



## Study Overview

Illicit cigarette trade in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is widely recognized and constitutes a major concern. However, the phenomenon has so far remained insufficiently studied. This research implemented by Development Gateway, in partnership with Research Initiatives For Social Development, Laboratory for Survey & Research for Development, and the University of Cape Town with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, was carried out as part of the Tobacco Control Data Initiative (TCDI) to fill this gap.

The research was guided by two main questions:

1. What is the percentage of illicit cigarette trade in the DRC?
2. What are the origins and brands of illicit cigarettes sold in the DRC?

An approach combining qualitative and quantitative research was used to answer these questions. This report only presents quantitative research results, as another report is dedicated to qualitative research results.

## Research Methodology

The methodology used consisted of collecting empty cigarette packets from trash cans and the streets and cigarette retailers, whether stationary or mobile. This data collection was carried out in 32 health areas, distributed in 16 health zones stratified in rural and urban areas, and located within eight provinces which were drawn randomly from the 26 provinces of the country. Each packet of cigarettes collected was examined in order to collect and encode the information present on the packaging, in particular the brand name, the tax stamp, the health warning, the instruction prohibiting the sale of cigarettes to minors and by minors, the nicotine and tar content of the cigarettes, as well as the country of origin and the name of the manufacturer. Data was collected using the SurveyCTO tool and then exported to STATA software for cleaning and analysis.

## Study Highlights

- **The study collected and analyzed 10,622 cigarette packets. It appears that 8.62% of the cigarette market in the DRC is illicit.** When assuming that imported yellow stamp packages are illegal, this rate increases drastically and reaches 51.46%.
- **The results indicate that the more porous a province's borders are, the more favorable it is for the illicit cigarette trade.** Furthermore, the weaker a province's institutional enforcement of anti-illicit trade measures, the more illicit cigarette trade prevails. Ituri province stands out with the highest rate of illicit trade, attributable to border factors, weak application of measures, and socio-political instability.
- **Concerning the origin of illicit cigarettes found in the DRC, Uganda and the United Arab Emirates emerge as the main sources of illicit cigarettes, together supplying 84.03% of the illicit cigarette market in the DRC.** As for cigarette brands, Supermatch and Oris dominate the illicit market with a 90.4% share.
- **Other results show that 71.71% of packages bear the old yellow stamp, linked to the brands Equateur, Monte Carlo, and Pall Mall are illicit.**



### THE PERCENTAGE

- **8.62% of cigarettes sold in the DRC are illegal** with no tax stamp.
- **5.63%** did not contain a message prohibiting the sale of cigarettes to minors.
- **7.98%** of the cigarette packs collected did not contain any of the four health warnings required by the Ministry of Health.

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### THE ORIGINS

Uganda and the United Arab Emirates are the main sources of illicit cigarettes sold in the DRC. These two countries represent **43.67%** and **42.47%** of the illicit market share, respectively.

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### THE BRANDS

The cigarette brands 'Supermatch' and 'Oris' represent **50.76%** and **41.48%** of the illicit cigarette market. This phenomenon is widespread, as other brands are also implicated, albeit at a lower frequency.

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### IMPLICATIONS

For policymakers: enforce existing laws and regulations, impose penalties on offenders, align the DRC with the WHO FCTC protocol, enhance administrative institutions and international cooperation.  
For research purposes: study the effectiveness of health warnings, the impact of tobacco on youth, and fiscal loss for the Congolese government.

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## Conclusions and Recommendations

**Illicit cigarettes in the DRC escape taxes and excise duties, cause significant revenue losses for the State, and create unfair competition for legal players in the tobacco industry. The implications for decision-makers are that strict actions are required, including effective enforcement of existing laws and regulations and sanctions against violators. Strengthening institutions, as well as border controls, and international cooperation, are also recommended to combat this transnational problem.** The findings of this study also suggest that the DRC ratifies the WHO Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products. Stricter regulations and continued monitoring are needed to protect the health of consumers, especially young people. Continuous monitoring and data collection mechanisms are also essential to track developments in illicit trade over time and better eradicate it. In terms of research implications, this study suggests that future studies evaluate the effectiveness of current health warnings, youth cigarette consumption, and the loss of tax revenue from the illicit cigarette trade.

The full report is available [here](#)