

Country Disease Outlook

Democratic Republic of Congo

August 2023



African Region

Background

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is a country in Central Africa bordered to the west by the South Atlantic Ocean. By land area, the DRC is the second-largest country in Africa, after Algeria. The last general population and housing census organized in the DRC dates back to July 1984. With the current estimated population of around 96 million, it is the most populous officially Francophone country in the world. The DRC comprises four geographical regions, namely: a coastal plain in the West; a central basin made up of plains and stepped plateaus characterized by dense forest (equatorial forest); plateaus to the north, north-east and south, and mountain ranges to the east, south-east and west.

Key points

- ◆ DRC is the fourth largest country in Africa by population size (96 million), with a high burden of both communicable and non-communicable diseases.
- ◆ DRC is making steady progress in tuberculosis with the mortality rate for TB reducing each year since 2015. There were close to half a million people receiving antiretroviral therapy in 2021, and the country has made progress towards the 95-95-95 goals.
- ◆ DRC is one of the 10 malaria High Burden to High Impact countries in the Africa region and reported more than 30 million cases in 2021. The incidence rate has remained steady since 2015 and the country is therefore off track to meet the targets set in the Global Technical Strategy for Malaria.
- ◆ While DRC still has a long way to progress to meet the SDG indicators for child survival, significant progress has been made since 2015. A priority area for intervention is vaccination, given the historically sub-optimal coverage rates, leading to high numbers of under-immunised and zero-dose children. DRC has recently experienced significant outbreaks of measles, as well as cases of other vaccine-preventable diseases, including pertussis, rubella, tetanus and yellow fever. Routine vaccination systems should be strengthened to reach new cohorts of children and catch-up vaccination strategies implemented to reach those missed.
- ◆ While the government has implemented policies regarding tobacco and alcohol taxes and advertising, most of the other NCD progress indicators are yet to be achieved.

UHC/CN

Universal Health Coverage/Communicable
and Non-communicable Diseases
WHO Regional Office for Africa





2019

34%

of deaths due to NCDs

Broad disease outlook

The country has high burden of communicable (such as malaria, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS) and non-communicable disease (NCDs). The latter was estimated to have caused 34% of deaths in 2019.

Malaria

The DRC was second only to Nigeria in the number of malaria cases reported in 2021 (> 30.5 million) in the African region comprising of 12.3% of the total global malaria cases. The 78,847 number of reported deaths also represent a similar proportion of global deaths attributed to malaria. DRC is one of the 10 High Burden High Impact countries in the Africa region. The national malaria strategy aims to reduce malaria morbidity by 40% and mortality by 50% compared to the 2018 levels. This will require strengthening investment in malaria, scaling up a mix of malaria vector control, improving the availability of diagnostic tests and treatments at peripheral health facilities, and strengthening epidemiological surveillance.

Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS

Since 2015 HIV and TB mortality (excluding co-infection with HIV) have both been steadily falling. There were approximately 444,499 people with HIV on anti-retroviral treatment in 2021. DRC has made progress against the 95-95-95 goals:

- ▲ 82% of people living with HIV know their status.
- ▲ 98% of people living with HIV who know their status are on treatment.
- ▲ There is limited data on the number of people living with HIV and on treatment that are virally suppressed.

Neglected tropical diseases

While it was never endemic to dracunculiasis disease (Guinea Worm), the country was certified in 2022. It is yet to be certified for yaws although the disease is not endemic. DRC is endemic for all the NTDs amenable to preventive chemotherapy through mass drug administration (MDA) (lymphatic filariasis, soil-transmitted helminthiasis, schistosomiasis, trachoma and onchocerciasis). Of the 68.4 million targeted for MDA, 65.8 million were treated.

Other known endemic NTDs include buruli ulcer, chromoblastomycosis and other deep mycoses, foodborne trematodiasis, leishmaniasis (cutaneous and visceral), human African trypanosomiasis (*gambiense*), leprosy, rabies, mycetoma, taeniasis and

cysticercosis. Integrated approaches for control and case management for NTDs are yet to be fully adopted and implemented.

Non-communicable diseases

The age-standardised mortality rate across four major NCDs (Cardiovascular Disease, Chronic Respiratory Disease, Cancer and Diabetes) was greater than 600 per 100,000 population since 2015 for both males and females. Most of the NCD indicators related to key targets to reduce the burden of NCDs are yet to be implemented. Government policies related to tobacco and alcohol taxes and advertising have been implemented. One key remaining area is drafting and implementing a National NCD policy and plan.

Cancer prevention and control

WHO is working with DRC in collaboration with the National Cancer Institute to develop an investment case for cancer.

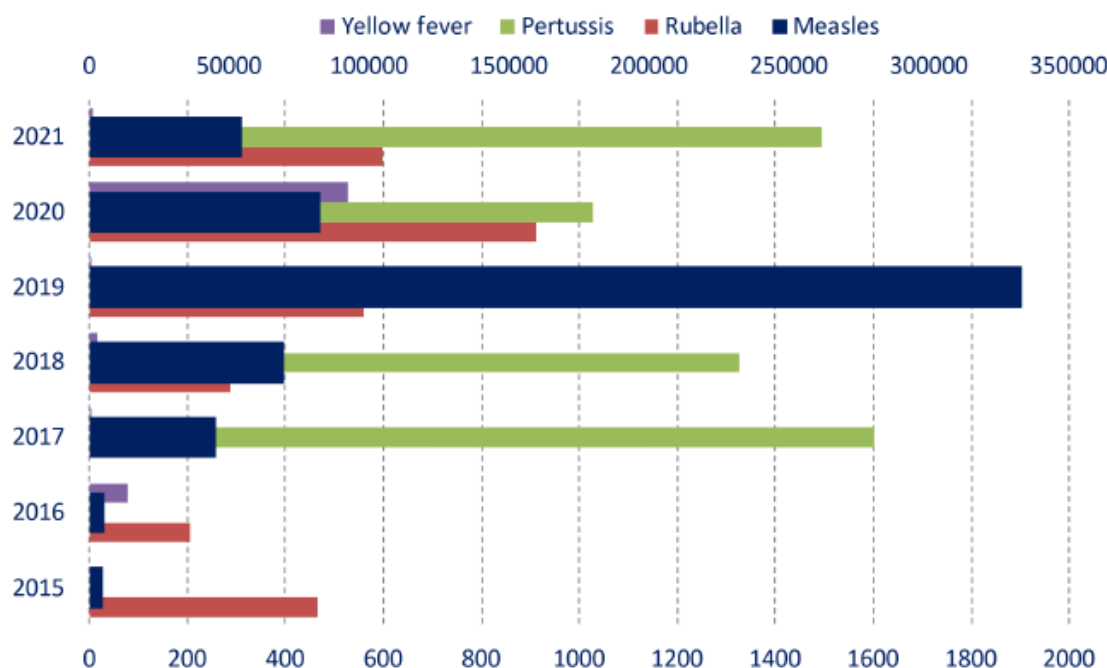
Prostate and cervical cancer: WHO is supporting the development of guidelines to support capacity building in the country.

Childhood Immunization

DRC is one of the countries where immunisation in children has historically been sub-optimal. Only the first dose of DPT was above 80% in 2015-21. Recent trends also show a dip in coverage rates across vaccines since 2019.

The large population, in combination with the low vaccination coverage rates (63% DTP3 coverage in 2021), resulted in a large number of zero-dose and under-immunized children (718,315 and 1.3 million, respectively). Figure 1 shows that the country has experienced regular disease outbreaks, including the largest outbreak of measles in 2019 across Africa (over 300,000 cases). The 2013 DRC Demographic Health Survey showed that 36.6% of unvaccinated children were seropositive for measles.

- ▲ Strengthen immunization programmes to sustainably reach zero-dose children through PHC and community systems.



▲ Fig 1. Number of reported cases for yellow fever, pertussis, rubella and measles in DRC by year, 2015- 2021.

Polio

DRC is classified by the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) as being affected by circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus type 1 (cVDPV1) and type 2. As of 15 June 2023, there were 14 cVDPV1 cases reported in 2023 and 146 cases in 2022. There have been 35 cVDPV2 cases reported in 2023 to date and 363 cases reported last year.

In June 2023, DRC launched its first major immunization campaign using the novel polio vaccine type

2 (nOPV2). Although used previously in the country to halt outbreaks of cVDPV2, this is the first time the DRC conducted such a large-scale vaccination campaign. Starting on 1 June 2023, more than 17 million children under the age of five were targeted in a three-day drive covering 20 provinces.

Child survival

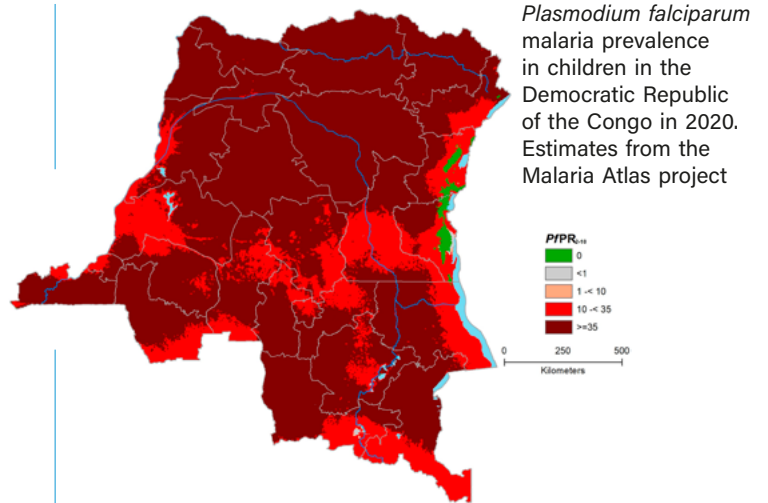
Based on the UN Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation (UN IGME) estimates derived from national data from censuses, surveys or vital registration systems, the under-5 mortality in DRC stands at 79 per 1000 live births down from 96.0 in 2015. The neonatal mortality is 26.5 per 1000 live births. These indicators are still higher than the SDG3 target of 25 per 1000 live births and 12 per 1000 live births, respectively. Child death is attributed to generally preventable causes such as malaria, pneumonia, and diarrhoea. Newborns are at risk from prematurity, asphyxia, and neonatal septic infection potentially worsened by factors such as poverty, insecurity due to war, and limited access to quality health services.



MALARIA

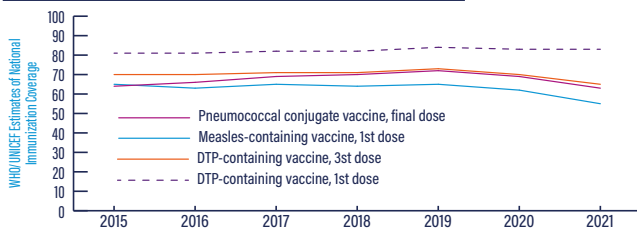
POPULATION AT RISK IN 2021	TOTAL MALARIA CASES IN 2021	TOTAL MALARIA DEATHS IN 2021
95.9 million people	30.5 million	78,847

ITN use in children under five years (55.8%) and 26.0% use of ACTs among those for whom care was sought and received a finger or heel prick.



Plasmodium falciparum malaria prevalence in children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2020. Estimates from the Malaria Atlas project

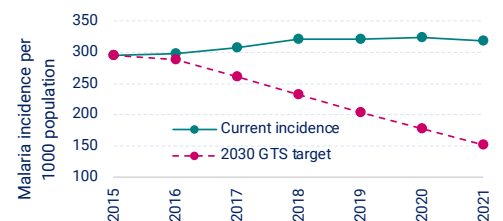
EXPANDED PROGRAMME ON IMMUNIZATION IN CHILDREN



Zero dose children 718,315 **Under-immunized 1.3 Million**

The drop in basic vaccination since 2019 suggests a strong need for catch-up in routine immunization for preventable diseases

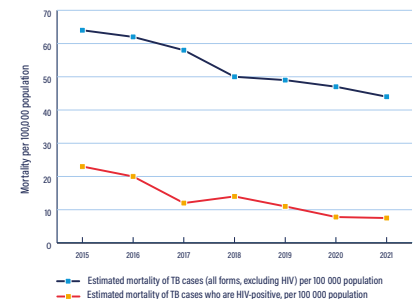
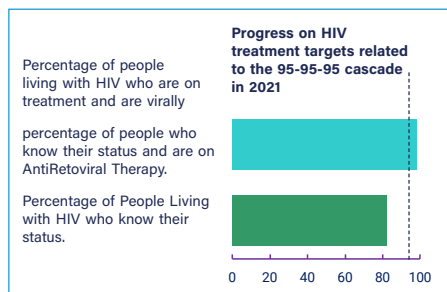
Malaria incidence in 2021 compared to GTS targets shows that the country is off track



HIV AND TUBERCULOSIS

- 444,499** people receiving antiretroviral therapy in 2021
- 74%** Treatment success rate for HIV-positive TB cases
- 52%** of children (aged < 5 years) household contacts of bacteriologically-confirmed TB cases on preventive treatment

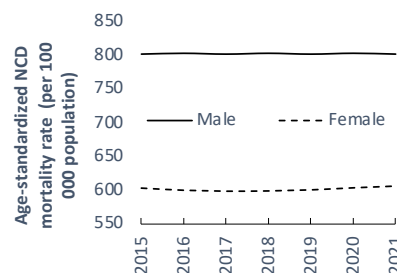
8.1% Domestic funding for TB
12% Domestic funding for HIV



- Indicator 1 - Targets
- Indicator 2 - Mortality
- Indicator 3 - Surveys
- Indicator 4 - NCD policy and Plan
- Indicator 5A - Tobacco taxes
- Indicator 5B - Tobacco smoke free/pollution
- Indicator 5C - Tobacco health warning
- Indicator 5D - Tobacco advertising ban
- Indicator 5E - Tobacco media campaign
- Indicator 6A - Alcohol availability
- Indicator 6B - Alcohol advertising restrictions
- Indicator 6C - Alcohol taxes
- Indicator 7A - Salt policies
- Indicator 7B - Trans fats policies
- Indicator 7C - Marketing to children
- Indicator 8 - Physical activity awareness
- Indicator 9 - NCD guidelines

NCD PROGRESS INDICATORS

- **Achieved**
- **Partially achieved**
- **Not achieved/Unknown**



NEGLECTED TROPICAL DISEASES

Endemic NTDS requiring Preventive Chemotherapy (PC)

- Lymphatic filariasis
- Soil-transmitted helminthiasis
- Schistosomiasis
- Trachoma
- Onchocerciasis

PC-NTDs treatment in 2021
68.4 Million targeted for MDA
65.8 Million treated with MDA

OTHER MAJOR NTDS

- Leishmaniasis (Cutaneous and visceral)
- Human Africa trypanosomiasis (*gambiense*)
- Leprosy
- Rabies