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DRC EMERGES AS RWANDA'S TOP TRADE PARTNER IN Q3 OF 2025

written by Oswald Niyonzima | January 16, 2026



Small scale traders from DRC and Rwanda

Rwanda's external trade performance in the third quarter of 2025 underscores the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) as the single most important driver of the country's export recovery, highlighting deepening economic interdependence with its western neighbour.

While total trade rose to US\$1.93 billion—an 11.33 percent increase from the previous quarter—trade flows linked to the DRC played a decisive role in sustaining export growth.

According to the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR) Formal External Trade in Goods Report for Q3 2025, domestic exports reached US\$389.99 million, marking a 12.70 percent increase compared to the second quarter.

Although exports remained 41.53 percent lower than in Q3 2024, the quarterly rebound points to a gradual recovery driven largely by strong regional demand, particularly from the DRC.

The report ranks the DRC among Rwanda's top export destinations, alongside the United Arab Emirates, China, Uganda, and Luxembourg.

However, when both domestic exports and re-exports are considered, the DRC clearly emerges as Rwanda's dominant trade partner by volume, underscoring its central role in the country's export ecosystem.

Re-exports cement DRC's dominance

Rwanda's re-export performance in Q3 2025 further illustrates its strategic position as a trade gate to eastern Congo. Re-exports increased by 21.94 percent compared to Q2 2025, reaching US\$173.6 million. Of this total, 95.45 percent was destined for the DRC.

This concentration reflects sustained demand in the DRC for essential goods transiting through Rwanda, driven by geographic proximity, logistical efficiency, and longstanding commercial networks.

Rwanda has increasingly positioned itself as a reliable supply corridor for eastern DRC, particularly for food products and energy-related commodities.

“Food and live animals” emerged as the leading re-exported commodity group, valued at US\$54.75 million, followed by mineral fuels, lubricants, and related materials at US\$29.72 million.

These flows highlight Rwanda's role in supporting regional food security and energy access, especially in areas where local supply remains constrained.

Domestic exports supported by regional demand:

Beyond re-exports, domestic exports to the DRC continued to provide a critical market for Rwandan producers. Cross-border trade benefits from proximity, lower transport costs, and strong consumer demand for Rwandan agricultural and manufactured goods.

While the United Arab Emirates remained Rwanda's leading destination for high-value exports—particularly minerals—the DRC's importance lies in its volume, consistency, and regional spillover effects.

Unlike distant markets, exports to the DRC support small and medium-sized enterprises, informal traders, and border communities, making the trade relationship more inclusive.

Uganda and China also featured among Rwanda's key export destinations, reflecting continued engagement with East African and Asian markets.

Luxembourg's presence among the top five destinations points to Rwanda's niche access to European markets, albeit on a smaller scale.

On the import side, Rwanda recorded a 9.74 percent quarter-on-quarter decline, with imports valued at US\$1.37 billion in Q3 2025.

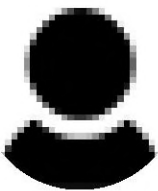
Imports also fell by 21.85 percent compared to the same quarter in 2024, easing pressure on the trade balance.

China, Tanzania, India, Kenya, and the United Arab Emirates remained Rwanda's main sources of imports, supplying essential industrial inputs, fuel, and consumer goods.

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