

# Where does the Congolese diaspora live?

## What Facebook and the United Nations say

*Meta advertising audiences compared with stocks of DRC-born migrants,  
by country, sex, age and period*

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### Abstract

How many Congolese live outside the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and where? The United Nations estimates that 2.10 million people born in the DRC lived abroad in mid-2024, 77% of them in neighbouring countries, but these figures rest on dated censuses and refugee statistics. We compare them with a new source: Meta's advertising audiences, which identify Facebook and Instagram users who "lived in the DRC" and now reside abroad. In October 2026, we submitted 300 queries to Meta's Marketing API for 25 countries of residence, by sex and age group (18 and over). Meta counts 3.2–3.8 million people who lived in the DRC worldwide, and 1.16 million adults in the 25 countries studied. The two sources agree neither on levels nor on the ranking of destinations (rank correlation 0.31). Meta matches or exceeds UN figures in Europe (116%) and North America (145%) but captures only 38% in Africa, and less than 15% in Uganda, Rwanda, South Sudan and the Central African Republic, home to most Congolese refugees. Meta instead ranks Angola first (212,200 adults, 2.3 times the UN estimate) and counts 6.8 times more people than the UN in Italy. According to Meta, women make up 49% of adults in Europe and North America but 40% in Africa, where the diaspora is also younger. Meta thus measures the connected part of the diaspora, plus people who lived in the DRC without being born there. It complements UN estimates where none exist but cannot replace them for refugees.

**Keywords:** international migration; diaspora; Democratic Republic of the Congo; Facebook; digital trace data; migrant stocks

## 1 Introduction

International migration from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is poorly documented. The country has not held a census since 1984, and estimates of its diaspora rely on sources from receiving countries: censuses, population registers and refugee statistics from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

The United Nations compiles these sources in its *International Migrant Stock* database, which estimates that 2.10 million people born in the DRC were living abroad in mid-2024, up from 0.39 million in 1990. Many of these estimates are dated, and several major destinations, including the United States, the United Kingdom and Germany, do not report DRC-born migrants separately.

Meta’s advertising audiences offer a different measure, updated continuously and available for every country. To allow advertisers to reach expatriates, Meta identifies users who “lived in” a given country and now reside elsewhere. [Zagheni et al. \(2017\)](#) showed that these audiences reproduce migrant stocks in the United States reasonably well once their biases are modelled, and later work extended the approach to other countries and to nowcasting ([Spyratos et al., 2019](#); [Alexander et al., 2022](#)). This paper applies the approach to the Congolese diaspora. For 25 countries of residence, it compares Meta’s counts with United Nations estimates by country, sex and age, and places the results in the trends observed since 1990.

## 2 Data and methods

### 2.1 Meta advertising audiences

According to Meta, the category “Lived in DR Congo (formerly Expats – DR Congo)” (identifier 6023516373983) covers “people who used to live in the DRC and now live abroad”. On 22 October 2026, we queried Meta’s advertising interface (Marketing API version 26.0, `delivery_estimate` endpoint) for the number of monthly active Facebook and Instagram users in this category in 25 countries of residence, for each sex and six age groups: all ages 18 and over, 18–29, 30–39, 40–49, 50–64, and 65 and over. Meta does not allow this category to be targeted below age 18. The countries were chosen among the main known destinations of Congolese migration in Europe, North America, Africa and the Gulf. Meta returns a lower and an upper bound; we use their mean. Audiences below 1,000 people are reported as “1,000–1,000”: we treat them as lying between 0 and 1,000, with a central value of 500. This affects 87 of the 300 queries, almost all of them age groups in small countries.

### 2.2 United Nations migrant stocks

The reference is the United Nations Population Division’s *International Migrant Stock 2024* ([United Nations, 2024](#)), Table 1 (destination and origin), which gives the number of people born in each country of origin for each country of destination, by sex, from 1990 to 2024. In most countries the estimate is based on the foreign-born population; in countries hosting

refugees, UNHCR figures are added. Of the 25 countries studied, 17 have a DRC-specific estimate. For the others, including the United States, the United Kingdom and Germany, DRC-born migrants are included in regional aggregates.

### 2.3 Comparability

The two sources differ on four points that shape the interpretation. The United Nations counts people *born* in the DRC, Meta those who have *lived* there, including foreigners who returned home or moved on. The United Nations counts all ages, Meta adults only; in neighbouring countries, where refugee populations include many children, this mechanically lowers the Meta-to-UN ratio. Meta only sees active users, which excludes people without a phone or an internet connection. Finally, the UN estimates refer to mid-2024 and Meta's counts to October 2026. The ratio between the two sources therefore reflects both Meta's coverage and these differences in definition.

## 3 Results

### 3.1 Main destinations

The ten main destinations, ranked by the larger of the two estimates, are Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Angola, Congo (Brazzaville), France, the United States, South Sudan, South Africa and Belgium (Figure 1). Together they account for 82% of the diaspora estimated by the United Nations. Yet the two sources draw two different geographies (Figure 2). According to the United Nations, the Congolese diaspora is above all regional: Uganda alone hosts 637,206 people born in the DRC, and neighbouring countries to the east and south host the majority. According to Meta, Angola comes first with 212,200 adults, ahead of France (147,800) and the United States (105,000), while Uganda counts only 57,150.

### 3.2 Highly uneven coverage

In the 17 countries where both sources are available, Meta counts 967,450 adults who lived in the DRC, against 1,984,741 people born in the DRC according to the United Nations, that is 49%. The ratio ranges from 0.03 in South Sudan to 6.8 in Italy (Figure 3; Table A1 in Appendix A). It is close to or above one in Europe (1.16 on average) and North America (1.45), but falls to 0.38 in Africa. The rank correlation between the two sources is only 0.31, and the correlation of their logarithms 0.48.

Three mechanisms explain these gaps. The first is digital coverage: in the refugee camps and settlements of Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, South Sudan and the Central African Republic, few people use Facebook, and a large share of refugees are children, whom Meta does not count. The second is definitional: Meta counts anyone who has lived in the

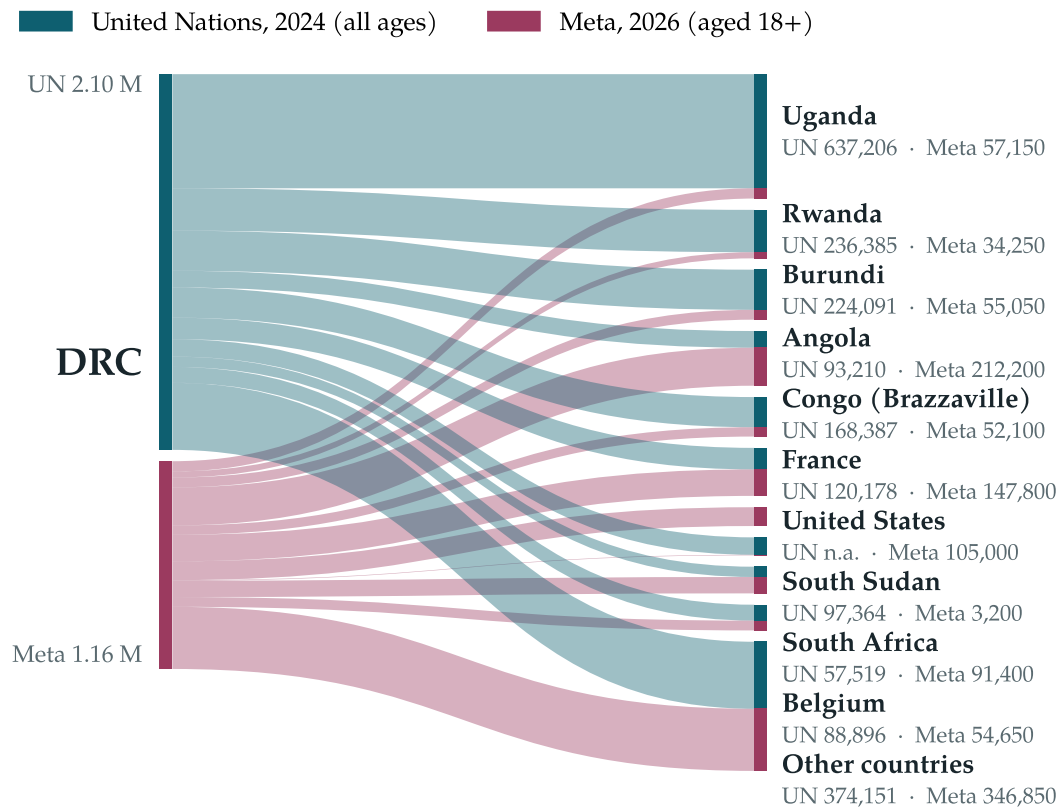


**Figure 1.** From the DRC to the ten main destinations: United Nations (2024) and Meta (2026).

*Notes:* Ribbon width is proportional to the number of persons, on the same scale for both sources. United Nations: people born in the DRC, all ages, mid-2024. Meta: active users aged 18 and over who lived in the DRC, 22 October 2026. “Other countries”: rest of the world for the United Nations, the fifteen other countries collected for Meta. n.a.: no DRC-specific UN estimate.

*How to read:* according to the United Nations, 637,206 people born in the DRC lived in Uganda in 2024; Meta counts 57,150 adults who lived in the DRC and resided in Uganda in October 2026.

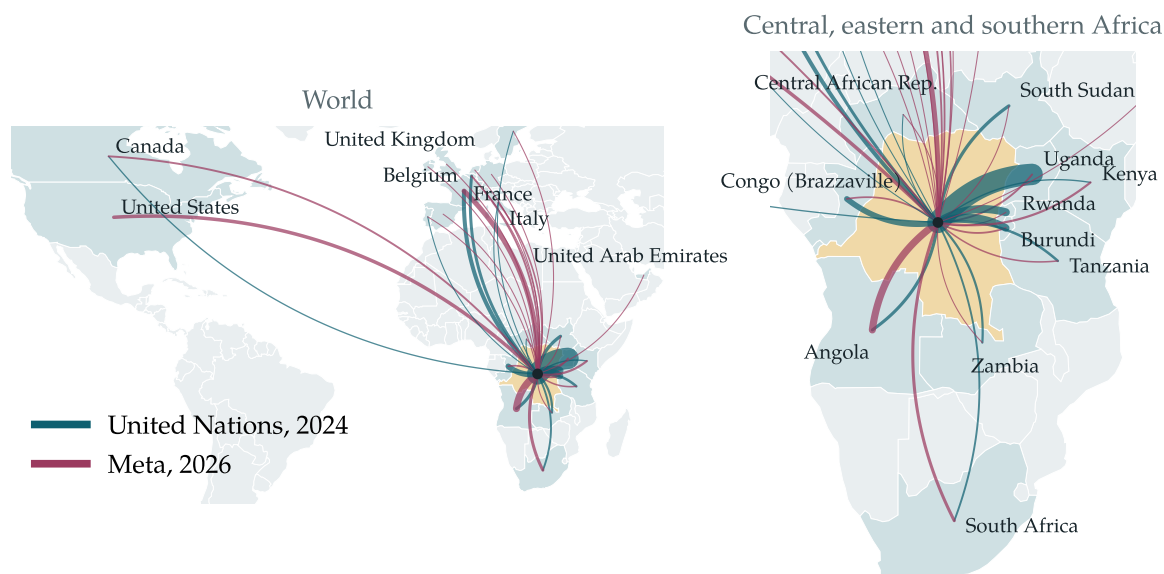


**Figure 2.** Flows from the DRC by source.

*Notes:* Arc width is proportional to the number of persons. United Nations: 2024, all ages. Meta: 2026, aged 18 and over. Left: world; right: central, eastern and southern Africa.

*How to read:* the thickest teal arc leads to Uganda (637,206 DRC-born persons according to the United Nations); the thickest plum arc leads to Angola (212,200 adults who lived in the DRC according to Meta).

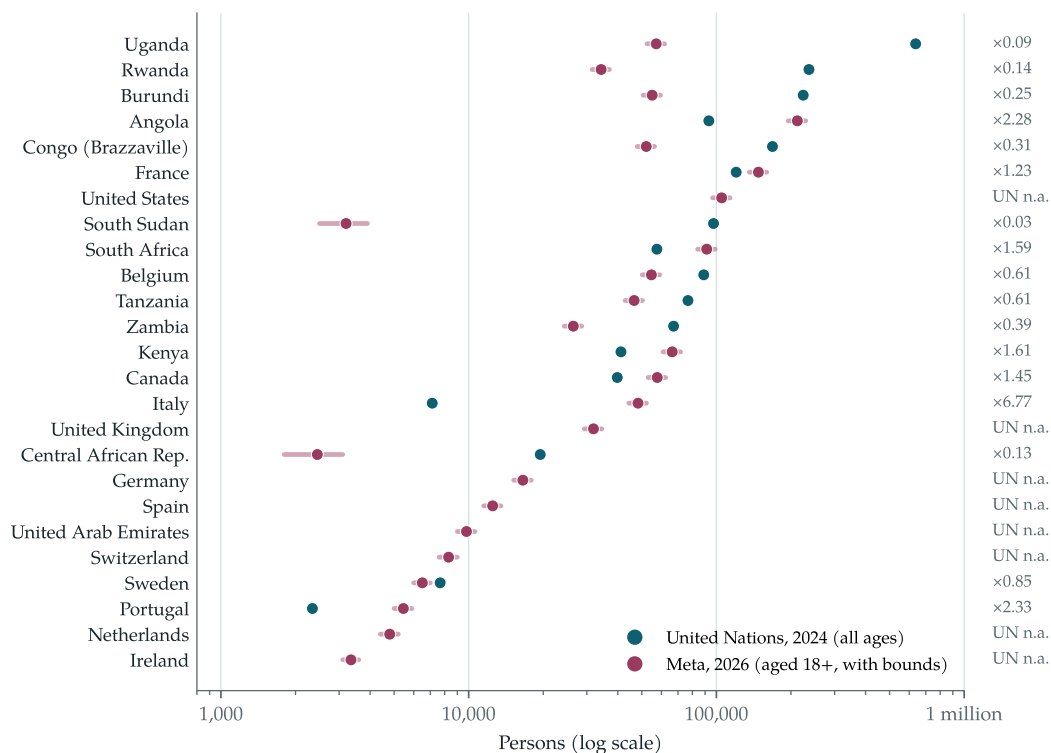


**Figure 3.** Size of the diaspora by country of residence: Meta and United Nations.

*Notes:* Logarithmic scale. Meta: central value and bounds, aged 18 and over, 2026. United Nations: 2024, all ages. The ratio Meta/UN is shown on the right; n.a.: no DRC-specific UN estimate.

*How to read:* in Angola, Meta counts 212,200 adults who lived in the DRC (bounds 195,000–229,400), 2.28 times the 93,210 DRC-born persons estimated by the United Nations.

DRC. In Angola, some of those identified are probably Angolans who found refuge in the DRC during the civil war (1975–2002) before returning home; in Italy, Belgium or France, missionaries, aid workers, traders and their families who lived in the Congo. The third lies in the UN sources themselves, which for some countries rely on old censuses or on citizenship rather than place of birth.

The two sources are closest in four countries: Sweden (Meta equal to 0.85 times the UN estimate), France (1.23), Canada (1.45) and, in Africa, South Africa (1.59). These countries share three features that make the two measures comparable. Their Congolese diaspora is almost entirely adult and long established: children of migrants born locally are counted neither by the United Nations nor by Meta, so the age difference between the sources matters little. It is mostly urban, with near-universal access to phones and the internet, so Meta sees most of it. Finally, the United Nations can draw on recent censuses or registers based on place of birth. The remaining gap, usually in Meta's favour, probably reflects people who lived in the DRC without being born there (aid workers, children of expatriates, students) and, in South Africa, migrants in an irregular situation who are poorly captured by official statistics. These are the countries where Meta could be used to update diaspora counts between censuses.

### *3.3 Sex: a more male diaspora in Africa*

The distribution by sex and age is described from Meta data only, since they provide both dimensions for every country at the same date. Across the 25 countries, women make up 44% of adults who lived in the DRC (Figure 4). Parity is almost reached in Europe and North America (49% women; 54% in Belgium, 49% in France), whereas men clearly dominate in Africa (40% women), particularly in Tanzania (34%) and Uganda (36%), and in the United Arab Emirates (26%). This imbalance combines two effects: more male labour migration to southern Africa and the Gulf, and lower access to phones and the internet among women, especially in refugee populations, which Meta only sees through their connected members.

### *3.4 Age: a young diaspora in neighbouring countries*

In African countries, people aged 18–29 account for 40% of the adults who lived in the DRC according to Meta, and those aged 50 and over for 15% (Figure 5). In Europe and North America the distribution is much flatter: 20% aged 18–29 and 34% aged 50 and over. The contrast reflects two distinct migrations: a recent one, linked to the conflicts in the east and to regional labour migration, and an older one towards Europe and North America. The share aged 65 and over is nevertheless high in several countries (up to 19% in Belgium),

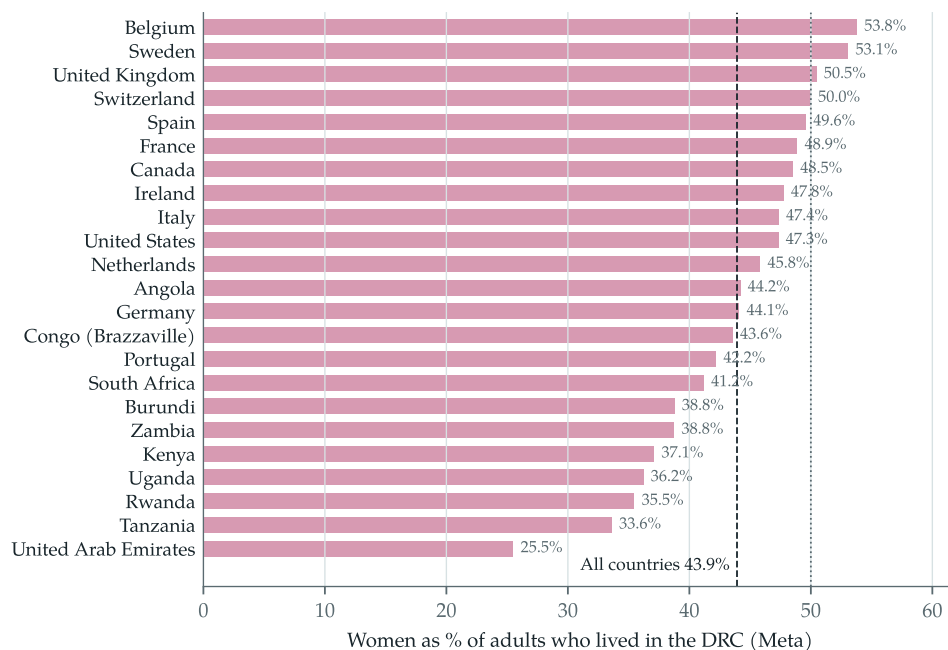


**Figure 4.** Share of women among adults who lived in the DRC, by country of residence (Meta).

*Notes:* Percent of users aged 18 and over, 22 October 2026. Countries where both sexes are above Meta's reporting floor. Dashed line: all countries; dotted line: parity.

*How to read:* in Belgium, 53.8% of the adults who lived in the DRC identified by Meta are women; across all countries, the share is 43.9%.

sometimes above that of the 50–64 group, which suggests, as in other work on Meta data, that age is misreported on some profiles.

### 3.5 Period: thirty-five years of growth

According to the United Nations, the number of people born in the DRC living abroad grew 5.3-fold between 1990 and 2024 (Figure A1 in Appendix A). Trajectories follow the history of crises: sharp increases in Tanzania and Zambia during the wars of 1996–2003, followed by declines after repatriation; a peak in 2010 in Congo (Brazzaville) after the 2009 violence in Équateur; continuous growth in Uganda since 2010 (161,865 in 2010, 637,206 in 2024) with the violence in the east; and steady growth in France, Belgium and Canada. Meta's 2026 figure extends these trends in Europe and North America but lies far below the curve in refugee-hosting countries.

## 4 Conclusion

Meta's advertising audiences provide an up-to-date measure of the Congolese diaspora, broken down by sex and age, and available for countries where the United Nations publishes nothing: Meta counts 105,000 adults who lived in the DRC in the United States, 31,900 in the United Kingdom and 16,550 in Germany. Their agreement with the United Nations

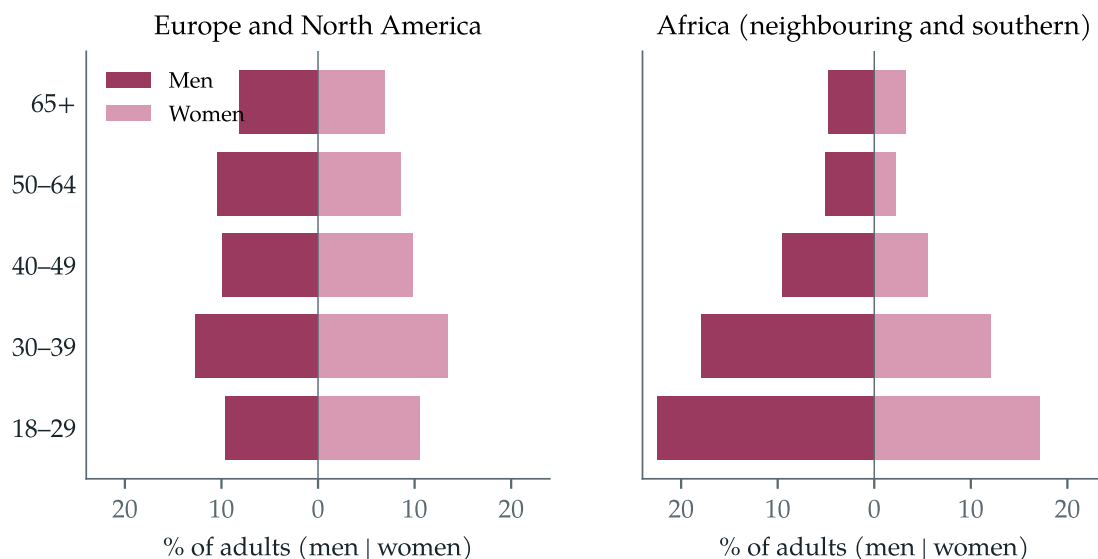


**Figure 5.** Age and sex structure of the diaspora according to Meta.

*Notes:* Percent of users aged 18 and over who lived in the DRC, 22 October 2026, in countries where at most two age groups are below the reporting floor. Left bars: men; right bars: women. The United Nations does not publish age structures by country of origin.

*How to read:* in African countries, men aged 18–29 represent 22.5% of all adults (men and women combined) who lived in the DRC identified by Meta.

is nevertheless weak. Meta overestimates the diaspora where foreigners have lived in the DRC (Angola, Italy) and strongly underestimates it where Congolese refugees live, who make up most of the DRC-born migrants. It also sees a more male diaspora in Africa, a sign that Meta's coverage depends on digital access.

Three uses nonetheless seem reasonable. In highly connected countries, Meta can update the size and the sex and age structure of the diaspora between censuses. Elsewhere, it can complement the United Nations for countries without a specific estimate, provided its limits are stated. Finally, repeated at regular intervals with the same protocol, data collection would make it possible to follow rapid changes, such as departures linked to a crisis, which censuses only capture years later. A statistical calibration in the spirit of [Zagheni et al. \(2017\)](#), modelling the Meta-to-UN ratio by region, sex and age, could correct part of the biases. Meta thus measures the connected part of the Congolese diaspora rather than the diaspora itself; it can complement, but not replace, refugee statistics and censuses.

## References

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## Appendix A. Supplementary figure and table

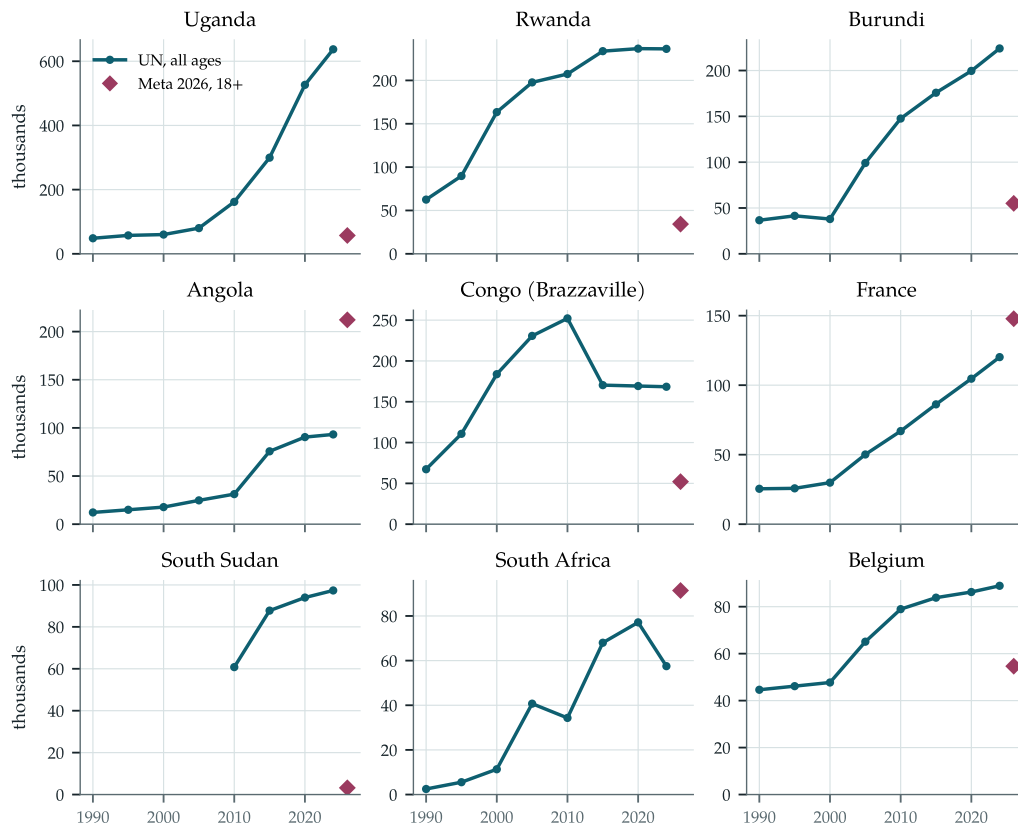


**Figure A1.** Number of people born in the DRC living abroad since 1990 (United Nations) and Meta count in 2026.

*Notes:* United Nations: 1990–2024, all ages. Meta: 22 October 2026, aged 18 and over (diamond). South Sudan: estimates from 2010 onwards.

*How to read:* according to the United Nations, the number of DRC-born persons living in Uganda rose from 48,439 in 1990 to 637,206 in 2024; Meta counts 57,150 adults in Uganda in 2026.

**Table A1.** Congolese diaspora by country of residence: Meta (2026) and United Nations (2024).

| Country              | Region          | Meta, 18+                 | UN, all ages |         | Women (%) |    |
|----------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|--------------|---------|-----------|----|
|                      |                 | (bounds)                  | 2024         | Meta/UN | Meta      | UN |
| Uganda               | Eastern Africa  | 57,150 (52,500–61,800)    | 637,206      | 0.09    | 36        | 55 |
| Rwanda               | Eastern Africa  | 34,250 (31,500–37,000)    | 236,385      | 0.14    | 35        | 51 |
| Burundi              | Eastern Africa  | 55,050 (50,600–59,500)    | 224,091      | 0.25    | 39        | 49 |
| Angola               | Southern Africa | 212,200 (195,000–229,400) | 93,210       | 2.28    | 44        | 40 |
| Congo (Brazzaville)  | Central Africa  | 52,100 (47,900–56,300)    | 168,387      | 0.31    | 44        | 49 |
| France               | Europe          | 147,800 (135,800–159,800) | 120,178      | 1.23    | 49        | 56 |
| United States        | North America   | 105,000 (96,500–113,500)  | n.a.         | –       | 47        | –  |
| South Sudan          | Eastern Africa  | 3,200 (2,500–3,900)       | 97,364       | 0.03    | n.e.      | 46 |
| South Africa         | Southern Africa | 91,400 (84,000–98,800)    | 57,519       | 1.59    | 41        | 32 |
| Belgium              | Europe          | 54,650 (50,200–59,100)    | 88,896       | 0.61    | 54        | 55 |
| Tanzania             | Eastern Africa  | 46,550 (42,800–50,300)    | 76,772       | 0.61    | 34        | 52 |
| Zambia               | Southern Africa | 26,450 (24,300–28,600)    | 67,171       | 0.39    | 39        | 48 |
| Kenya                | Eastern Africa  | 66,300 (60,900–71,700)    | 41,186       | 1.61    | 37        | 49 |
| Canada               | North America   | 57,700 (53,000–62,400)    | 39,790       | 1.45    | 49        | 53 |
| Italy                | Europe          | 48,250 (44,300–52,200)    | 7,127        | 6.77    | 47        | 52 |
| United Kingdom       | Europe          | 31,900 (29,300–34,500)    | n.a.         | –       | 50        | –  |
| Central African Rep. | Central Africa  | 2,450 (1,800–3,100)       | 19,448       | 0.13    | n.e.      | 53 |
| Germany              | Europe          | 16,550 (15,200–17,900)    | n.a.         | –       | 44        | –  |
| Spain                | Europe          | 12,500 (11,500–13,500)    | n.a.         | –       | 50        | –  |
| United Arab Emirates | Western Asia    | 9,800 (9,000–10,600)      | n.a.         | –       | 26        | –  |
| Switzerland          | Europe          | 8,300 (7,600–9,000)       | n.a.         | –       | 50        | –  |
| Sweden               | Europe          | 6,500 (6,000–7,000)       | 7,671        | 0.85    | 53        | 52 |
| Portugal             | Europe          | 5,450 (5,000–5,900)       | 2,340        | 2.33    | 42        | 34 |
| Netherlands          | Europe          | 4,800 (4,400–5,200)       | n.a.         | –       | 46        | –  |
| Ireland              | Europe          | 3,350 (3,100–3,600)       | n.a.         | –       | 48        | –  |

Countries ranked by the larger of the two estimates. n.a.: not available (DRC-born migrants included in a regional aggregate). n.e.: not estimable (one sex below Meta's reporting floor). Meta: central value; audiences below the floor counted as 500.

## Appendix B. Methodological notes

**Note 1. Data collection.** All queries used version 26.0 of Meta’s Marketing API, with the REACH optimisation goal and the advertising account’s `delivery_estimate` endpoint. The targeting specification combines the country of residence, the location type `home` (people whom Meta considers to live in the country), sex, minimum and maximum age, the Facebook and Instagram platforms, and behaviour `6023516373983` (“Lived in DR Congo”) within `flexible_spec`. A maximum age of 65 means “65 and over” for Meta. Queries were spaced ten seconds apart and the script resumes automatically after an interruption. The worldwide audience of the category (3.2 to 3.8 million, all places of residence and all targetable ages) comes from a search of the targeting catalogue on the same day.

**Note 2. Choice of countries.** The 25 countries cover the known destinations of Congolese migration: neighbouring countries (Angola, Congo-Brazzaville, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania, Zambia, the Central African Republic, South Sudan), two African labour-migration destinations (South Africa, Kenya), eleven European countries, the United States, Canada and the United Arab Emirates. Malawi, Sudan, Mozambique, Gabon and Australia, which appear in the UN data with fewer than 30,000 people born in the DRC, were not collected; their absence does not change the ranking of the ten main destinations.

**Note 3. Ranking and flow diagram.** The ten destinations in Figure 1 are those with the largest value of the larger of the two estimates, so that a country important in only one source is retained. The UN “Other countries” ribbon is the difference between the world total and the sum of the ten destinations; the Meta ribbon is the sum of the fifteen other countries collected, not the worldwide total, which includes countries not studied. Ribbon widths are proportional to counts, on the same scale for both sources.

**Note 4. Map.** The map uses simplified Natural Earth boundaries (public domain) with an equirectangular projection scaled at 20° latitude. Flows are drawn from the centre of the DRC to the centre of each country’s largest polygon, restricted to the mainland for France and the contiguous states for the United States. Arc widths are proportional to counts; Meta and UN arcs are slightly offset to remain legible.

**Note 5. Indicators.** The Meta-to-UN ratio divides the number of adults counted by Meta by the all-age UN estimate for 2024; it is therefore underestimated where children are numerous. Regional ratios are ratios of sums. Spearman’s rank correlation and the Pearson correlation of logarithms are computed over the 17 countries with both sources. The sex and age distributions rely on Meta data only, as the United Nations does not publish age by country of origin. The share of women is computed only when both sexes are above Meta’s floor. Regional age structures add up countries in which at most two age groups are below the floor; they refer to ages 18 and over and should be read with caution at older ages, where Meta appears to overestimate counts.

**Note 6. Trends.** The UN series cover 1990, 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010, 2015, 2020 and 2024. South Sudan, independent since 2011, has estimates from 2010 onwards. Meta’s figure, placed in 2026, is a

count of adults and is not directly comparable with the all-age UN estimates.

**Note 7. Reproducibility.** The file `diaspora_rdc_scripts.R` combines the script used to collect Meta audiences and the analysis script. It reads `meta_diaspora_rdc.csv` and the UN data file, and produces the tables underlying the figures. Data collection can be repeated with the same protocol to follow changes in the diaspora. All calculations were replicated independently in Python, with identical results. Scripts: [https://mguerschom-glitch.github.io/diaspora\\_rdc\\_scripts.R](https://mguerschom-glitch.github.io/diaspora_rdc_scripts.R). Data: Meta counts, [https://mguerschom-glitch.github.io/meta\\_diaspora\\_rdc.csv](https://mguerschom-glitch.github.io/meta_diaspora_rdc.csv); United Nations file, [https://mguerschom-glitch.github.io/undesa\\_pd\\_2024\\_ims\\_stock\\_by\\_sex\\_destination\\_and\\_origin.xlsx](https://mguerschom-glitch.github.io/undesa_pd_2024_ims_stock_by_sex_destination_and_origin.xlsx).