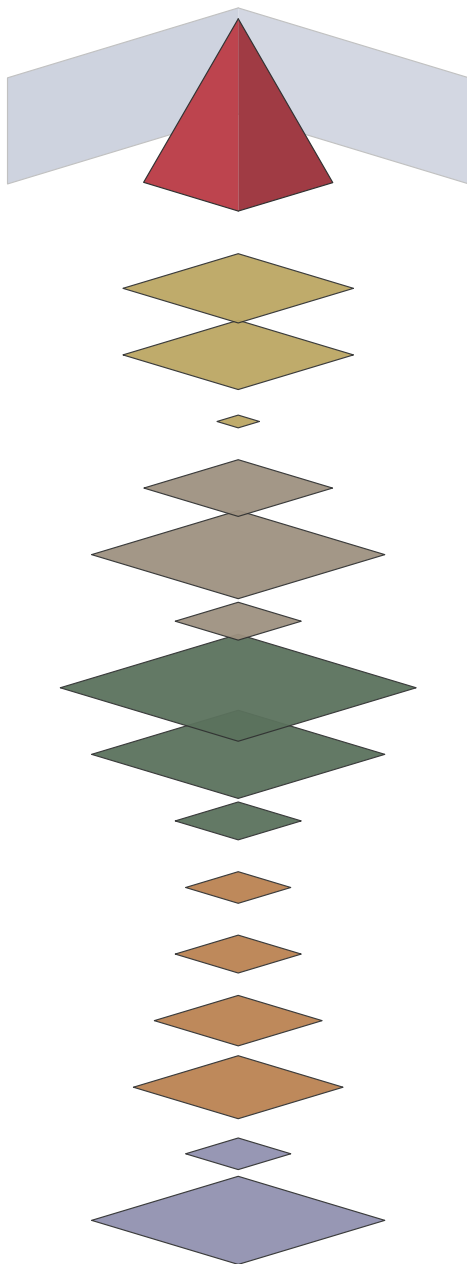




GABON




4.85 CRIMINALITY SCORE

33rd of 54 African countries
7th of 11 Central African countries



CRIMINAL MARKETS **4.6**

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	5.5
HUMAN SMUGGLING	5.5
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	1
ARMS TRAFFICKING	4.5
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	7
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	3
FLORA CRIMES	8.5
FAUNA CRIMES	7
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	3
HEROIN TRADE	2.5
COCAINE TRADE	3
CANNABIS TRADE	4
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	5
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	2.5
FINANCIAL CRIMES	7



CRIMINAL ACTORS **5.1**

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	1
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	5
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	8
FOREIGN ACTORS	6
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	6

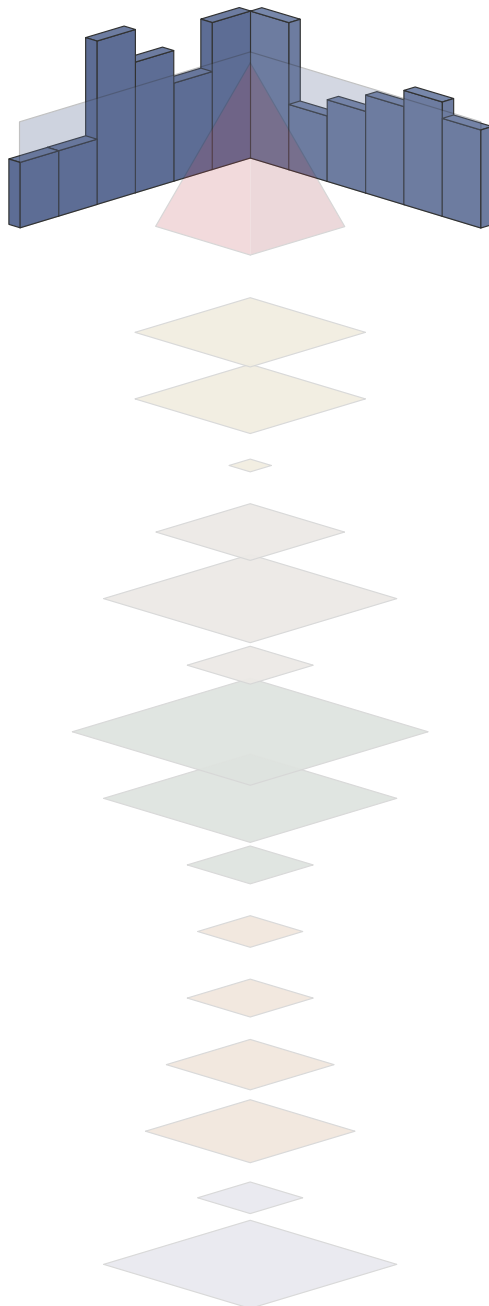


3.25 RESILIENCE SCORE





GABON




3.25 RESILIENCE SCORE

35th of 54 African countries
4th of 11 Central African countries

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	2
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	2
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	5
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	4
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	3
LAW ENFORCEMENT	4.5
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	4.5
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	2
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	2.5
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	3
PREVENTION	3.5
NON-STATE ACTORS	3



4.85 CRIMINALITY SCORE

CRIMINAL MARKETS	4.6
CRIMINAL ACTORS	5.1



CRIMINALITY

Criminal Markets

PEOPLE

Gabon continues to be mainly a destination and transit country for trafficked persons from West and Central Africa who are mostly subjected to forced labour and sexual exploitation. Boys are mainly exploited as street vendors, mechanics, and in the transport and fishing sectors. Girls are used as domestic workers, traders in markets, and for labour in roadside restaurants. Gabonese children are also exploited by shopkeepers for forced labour in markets in the Eastern provinces. Many are brought in by traffickers who have been reported to procure falsified documents identifying their child victims to be over the age of 18. Moreover, women from West Africa are used in domestic servitude and prostitution. There are reports of brothel owners sexually exploiting children. Irregular migrants are also vulnerable to forced labour and sexual exploitation by their smugglers. Victims have been also forced to conduct activities such as illegal gold mining and wildlife trafficking in regions outside of the capital. There have also been reports of trafficking of newborn babies in the country. Traffickers are reported to operate in loose, ethnic-based criminal networks with ties to transnational criminal organizations and in general carry out other illegal activities such as smuggling of counterfeit medication and drugs with human trafficking.

Similarly, Gabon continues to be a destination and transit country for migrants originating from West and Central Africa seeking to access the labour market in Gabon or neighbouring Equatorial Guinea, though human smuggling itself is not a major problem in the country. There is no information on the existence and prevalence of an extortion and protection racketeering criminal market in the country.

TRADE

Overall, Gabon is not a high-risk arms trafficking market. However, recent instability in the country has led to arms brokers seeking to sell weapons. Gabon is at risk given its proximity to Cameroon, although the southern border of Cameroon is not particularly prone to arms trafficking. Both Gabon and Cameroon entered into an agreement to prevent cross-border arms trafficking.

Gabon has become a considerable destination country for counterfeit pharmaceutical products because of the country's weak judiciary system, porous borders, and poor healthcare services. Despite the existence of the relevant market in the country for more than a decade, these activities have been rapidly increasing since 2020 causing severe harm to public health. Counterfeit medicine, which is mainly smuggled from India, Nigeria, Ghana, Benin, and the Ivory Coast, is sold openly in roadside and local shops by wholesale smugglers, cigarette vendors, and street hawkers. Despite efforts to counter the illicit trade, the counterfeit pharmaceutical market is still thriving as a consequence of the weak law enforcement and judiciary system, and the public's dismissal of the warnings sent out by the authorities and medical community. Contraband tobacco products are also common in Gabon, however, there is no data available on the seizures of this illicit trade. It is reported that the sale of counterfeit tobacco occurs at the same time as the sale of counterfeit medicines in street markets.

ENVIRONMENT

Forest crimes are widespread, systematic, and closely linked to the inner workings of the industrial logging industry in Gabon, facilitated by high-level corruption. An increasing percentage of concessionaires are Chinese or of other Asian origins. Moreover, Gabon is one of the top exporting countries to China, which suggests a considerable volume of rosewood is being illegally traded. In this framework, reported illegal practices by Chinese companies include the labelling of unprocessed wood as processed and protected species as less protected. There is also social pressure to allow these companies to continue operating as they are the biggest formal employers in the country. It is reported that several forest permits, which are often leased to different companies, were in the hands of high-level politicians. However, the situation has improved in recent years following a high-level commitment to tighten forest governance, which is reflected in the reduced cover loss rates.

Wildlife crime remains problematic, and corruption still facilitates poaching and wildlife trafficking. In key hotspots in the country, poaching has had a devastating impact on wildlife populations, particularly in areas such as Minkébé National Park. Gabon's forest elephant population is also decreasing because of the continuous poaching of elephants. The illegal trade in other species, including great apes, is a concern in the country with



poachers often entering from neighbouring Cameroon and Congo. Moreover, Gabon has been identified as an important source of pangolin scales destined for Asian nations, including China and Cambodia. However, the consumption of protected species (bush meat) in the country has decreased thanks to government and NGO programmes. Gabon's marine life is still threatened by illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing involving large-scale industrial vessels to supply foreign markets as well as small-scale, artisanal fishing boats.

There is anecdotal evidence suggesting convergence between timber and minerals (gold) trafficking by Cameroonian military officials, who conduct business in Northern Gabon's artisanal gold mines and exploit cheap Gabonese labour. Illegal miners include foreigners from Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Mali, Chad, Ivory Coast, and Benin, among others, and corruption is indicated to be one of the main factors facilitating illegal activity. Corrupt officials may benefit from the illegal trade of gold by receiving bribes in exchange for releasing detained miners or by overlooking illicit activity in exchange for bribes.

DRUGS

Gabon is an intra-continental trans-shipment point for cocaine that generally enters the continent through other West African and Central African entry points. It is repackaged and shipped through sea and air routes that include Gabon, before making its way to destination markets in other parts of Africa, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. An increase in domestic cocaine consumption and trade was registered in recent years in the country. Trans-shipment of heroin is likely, given that the transit of cocaine exists. However, heroin use is confined to Gabon.

Cannabis is the most commonly used drug in Gabon and is brought into the country primarily from Cameroon. The domestic cannabis trade is linked to production in neighbouring countries, with the herb and resin transiting the country. Gabon is primarily a destination country for synthetic drugs. As in other Central African countries, there are reports of widespread use of Tramadol. Mostly, opioids from India transit through Nigeria and then Cameroon to reach Gabon.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Despite the lack of information, there are few instances of cyber-dependent crime reported by Gabonese authorities and the country is also targeted by cybercriminals.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Tax evasion and embezzlement of public funds are the most common forms of financial crime occurring in the country with most of the wealth of the country siphoned off largely by political and economic elites. These financial crimes are facilitated by the abuse of power and corruption. A recent international investigation revealed how the former president of Gabon benefitted, with relatives and allies, from a scheme that allowed them to obtain millions in public funds using a mechanism of banking transactions. The latest indictment of a former-Miss France issued in France for concealment of embezzlement of public funds, corruption and social abuse revealed a much larger scandal in which members of the Gabonese elites are accused of spending state funds on luxury real estate in France.

Criminal Actors

State-embedded actors play a key role in facilitating a range of crime types. The ruling elite has been accused of embezzlement of public funds as well as laundering proceeds of illegally obtained funds abroad. Moreover, national police and gendarmerie reportedly practice extortion on a regular basis and also facilitate trafficking activities in the country. As for private sector actors, their involvement is mainly seen in illicit exploitation of forests and marine life as well as in trafficking of adulterated, illegal and/or, counterfeit goods. These actors mainly use their political connections while carrying out such activities.

Regular arrests of wildlife traffickers and seizures of ivory by Gabonese authorities suggest the existence of criminal networks active in Gabon with cross-border operations across parts of Central and West Africa. There are also reports pointing to loose, ethnically based criminal networks, often including female traffickers involved in human trafficking in the country. These networks recruit and transport trafficking victims from their countries of origin through the use of falsified documents. They often operate outside the capital, take advantage of Gabon's porous borders, and are involved in other criminal markets such as human smuggling, trade in counterfeit medicine and drug trafficking. Foreign actors are increasingly mixed up in flora and fauna crimes in the country, specifically criminal actors of Asian and African origin. Mafia-style actors originating from France also operate in Gabon. Meanwhile, there is no evidence of mafia-style groups operating in Gabon.



RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Political leadership and governance in Gabon are heavily affected by rampant corruption and personalized politics. For instance, the ruling elite has been accused of multiple incidents involving the mismanagement of public funds. Having said that, despite institutional weaknesses and problems with governance and leadership, the country's situation is stable compared to other countries in the region. The protection of wildlife and natural resources of the country is at the forefront of the Gabonese government and the president regularly makes statements calling for an effective fight against such criminal activities. However, there is an endemic lack of transparency and accountability in the Gabonese state with most believing that corruption has worsened in recent years, with the COVID-19 pandemic having increased the opportunities for embezzlement and clientelist redistribution. Despite the existence of anti-corruption regulatory framework and mechanisms, these are in general used against opposition leaders while the ruling party enjoys impunity.

At an international level, Gabon has ratified many relevant international treaties pertaining to organized crime and is generally seen as cooperative with international institutions with respect to organized crime-related matters. The country has entered into bilateral engagements to address forest and wildlife crimes. Gabon is also a signatory to regional treaties pertaining to the issue of the production, trafficking, sale and distribution of counterfeit pharmaceuticals. Public officials also participate in international events that aim to foster regional collaboration to address organized crime and illegal activities. On the domestic front, Gabon generally adopts relevant laws with respect to combating organized crime but is weak in compliance and implementation. However, there have been efforts made by the Gabonese government to combat the circulation and trafficking of small arms and light weapons through the establishment of a national commission responsible for coordinating the actions of national authorities in the design, development, and implementation of relevant national policies.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

There are no specialized judiciary units that specifically aim to counter organized crime in Gabon. In general, because of the country's governance and leadership framework, the judiciary is not trusted and is seen as a tool for the ruling party and the elite, because of the lack

of de facto separation of powers. There have been reports of complicity among judicial staff, with judges allegedly taking bribes from traffickers to delay or dismiss cases. In addition, limited professional capacity often results in prosecutorial judges not always investigating cases of human trafficking brought to their attention. There is a disregard for legal protections and due process for incarcerated people, and long pre-trial detentions continue to cause problems in the penitentiary system in the country.

Similar to the judicial system, Gabon also lacks specialized law enforcement units tasked with countering organized crime. However, security forces receive training to fight against specific organized crime activities such as the illegal exploitation of resources and drug trafficking. There are also efforts made within law enforcement to create strategic tools and units to ameliorate the exchange of key information and fight organized crime such as the creation of the Criminal Intelligence Analysis Unit.

As far as territorial integrity is concerned, there is statutory free movement of persons and goods between Gabon and its three neighbouring countries under the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa's free movement regulations. However, the country has often closed its borders in times of trouble, including during the pandemic. It has also closed its borders with Cameroon to curb alleged illegal immigration. The border with Cameroon, while well policed, is also highly vulnerable to corruption by customs officers on both sides, facilitating trafficking activities. Moreover, Gabon's unguarded beaches and porous borders in some locations allow traffickers to move people and commodities by car or boat.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Gabon has relevant mechanisms and regulatory framework established to curb money laundering, such as the Financial Intelligence Unit, and shares the same anti-money laundering strategy under the Central Africa Monetary Union. However, the relevant mechanisms and legislations lack the capacity to investigate and prosecute money laundering cases effectively. In this respect, even though money laundering is a criminal offence, there have not been any money laundering cases prosecuted by the Gabonese courts. Anti-corruption initiatives are often perceived as a political tool for the executive branch and its allies to settle scores with dissenting voices in the government or from the



opposition. Currently, there is no evidence suggesting an improvement in Gabon's institutional capacities to fight money laundering. Despite the government's efforts to attract local and foreign investors by creating special economic zones, business freedom is limited because of corruption, bureaucracy, lack of transparency as well as inconsistency in the enforcement of regulations, which jeopardize potential investments.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

With respect to human trafficking victims, there are two state-funded NGO shelters offering medical, legal, housing and other services to homeless and orphaned children who are most at risk of trafficking. National authorities have increased efforts to identify and protect victims of human trafficking in the country. As for support provided to drug users, there is a lack of information on rehabilitation programmes for drug abuse in Gabon, which indicates their general absence.

Gabon has taken preventive measures for certain criminal activities, such as flora crimes and illicit trade of counterfeit pharmaceutical products through the use of awareness

campaigns. However, national authorities decreased prevention efforts related to human trafficking as they did not sign the country's anti-trafficking national action plan into law. Nonetheless, the government has been training law enforcement officers to improve victim care.

Civil society organizations play a role in the response to organized crime in Gabon, for example, through the operation of shelters for victims of human trafficking. Civil society organizations are also working closely with the Gabonese government in the fight against wildlife trafficking as well as illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing in the country. Civil society organizations are also involved in the implementation of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. With regard to the media landscape, the erosion of limited press freedom has continued in the country in recent years. Although no journalists have been killed, the media is still not free, and journalists and editors of both online and paper press are intimidated by law enforcement operating in the country. Furthermore, the media is subjected to extreme restrictions by the media regulator sanctions. The actions of the government have led to journalists and reporters self-censoring to avoid legal repercussions and intimidation, but they continue to be critical of the government.

