

# GLOBAL TORTURE INDEX 2025: DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO FACTSHEET

## OVERALL GLOBAL TORTURE INDEX SCORE:

**HIGH RISK**

The Global Torture Index 2025 is the first analysis designed to assess the risk of torture and ill-treatment across 26 countries worldwide. This 2025 factsheet for the Democratic Republic of the Congo includes an analysis of the country's overall performance, a breakdown by thematic pillars and key recommendations for driving meaningful change in the fight against torture and the promotion of human rights.

## COLLABORATING ORGANISATIONS IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO:

Alliance pour l'Universalité  
des Droits Fondamentaux  
(AUDF)

Le Centre d'Espoir pour  
les Droits Humains  
(CEDH)

ACAT République  
Démocratique du Congo

JUSTICIA Asbl

Action pour la Promotion  
et la Défense de l'Enfant  
et de la Femme  
(APDEF)

Action des jeunes  
pour le bien-être social  
(AJBS)

La Voix des Sans  
Voix pour les droits  
de l'Homme (VSV)

Haki Zangu Asbl,  
HaZa RDC

Réseau 2  
Congo Genre et  
Développement

## AT A GLANCE

Torture remains widespread and systematic in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), particularly across law enforcement and the military and intelligence services. It is typically used to extract confessions, money or to punish dissent. Despite [recommendations from the United Nations Committee against Torture](#), there are still exceptions in law to the absolute prohibition of torture, such as superior orders. The failure to exclude amnesties perpetuates this practice with almost total impunity. For 2025, the Global Torture Index classifies the country as presenting a **high risk** of torture and ill-treatment on the basis of data collected in 2023 and 2024.

[More than 100 armed groups are active in eastern Congo](#), and the imposition of martial law in 2021 in the provinces of North Kivu and Ituri has facilitated **abuses by government security forces**. Civilians are regularly subjected to torture and ill-treatment during conflicts. Since January 2025, the conflict in North and South Kivu involving the Rwandan-backed AFC-M23 rebellion and the DRC Armed Forces (FARDC), supported by the Wazalendo groups, and attacks committed against the civilian population, including acts of torture and extrajudicial executions, have further aggravated the humanitarian and security crisis. Sexual violence has reached alarming levels, with almost 10,000 cases reported in January and February 2025, 35-45% of which involved children—equivalent to [one child being raped every 30 minutes](#). Human rights defenders and members of the judiciary have faced increased [threats and attacks from state and non-state actors](#), forcing many of them to flee the country or go into hiding.

Prison overcrowding has been a real challenge for several decades, with an **average occupancy rate of over 400%**. **Mass sexual violence and prisoner deaths are commonplace.** Monitoring of detention facilities remains limited, and complaint mechanisms are inaccessible or lead to reprisals, reinforcing a persistent culture of impunity. The Standing Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CCPT) acting as the National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) is underfunded and does not meet international standards, although discussions are underway to establish a new NPM.

The judicial system remains weak, underfunded and vulnerable to political influence. Transitional justice efforts are progressing very slowly and with limited impact. **However, military courts play a crucial role in torture-related cases, handling up to 66% of cases,** although investigations often take years or are never completed. The lifting of the moratorium on the execution of the death penalty on 14 March 2024 represents a dramatic turnaround after 20 years of de facto abolitionism.

Despite the creation in 2023 of a National Fund for the Reparation of Victims of Conflict-related Sexual Violence and Victims of Crimes Against Peace and the Security of Mankind (FONAREV) to support them, **fewer than 25% have received compensation.**

## GENERAL INFORMATION



**Type of government:**  
Constitutional Republic



**United Nations Convention Against Torture:**  
Ratified



**OPCAT ratification:**  
Ratified



**Population:**  
105.8 million



**People deprived of liberty:**  
44,536



**Prison population (per 100,000 of national population):**  
46



**Pre-trial detainees / remand prisoners (percentage of prison population):**  
70%



**Documented Detained Human Rights Defenders:**  
No data



**Alerts Issued by the Observatory for Human Rights Defenders in 2024:**  
6



**Prison Occupancy level:**  
322%



**Homicide rate (per 100.000 people):**  
12.8

# THEMATIC PILLAR OVERVIEW

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## I. POLITICAL COMMITMENT

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**INDEX SCORE: CONSIDERABLE RISK**

The DRC has shown limited political commitment to the fight against torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (CIDTP). Although torture is criminalised in the Penal Code, the existing legal framework does not exclude torture from amnesties and allows superior orders to justify acts of torture. Judges have little awareness of the issue and continue to treat acts of torture as [mere aggravating circumstances in cases of arbitrary arrest or detention](#).

In addition, despite having ratified the UN Convention against Torture, the country has not accepted the competence of the Committee Against Torture to examine individual allegations under Article 22 of the Convention. Dialogue between government authorities and civil society on the implementation of the [Committee's recommendations](#) made in 2019 remains limited.

While the DRC became the first country in Central Africa to adopt [Law No. 23/027 on the protection and accountability of human rights defenders](#), its application remains ineffective. Of the two NPMs established in the DRC, neither complies with international standards. These NPMs lack institutional autonomy, adequate staff, resources and budget allocations. However, it should be noted that a draft law for the creation of a new NPM is currently under consideration, following the [first visit of the UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture](#) to the country in 2024.



## II. ENDING POLICE BRUTALITY AND INSTITUTIONAL VIOLENCE

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**INDEX SCORE: HIGH RISK**

Police violence remains a serious and systemic problem in the country. The security and intelligence services frequently use torture to extort money from detainees. In the past year, there have been occasional reports of deaths and enforced disappearances following arrests, the exact circumstances of which are rarely documented accurately by law enforcement officials. Agents of the National Intelligence Agency (ANR) frequently resort to **arbitrary arrests and incommunicado detentions** outside any legal framework, which increases the risk of serious abuses.

In addition, the security forces use excessive force during demonstrations. On 30 August 2023, the security forces violently repressed a demonstration organised by the Wazalendo sect against the United Nations Organisation Mission for Stabilisation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) in Goma, [killing 56 people and injuring more than 80](#).

Detainees rarely have access to immediate medical care or independent examinations following violence inflicted during arrest or detention. During interrogation, detainees are often subjected to [cruel treatment](#), including deprivation of food and water, beatings, sexual humiliation, forced nudity, payment for prison services and sleep deprivation. Suspects are often [detained for periods well beyond legal limits, without contact with their families or access to a lawyer](#) and without being brought before a judicial authority. The Congolese National Police (PNC) systematically ignore detainees' right to a lawyer or to challenge the legality of their detention. LGBTQIA+ people, human rights defenders and people with disabilities are often subjected to discriminatory treatment and unjustified searches.

After twenty years of de facto abolition, President Félix Tshisekedi has [lifted the moratorium on the execution of the death penalty](#), in particular for soldiers convicted of treason or 'urban banditry' that resulted in fatalities. This decision has given rise to deep concern in view of the deeply flawed judicial system and the constant repression of political opponents, civil society actors and journalists. On the [3<sup>rd</sup> of July 2024, 25 soldiers were sentenced to death following a one-day trial](#). In January 2025, [127 young people were sentenced to death](#) following a major operation to combat urban banditry.



### III. FREEDOM FROM TORTURE WHILE DEPRIVED OF LIBERTY

INDEX SCORE: HIGH RISK

Conditions in detention centres in the DRC are alarming, characterised by extreme overcrowding, systemic torture and widespread human rights violations, particularly for [people suspected of belonging to the political opposition](#). Although President Tshisekedi has ordered the closure of all unofficial places of detention, informal detention sites, often referred to as 'cachots', still exist. They are run by various state security services, including the PNC, the *Détection Militaire des Activités Anti-Patrie* (DEMIAP) and the ANR, which have detained several [hundred civilians](#) over the past five years. The occupancy rate **varies between 400% and 700%**, with critical examples including **Makala Prison** in Kinshasa, which houses [more than 15,000 detainees despite a capacity of only 1,500](#). Basic facilities, including drinking water, food, sanitation, bedding and adequate ventilation, are wholly inadequate, exposing prisoners to illness and death in custody. However, it is worth noting the efforts made by the State with the adoption of Law No.23/028 of 15 June 2023 establishing the fundamental principles relating to the penitentiary system. The law is aimed at better management of the prison population. Since September 2024, [more than 2,000 prisoners have been released](#).

Particular categories of prisoners, such as LGBTQIA+ people, indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities and political prisoners, are victims of systematic abuse, sexual violence, discriminatory treatment and harsher disciplinary measures. Between 2020 and 2025, a total of **489 women prisoners were victims of rape**. In September 2024, **129 detainees died in a prison incident at Makala**, where **268 female detainees were victims of rape**. In January 2025, during a mass escape, at least 165 female inmates were raped at Munzenze prison in Goma, and many lost their lives in a fire. The practice of informal co-management of prisons by 'Capitas'—inmates who play an authoritative role—encourages abuse, particularly of the most vulnerable inmates. The implementation of the measures of Law No. 23/028 designed to address this problem remains pending. Solitary confinement of prisoners, including women and minors, is widespread, often exceeding the legal maximum of 15 days. **Medical care is rarely provided** following violence by staff, and even when it is available, it lacks independence and does not comply with international standards. Transfers of detainees are carried out without their families or lawyers being informed and are often accompanied by humiliating or offensive coercive measures.

Complaint mechanisms in prisons are inaccessible and ineffective. Prisoners who manage to lodge complaints frequently suffer reprisals. Although the ICRC makes regular visits to prisons, the absence of an effective and independent NPM considerably increases the risk of torture for detainees. However, the [current discussions on the establishment of a new NPM](#) reflect the State's willingness to strengthen its efforts to prevent torture.



### IV. ENDING IMPUNITY

INDEX SCORE: HIGH RISK

Impunity for serious crimes, including torture, is deeply entrenched in the DRC, particularly in the east of the country. The system is marked by a [number of shortcomings](#), including deep-rooted corruption and a lack of proper investigation, prosecution and punishment of crimes, particularly those committed by influential individuals or members of the government, and [violations against human rights defenders](#). Described by President Tshisekedi himself as ["sick"](#), the justice system suffers from serious weaknesses, including a lack of independence from the executive, insufficient financial and material resources, as well as adequate infrastructure, and is marked by administrative dysfunction. There is also a shortage of qualified staff and ongoing training for judges and other actors in the judicial system.

Investigations into allegations of torture are often hampered by procedural obstacles, which reinforces the culture of impunity that prevails across Congolese law enforcement agencies. Victims often have to report allegations at the very places where the abuses took place and are regularly discouraged from doing so by threats or bribes from police officers. Prosecutors often reclassify cases of torture as less serious offences such as abuse of power or bodily harm, unfairly placing the burden of proof on the victims instead of proactively conducting thorough investigations.

**Military courts, which handle up to 66% of torture cases, dominate the judicial landscape, highlighting** the disproportionate influence of military justice over civilian courts. While these courts have made it possible, in a difficult context, to prosecute certain serious crimes and render a measure of justice to the victims—particularly in the Kasai region—these actions remain limited and are no substitute for a genuine overall transitional justice process. Moreover, even if specialised investigation units do exist, their impartiality, independence and financial autonomy are the subject of considerable criticism, compounded by the insufficient number of forensic experts trained and familiar with international standards such as the Istanbul Protocol. Victims suffer retraumatisation during investigations and trials and rarely benefit from psychological assistance or effective reparations. In addition, convictions rarely acknowledge the involvement of senior officers on the grounds of command responsibility, which perpetuates the cycle of impunity.

Although transitional justice measures, such as the prosecution of senior officials and truth commissions, have been attempted, they rarely result in meaningful accountability. Overall, **fewer than 33% of torture complaints and investigations result in convictions**, underlining systemic obstacles to justice and reinforcing the prevailing culture of impunity.



## V. VICTIM'S RIGHTS

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**INDEX SCORE: HIGH RISK**

In the DRC, victims of torture face major obstacles in accessing justice, rehabilitation and reparation. The existing provisions of the penal code focus mainly on punishing perpetrators without fully meeting the needs of victims. Training for staff on the needs of victims, particularly in the police, judiciary, health and social services, is rarely provided. Although national legislation partially guarantees the right to an effective judicial remedy, it focuses only on individual compensation, neglecting other types of reparation such as collective measures like public apologies, memorials or symbolic recognition, which are rarely implemented.

In December 2022, the country enacted **Law no. 22/065 of 26 December 2022** establishing the **National Fund for Reparations to Victims of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence and Victims of Crimes against Peace and Human Security** (FONAREV). This law provides a legal framework for the protection and reparation of victims, including provisions for rehabilitation. Despite this significant step forward, the fund is under-financed and overall implementation of the law and access to services remain limited. Victims rarely receive fair and adequate compensation covering medical costs, financial losses, moral damages or legal fees. **Fewer than 25% have received any compensation in the last five years.** Similarly, fewer than a quarter have benefited from state-funded rehabilitation programmes.

Protection measures for victims, their relatives and witnesses lack effectiveness and systematic follow-up. The families of victims who have died because of torture or who have disappeared rarely have access to effective remedies. The absence of a dedicated state institution or complaints mechanism further aggravates the situation of victims, perpetuating their suffering and limiting their prospects of recovery. Finally, there are no state structures such as shelters or reception centres to help and protect victims of domestic or family violence from their abusers.



## VI. PROTECTION FOR ALL

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**INDEX SCORE: HIGH RISK**

In the DRC, the legal framework for the protection of vulnerable groups is insufficient, and state intervention in this area is inadequate. Serious forms of violence, such as domestic violence, sexual harassment, sexual slavery, forced marriage, honour crimes, child marriage, obstetric violence and female genital mutilation, often go unpunished. Interim judicial measures to protect the victims of these crimes are rarely applied, leaving women and girls even more exposed to harm. There are no state bodies such as shelters to support victims and protect them from their abusers. Forced marriage persists in the absence of dedicated state measures. **29% of girls in the country marry before the age of 18.** In addition, the state maintains a total ban on abortion, and women rarely receive quality care for complications arising from unsafe abortions.

The situation of tens of thousands of women displaced by conflict and living in refugee camps remains critical. Rape is often used as a **weapon of war** in the east of the country, where **a woman is raped every four minutes**. **Rape cases are on the rise, with children accounting for 30% of victims**—an unprecedented rate. Although the DRC has ratified ILO Convention 182, serious forms of child labour persist, particularly in mines and armed groups. [Around 10,000 children are still associated with armed groups and subjected to forced labour.](#)

Since the escalation of the conflict in January 2025, serious violations against children in the DRC have tripled. According to UNICEF: sexual violence has doubled, abductions multiplied by six, murders by seven and attacks on schools and hospitals by twelve. Around [1,100 children in North and South Kivu](#) are unaccompanied or separated from their families. Similarly, before this crisis, the crackdown on minors involved in urban banditry had become tougher: around 1,000 people, including minors, were arrested during Operation Black Panther in 2024. Several young people were tried for terrorism and sentenced to death after summary trials.

LGBTQIA+ people face severe discrimination in the DRC. [Sexual orientation and gender identity are not covered by anti-discrimination laws](#), and same-sex relationships are not recognised, leading to arbitrary detentions and bills to criminalise homosexuality. Conversion therapy continues despite legal prohibitions.



## VII. RIGHT TO DEFEND AND CIVIC SPACE

**INDEX SCORE: HIGH RISK**

In the DRC, although the adoption of [Law No. 23/027 of 15 June 2023 on the protection and accountability of human rights defenders \(HRDs\)](#) is a significant step forward, major obstacles continue to restrict their work. Provisions of this law introduce sanctions that could be abused against them. The process of obtaining legal personality for NGOs is complex, costly and dependent on the approval of the Ministry of Justice, in application of **Law no. 004/2001 of 20 July 2001** on general provisions applicable to non-profit associations and public utility establishments. Organisations have no effective means of challenging a refusal to register before an independent body, leaving them vulnerable to arbitrary deregistration or suspension of their activities, as illustrated by [the cancellation of Folio 92.](#)

In addition, the decree-law of 29 January 1999 imposes strict requirements on meetings and demonstrations. Public gatherings must be notified to the police, and often require prior authorisation, thus limiting freedom of assembly. HRDs regularly suffer severe reprisals, including physical violence, torture, judicial harassment and arbitrary arrest, particularly during peaceful demonstrations. In 2024, [dozens of HRDs and members of citizens' movements were arbitrarily arrested](#) during demonstrations. Between 2020 and 2025, at least [seven HRDs and members of citizens' movements were assassinated.](#) Between June 2023 and April 2024, the UN recorded cases of intimidation, threats, attacks and reprisals against 387 human rights defenders and 67 journalists. Women HRDs are particularly vulnerable, often suffering gender-based violence.

In addition, since January 2025, the armed conflict in the east of the country has led to [tighter restrictions on civic space.](#) Rebel groups and the DRC's [regular army](#), through the *Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel et de la Communication* (CSAC) are targeting journalists, the media and human rights activists who criticise them, particularly in [Bukavu.](#)

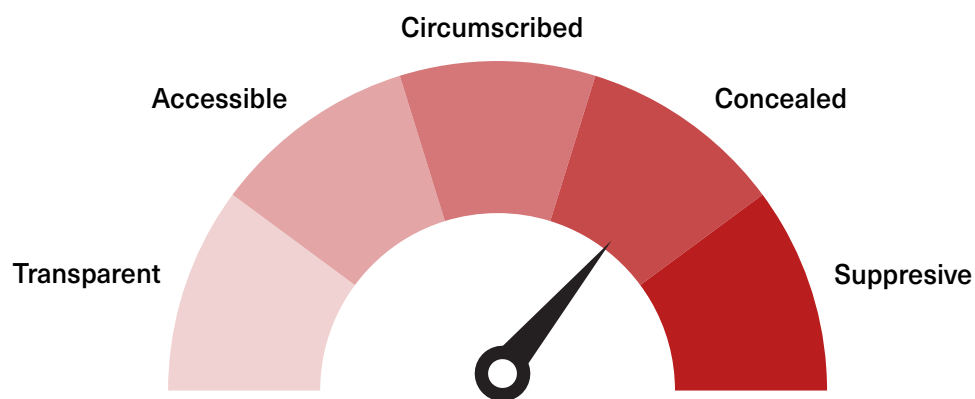
Finally, the adoption by the National Assembly on **4 April 2023 of Ordinance-Law No. 23/009 on press freedom and media regulation**, replacing the repressive and obsolete 1996 law, inherited from the Mobutu regime, seemed to mark significant progress for the safety and working conditions of media professionals. However, journalists and the media often face intimidation, threats and violence from the authorities and armed groups.

# TRANSPARENCY AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION

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The Global Torture Index rates the access to information and transparency available in each country when measuring and assessing the risks of torture and ill-treatment. It considers the availability of information, as well as the obstacles faced by civil society organisations in collecting data and their ability to access it. Data access must be guaranteed in every society, both in law and in practice, to ensure state transparency and accountability. It enables organisations, journalists and individuals to request information on public bodies, protocols, and statistics on human rights violations. This indicator reflects the challenges in accessing information within a country, with each country and territory assigned a rating as Suppressive, Concealed, Circumscribed, Accessible or Transparent.

The rating for the Democratic Republic of the Congo is **concealed** based on our assessment of the current level of transparency and access to information.



# ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO: KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

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The Index includes 5 recommendations for The Democratic Republic of the Congo, taken from the [Index webpage](#), which will serve as references in upcoming editions to monitor achievements within the anti-torture movement.

1. Speed up the establishment of a National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) in line with international standards and finalise the legal framework aimed at preventing and criminalising torture. Ensure that the legal provisions governing the security and intelligence services respect the rights of detainees and guarantee the absolute prohibition of torture.
2. Improve prison conditions, reduce prison overcrowding, by promoting alternatives to incarceration, and allow human rights defenders access to prisons to monitor conditions and engage in dialogue with inmates, particularly in establishments such as Makala prison, where access is currently restricted.
3. Create a protection mechanism for human rights defenders (HRDs), with their active participation, to ensure that their views are fully taken into account. Remove any ambiguity regarding the mandates of the HRD Protection Unit and the specific role of the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH).
4. Put an immediate end to the practice of arbitrary arrests and incommunicado detentions by the security and intelligence services, in particular agents of the National Intelligence Agency. Open impartial investigations into all allegations of torture and ill-treatment committed in detention or in the context of police violence, prosecute the perpetrators and grant reparations to the victims.
5. Adopt and implement a stronger national policy to combat sexual violence, by adopting a specific law on gender-based violence, guaranteeing the effective prosecution of perpetrators, providing courts and health services with adequate resources, and systematically training legal, security and health professionals to deal with victims.



## FURTHER RESOURCES

For further information, the complete 2025 Torture Index—including detailed data visualisations, FAQs, the methodology, and more—can be accessed on our website: <https://www.omct.org/en/global-torture-index>. Should you have any questions, feel free to reach out to us at [tortureindex@omct.org](mailto:tortureindex@omct.org).

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