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Republic of the Congo at 60

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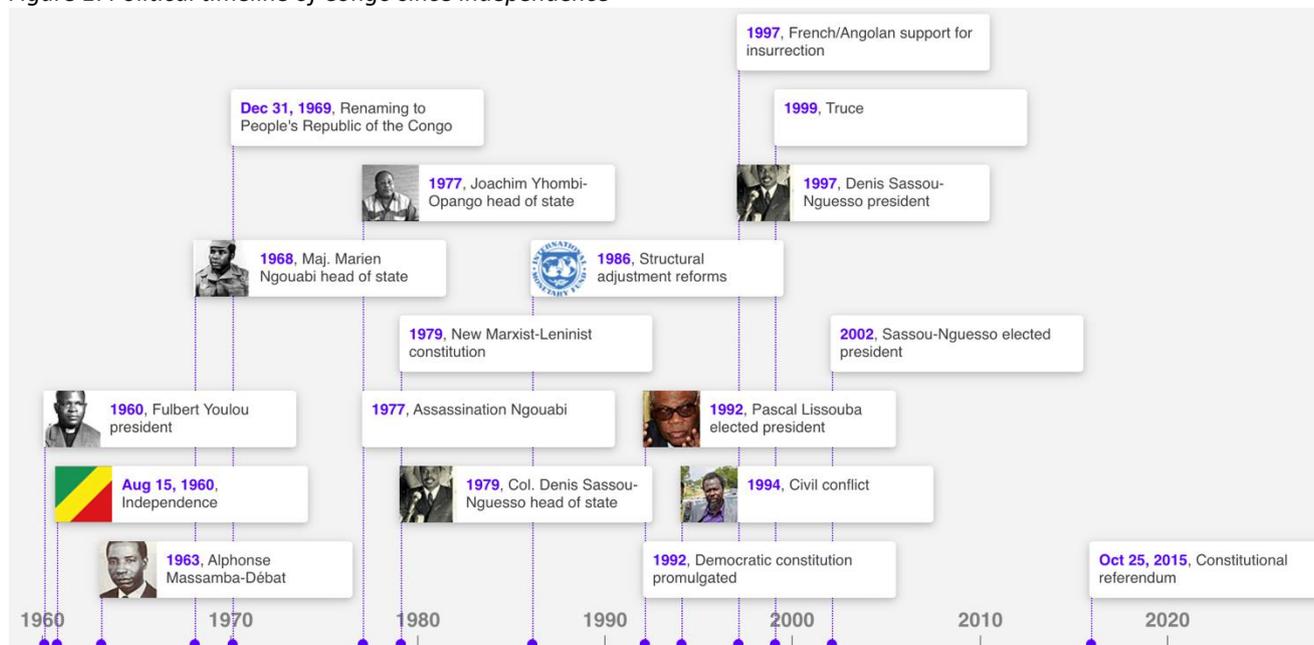
Republic of the Congo at 60

Political history

1960 was the ‘Year of Africa’: many former colonies in Africa became politically independent. Of the seventeen colonies gaining independence in that year, Republic of the Congo (‘Congo-Brazzaville’) was the thirteenth one: on August 15. Congo had been a French colony from 1880 onwards, first as French Congo, and from 1903 onwards as

Middle Congo. In 1908 it became part of French Equatorial Africa (together with Chad, Oubangui Chari, and Gabon), and Brazzaville became the federal colonial capital. Between 1940 and 1943 it was the symbolic capital of Free France (see Figure 1 for a post-independence political timeline).

Figure 1: Political timeline of Congo since independence



Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica

The Republic of the Congo (or Congo-Brazzaville) became independent under the leadership of Fulbert Youlou, a southern-Congolese politician of the Democratic Union for the Defense of African Interests (UDDIA). His government faced considerable and increasing opposition, not least from France, and was ousted in 1963. Youlou was succeeded by the left-wing Alphonse Massamba-Débat, who founded the National Revolutionary Movement and strengthened ties with the Soviet Union, China, and the MPLA in Angola. He, in turn, was deposed by the military in 1968 and replaced by Major Marien Nguoubi, who renamed the country the People’s Republic of the Congo a year later. Nguoubi’s reign ended in 1977, when he was assassinated and succeeded by Colonel Yhombi-Opango

and, a mere two years later, by Colonel Denis Sassou-Nguesso.

Sassou-Nguesso quickly introduced a Marxist-Leninist constitution and socialist policies, but also enhanced relations with Europe. At the same time, economic problems arose as oil prices fell, and the International Monetary Fund entered the country in 1986 to negotiate loans in exchange for structural liberalisation. Political liberalisation followed, and the early 1990s witnessed competitive elections, in which Pascal Lissouba won the presidency. Defeated politicians, however, mobilised militias against the government (and each other), ushering in a long period of civil unrest and war between the so-called Cocoye, Cobra, and Ninja militia groups. France and Angola intervened to end the violence in 1997, but it

resumed after Sassou-Nguesso had been installed as head of state. Hostilities ceased again in 1999, only to flare up in 2002 until the peace agreement in 2003. Since then, Sassou-Nguesso has managed to remove constitutional term limits and retain his hold on the presidency.

Conflict, state fragility, and travel risks

For African standards Congo is high on the ‘security risk’ indices. Before the Corona crisis, in December 2019, the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs had put the border area with the Central African Republic, as well as the southern border area with the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the ‘orange’ zone (= high risks, ‘only travel if really necessary’). [Currently, September 2020, all ‘danger zoning’ has been disturbed by the global COVID-19 crisis].

The State Fragility Index of the Fund for Peace puts Congo in the ‘alert range’, with 92.5 points (most negative score would be 120.0 points; for Africa, ‘alert’ is a relatively bad category; the ninth category out of eleven - <https://fundforpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/9511904-fragilestatesindex.pdf>). The index consists of twelve variables, and Congo has relatively good scores for ‘factionalised elites’, and for ‘external intervention’ (but these scores are around 7.0 out of 10.0, 10 being the worst possible score, which means that also for the relatively good scores Congo is in the ‘warning’ range). Congo has very problematic scores for ‘state legitimacy’, and for the ‘quality of public services’.



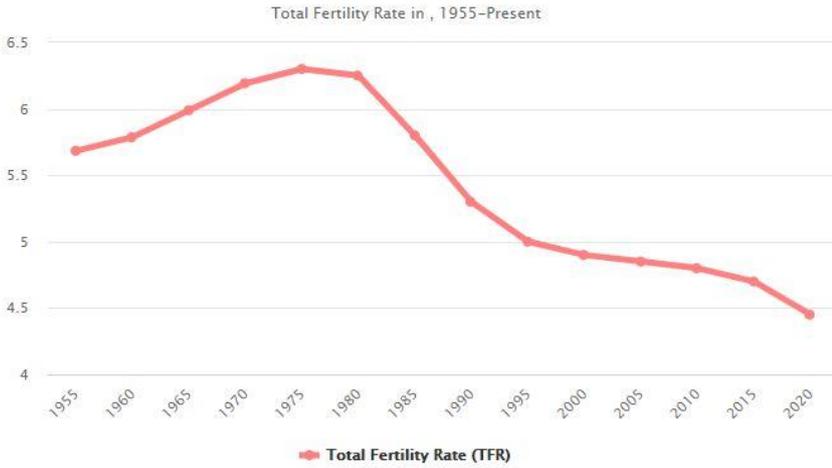
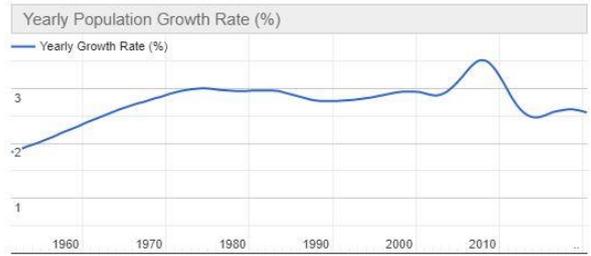
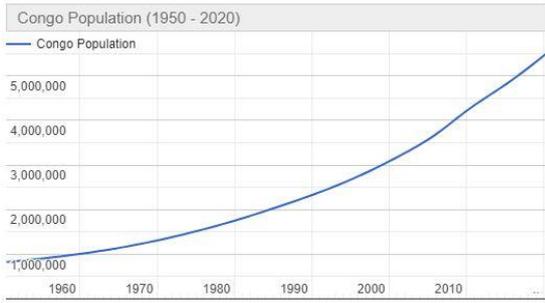
Source of the map: <https://i.pinimg.com/originals/d4/81/54/d481547fd308dd9c6af02cea5d445c82.gif>

Demography

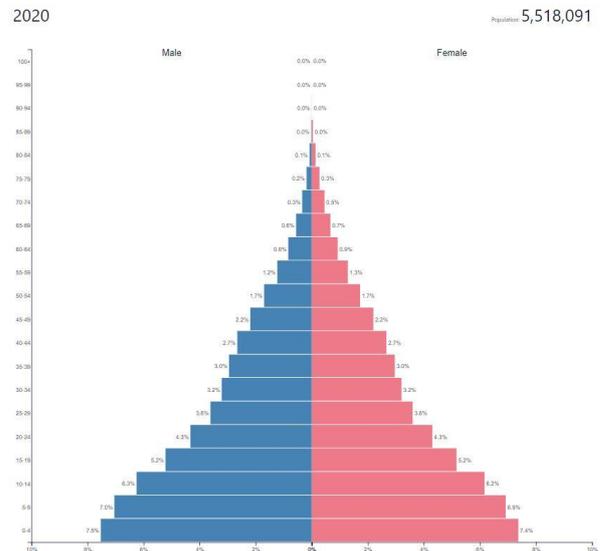
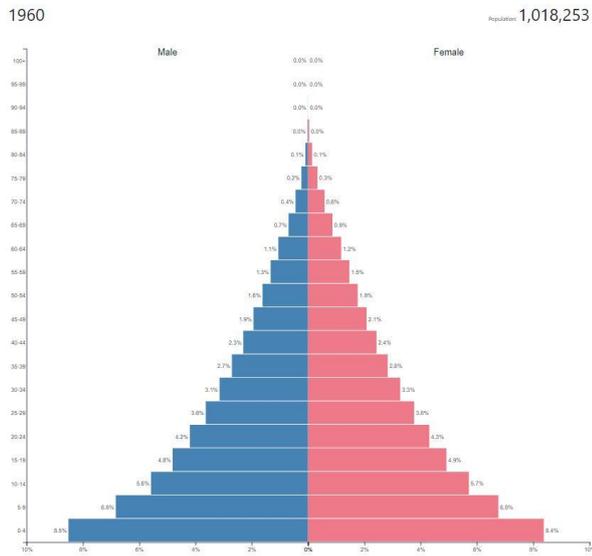
Congo’s population increased more than fivefold between 1960 and 2020, from 1.0 million in 1960 to 5.4 million in early 2020, mostly through high fertility rates and longer life expectancy for both males and females (also because of rapidly improving child and infant mortality figures). Population growth figures were more than 2.5% per year from 1962 onwards, and beyond 3% between 2004 and 2010. Currently the average growth rate is around 2.6 percent per year. Total fertility was around 5.8 live-born children per woman in 1960; it first increased to 6.3

around 1975, and then started to diminish, with currently 4.5 births per average woman in Congo during her lifetime. As a result of these demographic developments, Congo has a skewed population pyramid, with more young people than adults and elderly people. The median age changed from 19.2 years old in 1960, down to 16.9 years old in 1980, and currently again 19.2 years old. The current urbanisation rate is one of the highest of Sub-Sahara Africa (70% in 2020) and has always been relatively high for African standards (32% in 1960).

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Source: Worldometers



Source: <https://www.populationpyramid.net/congo>

Demographic statistics, Congo as a whole, 1960 and 2020

	1960	2020
Population	1.0 million	5.5 million
Fertility rate	5.8	4.5
Life expectancy (males)	45	64
Idem (females)	50	67
Median age	19.2	19.2
Infant mortality (< 1 yr)	108/1000	31/1000
Under-5 mortality	177/1000	42/1000
Urbanisation rate	32%	70%
Urban population	0.3 million	3.9 million
Rural population	0.7 million	1.7 million

Source: Worldometers

Human Development Index, Congo as a whole, 1990 and 2018

Human Development Index data exist since 1990, with annual UNDP updates. In 1990, Congo's Human Development Index started at a level of 0.531, quite high for African standards. The HDI consists of a health index, an income index and an education index, while UNDP also provides data about life expectancy, and some other indicators. For Congo the various components of the HDI mostly show some improvement, except the income index, and the GDP/capita (both were at its lowest in 2006, with recovery afterwards). Between 1990 and 2018 Congo's population increased from 2.4 million people to 5.2 million people. Unlike most countries in Africa, the (modest) increase in the HDI between 1990 and 2018 (from 0.531 to 0.608) can be mostly attributed to

improvements in the health index, and not so much in the education index, while the income or standard of living deteriorated somewhat. Data for life expectancy show that this figure was already quite high (for African standards) in 1990, and further increased towards 2018. Average income levels per capita (in US\$ of 2011, PPP) show massive ups and downs: from the relatively high level of 5976\$ in 1990, it first increased to 6307\$ in 1992, and then plunged to 2674\$ in 2006. Then it started to increase rapidly to a level of 7631\$ in 2014, and went down again to 5804\$ in 2018. This very volatile economic development can be seen in the income index of HDI as well: from the high level of 0.618 to 0.496 in 2006, up to 0.655 in 2015, and down again to 0.613 in 2018.

Congo: Human Development Index, its composition, and other indicators; data for 1990, and 2018

	1990	2018	2018/1990	
Health Index	0.533	0.681	1.28	
Income Index *	0.618	0.613	0.99	
GNI/capita **	5976	5804	0.97	
Education Index	0.455	0.539	1.18	
Mean years of schooling	4.4	6.5	1.49	
Expected years of schooling	11.2	11.6	1.04	
Life Expectancy	55	64	1.18	
Total HDI index	0.531	0.608	1.15	

Source: <https://globaldatalab.org> 4.0; * = for 2018 called 'standard of living component'.

** GNI/capita in US \$ of 2011, PPP).

Trade statistics, Congo: exports and imports, 2018

In 2018, Congo exported products for a total value of 10.0 billion \$, and imported for a total value of 2.4 billion \$ (mostly from China, France, UAE, Belgium, India and South Korea, in that order), resulting in a major positive trade

balance. Leading import products were poultry meat, office machine parts, packaged medicaments, palm oil, and refined petroleum, in that order. These figures are based on the Observatory for Economic Complexity, a spin-off of MIT.

The most important export products and most important export destinations in 2018 were:

Main export products (value in \$ million)		Main export destinations (value in \$ million)	
Crude petroleum	6820	China	5880
Refined copper	2050	UAE	1370
Rough wood	207	Italy	445
Other copper products	179	USA	391
Refined petroleum	176	India	375

Source: <https://oec.world/en/profile/country/cog/>

If we compare Gross Domestic Product, Exports and Imports, and we use Macrotrends data (which differ from the data from OEC), we get the following average picture

for the four-year period of 2016-2019, showing extreme export dependency of the economy.

6.0 b\$	1.6 b\$	8.5 b\$
Imports	Home use	Exports
Gross Domestic Product (10.1 b\$)		

Sources: GDP: <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/COG/congo-rep/gdp-gross-domestic-product>;

Imports: <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/COG/gabon/imports>;

Exports: <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/COG/gabon/exports>.

Protected areas and Forests

Congo currently has four national parks, one forest reserve, seven wildlife sanctuaries/reserves, two hunting areas, a community reserve, and one 'area of absolute protection'. Internationally fourteen Ramsar sites, and two UNESCO-MAB biosphere reserves have been recognised, besides one world heritage site. According to Protectedplanet, currently 14.6 million hectares are protected areas (42 % of Congo's total area), as well as 128,000 hectares of marine protected areas¹. Congo has

22.4 million hectares of forests, 66% of its total land area). However, between 1990 and 2010 Congo has lost some of its forest cover, a total of 315,000 ha². Other areas are mainly 'other wooded land', and areas for agriculture, livestock, hunting and gathering.

Agricultural Congo

Crop Area (in 1000 hectares), and total production (in 1000 tonnes), 1961 and 2018, in the order of the crop areas in 2018:

	1961		2018		2018/1961	
	Area	Prod.	Area	Prod.	Area	Prod.
Cassava	95	480	132	1436	1.4	3.0
Groundnuts	35	25	50	26	1.4	1.0
Cereals	7	5	36	29	5.1	5.8
Vegetables	12	34	36	188	3.0	5.5
Fruits	10	48	35	242	3.5	5.0
Sugarcane	5	190	20	718	4.0	3.8
Roots and tubers	11	46	19	78	1.7	1.7
Cocoa beans	3	1	14	4	4.7	4.0
Oil palm	10	125	12	179	1.2	1.4
Coffee	4	1	10	3	2.5	3.0
Seeds and nuts	4	2	9	7	2.3	3.5
Other crops	1	1	4	3	4.0	3.0
Total (area)	197		377		1.9	

2018/1961: red = 2018 is below 1961; green: 2018 is more than 5.0 times the 1961 figures (that is: more than population increase in Congo from 1.0 million to 5.2 million between 1961 and 2018); black: in-between. Source: Faostat data.

¹ <https://www.protectedplanet.net/country/COG>;
slightly different data in
<http://www.parks.it/world/CG/index.html>

² <https://rainforests.mongabay.com/deforestation/2000/Congo.htm>

Congo's land area is 34.2 million hectares, and its crop area increased from 0.6% to 1.1% of its land area between 1961 and 2018. Congo has not put a lot of emphasis on its agriculture. Although all food crop areas expanded, expansion was mostly below population growth, with the exception of cereals (maize, millet, and rice). Production volumes also increased but at levels below population growth, again with the exception of cereals, but also for vegetables.

The numbers of all live animals together, measured in stock units, expanded more rapidly than Congo's population: 1030% compared with 500%. Per capita the numbers of live animals in the country increased from a very low 0.03 livestock units per capita in 1961 to 0.07 livestock units per capita. The best growth performance can be seen for cattle, followed by goats.

Livestock numbers (x 1000)

	1961	2018	2018/1961
Cattle	21	364	17.3
Chicken	600	2966	4.9
Goats	55	327	5.9
Pigs	26	109	4.2
Sheep	40	130	3.3
Livestock units	33	341	10.3

Source: Faostat data; 1 livestock unit = based on 0.7 cattle; 0.1 goats/sheep/pigs; 0.01 chicken.

International migration

In 2015, 221,000 people who were born in Congo lived outside the country (4.4% of Congo's total population of 5.1 million people inside and outside the country during that year), of whom 115,000 elsewhere in Africa (mainly Mali, Tanzania, South Africa, Gabon and Zambia, in that order), and 106,000 outside Africa (2.1% of Congo's total population: most of them in France; UN migration report 2015). In 2010 Congo had 420,000 immigrants (10% of its total population in that year) and in 2017 there were still 399,000 immigrants, almost half of them from the DRC, but also from Angola, Mali, the Central African Republic, Rwanda, Benin, Senegal, Cameroon, and Chad, in that order. In 2015 10,000 people from France lived in Congo. Immigration more than tripled between 1990 and 2017,

with a major increase between 1995 and 2000 as a result of refugees coming from the DRC (UN Migration Report 2017).

Urban Congo

Congo is one of the most urbanised countries in Africa. Congo's urban population increased from only 0.3 million people in 1960 (32% of its national population at Independence) to 3.9 million in 2020 (70%). Growth has been rapid for all cities. Between 1960 and 2020 the population increase was almost twentyfold in the two major cities, Brazzaville and Pointe Noire.



Map: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/attachments/maps/CF-map.gif>

Major urban areas in Congo

Cities (and region)	Population in thousands of inhabitants			
	Macrotrends: 1960	Macrotrends (metropoles): 2020	Worldometers, city, as given in 2020	Wikipedia (census 2007)
Brazzaville	124	2388	1285	1373
Pointe Noire	64	1214	659	715
Dolisie/Loubomo	(29)	...	104	84

Source for 2020: <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/congo-population/>;

Also: <https://www.macrotrends.net/cities/20848/brazzaville/population/>;

<https://www.macrotrends.net/cities/20849/pointe-noire/population/>;

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_cities_in_the_Republic_of_the_Congo;

For Dolisie/Loubomo in 1960 = 1974 (census), according to <https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dolisie>.

Regional Inequality

Map	Region / Région	Population x 1000		'18/'90
		1990	2018	
	1 = Bouenza	270	350	1.30
	2 = Brazzaville	750	2020	2.69
	3 = Cuvette	100	190	1.90
	4 = Cuvette-Ouest	60	80	1.33
	5 = Kouilou	100	120	1.20
	6 = Lékoumou	80	110	1.38
	7 = Likouala	120	210	1.75
	8 = Niari	240	270	1.17
	9 = Plateaux	130	190	1.46
	10 = Pointe Noire	360	1250	3.47
	11 = Pool	130	360	2.77
	12 = Sangha	30	100	3.33
Congo total		2360	5240	2.22

Source: <https://globaldatalab.org> 4.0,

map: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/0c/Congo_regions_named.png.

Pointe Noire is on the southwest side of Kouilou

Congo has 12 Regions, if we also count Pointe Noire as a separate (city) region. Between 1990 and 2018 all regions experienced population growth, but with very big differences between the regions. The highest growth happened in Pointe Noire, Sangha, Pool, and Brazzaville. Low population growth was experienced in the southwest, the area of Niari and Kouilou (around Pointe Noire that probably absorbed a lot of migrants from the surrounding rural areas).

If we look at the regional data for human development, which for Congo exist since 1990, we see that across the board there was an improvement between 1990 and 2018 for the subregional HDI as a whole, and for

education and life expectancy. Both in 1990 and in 2018 the best conditions existed in the region of Brazzaville, the capital city, but not for life expectancy. For life expectancy the best average conditions existed in Niari, in 1990, and shifted to Pointe Noire, the second city in the country, in 2018. The region with the worst conditions differs per variable and between the years. For the SHDI as a whole, and for education, it shifted from Kouilou (the area around Pointe Noire) to Pool, the area around Brazzaville. For life expectancy the worst conditions could be found in Sangha in the northwest, in both years.

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Region	Subregional HDI			Life expectancy			Education index		
	1990	2018	18/90	1990	2018	18/90	1990	2018	18/90
1	483	530	1.10	51	62	1.21	418	437	1.05
2	587	661	1.13	56	65	1.16	518	606	1.17
3	495	579	1.17	54	66	1.22	443	507	1.14
4	494	512	1.04	54	59	1.11	433	474	1.09
5	459	498	1.08	54	61	1.13	344	405	1.18
6	460	501	1.09	51	60	1.19	380	418	1.10
7	515	526	1.02	54	61	1.12	450	481	1.07
8	505	567	1.12	59	65	1.11	399	476	1.19
9	472	542	1.15	53	66	1.26	397	455	1.15
10	571	651	1.14	57	69	1.22	481	549	1.14
11	474	484	1.02	55	60	1.09	384	397	1.03
12	450	520	1.16	49	57	1.16	363	476	1.31
Congo	531	608	1.15	55	64	1.18	455	539	1.18
Ineq	1.28	1.37		1.21	1.22		1.51	1.53	

HDI and education figures X 1000; life expectancy: years; (comparisons between the years for life expectancy on the

basis of more detailed figures). Ineq = inequality: highest figure divided by lowest figure.

Region	Income in \$/capita							
	1990	2006	2006 /1990	2015	2015 /2006	2018	2018 /2015	18/90
1	4197	1939	0.46	4308	2.22	3334	0.77	0.79
2	10590	4396	0.42	12890	2.93	9647	0.75	0.91
3	3265	1590	0.49	4774	3.00	3683	0.77	1.13
4	3573	1593	0.45	2864	1.80	2244	0.78	0.63
5	3527	1590	0.45	3226	2.03	2519	0.78	0.71
6	3712	1666	0.45	3147	1.89	2459	0.78	0.66
7	4463	1908	0.43	3128	1.64	2445	0.78	0.55
8	3586	1736	0.48	4870	2.81	3755	0.77	1.05
9	3333	1528	0.46	3363	2.20	2622	0.78	0.79
10	9500	4060	0.43	10920	2.69	8214	0.75	0.86
11	3025	1418	0.47	2757	1.94	2163	0.78	0.72
12	4367	1931	0.44	4171	2.16	3231	0.77	0.74
Congo	5976	2674	0.45	7631	2.85	5804	0.76	0.97
Ineq	3.50	3.10		4.68		4.46		

\$/capita: 1000 US \$ (2011), PPP

For the income per capita situation the development between 1990 and 2018 is so volatile that we present data for 1990 (when the income/capita situation was good for African standards), via 2006 (after a major collapse of the economy) and 2015 (after a rapid recovery to very high levels), and finally for 2018 after a deterioration. During all those years Brazzaville was by far the best region, followed by the other city region, Pointe Noire. The worst situation could consistently be found in Pool, the area around Brazzaville. The crisis of 2006 hit the capital city most, though, and Cuvette the least (although even there the income per capita situation was less than half of the 1990 level in 2006). The recovery to the highest levels ever (in 2015) was most profound in Cuvette, but also in Brazzaville and Pointe Noire. The lowest growth between 2006 and 2015 took place in the north, Likouala. The

downfall between 2015 and 2018 hit most in the two major cities, but was more or less the same for all regions. If we compare 2018 with 1990, two regions improved the income per capita situation: Cuvette and Niari. In all other regions (including Brazzaville and Pointe Noire) the average income per capita situation was worse in 2018 compared to 1990, which is very exceptional for Africa. The biggest deterioration took place in the north, Likouala, near the troubled Central African Republic.

Income/capita data for the country and for regional inequality within the country do not say anything about income inequality (let alone wealth inequality) between the rich and the poor in the country. If we look at the measure for income inequality, the Gini coefficient, it shows rather extreme income inequality: a level of 47% in 2005, and 49% in 2011

(<https://www.indexmundi.com/facts/congo/indicator/SI.POV.GINI>). For the regions these data do not exist.

If we compare 2018 with 1990 for the other variables, the education situation has improved most in Sangha and least in Pool. The regional differences in education became a bit more pronounced. The same is true for subregional HDI as a whole: a slightly higher level of regional inequality, this time with most improvements in

Cuvette and the least in Pool. The regional differences in life expectancy became a bit more pronounced as well, this time with most improvements in Plateaux, and the least (again) in Pool.

Further Reading

Country Portal: <http://countryportal.ascleiden.nl/republic-congo-brazzaville>

Selected publications: [https://www.ascleiden.nl/content/africa-2020-further-reading#Republic of the Congo \(Brazzaville\)](https://www.ascleiden.nl/content/africa-2020-further-reading#Republic of the Congo (Brazzaville))



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Country Information: Ton Dietz, David Ehrhardt and Fenneken Veldkamp

Country Portal: Harro Westra

Selected publications: Germa Seuren

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