

# U.S. Country Commercial Guides



## Republic of the Congo Year 2020

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## **Doing Business in the Republic of Congo**

The Republic of Congo, also known as Congo-Brazzaville or simply Congo, is a stable, well connected, and strategically located middle-income country in Central Africa. Roughly the size of the U.S. state of Montana, Congo shares borders with Angola, Cameroon, Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Gabon.

Congo has a population of approximately 5.3 million, of which 65 percent is urbanized. More than half of the country's population lives in the capital of Brazzaville and the economic hub of Pointe-Noire.

### **Market Overview**

Congo possesses natural riches in abundance and the economy relies on the export of natural resources. Oil exports account for 55 percent of gross domestic product, 85 percent of export value, and 80 percent of government revenue.

To reduce dependency on the oil sector, the government seeks to attract foreign investors in the forestry, agriculture, construction, ecotourism, transport, mining, and information technology services sectors. The increasing conversion of natural gas to electricity could improve investment prospects in the energy sector as well.

Investing in Congo can be challenging, but the country also offers enormous potential to those willing to invest the time toward understanding Congo's business environment.

1. Thousands of Congolese products can be exported to the United States duty-free.
2. Congo offers access to modern, internationally certified airports and a deepwater seaport.
3. An overemphasis on the oil sector has left other sectors ripe for investment and quality U.S. exports.
4. Congo's currency, the Central African Franc, is pegged to the Euro and stable.
5. In a sensitive and sometimes volatile region, Congo offers stability and security to businesses.

The World Bank estimates Congo's 2019 exports at \$8.38 billion and imports of \$3.77 billion. Congo's biggest trading partners include France, China, the United States, and Italy. China is the biggest exporter of goods to Congo. China and the United States are the biggest importers of Congolese goods, mostly petroleum products.

Congo is a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (Communauté Economique et Monétaire de l'Afrique Centrale, CEMAC), and the Bank of Central African States (Banque des États de l'Afrique Centrale, BEAC).

### **Market Challenges**

Investing in Congo can seem daunting to an outsider, and investors should strongly consider seeking the advice of companies with experience in the country. The Republic of Congo ranks 180 out of 190 in the World Bank's 2020 Ease of Doing Business Index. This ranking highlights the numerous challenges that investors face in Congo, including corruption, poor infrastructure, a weak judicial system, and an inadequately trained workforce.

The absence of a true middle class, lack of western-standard health care, and a tight housing market may make Congo less attractive to certain businesses.

Transportation of goods can be challenging. Rail and road linkages between the commercial center of Pointe-Noire and the capital city of Brazzaville are substandard and do not connect with Kinshasa, the capital of the neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo, located across the Congo River from Brazzaville. Two new roads connect Pointe-Noire and Brazzaville, but both main roads run through the Pool region. Although peaceful since December 2017, the Pool region has seen periodic violent attacks against commercial vehicles, civilians, and military personnel.

The boat connection between Brazzaville and Kinshasa takes about ten minutes excluding time spent on immigration formalities on either side, which can be significant.

## **Market Opportunities**

The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) affords Congo duty-free access to the U.S. market for over 1,800 products. Another 5,000 products are eligible for duty-free access under the Generalized System of Preferences program. AGOA eligibility, which the Department of State re-certifies each year, means that Congo has established or is progressing toward establishing a market-based economy, the rule of law, political pluralism, and the right to due process. AGOA eligibility also signifies no barriers to U.S. trade and investment.

A strategic link in the region, Congo boasts Central Africa's only deepwater port, the Port of Pointe-Noire, which complies with the International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code. Pointe-Noire hosts a modern airport that opened in 2019. A railway connects Pointe-Noire to the capital of Brazzaville, whose new airport opened in 2018. The African Development Bank is working to facilitate the construction of a road-rail bridge to across the Congo River that would connect Brazzaville with Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Years of overinvestment in the petroleum sector have left opportunities in a number of markets that are ready to grow. Agriculture, tourism, transportation, and energy are promising sectors. While only a fraction of the size of the oil industry, forestry is currently the second-largest sector of the economy and continues to expand. Congo has much unused arable land, providing potential for mechanized agriculture and associated food processing endeavors. According to recent estimates only four percent of Congo's arable land is being farmed.

As a member of the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa, Congo uses the Central African franc (CFA). The CFA is pegged to the Euro (CFA 656 = 1 Euro) and offers predictability to investors.

Finally, Congo offers uncommon stability in a sensitive and volatile region. The country has historically experienced instances of localized fighting and a civil war in 1997. The current situation shows no signs of deteriorating, however, and the government of longtime President Denis Sassou Nguesso maintains robust security and police forces to maintain order.

## **Market Entry Strategy**

Personal connections matter greatly in Congo, and the importance of visiting to make connections with import partners cannot be overstated. Such partners can provide an important orientation to the business environment, opportunities, and challenges.

In June 2019, a dozen U.S. businesses formed an American Chamber of Commerce in the economic hub of Pointe-Noire. The small but dynamic group stands ready to assist U.S. exporters or investors who are considering business in Congo. Interested parties may contact the U.S. Embassy's economic section to arrange for an introduction.

## Leading Sectors for U.S. Exports and Investment

### Agriculture

#### Overview

The Republic of Congo's agricultural sector is limited and cannot satisfy domestic demand. The country relies heavily on food imports, which account for about 80 percent of domestic food consumption. Imported foodstuffs come mainly from the Democratic Republic of Congo, France, and the United States. France is the largest source of the Republic of Congo's agricultural imports.

	2017	2018	2019	2020 estimated
Total Local Production	9.48	11.19	13.05	3.56
Total Exports	8.10	8.95	10.36	3.24
Total Imports	567	517	596	282
Imports from the US	48	49	45	n/a
Total Market Size	568.38	519.24	598.69	289.12
Exchange Rates	589	586	556	545

Unit: Millions of US Dollars.

*Total market size = (total local production + imports) - exports*

Data sources: Republic of Congo Ministry of Agriculture and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization

#### Leading Sub-Sectors

Corn grows well in the Republic of Congo and has potential as a human food source, as well as to support poultry and livestock production. Mechanized farming is a promising area for investment, as land, labor, and demand are readily available.

#### Opportunities

Opportunities exist for exporting food products to the Republic of Congo, as well as setting up operations in the Republic of Congo for the production and/or processing of food.

Approximately 40 percent of the population is engaged in subsistence agricultural production, which contributes just four percent of Congo's gross domestic product. Only a small percentage of arable land is currently under cultivation – less than four percent according to one recent estimate. Land under cultivation has not increased appreciably in recent years.

South African farmers have recently leased land for food production in Congo, and the U.S.-based NGO International Partnership for Human Development (IPHD) has successfully prototyped large-scale industrial farming in three different areas of the country.

#### Web Resources

[International Partnership for Human Development \(IPHD\)](#)

#### Travel and Tourism

##### Overview

The Republic of Congo boasts some of the last true pristine wilderness areas on the planet. The lush Congo Basin rainforest supports charismatic fauna such as forest elephants and lowland gorillas in quantities not found anywhere else in the world. Remoteness, a bureaucratic and inefficient visa regime, infrastructure and

transportation difficulties, cost, and corruption have thwarted significant inroads in the tourism sector. As the country continues to develop, ecotourism will likely become increasingly viable.

	2017	2018	2019	2020 estimated
Total Local Production	10,120	11,383	n/a	n/a
Total Exports	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total Imports	264,582	274,573	n/a	n/a
Imports from the US	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total Market Size	274,702	285,956	n/a	n/a
Exchange Rates	589	586	556	545

Unit: Number of visitors and tourists

*Total market size = (total local production + imports) - exports*

Data sources: Republic of Congo Ministry of Tourism

### Leading Sub-Sectors

Transportation and guide services to access existing park resources.

### Opportunities

Lodging and guide services near national parks are likely to receive strong support from the Congolese government. The upscale lodges run by the Congo Conservation Company (CCC) in Odzala-Koukoua National Park provide a glimpse of what is possible at the high end of the tourism market.

The U.S. NGO Wildlife Conservation Society recently began a collaboration with CCC to expand its model to Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park.

In 2020, USAID's Central African Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE) became active in the ecotourism sector as a tool to conserve the Congo River Basin environment. It works through partners to promote sustainable livelihoods (such as tourism) to protect environmental resources.

### Web Resources

[Wildlife Conservation Society \(WCS\) Congo](#)

[Odzala Wilderness Camps](#)

[USAID- CARPE](#)

## Petroleum

### Overview

Congo is the fourth largest oil producing country in sub-Saharan Africa and at the end of 2019 produced 350,000 barrels per day. Congo has one oil refinery in the coastal city of Pointe-Noire, which fulfills a small percentage of the country's domestic needs. Chevron is the only U.S. operator in Congo, and Baker Hughes, Frank's International, Halliburton, and Weatherford are active in the oil services sector.

	2017	2018	2019	2020 estimated
Total Local Production	4,277	10,602	5,845	3,526
Total Exports	3,624	8,690	4,676	3,013
Total Imports	72	121	67	17
Imports from the US	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total Market Size	725	2,033	1,236	530
Exchange Rates	589	586	556	545

Unit: Millions of U.S. dollars

*Total market size = (total local production + imports) - exports*

Data sources: Republic of Congo Ministry of Hydrocarbons

### Leading Sub-Sectors

Oil services remain important in both the development of new fields and the maintenance and support of older fields.

### Opportunities

Offshore drilling and exploration remain the principal activities, but some opportunities exist in onshore prospection, refining, research and development, and services (e.g., logistics, construction, drilling, maintenance, and supplies).

### Resources

[The Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative \(EITI\)](#) is a global standard to promote the open and accountable management of oil, gas and mineral resources. The Standard seeks to address the key governance issues of the oil, gas and mining sectors. In the Republic of Congo, EITI solely focuses on oil and gas.

## Energy Production and Distribution

### Overview

The Republic of Congo's energy sector is ripe for investment. The absence of reliable power grids and adequate electrical distribution has a dampening effect on investment and development, as potential investors typically provide their own power generation to operate effectively. Electricity production cannot keep up with demand, and the distribution system suffers from old, failing infrastructure. However, the government's policy of strictly controlling energy prices has until now discouraged investment.

	2017	2018	2019	2020 estimated
Total Local Production	510	510	650	665
Total Exports	100	100	100	100
Total Imports	125	125	125	150
Imports from the US	0	0	0	0

Total Market Size	535	535	675	715
Exchange Rates	589	586	556	545

Unit: Megawatts (MW).

*Total market size = (total local production + imports) - exports*

Data sources: Republic of Congo Ministry of Economy, World Bank

**Leading Sub-Sectors**

Infrastructure projects, technical assistance and national grid or distribution network upgrades are leading sub-sectors with investment potential.

**Opportunities**

The Ministry of Energy and the national electric company (Société Nationale d' Electricité, SNE) are eager to find partners to work with them to improve services in the energy sector.

Power Africa: Launched in 2013, Power Africa is a market-driven, U.S. Government-led public-private partnership to double access to electricity in sub-Saharan Africa. It also serves as a one-stop shop for private sector entities seeking tools and resources to facilitate doing business in Africa’s power sector. In 2016, the Electrify Africa Act unanimously passed both houses of Congress and was signed into law, institutionalizing Power Africa and establishing two goals: to add 20,000 MW of generation capacity, and expand electricity access to 50 million people in sub-Saharan Africa by 2020. In bringing together more than 140 of the world’s top companies, development institutions, and financial entities, Power Africa employs a transaction-centered approach to directly address key constraints to project development and investment in the power sector. These interventions aim to de-risk investments and accelerate financial close -- from facilitating project bankability with financing and risk mitigation, to providing technical and transaction support, and engaging with host-government counterparts. Learn more about the [full Power Africa toolbox](#) or other opportunities offered by [Power Africa](#).

**Web Resources**

## Telecommunications

### Overview

Phone saturation in the Republic of Congo is strong, but supporting infrastructure, particularly for data communications, is lagging. Internet penetration is extremely low and costs are high, providing significant room for competition and growth in that sector. Low incomes prevent many from owning personal computers and internet service, but cyber cafes and wi-fi are increasingly available. South Africa's MTN, India's Airtel, and Congo Telecommunications are the only actors in the sector.

	2017	2018	2019	2020 estimated
Total Local Production	319	266	262	99
Total Exports	–	–	–	–
Total Imports	–	–	–	–
Imports from the US	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total Market Size	319	266	262	99
Exchange Rates	589	586	556	545

Unit: Millions of U.S. dollars

*Total market size = (total local production + imports) - exports*

Data sources: ARPCE (Agence de Régulation des Postes et Communication Electronique)

### Leading Sub-Sectors

Infrastructure support and management; internet services.

### Opportunities

Most businesses and government offices lack a web presence. Government officials in particular use Yahoo and Hotmail accounts for their email access, lacking a specific government or ministry domain. The Republic of Congo recently gained “.cg” URLs.

### Web Resources

[MTN](#)

[Airtel](#)

## Customs, Regulations and Standards

### Trade Barriers

All categories of products may be imported into the Republic of Congo with two exceptions – sugar and eggs. Some items such as motor vehicles are heavily taxed (up to a 50 percent import duty). Customs can sometimes inflict unnecessary trade barriers, with arbitrary, irregular, or uneven enforcement of regulations.

### Import Tariffs

The Republic of Congo follows the import tariff structure of Central Africa. Import tariffs include:

- General Systems of Preference: No import tariffs for goods produced within a CEMAC-member country
- Common External Tariff: Five percent for category one products (e.g. basic products), 10 percent for category two (e.g. raw materials), 20 percent for category three (e.g. intermediate products such as most food), and 30 percent for category four (all other products).
- Processing Fee (Redevance d'utilisation du systeme informatique): Varies from 20 to 60 percent of the cost of insurance and freight (CIF).
- Value Added Tax (VAT): 18 percent. A reduced VAT of 10 percent is applicable to mineral water, cement, sugar, and chicken produced in Congo. Several products are exempt from VAT when produced in Congo, including milk products, vegetables, fruits, cereals, drugs and medical supplies, and fertilizer.

### Import Requirements and Documentation

A bill of lading and an invoice must accompany all goods entering the Republic of Congo. Import permits and sanitary certificates are required for farm products (including meat and poultry), and permits must also be secured for hazardous products (weapons, explosives, chemical products).

### Labeling and Marking Requirements

French labeling of prices for all imported and domestic goods is required, but not strictly enforced. There are no other special labeling or marking requirements.

### U.S. Export Controls

The United States imposes export controls to protect national security interests and promote foreign policy objectives related to dual-use goods through implementation of the Export Administration Regulations (EAR). The Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) is comprised of two elements: Export Administration (EA), which is responsible for processing license applications, counseling exporters, and drafting and publishing changes to the [Export Administration Regulations](#); and Export Enforcement (EE), which is responsible for the enforcement of the EAR. BIS works closely with U.S. embassies, foreign governments, industry, and trade associations to ensure that exports from the United States are secure and comply with the EAR. BIS officials conduct site visits, known as End-Use Checks (EUCs), globally with end-users, consignees, and/or other parties to transactions involving items subject to the EAR to verify compliance.

An EUC is an on-site verification of a non-U.S. party to a transaction to determine whether the party is a reliable recipient of U.S. items. EUCs are conducted as part of BIS's licensing process, as well as its compliance program, to determine if items were exported in accordance with a valid BIS authorization or otherwise consistent with the EAR. Specifically, an EUC verifies the *bona fides* of transactions subject to the EAR, to include: confirming the legitimacy and reliability of the end-use and end-user; monitoring compliance with license conditions; and ensuring items are used, re-exported or transferred (in-country) in accordance with the EAR. These checks might be completed prior to the export of items pursuant to a BIS export license in the form of a Pre-License Check (PLC), or following an export from the U.S. during a Post-Shipment Verification (PSV).

BIS officials rely on EUCs to safeguard items subject to the EAR from diversion to unauthorized end-uses/users. The verification of a foreign party's reliability facilitates future trade, including pursuant to BIS license reviews. If BIS is unable to verify the reliability of the company or is prevented from accomplishing an EUC, the company

may receive, for example, more regulatory scrutiny during license application reviews or be designated on BIS's Unverified List or Entity List, as applicable.

BIS has developed a list of "[red flags](#)", or warning signs, and compiled "[Know Your Customer](#)" guidance intended to aid exporters in identifying possible violations of the EAR. Both of these resources are publicly available, and their dissemination to industry members is highly encouraged to help promote EAR compliance.

BIS also provides a variety of training sessions to U.S. exporters throughout the year. These sessions range from one to two-day seminars that focus on the basics of exporting to coverage of more advanced, industry-specific topics. Interested parties can check [list of upcoming seminars and webinars](#) or reference BIS provided [online training](#).

BIS and the EAR regulate transactions involving the export of "dual-use" U.S. goods, services, and technologies. For advice and regulatory requirements, exporters should consult the other U.S. Government agencies which regulate more specialized items. For example, the U.S. Department of State's Directorate of Defense Trade Controls has authority over defense articles and services, or munitions. A list of other agencies involved in export control can be found on the [BIS website](#) or in Supplement No. 3 to Part 730 of the EAR.

The EAR is available on the [BIS website](#) and on the [e-CFR](#) (Electronic Code of Federal Regulations) and is updated as needed. The [Consolidated Screening List](#) (CSL) is a list of parties for which the United States Government maintains restrictions on certain exports, reexports or transfers of items. The CSL consolidates eleven export screening lists of the Departments of Commerce, State and the Treasury into a single data feed as an aid to industry in conducting electronic screens of parties to regulated transactions. Exporters are encouraged to classify their items prior to export, as well as consult the CSL to determine if any parties to the transaction may be subject to specific license requirements.

### **Temporary Entry**

Some goods enter the Republic of Congo duty free on a temporary basis. For certain sectors, such as petroleum, mining and agriculture, the law suspends customs duties in the form of temporary admission (up to three years) or exemptions on all entry taxes/duties for the importation of material required in sector operations. Farm equipment, for example, is exempted.

### **Prohibited and Restricted Imports**

All categories of products may be imported into Republic of Congo with two exceptions – sugar and eggs. The Ministry of the Interior regulates the private import of all firearms and munitions.

### **Customs Regulations**

#### **Overview**

The Republic of Congo belongs to the African Continental Free Trade Area and the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC). CEMAC member countries include Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, the Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, and Gabon. The Republic of Congo's standards of trade duplicate French standards, which are sometimes not well adapted to the local market.

#### **Standards**

The Republic of Congo follows [CEMAC general standards](#). As a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), it is required to adhere to the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT).

#### **Testing, Inspection and Certification**

There are no particular testing, inspection and certification requirements. Each company should research testing, inspection and certification requirements.

Members of the World Trade Organization (WTO) are required under the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT Agreement) to notify to the WTO proposed technical regulations and conformity assessment

procedures that could affect trade. Notify U.S. ([www.nist.gov/notifyus](http://www.nist.gov/notifyus)) is a free, web-based e-mail registration service that captures and makes available for review and comment key information on draft regulations and conformity assessment procedures. Users receive customized e-mail alerts when new notifications are added by selected country or countries and industry sector(s) of interest and can also request full texts of regulations. This service and its associated web site are managed and operated by the USA WTO TBT Inquiry Point housed within the National Institute of Standards and Technology, part of the U.S. Department of Commerce

### **Contact Information**

The website of the [Customs Office \(Direction Générale des Douanes et Droits Indirect\)](#) offers more information about Congolese customs requirements and provides points of contact for additional questions. Interested parties may also contact the U.S. Embassy's economic section.

### **Trade Agreements**

The Republic of Congo is a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO). It is also a member of CEMAC and its free trade area.

### **Licensing Requirements for Professional Services**

Most professional services (i.e. accountants) might have licensing requirements. Prospective companies are advised to contact the U.S. Embassy or any trade organizations (i.e. Chambers of Commerce or Trade Unions) to find out about potential licensing requirements.

## **Selling U.S. Products and Services**

### **Distribution & Sales Channels**

Most U.S. products sold in the Republic of Congo are marketed through Congolese agents. Some prominent examples include CFAO (selling Otis Elevator products produced in French manufacturing facilities), and Coca-Cola products produced under a licensing agreement with a local brewery. Small local firms sell other U.S. products and services.

### **eCommerce**

Electronic commerce is not widely used in the Republic of Congo. The internet penetration rate is one of the lowest on the continent due to lack of reliable infrastructure and equipment.

### **Selling Factors & Techniques**

U.S. companies need to be aware that English is not widely spoken in the Republic of Congo. The official language is French. Few government officials and potential business partners have more than a passing knowledge of English. Companies without internal French language proficiency would be well-advised to engage a trusted interpreter before attempting to enter the Republic of Congo market. Personal relationships are very important. There is no substitute for face-to-face contact.

### **Trade Financing**

#### Methods of Payment

Payment is usually made by bank wire transfers for amounts larger than \$2,000 and directly by check or cash if the amount is less than \$2,000. For more information about the methods of payment or other trade finance options, please read the Trade Finance Guide available at <https://www.trade.gov/trade-finance-guide-quick-reference-us-exporters>.

### **Banking Systems**

The Bank of the Central African States (BEAC), headquartered in Cameroon, regulates the banking system. Overall authority for Republic of Congo's banking system rests with the Ministry of Finance.

Within the BEAC is the Banking Commission of Central African States (COBAC), which ensures the legality of the operations carried out by financial institutions. BEAC issues the currency and controls liquidity within the zone. The interest rate structure is common to all member countries of the zone. Within the CEMAC zone, the CFA franc circulates freely and may be freely converted to other currencies through the banking system. The West African CFA franc is not accepted in the CEMAC zone.

The Republic of Congo's banking system includes eleven commercial banks. Commercial banks offer most corporate banking services or can procure them from overseas. Local credit to the private sector is limited and expensive, but available to both foreign and local investors on equal terms. The country's main economic actors, the oil companies, finance themselves outside of the Republic of Congo. Commercial banks have transferred excess liquidity to correspondent banks outside the region.

### **Foreign Exchange Controls**

BEAC, the central bank, requires banks to record and report the identity of customers engaging in large transactions. Additionally, financial institutions must maintain records of large transactions for five years. CEMAC regulations do not stipulate a threshold amount for transactions to be reported. For any wire transfer in excess of \$2,000 for an individual and \$20,000 for a corporation, a special authorization must be filed with the DGMC (Direction Générale de la Monnaie et du Crédit).

### **U.S. Banks and Local Correspondent Banks**

There are no U.S. banks or local correspondent banks in the Republic of Congo.

## **Protecting Intellectual Property**

As a member of the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC), the Republic of Congo is automatically a member of the African Intellectual Property Organization (AIPO). AIPO is charged with issuing a single copyright system that is enforceable in all member states. As a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Republic of Congo must ensure that its legislation conforms to trade-related aspects governing intellectual property.

The Ministry of Commerce and other interested ministries work together to address issues related to counterfeit products and other items entering the country illegally. Local authorities have seized and destroyed containers of contraband items, such as medical supplies and food products.

Interested parties may contact the U.S. Embassy's economic section, [brazzavillepolecon@state.gov](mailto:brazzavillepolecon@state.gov), for more information about protecting intellectual property in the Republic of Congo.

In any foreign market companies should consider several general principles for effective management of their intellectual property. For background on these principles please link to the following article on [Protecting Intellectual Property](#) and [Stopfakes.gov](#), or contact ITA's Office of Intellectual Property Rights Director, Stevan Mitchell at [Stevan.Mitchell@trade.gov](mailto:Stevan.Mitchell@trade.gov).

## **Selling to the Public Sector**

### **Selling to the Government**

The Congolese government typically publishes public bids to buy or contract with commercial entities through a commercial transaction. Public bids are published for transactions involving amounts above \$100,000 for equipment, supplies, and other goods and for transactions above \$40,000 for professional services (i.e. architects, lawyers, consulting services). Below this level, the government may follow a simplified process for public bids where three bidders are asked to submit their bids and the bidder with the lowest price is selected.

Companies hoping to conduct business successfully with the government should have either a local presence or a local partner to more easily identify opportunities to bid on government projects, which may be advertised by word-of-mouth prior to publication, or be physically posted in hard copy only at the advertising ministry itself. Additionally, a potential bidder will be taken more seriously if the relevant government ministry is acquainted with the company.

U.S. companies bidding on Government tenders may also qualify for U.S. Government advocacy. A unit of the U.S. Commerce Department's International Trade Administration, the Advocacy Center, coordinates U.S. Government interagency advocacy efforts on behalf of U.S. exporters bidding on public sector contracts with international governments and government agencies. The Advocacy Center works closely with our network of the U.S. Commercial Service worldwide and inter-agency partners to ensure that exporters of U.S. products and services have the best possible chance of winning government contracts. Advocacy assistance can take many forms but often involves the U.S. Embassy or other U.S. Government agencies expressing support for the U.S. bidders directly to the foreign government. Consult [Advocacy for Foreign Government Contracts](#) for additional information.

### **Financing of Projects**

Many governments finance public works projects through borrowing from the Multilateral Development Banks. Please refer to "*Trade Financing*" section for more information.

Learn more by contacting the:

- [Advocacy Liaison for World Bank](#) or
- [Advocacy Liaison for African Development Bank.](#)

## **Business Travel**

Business Customs: Many American business customs apply in Congo, although more formalities should be expected. Expect to hire a French translator and know how to work effectively through a translator. Business attire is expected in meetings despite the warm climate. First names are less common or expected; you should learn the last name of your interlocutor as well as address her/him as Ms./Mr. Lastname. Exchanges of business cards and small gifts are common.

### **Travel Advisory:**

Travel information changes frequently. The latest U.S. government information on traveling to the Republic of Congo may be obtained through the [Consular Information Sheet](#).

### **Visa Requirements:**

A passport, visa, and evidence of yellow fever vaccination are required for entry. Airport visas are not available, and visitors to the Republic of Congo will need to obtain their visas in advance of travel. A letter of invitation and/or written proof of a hotel reservation are required in order to apply for a visa. Your local sponsor should arrange this for you.

U.S. companies that require travel of foreign businesspersons to the United States are advised that security evaluations are handled via an interagency process. Visa applicants should go to the following link(s): [State Department Visa Website](#).

Additional information on entry requirements may be obtained from the [Embassy of the Republic of Congo](#), 1720 16th Street, NW, Washington DC 20009, telephone (202) 726-5500, [web site](#) or from the [Permanent Mission of the Republic of Congo to the United Nations](#), 14 E. 65th St., New York, NY, 10021, telephone (212) 744-7840. Overseas inquiries should be made at the nearest Congolese embassy or consulate.

### **Currency:**

The common currency used in the Republic of Congo and other CEMAC members is the CFA Franc (CFA). The CFA is linked to the Euro and is treated as an intervention monetary unit at a fixed exchange rate of 1 Euro: 655.957 CFA Franc. It is widely available at hotels and ATMs.

### **Telecommunications/Electric:**

Telecommunications are generally adequate and reliable. Cellular service is available in the major cities and the interior of the country. U.S. carriers are unlikely to work in Congo, but travelers may obtain local SIM cards for the duration of their travels at reasonable prices. Electric service is 220v. The Republic of Congo uses the European-type two-pin plugs.

### **Transportation:**

The international airports of Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire constitute the primary entry points for travel from the United States. Brazzaville's Maya-Maya International Airport is ten minutes from the city center. Various airlines provide domestic flights including Trans Air Congo and Canadian Airways Congo. Airports can be found in major cities – e.g., Pointe-Noire, Dolisie, and Ouessou.

Taxis are available in Brazzaville, Pointe-Noire, Dolisie, and Ouessou. Car rental is available but expensive. Major hotels offer bus service to and from the airports for international flights.

### **Language:**

French is the Republic of Congo's official language. English is not widely spoken.

### **Health:**

Medical facilities are limited. A list of doctors may be obtained through the [Embassy's consular section](#). Malaria is endemic in the Republic of Congo. Malaria prophylaxis are strongly recommended and should be begun prior to arrival. Travelers should drink only bottled water or bottled drinks.

**Local Time, Business Hours and Holidays:**

Local time is GMT+1. The working days for civil servants and employees of private companies typically begin at 7:30 am and conclude around 3:30 pm (civil servants may finish a little earlier, private employees a little later), with a thirty-minute lunch break. An updated list of holidays may be found on the U.S. Embassy's website.

**Temporary Entry of Materials or Personal Belongings:**

No special accommodations are made for temporary entry of materials and personal belongings. Items brought as carry-on or checked luggage will typically not be scrutinized, but all other incoming shipments will likely be taxed.

## **Investment Climate Statement (ICS)**

The U.S. Department of State Investment Climate Statements provide information on the business climates of more than 170 economies and are prepared by economic officers stationed in embassies and posts around the world. They analyze a variety of economies that are or could be markets for U.S. businesses.

Topics include Openness to Investment, Legal and Regulatory systems, Dispute Resolution, Intellectual Property Rights, Transparency, Performance Requirements, State-Owned Enterprises, Responsible Business Conduct, and Corruption.

These statements highlight persistent barriers to further U.S. investment. Addressing these barriers would expand high-quality, private sector-led investment in infrastructure, further women's economic empowerment, and facilitate a healthy business environment for the digital economy.

For the latest background information on the investment climate in the Republic of Congo, please visit the State Department's [Investment Climate Statement](#) website.

## **Political Environment**

For the latest background information on the political environment of the Republic of Congo, please visit the State Department's [Countries & Areas](#) website.