WORLD BANK GROUP
THE WORLD BANK IBRD • IDA | IFC International Finance Corporation | MIGA Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency

Republic of Congo:

Country Private Sector Diagnostic

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MAY 2026

About the Country Private Sector Diagnostic

The private sector is the engine of long-term economic growth and a vital catalyst for global social and economic development. When functioning well, the private sector promotes innovation and entrepreneurship, improves access to and the quality of economic opportunities, and supports the sustainable use of natural resources. In developing economies, the private sector creates the vast majority of jobs, generates tax revenue, and accounts for significant investment.

The Country Private Sector Diagnostic (CPSD) reports seek to unlock private investment and job creation through policy action. Prepared jointly by the institutions of the World Bank Group, each report provides an analysis of specific sectors of the economy in which private sector investment could accelerate growth, if appropriate policy and regulatory issues are addressed.

Designed from the perspective of an investor or entrepreneur, this new generation of reports seeks to identify untapped private investment opportunities and the barriers that stand in their way (earlier reports can be found here). Subsectors of the economy are chosen based on their potential to spur private investment, create more and better jobs, generate domestic revenue, and foster sustainable, inclusive growth in response to targeted policy action. The report aims to help country policy makers prioritize impactful actions that can be taken in the near term to remove disincentives to private investment, while delivering on broader development goals.

The CPSD is a core country diagnostic of the World Bank Group produced to guide the design and implementation of country strategies, public and private investment projects, budget support operations, advisory services, and other analytical work. It is intended to be of interest to domestic and foreign business investors, government officials, World Bank Group staff and management, civil society, and other development partners.

CPSDs are a central instrument of the World Bank Group's jobs agenda as articulated in the 2025 Development Committee Paper on Jobs: The Path to Prosperity, which emphasizes the need to translate private sector development into large-scale employment opportunities. By providing country-level, sector-specific diagnostics, CPSDs help to identify systemic barriers to private investment critical to job creation. It is aligned with the approach to private sector development and job creation outlined by the Development Committee to establish basic preconditions for jobs through investing in human capital and infrastructure, support business-enabling policies, and mobilize private capital at scale to expand firms'capacity to create more and better jobs.

Republic of Congo:

Country Private Sector Diagnostic

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MAY 2026

WORLD BANK GROUP
THE WORLD BANK IBRD • IDA | IFC International Finance Corporation | MIGA Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency

Acknowledgments

The Republic of Congo Country Private Sector Diagnostic was prepared by staff from across the World Bank Group. The core team was led by Maty Konté and Karim Ouled Belayachi, and included Alejandro Rueda-Sanz, Annoncia Badiabio, Matina Deen, Georges Vivien Houngbonon, and Christopher Balliet Bleziri. The extended team included Harrison Charo Karisa, Baptiste Marquant, Benjamin Herzberg, and Sylvestre Boudzoumou. Adama Badji provided administrative support to the team, and Hilary Johnson and Scott Wenger supported the report.

The report was conducted under the guidance and supervision of Jeffrey Chelsky, Maiko Miyake, Leonardo Iacovone, and Mehnaz Safavian, and the guidance of Directors Cheick Fantamady Kanté, Dahlia Khalifa, Paolo Mauro, and Denis Medvedev. The team is also grateful to Alexandra Célestin, Malick Fall, Pierre Pozzo di Borgo, José Ernesto López-Cordova, Zeinab Partow, Marcio Cruz, and Louise Pierrette Mvono for their support.

Peer reviewers at different stages in the preparation of the report were (in alphabetical order) Solène Prince-Agbodjan, Olivier Hartman, Robert de Groot, Arti Grover, Maria Deborah Kim, Thomas Kouadio, Juliana Lopes, Denis Medvedev, and Vincent Palmade. Technical consulting services were provided by Gbenoukpo Robert Djidonou, Amballur Joseph James, Bouda Sana, and Emery Fabrice Senga. The team is grateful for generous guidance, support, and contribution from many other colleagues across the World Bank Group, including Ana Santillana Farakos, Anup Jagwani, Aziz Tély Rodrigue Hema, Joseph N. Besong, Charlotte Kaheru, Chishamiso Mawoyo, Claude Jennifer Bango, David Ivanovic, Denis Medvedev, Dwight H. O'Donnell, Eric Jannaud, Freddy Bilombo, Hannah Blyth, Hawaly Agne, Jacqueline Irving, Juliana Beall, Kabinet Kaba, Khady Laye Ndiaye, Koffi Franck Lavry Amessan, Lezhi Cao, Lisa Choux, Lola Meunier, Marc H. Juhel, Manievel Sene, Michael Corlett, Nama Ouattara, Nadege D. Yameogo, Natsuko Toba, Nfaly Berete, Oceane Keou, Ögmundur Knútsson, Ondrej Schneider, Rabiatou Balde, Rick Emery Tsouck Ibounde, Robert de Groot, Sami Saarela, Santiago Marrón Ruiz, Shivani Dixit, Simone Brunner, Sina Prem, Stephen McGoldrick, Steven Potter, and Tommaso Rooms. The team thanks Anclem Urielle Biniakounou, Sabrina Islam, Gleice Zanettin De Marrocos, Akosiwa Esi Mawusi, Santosh Joshi, and Yue Sun for their support, as well as other Bank Group staff who provided documents and information and participated in various meetings.

The team is also grateful to government officials, private sector representatives, development partners, and other stakeholders who provided valuable insights that helped improve the quality of the report.

Executive Summary

The Republic of Congo has significant opportunities for private investors if it can overcome a variety of hurdles and initiate vital regulatory and industry reforms.

While the nation's natural resource exploitation remains heavily concentrated in the oil sector, it is endowed with diverse nonoil resources that present noteworthy potential. This report focuses on four sectors—processed wood, port logistics in the Pointe-Noire to Brazzaville corridor, maize milling, and aquaculture—that could be of interest to private investors if concrete and targeted policy actions are undertaken.

The lack of sector development beyond oil in the Republic of Congo is due, in part, to underinvestment in human capital, low labor productivity, a challenging business environment, weak infrastructure, limited competition, and a small private sector (World Bank 2023). Regional disparities—driven by poverty, inadequate education, and poor infrastructure in rural areas (IMF 2024)—have further constrained economic and employment opportunities, undermining social cohesion. Despite the Republic of Congo's oil wealth, resource revenues have not translated into improvements in health, education, or infrastructure. Public spending on human capital remains low and often below budget targets.

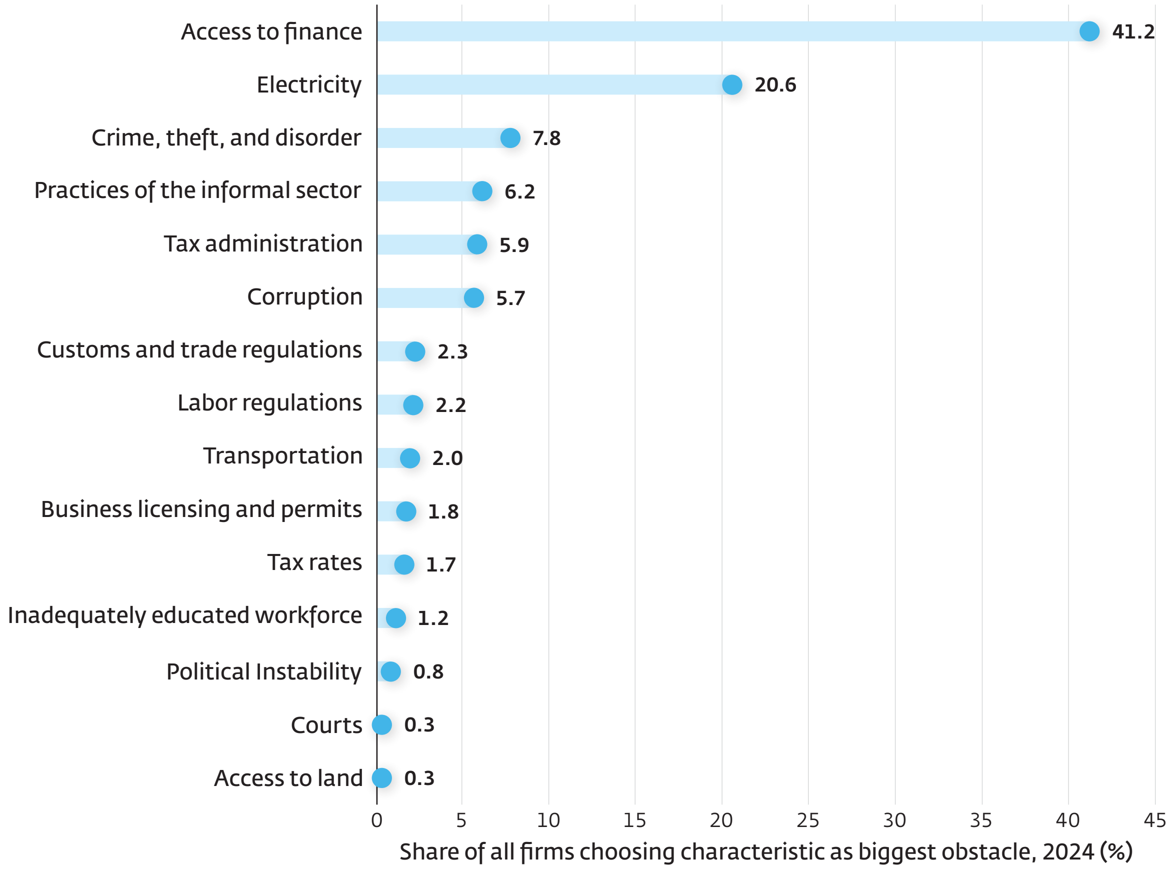
The labor force, though relatively large and active, faces high unemployment, particularly among youth and urban populations. Persistently high public debt and macroeconomic volatility have constrained the government's capacity to invest in infrastructure and services, crowding out private investment. Limited access to finance and electricity are among the top constraints to conducting business identified by firms (figure ES.1).

The Republic of Congo has experienced persistently negative net foreign direct investment (FDI) in recent years, reflecting deep-rooted investor uncertainty and weaknesses in the investment climate. Between 2019 and 2023, net FDI averaged –4.4 percent of gross domestic product, among the lowest globally, reflecting persistent capital withdrawals and profit repatriation (figure ES.2). FDI beyond hydrocarbons is limited (World Bank 2024). Between 2020 and 2024, investors announced approximately US$3.0 billion in FDI, with over 70 percent concentrated in the Republic of Congo's coal, oil, and gas sectors.

Despite deep challenges, the Republic of Congo has considerable potential that can be realized if the right policy actions are taken. The forestry sector offers opportunities for

Figure ES.1

Top constraints identified by firms include access to finance and electricity

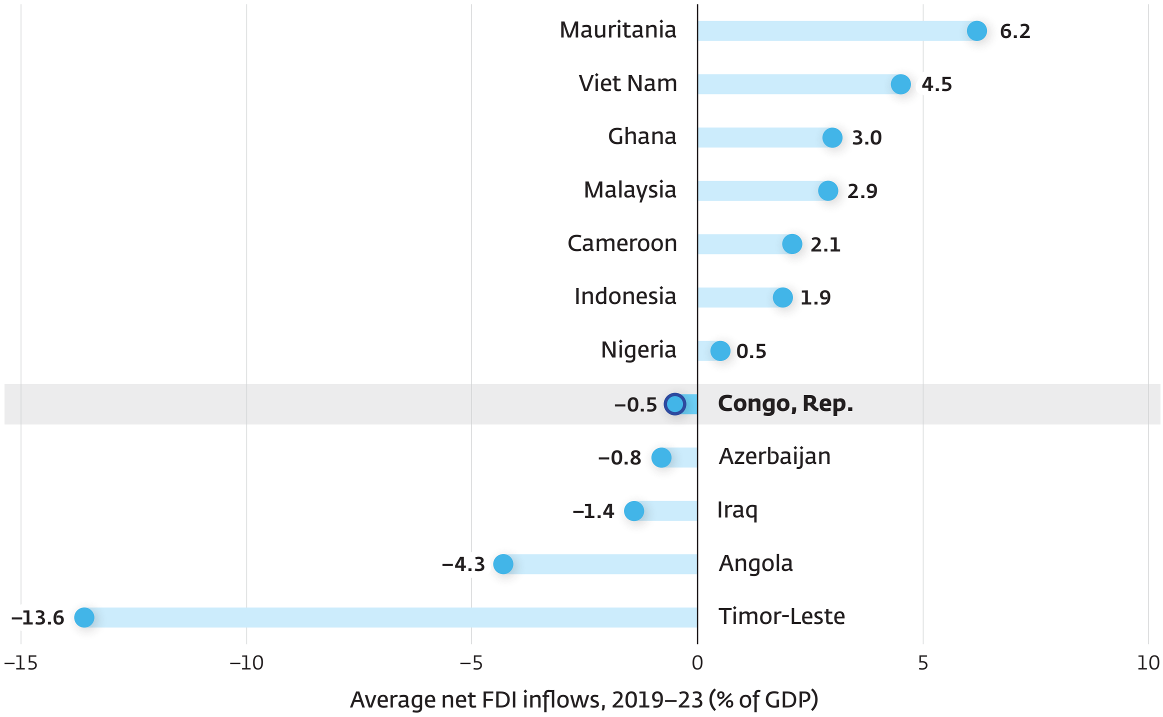


Source: World Bank Enterprise Survey.

private investment and job growth, with an estimated 3.8 to 5 million cubic meters of sustainably harvestable timber that could support value-added wood processing. The Republic of Congo's location on the Atlantic coast and its deep-water port in Pointe-Noire—capable of handling large vessels—positions it as a potential regional trade hub, as well as an attractive destination for private investment in logistics and industrial services. And with nearly 10 million hectares of arable land, as well as abundant inland water resources, a favorable climate, and strong domestic and regional demand for fish, both expanded maize milling and aquaculture could attract private investors, generate jobs, reduce the country's import bill, and enhance food security. With supporting policy reforms, private investment in processed wood, port logistics, maize milling, and aquaculture can be mutually reinforcing and drive diversification in the Republic of Congo. Efficient port logistics lower transport costs and facilitate access to the regional market for other sectors. Meanwhile, increased exports of processed wood, maize products, and aquaculture products can

Figure ES.2

FDI net flows declined over the last five years, similar to other oil producing peers



Source: Calculations based on World Development Indicators data.
Note: FDI = foreign direct investment; GDP = gross domestic product.

boost port activity and revenue, thereby enhancing the Republic of Congo's regional trade competitiveness.

This Country Private Sector Diagnostic takes an investor perspective to identify a few sectors where private investment can be boosted by taking concrete policy actions to remove impediments.

The selection of sectors follows a rigorous, systematic process that includes analysis of quantitative[1] and qualitative indicators (subject to availability) and stakeholder consultations, including interviews with private investors, companies, technical experts, policy makers, and development partners. The criterion for selecting sectors is whether they can attract significant private investment over the medium term if well-identified constraints can feasibly be addressed by the public sector in the near term. Recognizing that an element of judgment is involved, the selection is not intended to be exhaustive; rather, it aims to facilitate focused analysis and concrete recommendations.

Processed Wood

The Republic of Congo is endowed with vast forest resources (more than 70 percent of the nation is covered by forest) and has the potential to attract investment into wood-related industries without raising deforestation risks. Global demand for processed wood products has been increasing at an average of 9 percent per year between 2019 and 2023 for sheets of veneering used in construction, flooring, and wall paneling. In lumber, the Republic of Congo is already serving some of the largest and fastest growing international markets, with world class players holding important concessions.[2] Secondary and tertiary wood processing offers strong investment potential. Sustainable practices—the Republic of Congo deforestation rates are among the lowest globally—are an asset to potential and current investors as they enable sales in the European Union, the largest market for the Republic of Congo's wood exports (table ES.1).

The Republic of Congo is home to wood species well-suited for construction materials. Sapelli and okoume, known for their sturdiness and malleability, are the two most widely harvested species and are ideal for processed products such as window frames, doors, kitchenware, and other housing-related finishes. The Republic of Congo also possesses less-exploited tree species suitable for furniture, paneling, and other processed products, creating an underutilized opportunity for diversification (figure ES.3).

Table ES.1

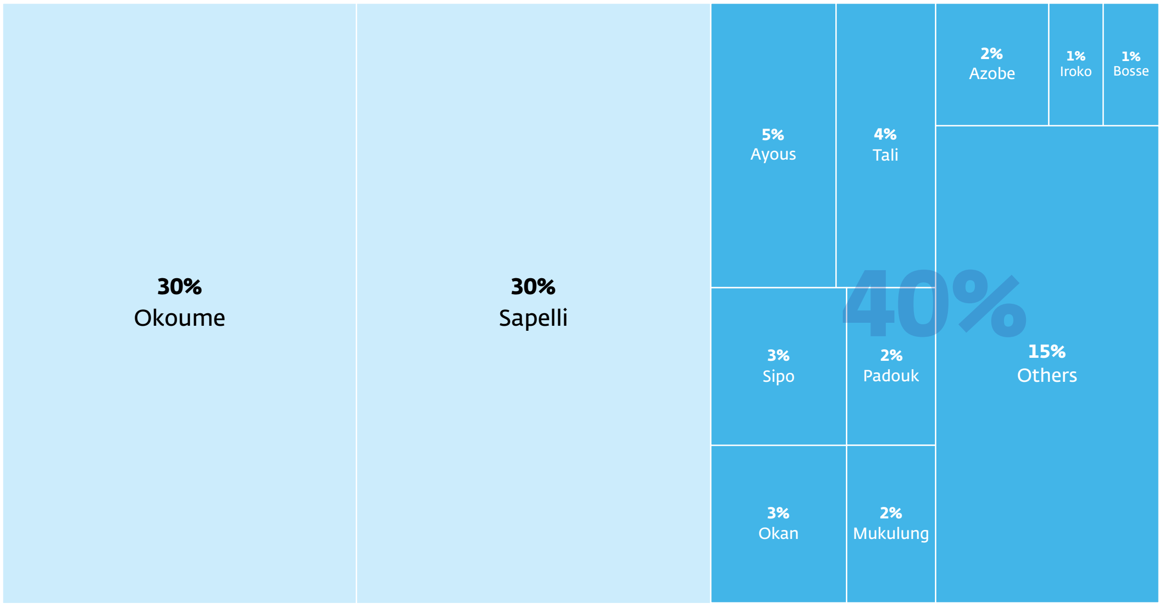
Potential opportunities in Congo, Rep. for private investment in wood processing, if reforms are implemented, concentrate on secondary and tertiary sales to the EU and the United States

Products	Top global importers	How Congo, Rep. performs	Opportunity
Lumber	United States, China, and EU-27	Better than peers and on par with global growth.	n/a
Panel, particle boards products, and composite wood	United States and EU-27	Low exports compared to peers, mostly to Saudi Arabia and Angola.	Both the United States and EU-27.
Finished wood products: furniture, kitchenware, and housing	EU-27	Most exports go to the EU-27, with a small but growing share to the United States.	Given performance: growing exports to US buyers.

Note: EU = European Union; n/a = not applicable.

Figure ES.3

Secondary wood species suitable for processing account for 40% of production



Source: Annual Statistics, Congo, Rep., Ministry of Forest Economy.

The potential to attract private investment has been undermined by the uneven enforcement of the log export ban and by regulatory uncertainty associated with the production sharing agreement, particularly the use of the *Facteur R*, which makes the state's share of logs unpredictable and discourages investment. Access to raw materials for domestic processors remains constrained, especially for firms without concessions. To unlock opportunities in the wood-processing sector, policy actions should establish and enforce clear and transparent criteria for log export-ban exemptions, clarify the production sharing agreement by eliminating the *Facteur R*, simplify volume sharing by focusing on secondary wood species, and facilitate access to raw timber for domestic processors.

The recommendations, if implemented, could attract between US$560 million to US$1.1 billion in private investment and create between 5,300 and 11,500 direct jobs over the next five years.

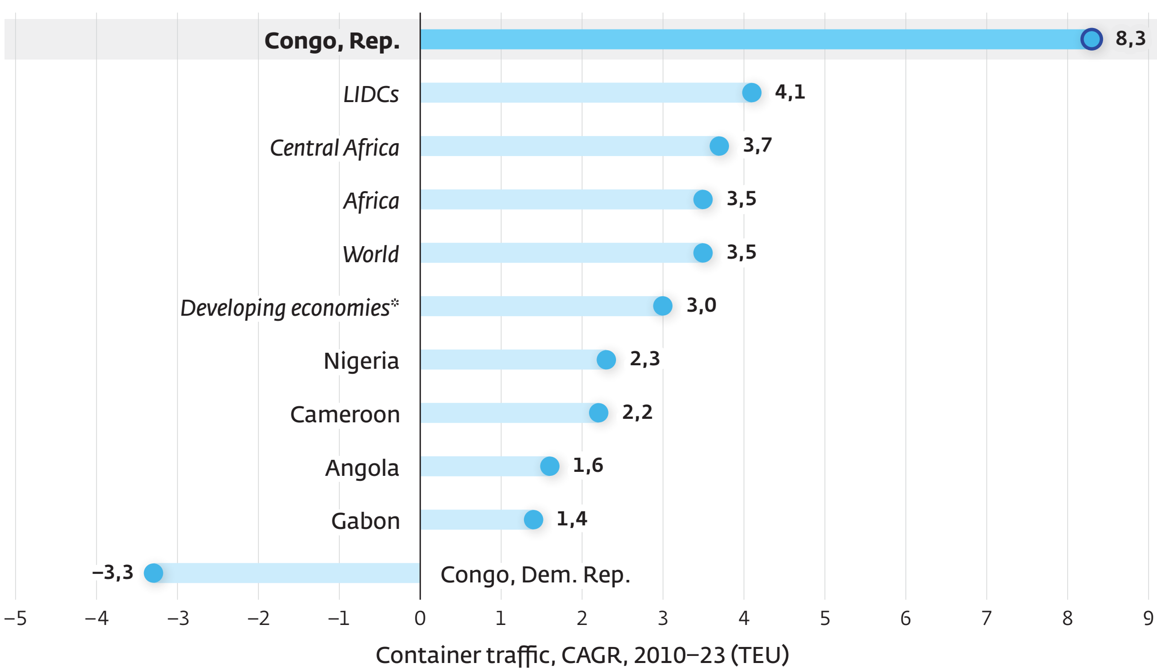
Port Logistics

The country benefits from a strategic location, with a deep-sea port in Pointe-Noire and shared borders with large, landlocked neighbors. The Republic of Congo could serve as a gateway to central Africa, especially the Democratic Republic of Congo's Kinshasa region, which is just eight hours away and whose population is nearly four times that of the Republic of Congo. Over the past decade, the country has made notable investments in transport and logistics infrastructure, including airport upgrades, the RN-1 highway, and the expansion of Congo Terminal. Pointe-Noire has recorded the highest increase in container traffic in the region (UNCTAD 2024), reflecting these improvements (figure ES.4).

Container traffic growth has attracted substantial investor interest and created demand for complementary logistics services to enhance port efficiency and connect with emerging hubs like the new Pointe-Noire Special Economic Zone. Development potential is considerable—particularly in fostering small and medium enterprises (SME) activity and generating employment for lower-skilled workers—given the relatively low entry barriers.[3]

Figure ES.4

Congo, Rep. had the fastest growth in container traffic compared to peers, as well as regional and global averages, between 2010 and 2023



Source: Calculations based on UNCTAD data.

The warehousing market could double in size over the next decade, driven by rising trade, including significant growth in nonoil exports and exports to the Democratic Republic of Congo (table ES.2).

Private investment is constrained by misaligned operating hours between customs and port operators, burdensome entry procedures, non-risk-based inspections, multiplicity of port fees, lack of skills in logistics, as well as insufficient qualified drivers and loaders. With filled and empty trucks charged the same rate, toll pricing remains a key factor producing cost disparities between Pointe-Noire–Brazzaville and competing corridors.

Table ES.2

Growing imports into Congo, Dem. Rep. are the most important source of demand for port activities in Pointe-Noire and logistics in Congo, Rep.

Period	Average annual exports (US$, millions)	Average annual export volumes (tons, thousands)	Export value, 5Y CAGR (%)	Export volume, CAGR (%)	Average annual imports (US$, millions)	Average annual import volumes (tons, thousands	Import value, 5Y CAGR (%)	Import volume, CAGR (%)
Congo, Rep.								
1999–2003	0.65	0.42	...	...	849.9	873.9	...	...
2004–08	1.45	1.19	17.3	23.4	3,116.9	1,542.4	29.7	12.0
2009–13	2.81	0.39	14.1	−19.8	7,596.0	2,941.0	19.5	13.8
2014–18	1.75	0.50	−9.1	4.8	9,728.8	3,456.2	5.1	3.3
2019–23	3.47	0.53	14.7	1.3	3,972.1	2,459.3	−16.4	−6.6
Congo, Dem. Rep.								
1999–2003	2.02	1.19	...	...	627.5	979.3	...	...
2004–08	6.30	8.30	25.6	47.6	2,277.7	1,898.5	29.4	14.2
2009–13	23.78	30.61	30.4	29.8	4,242.0	2,700.5	13.2	7.3
2014–18	30.00	38.32	4.8	4.6	6,792.2	4,270.9	9.9	9.6
2019–23	31.75	44.09	1.1	2.8	10,128.9	6,654.7	8.3	9.3

Note: CAGR = compound annual growth rate.

These constraints could be alleviated by allowing customs staff to operate on rolling eight-hour shifts, adopting a risk-based procedure for scanning and inspection, adopting a single customs platform, providing training, and revising the RN-1 toll pricing framework to reflect axle count and weight.

The recommendations, if implemented, could contribute to unlocking US$70 million to US$200 million in private investment due to increasing container flows and the creation of 2,000 to 6,000 jobs over the next five years. Greater traffic shifts from the Matadi-Kinshasa route to the Pointe-Noire–Brazzaville corridor could increase these figures further.

Maize Milling

The Republic of Congo has potential to attract private investment in maize milling due to rising demand for brewery inputs and animal feed in domestic and regional markets. The country already has large-scale processing firms—mainly focused on other cereals—that possess adaptable technologies that could be scaled to expand maize milling operations, particularly to serve the maize-reliant brewery and animal feed industries. Congolese maize is particularly attractive for processing due to its higher grits yield compared to imported maize. Contract farming between maize processors and producers can help secure domestic supply for milling. Expanding production could strengthen food security, enable sectoral upgrading, and create opportunities in related industries.

Nonetheless, private investment in maize milling faces major constraints. Producer groups cannot formalize cooperatives easily under the Organization for the Harmonization of Business Law in Africa framework—the regional system that harmonizes business laws across 17 African countries; domestic production volumes are low (figure ES.5) due to fragmented farming structures, land tenure conflicts with communities increase investor risk, value added tax (VAT) and tariff exemptions for inputs are not consistently applied at customs, and access to industry-ready land is uncertain.

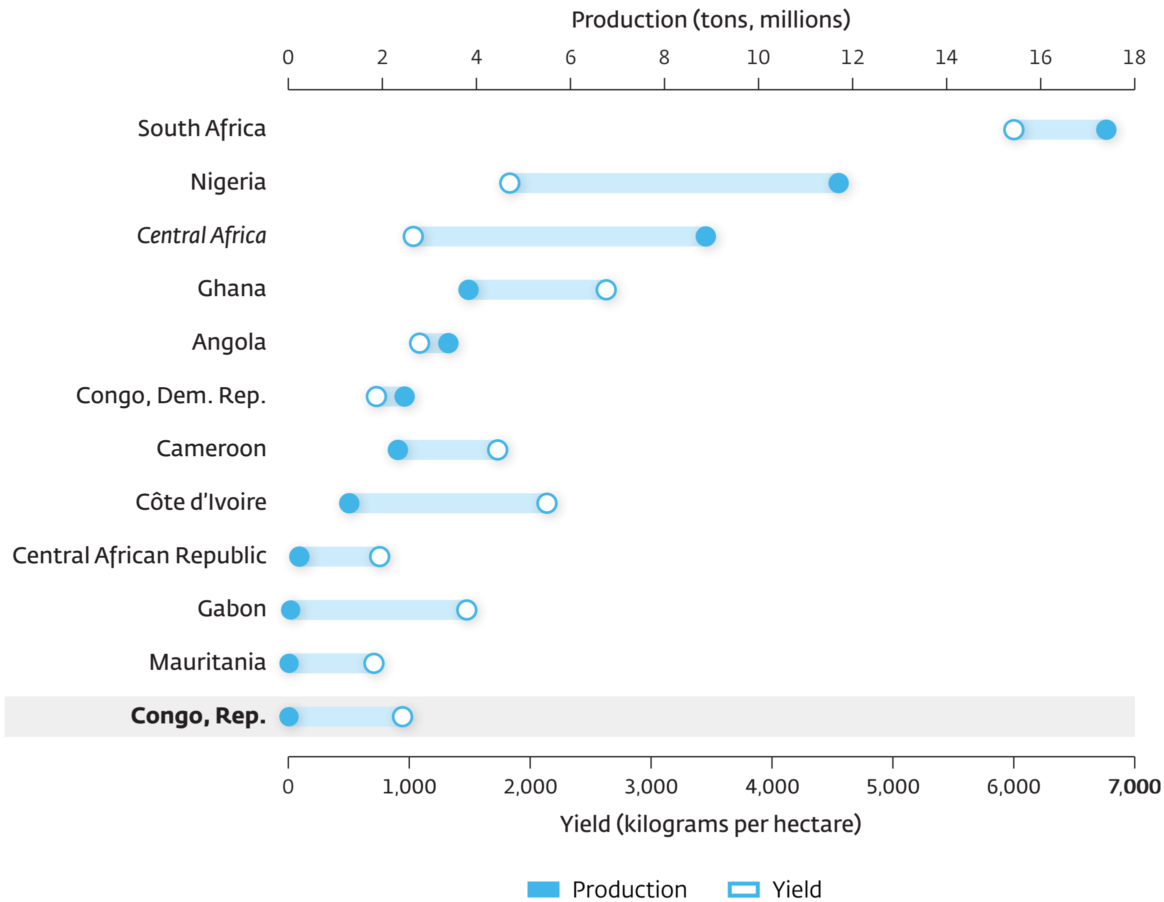
Reforms to attract private investment include: operationalizing the cooperative framework (including simplified agriculture-specific registration), creating a registry of smallholders with capacity to engage in contract farming, establishing standardized procedures for negotiating leases with the government and communities and for extending leases, and adopting preclearance mechanisms for shipments of machinery and inputs to minimize discretionary action at the border and to ensure effective application of VAT and tariff exemptions.

Implementation of these recommendations could contribute to US$24 to US$72 million in new private investment in mills, silos, and land preparation, and to the creation of between 400 and 1,100 direct jobs over the next five years.

Figure ES.5

Maize production and yields in Congo, Rep. remain below most of central Africa

Maize yields and annual production, Congo, Rep. vs. peers, 2023



Source: Based on FAOSTAT data.

Aquaculture

Aquaculture presents noteworthy potential for private investment, underpinned by the Republic of Congo's abundant inland water resources, favorable climate, and strong domestic and regional demand for fish. The Republic of Congo has a comparative advantage in farming tilapia and catfish—species that are highly marketable and adaptable to both traditional and sustainable farming techniques. Land and water access is relatively open, enabling deployment of aquaculture farms across the Republic of Congo's agricultural zones.

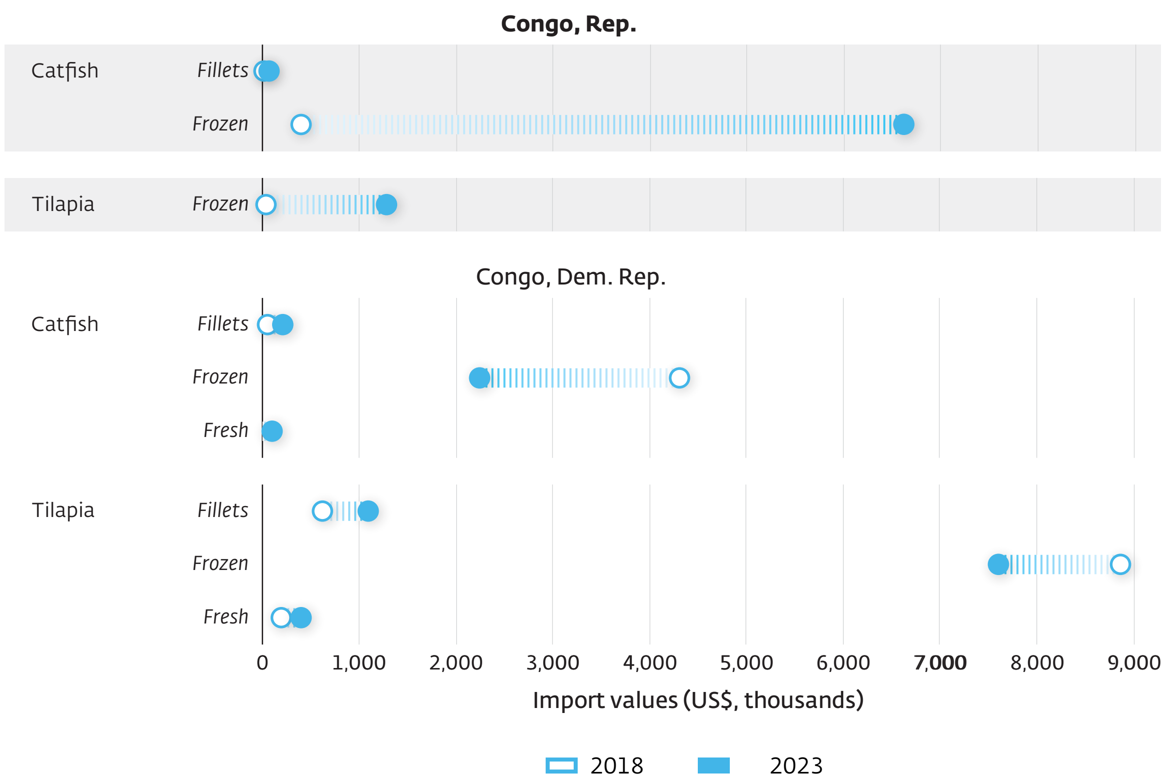
With demand for fish expected to increase, especially in the Global South (UNCTAD 2024), aquaculture is expected to help bridge the demand-supply gap, especially for fresh fish, presenting compelling potential for private investment. Congolese consume more than 160,000 tons of fish per year, most of which is imported and frozen. Per capita consumption is 25.5 kilograms—well above the global average of 20.7 kilograms. Domestic production comprises 60,000 tons from capture fisheries and 1,962 tons from aquaculture, leaving a significant supply gap. There are also opportunities for trade, particularly with neighboring the Democratic Republic of Congo, a net importer of tilapia and catfish (figure ES.6).

Key constraints to private investment include a fragmented sanitary and biosecurity oversight framework, weak markets for quality seed, feed, and technical services, poor spatial planning that results in farms being located at suboptimal sites, and the absence of cold-chain and market infrastructure connecting farms to urban buyers.

Figure ES.6

Imports of catfish and tilapia to Congo, Rep. have increased sharply since 2018

Catfish and tilapia imports, Congo, Rep. and Congo, Dem. Rep.



Source: Calculations based on BACI data.

To remove these barriers, the government should streamline sanitary and biosecurity oversight under a single competent authority, publish a transparent list of aquaculture-specific inputs eligible for VAT exemption, and enable private investment in cold-chain and market infrastructure by supporting more reliable utility access in selected protected agricultural zones (zones agricoles protégées; ZAPs)—government-designated areas intended to concentrate and accelerate agricultural investment—as well as in major markets.

The recommendations, if implemented, could contribute to unlocking potentially US$5 to US$16 million of private investment in farms, and to the creation of between 1,200 and 3,600 jobs over the next five years.

The Path Ahead

Beyond processed wood, port logistics, maize milling, and aquaculture, private investors may well identify additional profitable opportunities in other sectors in the Republic of Congo. This report focuses on sectors where identified constraints can feasibly be alleviated by public policy actions in the near term. The recommended actions are not necessarily sufficient on their own and would likely require complementary measures and longer-term capacity building. Rather, they are highlighted as concrete and observable steps that would represent meaningful progress along the results chain from action to impact, and that can be taken in the near term, with impact on private investment and job creation over the medium term.

Table ES.3

Summary of constraints and recommendations

Constraints	Recommended actions
Processed wood	
Rationale • Large forest endowments. • Fast-growing markets for processed wood.	
1. Inconsistent enforcement of sectoral norms.	1. If log export ban is to be retained, establish clear and transparent criteria for exemptions.
2. Regulatory uncertainty and ambiguity around the production sharing agreement.	**2a.** If production sharing agreement is maintained, apply revenue component to total sales only. **2b.** Limit volume sharing to underutilized secondary wood species and eliminate the use of Facteur R.
3. Limited access to raw materials and international markets for domestic wood processors.	3. Simplify and operationalize access to domestic exploitation permits (permis d'exploitation domestique) by revising eligibility criteria.
Logistics in the Pointe-Noire–Brazzaville corridor	
Rationale • Fast growth in container traffic and expansion of the port of Pointe-Noire. • Opportunity for logistics services in serving containers in gateway transit toward Brazzaville and Kinshasa.	
1. Delays from misaligned operating hours in customs and port services.	1. Amend labor code to require customs staff at the port of Pointe-Noire to operate in rolling 8-hour shifts.
2. Overcrowding inside ports due to inefficient inspections.	2. Adopt risk-based inspection procedures at Pointe-Noire.
3. Overlapping procedures that delay import clearance process.	3. Integrate clearance processes into a single unified customs platform.
4. Limited availability of skills in transport and logistics.	4. Allow the sector association to propose the list of trainers and curriculum to the Fond National de l'Appui à l'Employabilité et l'Apprentissage, which is responsible for vocational training and employment support.
5. Toll pricing in the Pointe-Noire–Brazzaville corridor that raises costs relative to alternative routes.	5. Update toll pricing structure to charge tolls as a function of both truck axels and weight—up to the maximum weight allowed.

(Table continues next page)

Table ES.3

Summary of constraints and recommendations *(continued)*

Constraints	Recommended actions
Maize milling	
Rationale • Large arable land area, suitable for maize, not being used. • Opportunity for investment in mills to serve growing demand from breweries and feed industries in Congo, Rep.	
1. Absence of formalized cooperatives to facilitate contract farming.	**1.** Simplify agriculture-specific registration procedures.
2. Land-tenure conflicts with local communities.	**2.** Develop a publicly accessible digital map of agricultural zones, identifying customary and community land.
3. Inconsistent application of duty exemptions on inputs for maize processing.	**3.** Establish a formal preclearance procedure for agricultural shipments eligible for value added tax (VAT) exemptions.
4. Difficulty in obtaining industry-ready land for maize mills.	**4.** Update the protected agricultural zone (zones agricoles protégées, ZAPs) legislation to allow maize mills to operate within the zones.
Aquaculture	
Rationale • High and growing fish consumption per capita in Congo, Rep. • Potential for small and medium farms to invest in better technologies to meet rising domestic demand for fresh fish.	
1. Fragmented sanitary and biosecurity governance framework for commercial aquaculture.	**1a.** Create a streamlined commercial aquaculture regime with a single competent authority. **1b.** Adopt basic biosecurity rules for the aquaculture sector.
2. Inconsistent enforcement of existing import VAT exemption makes access to quality seeds, feed, and inputs unpredictable.	**2.** Publish a concrete list of aquaculture-specific inputs that qualify for the existing VAT exemption, by HS codes.
3. There is uncertainty on private investor participation in ZAPs to build postharvest facilities and cold storage.	**3.** Clarify that private investors in cold-chain and market infrastructure for fish are permitted to operate in selected ZAPs.

Notes

1. This Country Private Sector Diagnostic selects four subsectors that satisfy the following three criteria: (a) potential of the sector to attract private investment, if feasible reforms are undertaken in the near term; (b) relevant development impact including job creation, food security, and climate friendly GDP growth; and (c) potential interest of the Congolese government in considering concrete policy reforms measures. The quantitative analysis for the sector selection was based on indicators such as revealed comparative advantage, global demand growth, export gaps, value-added trends, input endowments, and FDI inflows, among others.
2. In 2023, the Republic of Congo exported approximately US$161.5 million in raw logs and US$167.4 million in lumber (primary processing), while secondary and tertiary processed products—such as fiberboards, plywood, furniture, and kitchenware—accounted for US$132,300 and US$11 million, respectively). The EU, which is the largest and fastest growing global market already absorbs about half of the Republic of Congo's processed-wood exports.
3. Consultations indicate SMEs need only minimal investment, such as a few trucks or a basic warehouse.

Photo credits: *Cover:* Claudine/Adobe Stock.

Interior design: Patrick Ibay, https://www.designed-for-humans.com/.

SCANNER POUR
TÉLÉCHARGER

WORLD BANK GROUP

THE WORLD BANK
IBRD • IDA

IFC International Finance Corporation

MIGA Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency