

Responses to Information Requests - Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

Democratic Republic of the Congo: Entry and exit procedures at the NDjili [N'Djili] International Airport [Aéroport International de Ndjili] in Kinshasa (2017-July 2019)

1. General Conditions at the Airport

The page on the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) of the French travel guide website Petit Futé indicates that entering or exiting the country via the airport is done with [translation] “[varying degrees of] ease depending on the day and the public officials [travellers] are dealing with,” and explains that “Congolese customs officers, like their immigration colleagues at the Migration Directorate (Direction générale de migration, DGM) ... are particularly zealous” and seeking bribes and favours (Petit Futé n.d.). The same source adds that the [translation] “airport area is overrun by police officers and soldiers,” who may also be looking to get “a little something” (Petit Futé n.d.).

According to its website, the DGM [translation] “operates in reserved areas at border posts and borders,” particularly by “[s]ystematically collecting migrants’ personal data,” “[m]anaging prohibitions on entry and exit,” “[m]onitoring ‘target’ persons,” and “[a]pplying and enforcing police orders relating to migrants” (DRC n.d.a).

The DGM website indicates that the DGM [translation] “conducts checks at entry and exit posts to certify that migrants crossing the border meet the country’s entry or exit requirements” and lists the following general conditions for entering and exiting the DRC:

In accordance with legislative and regulatory provisions, migrants must meet the following conditions to enter or exit the DRC:

- Be in possession of a valid travel document authorizing them to cross the border
- Be in possession of a valid visa, if required
- Produce documents attesting to the purpose and conditions of the stay and covering the whole duration of their stay and the repatriation bond (return travel document)
- Not appear on any watchlist
- Not considered a potential threat
- Be in possession of a travel order, for those holding a service passport
- Be in possession of a leave certificate, for all public servants and employees. (DRC n.d.b)

The website adds the following regarding document verification by the DGM:

[translation]

The Migration Directorate checks travel documents to ensure they are valid and to look for various types of document fraud.

...

To carry out this work, the DGM uses several techniques, including:

- Physical handling
- Ultraviolet lamps
- Passport reader. (DRC n.d.b)

2. Entry Procedures

The website of the NDjili International Airport in Kinshasa states that [Aéroport international de NDijili English version] “arriving passengers must [allow for] an average of 30 to 45 minutes to complete the formalities of police and customs and to retrieve their luggage” (Aéroport international de NDijili n.d.a). However, according to the travel guide Lonely Planet’s website, entering the DRC, especially when arriving in Kinshasa by airplane, can be “lengthy and frustrating” and include “delays” and “intimidation,” meaning that, “in general,” entry procedures can take “an hour or two” (Lonely Planet n.d.). Similarly, the Government of Canada’s advice and warnings regarding travel to the DRC indicate that [Canada English version] “[t]ravellers going to the DRC commonly encounter difficulties at the airport and other ports of entry” and adds that “[a]rrival at N’Djili International Airport in Kinshasa can be chaotic” (Canada 28 June 2019a). Petit Futé states that [translation] “while there has been some improvement in recent years, airport processing is sometimes Kafkaesque” (Petit Futé n.d.).

According to the Government of Canada’s travel advice, [Canada English version] “[t]ravellers can sometimes be temporarily detained and asked by security and immigration officers to pay unofficial ‘special fees’” (Canada 28 June 2019a). In the same vein, Lonely Planet states that travellers may be asked “to take a seat in a side office for no apparent reason and [be asked] for a bribe” (Lonely Planet n.d.). Similarly, in advice for travellers to the DRC, the US Department of State recommends that American nationals contact their embassy in the event of harassment at any of the country’s ports of entry, “such as detention, passport confiscation or demands by immigration and security personnel for unofficial ‘fees’” (US 20 Nov. 2018).

2.1 Travel Documents

Sources indicate that foreign travellers arriving in the DRC [usually] need a passport and a visa (Lonely Planet n.d.; Aéroport international de NDijili n.d.a). The website of the NDjili International Airport specifies that the passport must have an expiry date at least six months after entry into the DRC (Aéroport international de NDijili n.d.a).

The airport’s website states that various types of visas may be granted [Aéroport international de NDijili English version] “to applicants who fulfill the conditions laid down by laws and regulations” and adds that [translation] “the conditions for obtaining visas, their fees and the nationalities concerned change regularly according to diplomatic developments” (Aéroport international de NDijili n.d.b). The same source also provides the following information on the conditions for granting visas according to the nationality of travellers:

[translation]

Visa-exempt foreign nationalities: Burundi, Congo Brazzaville, Rwanda, Zimbabwe.

Nationalities eligible for visa on arrival: Kenya, Mauritius, Tanzania (nationals of these countries may obtain a visa upon arrival without further formalities).

...

Nationalities subject to a regular visa: Citizens of all other nationalities must have a visa obtained from Congolese consular representation. (N'Djili International Airport n.d.b, in bold in the original)

The airport website also indicates that guests of the Congolese government or residents of a country where the DRC does not have diplomatic or consular representation can obtain a [Aéroport international de NDijili English version] “flying” visa, which the visitor can then use to obtain a visa at the airport to enter the country (Aéroport international de NDijili n.d.b). The airport website adds that [Aéroport international de NDijili English version] “binational passengers who ca[nn]ot prove their Congolese nationality (passport or ID card) are also subject to visa requirements” (Aéroport international de NDijili n.d.a).

Information from the airport website on the names of the various types of visas issued by the DGM and the conditions under which they are granted is attached to this Response.

2.2 Exemptions from the Passport or Visa Requirement

The airport website indicates that, in the following cases, travellers are exempted from the requirement for a passport or visa:

[translation]

1. Passport and Visa

1. Travellers under the age of 15, provided that their identity is indicated on the passport of a parent, relative or guardian accompanying them;
2. Foreigners who are crew members of an airline or maritime line and who have a stopover in the DRC, provided that they hold a valid crew member licence or certificate.

2. Transit Visa

1. Foreigners in transit travelling by air or sea, provided that they do not leave the airport or port boundaries during their stopover;
2. Foreigners who transit through the DRC, travelling exclusively by air and staying only as long as is strictly necessary to take their first connecting flight to continue their journey;
3. Foreigners who, as passengers of an airline, have a stopover at Kinshasa airport and continue their journey by air from Brazzaville airport; they may also benefit from this exemption from Brazzaville airport to Kinshasa airport;
4. Crew members of airlines or maritime lines who have a stopover in the DRC, provided that they hold a valid crew member licence or certificate. (Aéroport international de NDijili n.d.b)

2.3 Proof of Vaccination

Sources indicate that travellers arriving in the DRC must present proof of vaccination against yellow fever (France 19 June 2019; Petit Futé n.d.; Aéroport international de

NDijili n.d.a), in the form of an international certificate of vaccination (Petit Futé n.d.; Aéroport international de NDijili n.d.a).

Canadian travel advice indicates that [translation] “proof of yellow fever vaccination is required if travellers are coming from or have transited through an airport of a country where yellow fever is present” (Canada 28 June 2019b). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The airport website adds that [translation] “travellers from countries affected by different epidemics ... may be subject to specific formalities” (Aéroport international de NDijili n.d.a). Canadian travel advice states that proof of polio vaccination may be required for a trip of four weeks or more to the country (Canada 28 June 2019b).

2.4 Immigration Control

According to Petit Futé, DGM officers are responsible for checking passports and visas and registering travellers, and it is their responsibility to submit the completed [translation] “migration” form, which is provided to travellers in aircraft inbound to the DRC (Petit Futé n.d.).

According to Lonely Planet, immigration checks can create problems when entering DRC territory (Lonely Planet n.d.). Petit Futé reports that the DGM is [translation] “sadly famous for systematic racketeering,” but that this is especially the case “inside the country, because at the Kinshasa and Lubumbashi airports, DGM officers are now drilled and relatively efficient” (Petit Futé n.d.).

According to a report on the treatment by DRC authorities of nationals who return to the country, prepared by the Belgian Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons, [translation] “upon arrival at the NDjili/Kinshasa airport, persons forcibly repatriated from Belgium are handed over to the DGM for identification purposes. They may be screened a second time by the [National Intelligence Agency (Agence nationale de renseignements, ANR)] but that is not always the case” (Belgium 14 June 2019, 14). The Belgian report quotes an advisor from the Belgian Aliens Office, who provides the following details about the checks carried out by the Congolese authorities at the airport when people return to the DRC:

[translation]

“These controls apply to all returnees (“ordinary” passengers), but specifically to persons repatriated by the Belgian authorities. In the case of airline flights, there are no additional interrogations when the returnees arrive. A returnee may still be interrogated if they are wanted by the Congolese authorities for reasons of public order. In the case of special flights, returnees will always undergo additional interrogation by Congolese intelligence authorities (ANR), after they have been processed by migration authorities (DGM).” (Belgium 14 June 2019, 11)

According to an article written by a migration researcher at the Amsterdam Vrije Universiteit concerning failed asylum seekers from the DRC and Cameroon,

[f]ailed asylum seekers can be at risk upon return in cases where their application was unduly turned down, if they fabricated fraudulent documents During a research visit to Kinshasa, I came across the case of a deportee from Belgium who was

sent to Makala [prison] because his asylum application contained fraudulent documents. (Alpes 9 Nov. 2016)

Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2.5 Customs

The airport website provides the following information about what must be declared to customs when entering Congolese territory:

[translation]

- Items you purchased and are carrying with you upon return to the Congo (even if you are travelling on to another foreign destination).
- Items you inherited while travelling abroad.
- Items you bought in dutyfree shops or on the airplane whose purchase price exceeds the allowed limits.
- Currency in excess of US\$5,000 (or its equivalent in another currency).

You must state on the declaration form, in US dollars, the price you paid for each item. This price must include all taxes. If you are not sure of the amount, provide an estimate. (Aéroport international de NDjili n.d.c)

According to Lonely Planet, “there’s no need to list electronic equipment or currency you’re holding, though officers may ask” (Lonely Planet n.d.).

Lonely Planet adds that customs checks in the DRC “are generally not that thorough” and that it is “unlikely” that there will be any problems (Lonely Planet n.d.). Similarly, Petit Futé states that, [translation] “in principle, there is no cause for concern” on arrival at the country’s customs, but that “‘floating brigades’, meaning one or more zealous officials out for *matabish* [bribes], might stop a traveller after the baggage has been claimed” (Petit Futé n.d.).

3. Exit Procedures

According to Petit Futé, flights to foreign destinations from the Kinshasa airport [translation] “are scheduled in the evening” (Petit Futé n.d.). Similarly, the Belgian airline Brussels Airlines reports that its ticket counter at the NDjili airport are open from 4:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m., Monday to Sunday (Brussels Airlines n.d.).

According to Petit Futé, airlines, including Brussels Airlines and Air France, allow travellers leaving the country from the international airport in Kinshasa to check in and complete departure formalities in the morning or early afternoon on the day of departure at those airlines’ offices in town (Petit Futé n.d.). Similarly, the website of the Kinshasa office of Brussels Airlines indicates that it offers a pre-check-in service on the day of the flight between 11:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m., Monday to Sunday (Brussels Airlines n.d.). Petit Futé adds that the DGM also has a presence at the airline offices (Petit Futé n.d.). According to the same source, [translation] “all formalities will be completed [in those offices]: baggage weighed, searched and checked in; boarding pass and migration form (to be handed in at the airport in the evening)” (Petit Futé n.d.).

According to Petit Futé, proof of yellow fever vaccination is [translation] “now” a

requirement when leaving the DRC (Petit Futé n.d.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The airport website states that travellers must be [Aéroport international de NDijili English version] “at the airport two hours before the scheduled departure time” and that most airlines close their check-in counters approximately 60 minutes before a flight (Aéroport international de NDijili n.d.a). Brussels Airlines recommends that travellers be at the airport three hours before the scheduled departure time [Brussels Airlines English version] “in order to finalise or complete the predeparture formalities,” noting that the check-in counter at the airport “will be closed strictly at 1h15min prior to departure” and that “from that time on, only guests who have completed the immigration process, or guests who are already in the immigration queue to do so, will be accepted on board” (Brussels Airlines n.d.). According to Brussels Airlines, at the airport, [Brussels Airlines English version] “[t]he immigration desks are open as from 17:00” (Brussels Airlines n.d.).

The NDjili International Airport website advises travellers, after checking in, [Aéroport international de NDijili English version] “to go immediately to the boarding lounge for police formalities that can be long if several departures are planned [at short intervals]” (Aéroport international de NDijili n.d.a). Further information on required immigration and police procedures could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Media sources indicate that Bruno Tshibala, then Deputy Secretary General of the Union for Democracy and Social Progress (Union pour la démocratie et le progrès social, UDPS), was arrested on 9 October 2016 at the N'Djili airport as he about to leave for Brussels (*Jeune Afrique* with AFP 10 Oct. 2016, VOA Afrique 29 Nov. 2016, Radio Okapi 29 Nov. 2016). *Jeune Afrique*, in collaboration with Agence France-Presse (AFP), adds that Mr. Tshibala's name appeared

[translation]

on a list of a dozen leaders of the Rassemblement [coalition of opposition political parties under the Kabila government (*Jeune Afrique* 27 Apr. 27, 2017)] sent by the Attorney General of the Republic to border services with orders to arrest these people if they tried to leave the country. (*Jeune Afrique* with AFP 10 Oct. 2016)

Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to certain sources, the DGM confiscated the passport of UDPS Secretary General Jean Marc Kabund Kabund in November 2017 at the Kinshasa airport and prevented him from leaving the country (VOA Afrique with AFP 24 Nov. 2017; US 13 Mar. 2019, 25).

3.1 Departure Taxes

Air passengers leaving the DRC must pay a departure tax, called a [Canada English version] “Go Pass” (Canada 28 June 2019a; Médiacongo.net 13 Jan. 2017, Petit Futé n.d.). The amount of this tax is reported to be between US\$50 and US\$60 (Petit Futé n.d.; Canada 28 June 2019a; Médiacongo.net 13 Jan. 2017). Sources report that there is an additional fee of US\$5 in addition to the Go Pass (US 20 Nov. 2018; France

19 June 2019; Petit Futé n.d.).

According to Petit Futé, travellers can pay the Go Pass fee at the office of the DGM when checking in at airline offices in town (Petit Futé n.d.). The same source adds that the proof of payment for these fees is subsequently given [translation] “with the completed migration form during passport control at the airport in the evening” (Petit Futé n.d.).

3.2 Customs

Petit Futé states that when travellers leave the DRC, [translation] “their baggage is subjected to a systematic but limited check during precheckin the morning of departure at the airline offices” (Petit Futé n.d.). The same source adds that if there is no pre-checkin, travellers [translation] “will then have to deal with customs at the airport, and they will usually be asked for a small amount of money or they will be searched” (Petit Futé n.d.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to the airport’s website,

[Aéroport international de Ndjili English version]

[i]n addition to the other security checks, customs officers may weigh and inspect all outgoing baggage. Departing travellers are therefore required to identify their baggage for inspection by the customs officers. (Aéroport international de Ndjili n.d.c)

The same source states that the following must be declared when travellers depart:

[Aéroport international de Ndjili English version]

- Currency exceeding US\$5.000 or its equivalent MUST be declared at customs before departure.
- Unworked precious metals and precious stones. (Aéroport international de Ndjili n.d.c)

3.3 Final Procedures

According to Petit Futé, [translation] “once past the DGM, carry-on luggage will be searched before being scanned and passed through the metal detector” (Petit Futé n.d.). The same source adds that, [translation] “carry-on luggage will be checked and searched one last time at the aircraft door, on the tarmac, but this time by the airline” (Petit Futé n.d.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Oral sources: Aéroport International de Ndjili; Brussels Airlines office in Kinshasa; Democratic Republic of the Congo – embassy in Ottawa, Régie des voies aériennes.

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Attachment

Aéroport International de Ndjili. N.d. “[Visas et conditions d’entrée au Congo](#).” [Accessed 28 June 2019]