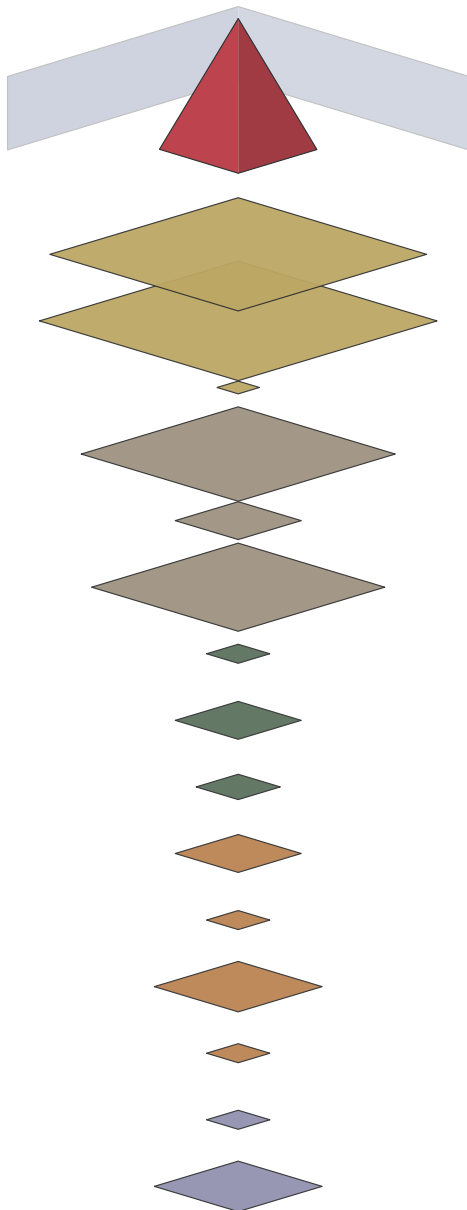




# ERITREA




## 3.97 CRIMINALITY SCORE

49<sup>th</sup> of 54 African countries  
9<sup>th</sup> of 9 East African countries



### CRIMINAL MARKETS **3.93**

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	9
HUMAN SMUGGLING	9.5
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	1
ARMS TRAFFICKING	7.5
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	3
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	7
FLORA CRIMES	1.5
FAUNA CRIMES	3
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	2
HEROIN TRADE	3
COCAINE TRADE	1.5
CANNABIS TRADE	4
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	1.5
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	1.5
FINANCIAL CRIMES	4



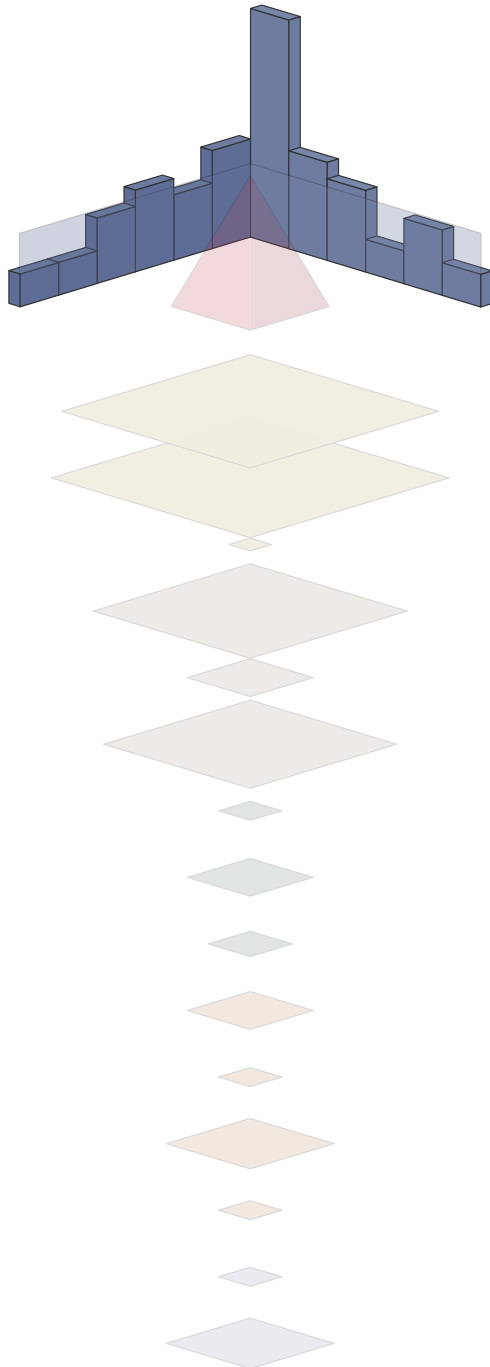
### CRIMINAL ACTORS **4**

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	1
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	5.5
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	9.5
FOREIGN ACTORS	2.5
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	2.5



## 2.33 RESILIENCE SCORE

 **ERITREA**





 **2.33  
RESILIENCE SCORE**

48<sup>th</sup> of 54 African countries  
7<sup>th</sup> of 9 East African countries

<u>POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE</u>	<b>1</b>
<u>GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY</u>	<b>1</b>
<u>INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION</u>	<b>2</b>
<u>NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS</u>	<b>2.5</b>
<u>JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION</u>	<b>2</b>
<u>LAW ENFORCEMENT</u>	<b>3</b>
<u>TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY</u>	<b>7</b>
<u>ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING</u>	<b>3</b>
<u>ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY</u>	<b>2.5</b>
<u>VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT</u>	<b>1</b>
<u>PREVENTION</u>	<b>2</b>
<u>NON-STATE ACTORS</u>	<b>1</b>

 **3.97  
CRIMINALITY SCORE**

 <u>CRIMINAL MARKETS</u>	<b>3.93</b>
 <u>CRIMINAL ACTORS</u>	<b>4</b>



# CRIMINALITY

## Criminal Markets

### PEOPLE

The human trafficking dynamic in Eritrea has remained unchanged over the past few years. The government continues to exploit its nationals in forced labour, specifically in its compulsory national service and citizen militia, forcing them to serve for indefinite or arbitrary periods. In addition, Eritrea's strict exit control procedures and limited issuance of passports compel people to travel clandestinely, increasing their vulnerability to trafficking abroad, particularly in Sudan, Ethiopia, and Djibouti, despite border closures. High-ranking military officers reportedly engage in human trafficking activities.

Similarly, Eritrea's human smuggling situation has remained unchanged over the past two years, exacerbated at times by dynamics related to the war in Tigray. Smugglers are often contacted by the victims' families, who will pay for the journey. Rates to exit Eritrea are extremely high, indicating the level of demand and the risk and complexity of the journey. Members of the Eritrean diaspora also remain entrenched within sophisticated human smuggling networks with links to the political class, top-level civil servants, and diplomats in various African and Middle East embassies. Senior Eritrean military officers are reportedly involved in the smuggling of Eritreans out of the country for private gain. The abuse of individuals smuggled is frequent, and Eritrean smugglers have a cruel reputation. There is no substantive evidence to suggest the existence of extortion and protection racketeering perpetrated by organized crime groups in Eritrea.

### TRADE

Despite having been isolated for over 20 years, Eritrea serves as a trans-shipment point for arms trafficking to embargoed states including Sudan, South Sudan, and Somalia. Eritrea has a history of armed conflict with neighbouring countries, and the Eritrean army has been heavily involved in Ethiopia's internal affairs in the Tigray war, with the Ethiopian government being reported as a primary source of weapons for the Eritrean army. Eritrea remains one of the most armed countries in the Horn of Africa region. Given that the ruling party maintains a dominant role in the economy, including a monopoly on all imports, there are allegations regarding the involvement of state-embedded actors in arms trafficking.

The illicit trade of excise goods in Eritrea is strongly related to the trade in counterfeit goods, with the major players being corrupt government officials and high-ranking military officers. The scarcity of foreign currency and the limitations on importing vital consumer products and spare parts for various machinery make the smuggling of goods a thriving business. This motivates corrupt officials to engage in contraband activities, smuggling items such as food, building materials, and alcohol. Most of these commodities are smuggled from neighbouring countries, mainly Sudan, with Tesseney being a hub for smuggling and cooperation between Eritrean and Sudanese officials. The government policy of separating the country into self-financing zones has provided conducive conditions for civil administrators and military commanders to engage in the trade of non-declared goods. The Tigray war has also created ideal conditions for the regime's high-ranking military officials to smuggle excise goods from Ethiopia, with cigarette smuggling being a major public health and economic concern in the country.

### ENVIRONMENT

Eritrea has seen few developments regarding flora crime since 2020. There have been some reports of military involvement in the illegal harvesting of wood and charcoal smuggling. There is also low-level smuggling of cactus species from Eritrea to Middle Eastern countries, as well as speculation about the existence of illicit trade in gum Arabic and frankincense. Despite the Horn of Africa's emergence as a major wildlife crime hub, Eritrea plays a minor role. The country's Massawa port is, however, a shipping point for ivory trafficking toward Asia. Evidence that emerged from the Tigray war in Ethiopia revealed that Eritrean army members were either hunting elephants for their ivory or transporting their parts into the country. Eritrea is also becoming a hotspot for illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.

Gold is Eritrea's second largest export, and is currently being smuggled out of the country because of sanctions. There are also indications that gold is being smuggled from Sudan, through Eritrea, to the United Arab Emirates, but this trade is not taking place systematically. Overall, the level of gold smuggling in Eritrea is low, in comparison to other countries in the region. The trafficking of non-renewable resources is mostly carried out by low-level individual actors rather than established criminal networks, with just a small part of the country affected.



Eritrea is, however, becoming a destination country for fuel smuggled from Ethiopia. There has not been much reporting on violence linked to smuggling activity.

## DRUGS

The heroin trade has remained stable in Eritrea over the last two years. Eritrean ports are used to traffic heroin from South Asia to Europe and the Americas, but not to the same extent as other ports along the coastline. There is limited information on heroin use in the country. There is also little evidence to suggest that Eritrea plays a role in the trafficking of cocaine. The country is neither a destination nor a transit point for this drug. However, as Eritrean ports are an entry point for traffickers operating in East Africa, instances of cocaine trafficking cannot be ruled out.

Cannabis trade has remained unchanged in Eritrea over the last couple of years. The country's ports have become increasingly important to the cannabis smuggling routes from South Asia to Europe and the Americas. Although cultivation within Eritrea is relatively widespread, there is little evidence of cannabis being cultivated for large-scale commercial supply or trafficking; the majority is consumed domestically. Additionally, there is little evidence of a criminal market around synthetic drugs. Drug use in Eritrea is among the lowest in the world.

## CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

There is very limited publicly available data to suggest the existence of cyber-dependent crimes in Eritrea.

## FINANCIAL CRIMES

The executive branch of Eritrea's government has established a command economy in which all enterprises are controlled by it and high-ranking officers of the ruling and sole legal political party, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ). This elite has imposed severe economic restrictions, including a monthly withdrawal limit of nakfa and the heavy regulation of foreign currency exchange and import and export

trade. As a result, hawala and black market exchanges have increased. The Eritrean diaspora uses the hawala system to send money to their families, who exchange the currency on the parallel market at far higher than official rates. Moreover, Eritreans are involved in black market exchanges in neighbouring countries such as Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Uganda. In general, there is a lack of data on the various types of financial crime, such as fraud, tax evasion, and misuse of funds, in the country. Nevertheless, the country is struggling to combat illicit financial activities. Moreover, there are allegations regarding embezzlement of public funds involving senior officials.

## Criminal Actors

State-embedded actors, such as the PFDJ and the military, are considered the main actors in organized criminal activities within the country. Members of the government have been involved in a range of crimes, including goods smuggling and human trafficking, with the conscription system playing a considerable role in the latter. Overall, the government, the PFDJ, and the military form a monopolistic conglomerate that controls the national economy. Because of this, most Eritreans regard the state as the most significant criminal actor, associated with covert finances and a lack of the rule of law. This centralization of power is one of the reasons there are no notable mafia-style groups in Eritrea.

Criminal networks in Eritrea have remained unchanged over the past two years, with transnational networks of Eritrean smugglers operating on routes towards Europe, aided by Rashaida traffickers along the Eritrea–Sudan border. These groups allegedly kidnap people and hold them for ransom in the Sinai region or Libya. There is no concrete evidence of foreign actors' involvement in organized crime in Eritrea, but there has been speculation around the possible involvement of criminal actors from Sudan and/or Egypt. As the private sector in the country is severely restricted by import and export regulations and a lack of hard currency, there is also no substantial evidence to suggest its involvement in organized crime activities.



# RESILIENCE

## LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

The Eritrean government has no solid position on preventing or combating organized crime. The PFDJ is the sole political party, corruption is institutionalized, and civil rights, freedom of expression, and human rights are routinely violated. The state continued to endorse the criminal activities of high-ranking military officers by tacitly tolerating their methods of self-enrichment, including contraband trade, human trafficking, forced labour, and bribes of all kinds. The Eritrean army's involvement in the Tigray war is also worth noting, with high-ranking military officers using the conflict to enrich themselves by looting government and private properties. The Eritrean regime does not respect the rule of law and there are no institutions that are capable of or willing to oppose the executive and its military. Moreover, the continued militarization of society and the distortion of the labour market fuel a mass exodus of the youth and the educated, increasing the fragility of the state's institutions. Eritrea operates without public scrutiny. Basic data regarding the state budget and asset disclosure is not publicly available, and there is no auditing of state spending or income. There is no accountability to the public for mismanagement or corruption, and even the military-headed special courts, meant to oversee corruption cases, have remained largely inactive. The PFDJ's Hdiri Trust Fund controls all major companies in the country, and the financial head of the party is responsible for auditing the fund.

Eritrea's attitude toward international cooperation has committed few advances but overall has remained steady. Generally, the leadership in Asmara considers international cooperation to be undesirable, believing it to create dependency. For this reason, the government follows a strategy of self-reliance with regard to economic and social development, recruiting the working-age population into the poorly paid national service programme and imposing a 2% tax on its diaspora. Eritrea has several laws in place to counter organized crime, but its Constitution, although written and approved by the National Constituent Assembly, has never been enacted.

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

The lack of an independent judiciary and democratic institutions in Eritrea has resulted in a climate of impunity with respect to crimes against humanity over the past 25 years. The judiciary system is poorly organized and

dependent on the government, with instances of interference by the executive branch. The special courts, headed by military officers acting as lay judges and operating without standard procedures, seem to have become defunct, replaced by the even more informal and arbitrary activities of power holders. There are no judiciary-related specialized units with the specific aim of countering organized crime in force. Arbitrary arrest and detention are common, and due process is systematically violated. Prison conditions are harsh and severely overcrowded, and prisoners, including children and former members of the government and their families, are routinely held incommunicado for indefinite periods without charge or trial. Eritrean law enforcement capacity remains weak, with widespread corruption and bribery being reported as the cause.

Eritrea's territorial integrity is maintained by strict border control policies, including a policy of 'shoot to kill' towards people attempting unauthorized crossings. However, there is mounting evidence that the government not only controls the illicit smuggling of its own citizens but profits from it. There has been no progress regarding the demarcation of the border between Eritrea and Ethiopia. Eritrean troops are involved in a war against the Tigray People's Liberation Front, and there have been reports that Eritrean soldiers have occupied chunks of territory previously administered by the regional government of Tigray. The government of Eritrea views the Tigray People's Liberation Front as a threat to their territorial integrity. Internet penetration in Eritrea is extremely low, with citizens needing to apply to the local government administration to obtain a SIM card, and there is no mobile data. As a result, Eritrea's vulnerability to cyber-dependent crime is low.

## ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Eritrea is considered vulnerable to money laundering and related activities owing to its informal, cash-based economy, limited regulatory structures, underground remittances, and prevalent use of money and value transfer services such as hawala. The non-convertibility of the nakfa in international markets contributes to the use of underground remittance systems. Additionally, Eritrea's proximity to regions where terrorist and criminal organizations operate makes it more vulnerable to corruption. Despite enacting anti-money laundering laws, establishing a financial intelligence unit, and endorsing anti-money laundering/countering financing of terrorism



(AML/CFT) policies, Eritrea has not submitted any reports on its AML/CFT endeavours. However, the country is a member of the Eastern and South Africa Anti-Money Laundering Group, and has not been identified as having strategic AML/CFT deficiencies.

Eritrea's economic regulatory capacity continues to be substandard because of the government's irrational financial policy, which keeps fixing the nakfa to the US dollar at a rate of 15 to 1, leading to a steady expansion of the currency black market. Families and business owners are not allowed to withdraw more than 5 000 nakfa (approximately 333 US\$) from their accounts per month. The PFDJ and the military have a monopoly on the economic sphere, with all economic enterprises of any significance, including the mining sector, being controlled by the PFDJ or the military and not subject to financial oversight. The Hdiri Trust Fund controls all relevant companies operating in Eritrea, while the PFDJ-owned Red Sea Corporation controls the country's import–export trade. Eritrea is the only country that has not joined the African Continental Free Trade Area.

## CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

The lack of victim and witness support mechanisms in Eritrea is an ongoing problem, with the government failing to take any measures to identify and support victims and witnesses of organized crime. The government has also made no effort to identify, protect, and support victims of trafficking. Eritrean officials have no procedures in place to proactively identify trafficking victims among vulnerable groups, and the government has not developed a systematic mechanism for referring identified trafficking victims to care. In addition, Eritrean forces have been accused of committing serious human rights abuses against Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia, including harassment, indiscriminate arrests, killings, and rape.

Civil rights and freedom of expression and assembly are absent, and human rights are routinely violated. Civil society organizations such as NGOs, labour unions, and organized interest groups are prohibited, and state institutions and social services remain weak. Arbitrary arrests and religious persecution continue, although some Jehovah's Witnesses were recently released from prison. The media have no rights, and independent media has been shut down since 2001. Eritrea is also one of the most notorious jailers of journalists in the world.

