free and Sovereign Congo (APCLS), Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), Nduma Defense of Congo-Renouveau (NDC-R), and Nyatura, all of which unlawfully recruited and used child soldiers, including sometimes forcibly. Although some FARDC officials faced administrative penalties for allowing or attempting to allow children to enlist in the military, authorities did not report initiating any criminal investigations or prosecutions in these cases.

PROTECTION

The government maintained inadequate protection efforts.

The government, in coordination with NGOs, identified and referred to services 58 trafficking victims (48 labor trafficking victims, nine sex trafficking victims, and one victim of an unspecified form of trafficking); a significant decrease compared with identifying and referring 174 victims to services during the previous reporting period. Civil society organizations reported identifying an additional two sex trafficking victims and one forced labor victim. Due to conflation of trafficking with other crimes, victim identification data likely included non-trafficking crimes.

The government continued implementing its victim identification and referral SOPs and trained some frontline officials on the SOPs and case management procedures; however, budgetary constraints and understaffing hindered its implementation. The PNC's Child Protection and Sexual Violence Directorate also had a formal mechanism in place with local NGOs to screen for possible trafficking victims among vulnerable groups. Due to inconsistent implementation of victim identification and referral SOPs, and the frequency of arbitrary arrests in the country, the government did not take effective measures to prevent the inappropriate penalization of potential victims solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked.

Observers reported victim services remained significantly limited with few shelters or services available to assist trafficking victims, particularly in conflict-affected areas, and officials relied on civil society organizations to provide most services. The government did not report its funding for victim services, and observers noted concerns over alleged misallocation and misuse of resources. Frontline officials were required to report suspected trafficking cases to the Ministry of Social Affairs to coordinate victims' access to services. The government operated two shelters capable of supporting trafficking survivors in Kinshasa and coordinated with a network of shelters and host families in four provinces; however, the government struggled to fund its own shelters or services and often relied on partner organizations. The government restricted child victims from leaving

shelters while criminal proceedings remained ongoing. The Ministry of Social Affairs also coordinated provision of victim services, including medical care, psycho-social support, legal aid, and socioeconomic reintegration services, although officials did not provide specialized services to trafficking victims distinct from other vulnerable groups. The government usually referred trafficking victims to NGO-run shelters that provided the majority of services to trafficking victims, including legal services, medical aid, psycho-social care, shelter, and vocational and educational training. The government reported coordinating with the government of the Republic of Congo, to repatriate 47 victims identified in the DRC. Foreign national and Congolese victims were eligible for the same services.

The government did not have a systematic victim-witness assistance program. Although the government attempted to provide support to victims who assisted in the investigation and prosecution of trafficking cases, victims did not consistently have access to lodging, medical, psychological, or transportation support during legal proceedings, which discouraged victim cooperation. Courts were authorized to provide measures concealing witnesses' identities such as using physical screens in court or testifying in adjacent rooms; however, these protections were only available if specifically requested by a victim's lawyer, and infrastructure challenges and severe resource constraints limited their availability and effectiveness. Observers reported defendants' family members frequently intimidated witnesses and victims. The government did not provide legal aid to assist trafficking victims during the reporting period; observers reported an overall lack of legal services and high legal fees impeded victims' access to the justice system. Victims could file civil suits against traffickers, but none reportedly did so, and victims rarely received compensation. The law allowed victims to obtain restitution, but in practice, defendants rarely paid it. The government did not report ordering restitution, compared with one case during the previous year. The government did not report providing legal alternatives to the removal of foreign victims to countries where they may face hardship or retribution.

As part of its national disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration plan, the government continued partnering with an international organization and NGOs to identify and remove children associated with armed groups operating in eastern DRC. The government and its partners referred 345 children separated from armed groups to international organizations for services, including medical, psycho-social, and reintegration support; the government did not report how many children were referred in the previous reporting period. However, the conflict in eastern DRC hindered officials' access to conflict areas and subsequently limited screening and demobilization efforts. The government continued to detain children for alleged association with armed groups, including potential trafficking victims; some of these children remained in detention at the end of the reporting period.

PREVENTION

The government maintained inadequate efforts to prevent trafficking.

The CJVFFT, under the office of the presidency, was responsible for coordinating the government's anti-trafficking response, although the CJVFFT remained understaffed and received limited funding. The CJVFFT led the interagency trafficking in persons committee and twice convened the technical working commission. The government drafted a new 2025-2029 NAP to replace its previous NAP; however, it remained pending approval at the end of the reporting period.

The government continued its awareness-raising efforts. However, awareness-raising materials were not readily available in local languages and the Congolese public remained generally unfamiliar with human trafficking. In collaboration with an international organization, the government also conducted an awareness-raising event for World Day Against Trafficking in Persons. The FARDC, in collaboration with an international organization, continued efforts to screen prospective soldiers and prevent FARDC recruitment and use of children. The government reported these efforts prevented 126 children from enlisting in the military, compared with preventing 50 children from entering basic training during the previous reporting period. When

authorities identified children among new recruits, it collaborated with an international organization to separate and reintegrate them with their families, and the FARDC fired or issued administrative punishments to the recruiters.

The Ministry of Labor remained insufficiently resourced and unable to effectively conduct its primary functions or enforce regulations prohibiting child labor and forced labor. The government did not prioritize efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor, including trafficking, particularly in less economically crucial sectors. The Minister of Human Rights issued a decree in 2020 to increase oversight of mining communities, including a zero-tolerance policy for forced child labor in the mining sector, and certified mining sites in eastern DRC as conflict-free and child labor-free. However, the government lacked resources to sufficiently inspect mines – including cobalt mines – and officials did not report certifying any mines; additionally, the government did not report whether it identified any potential victims as a result of the inspections during the reporting period.

The Assistance and Supervision Service of Artisanal and Small-Scale Mines, the government entity responsible for inspecting artisanal and small-scale mines to prevent child labor, did not have the capacity to conduct regular inspections across the hundreds of formal and informal ASM sites in DRC. Officials did not have formal mechanisms to prevent gold sourced from sites controlled by armed groups, which reports indicated utilized child labor and forced labor, from entering supply chains; observers similarly alleged cobalt and copper were not solely derived from formal industrial facilities. Recognizing these challenges, the government adjusted its goal of eradicating child labor in mining from 2025 to 2030. The government also adopted a child labor monitoring and remediation system to identify and track children found working in cobalt mines. However, inspectors seldom referred potential cases of labor trafficking to law enforcement for criminal investigation or potential victims to services. The government also struggled to regulate subcontractors in the mining sector despite concerns about vulnerability of workers to abusive practices.

Additionally, labor protections for migrant workers and oversight of foreign labor recruitment agencies remained weak. In November 2024, the government suspended all recruitment agencies and convened a commission to address labor recruitment issues; the suspension remained in effect at the end of the reporting period. The government did not take measures to hold fraudulent labor recruiters accountable. It did not prohibit worker-paid recruitment fees.

The government hotline for reporting violence against women and girls remained suspended due to a lack of funding. The government did not make efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts. The government did not provide any anti-trafficking training to its diplomatic personnel. The government did not report any currently deployed peacekeepers. Although not explicitly reported as human trafficking, there were seven open allegations of alleged sexual exploitation with trafficking indicators by Congolese peacekeepers deployed to the UN peacekeeping mission in the Central African Republic from 2011 to 2017. The government had not yet reported the accountability measures taken, if any, for the open case at the end of the reporting period.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE:

Trafficking affects all communities. This section summarizes government and civil society reporting on the nature and scope of trafficking over the past five years. Human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in the DRC, and traffickers exploit victims from the DRC abroad. Most trafficking is internal and involves labor trafficking in artisanal mining sites, agriculture, domestic servitude, or armed group recruitment of children in combat and support roles, as well as sex trafficking. The decades-long instability in eastern DRC – notably North Kivu, Ituri, South Kivu, and Tanganyika provinces – continued to exacerbate many conflict-related human trafficking indicators, including unlawful recruitment or use of child soldiers, trafficking of IDPs, forced marriage, sexual slavery, and sexual violence.

Children in extreme poverty, from displaced communities, and who are homeless remain vulnerable to trafficking. As in prior years, traffickers exploit cultural practices and families eager to find opportunities for their children to reduce economic burdens. Some traffickers, including family members, promise victims' educational or employment opportunities in urban areas, but exploit victims in labor trafficking as domestic workers or street vendors, or exploit them in sex trafficking. Children are vulnerable to labor trafficking in small-scale agriculture, construction, domestic work, street begging, vending, and portering. Congolese women and girls are coerced into forced marriages where they may be subjected to domestic servitude or sex trafficking.

Labor trafficking, including forced labor and the worst forms of child labor, remain prevalent in provinces with mining activity such as Haut Katanga, Haut Uele, Ituri, Kasai, Lualaba, North Kivu, South Kivu. Artisanal mining remained predominantly informal, illicit, and strongly linked to both armed groups and the FARDC. Traffickers – including mining bosses, other miners, family members, government officials, and armed groups – force or coerce some adults and children into forced labor in artisanal mines in eastern DRC, including through debt bondage. Individuals associated with the extractive sector exploit some children in forced labor in the illegal mining of cobalt, copper, diamonds, gold, tantalum ore, tin, and tungsten ore, as well as the smuggling of minerals. Observers reported child marriages and forced marriages in the mining sector and noted women and children in mining areas are vulnerable to sex trafficking. Chinese national-owned cobalt and copper mines likely engaged in abusive labor practices and reportedly exploited Congolese workers in forced labor; observers reported workers faced wage violations, physical abuse, employment without contracts, and restricted movement – all potential indicators of forced labor.

The conflict in eastern DRC exacerbated conflict-related forms of human trafficking, including the unlawful recruitment and use of child soldiers, forced conscription and recruitment, forced labor, and sex trafficking. Observers estimate there are approximately 8 million displaced persons in the DRC; these individuals are vulnerable to trafficking due to their lack of safety, economic stability, and access to the justice system. Experts report all parties to the conflict recruit and use children, including in combat and support roles, at an unprecedented scale. Non-state armed groups – most egregiously Alliance des Forces de Resistance Congolaise, APCLS, Cooperative for Development of the Congo, FDLR, ISIS-DRC (known locally as Allied Democratic Forces), Kamuina Nsapa, Mai Mai Mazembe, Mai Mai Apa na Pale, Mobondo, Nyatura, NDC-R, Raia Mutomboki, and Twa militias – continue to recruit Congolese adults and children, at times forcibly and through abduction, for use as combatants, human shields, and in support roles (such as guards, porters, cleaners, cooks, messengers, spies, and tax collectors at mining sites). The FARDC collaborated with and provided material support to armed groups, including APCLS, NDC-R, FDLR, and Nyatura, which unlawfully recruited and used child soldiers, including sometimes forcibly. Observers reported the Government of Rwanda provided support to and coordinated with the March 23 Movement (M23), a non-state armed group that forcibly and fraudulently recruited and used children as conscripted soldiers, porters, and sex slaves in the DRC. Observers reported M23 systematically engaged in forced recruitment of adults and children and forced labor of the civilian population under its control in eastern DRC. Some armed groups also force women and girls into marriage or sexual slavery.

Women and children experiencing poverty, living in conflict-affected areas such as eastern DRC, or residing in communities around mining activities were at particular risk of sex trafficking. Experts report the deteriorating security and humanitarian situation has led to unprecedented levels of sexual violence, including sex trafficking, among women and girls and, to a lesser extent, men and boys. The recurrence of armed hostilities resulted in a surge in IDPs fleeing violence; IDPs and refugees from neighboring countries, including Central African Republic, are exploited in sex trafficking or compelled to engage in “survival sex” in exchange for shelter and basic necessities. The presence of FARDC and pro-government forces, including the *Wazalendo*, exacerbates the threat of violence to IDPs and local communities. Traffickers fraudulently recruit displaced women and girls as young as 10 years old for employment in domestic work or restaurants and subsequently exploit them in commercial sex establishments operating out of bars, restaurants, and shelters in and around IDP sites with impunity.

Congolese women and children migrate or flee violence to other countries in Africa, the Middle East, and Europe, where traffickers exploit them in sex trafficking or forced labor in agriculture, diamond mines, or domestic service. Illicit labor recruiters fraudulently recruit women and force or coerce them into domestic work abroad through false promises of education or employment opportunities. Media and NGOs report unscrupulous actors, including Russian officials and illicit recruiters, fraudulently recruited women ages 18-22 from Africa – including DRC – South Asia, and South America for vocational training programs and subsequently placed them in military drone production sites. Media report workers at these sites are subjected to hazardous conditions, surveillance, hour and wage violations, contract switching, and worker-paid recruitment fees, all of which are indicators of human trafficking. North Korean nationals working in the DRC may be operating under exploitative working conditions and display multiple indicators of forced labor.