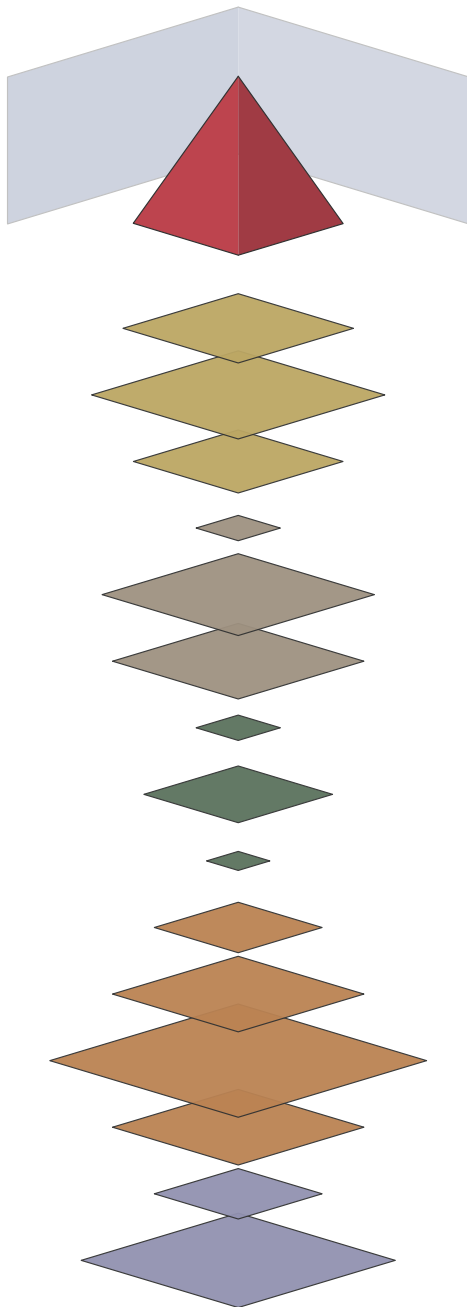


 **MOROCCO**




 **4.8  
CRIMINALITY SCORE**

**34<sup>th</sup>** of 54 African countries  
**4<sup>th</sup>** of 6 North African countries

 **CRIMINAL MARKETS 5.1**

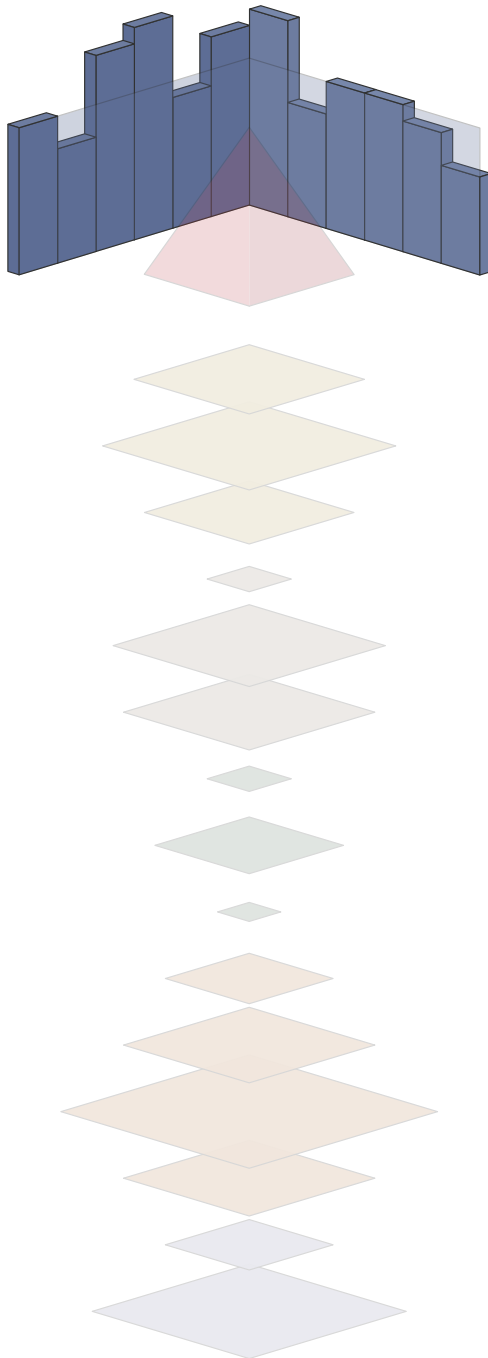
HUMAN TRAFFICKING	5.5
HUMAN SMUGGLING	7
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	5
ARMS TRAFFICKING	2
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	6.5
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	6
FLORA CRIMES	2
FAUNA CRIMES	4.5
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	1.5
HEROIN TRADE	4
COCAINE TRADE	6
CANNABIS TRADE	9
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	6
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	4
FINANCIAL CRIMES	7.5

 **CRIMINAL ACTORS 4.5**

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	1.5
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	6.5
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	7.5
FOREIGN ACTORS	4
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	4

 **4.63  
RESILIENCE SCORE**

 **MOROCCO**





 **4.63  
RESILIENCE SCORE**

15<sup>th</sup> of 54 African countries  
1<sup>st</sup> of 6 North African countries

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	4.5
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	3.5
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	6
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	6.5
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	4
LAW ENFORCEMENT	5.5
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	6
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	3.5
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	4.5
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	4.5
PREVENTION	4
NON-STATE ACTORS	3

 **4.8  
CRIMINALITY SCORE**

 CRIMINAL MARKETS	5.1
 CRIMINAL ACTORS	4.5



# CRIMINALITY

## Criminal Markets

### PEOPLE

Morocco serves as a source, destination and transit point for victims of forced labour and sex trafficking. While both adults and children are affected, adults are more commonly victimized. Most trafficking victims are Moroccan nationals. However, undocumented female migrants from sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia transiting through the country are particularly vulnerable to human trafficking. There are reports of foreign nationals engaging in child sex tourism in major Moroccan cities.

Morocco remains a critical origin and transit point for human smuggling, with people of diverse nationalities using it as a staging point from which to reach Europe. Each year the authorities arrest thousands of people attempting to leave the country through irregular forms of migration. A post-2020 increase in human smuggling is attributed to the social, economic and political challenges in African countries during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, pushing thousands of young people to seek ways to migrate towards Europe. Irregular migrants also encounter extortion and racketeering by members of organized criminal groups that demand payment for the 'right' to safe passage. Kidnapping, forcible confinement and identity theft for the purpose of extortion are also prevalent in the country, with hundreds of millions of dollars reportedly being collected in profits by criminal groups.

### TRADE

Morocco's strict surveillance of its territory, the ban on the use of arms by civilians and regulations that impose long prison sentences for their use have helped to reduce arms trafficking. The number of weapons seizures remains limited, although there have been reports of the illegal manufacture of firearms for drug trafficking purposes.

Morocco is a major player in the illicit trade in counterfeit goods, its weak law enforcement, low taxes and light customs controls in free zones making it a thriving market. As a result, it is one of the main origin countries for counterfeit goods bound for Europe. While the authorities have tried to tackle this illicit activity, resource constraints remain a significant challenge.

Illicit trade in excise goods, particularly cigarettes, is a major issue, with the country serving as a source or transit point for illegal trade into Europe. Billions of illicit cigarettes flow from the Western Sahara to Morocco before reaching Europe. While Morocco has made significant efforts to combat illicit trade, there are concerns about e-cigarettes, which could trigger illicit trade in counterfeit products and endanger the health of smokers. The consumption of alcohol is higher there than in other countries in the region, leading to illicit trade. Security services have seized various types of alcohol, including medical alcohol, wine and beer, and have dismantled criminal networks involved in the trade, leading to several arrests and confiscations.

### ENVIRONMENT

The volume of flora crimes in Morocco is low, with the Atlas Cedar the only species identified as subject to illegal logging for resale. On the other hand, while there is no significant presence of organized criminal involvement in the wildlife trade, much of the trade is illegal, and the absence of enforcement of existing animal welfare laws means there are few deterrents. Species illegally traded include the elegant goldfinch and the barbary macaque, often with Europe as the destination. Some species remain in the country, where they are exploited in the tourism industry as props for photographs and shows. The trafficking of eels, destined for the Spanish and Asian markets, and the capture of endangered species such as the noon fish, the spur-thighed tortoise, North African hedgehog, Mediterranean chameleons and Egyptian cobra, are also prevalent.

The trafficking of non-renewable resources has declined in recent years because of action taken by the Moroccan and Algerian governments, including construction of walls along and surveillance of the two countries' shared border. However, some fuel smuggling from Algeria to Morocco continues in the area.

### DRUGS

The heroin trade is a significant problem in the northern regions of Morocco, particularly Nador, Tetouan and Tangier. Most heroin in the country comes from Europe and is bartered for cannabis resin in the Rif. Although there were indications of supply chain disruptions during the COVID-19 pandemic, new trafficking routes have emerged and the wholesale drug trade appears



to be largely unaffected. Morocco is also an important trans-shipment point for cocaine destined for European markets. Although there is a limited but growing local market for this drug, the main focus of trafficking is transshipment abroad. The price of cocaine in Morocco has decreased significantly in the past decade, probably because of the increased availability of the drug.

The country is one of the world's leading cannabis producers, with the Rif region being the primary centre of production. While there is significant local consumption in the country, Moroccan cannabis is also distributed internationally, including to African and European markets. The authorities are reluctant to dismantle the cannabis trade because it is often the primary source of income for large segments of the population. In addition to cannabis, there are reports of increased consumption in Morocco of ecstasy, crystal methamphetamine and Karkoubi (a cocktail of various synthetic drugs, solvents, and benzodiazepines). Karkoubi is typically sold in individual pills or in groups of 7 to 10 pills called 'belts'. Its increasing popularity is driven by its ubiquity and the extremely low price, which makes it accessible to lower-income and middle-class users.

## CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

The rise in cyber threats is a daily concern in Morocco, as the country becomes more reliant on digital infrastructure and attacks get more sophisticated. In 2021, authorities detected and neutralized hundreds of cybersecurity threats, mostly aimed at government ministries and public institutions. The country also recorded high levels of Distributed Denial of Service activity in the last few years. Despite these attacks, no significant damage or losses were reported, and there was overall no major impact on the economic and financial systems or on infrastructure.

## FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crimes such as tax evasion and fiscal fraud continue to hinder efforts to broaden the tax base. Real estate fraud and embezzlement of public funds in the security and health sectors have resulted in the loss of hundreds of millions of Moroccan dirhams. The country has also lost billions of dollars to tax evasion and fraud schemes perpetrated by multinational companies, and banks have reported cases of embezzlement of customer deposits. Various types of fraud have been identified, mainly relating to cheques and cards, with the most common techniques including skimming, misuse of card data, fraudulent opening of accounts, improper

payment reversals and hacking of automated data systems, servers and networks. Cyber-enabled incidents have also been reported, with breaches of customer accounts resulting in unauthorized transactions.

## Criminal Actors

Although there is historic and anecdotal evidence to suggest that mafia-style groups have only a limited influence on Morocco's criminal markets, there are several criminal networks present in the country, involved in a variety of activities such as drug trafficking, human smuggling, human trafficking, corruption of officials, counterfeiting, cyber-dependent and cyber-enabled crimes. They are also believed to have ties with the highest political and administrative circles in the kingdom. Corruption, primarily at the low level of state apparatus, continues to be an issue, with law enforcement officers sometimes involved in or linked to trafficking networks. The culture of nepotism and intermediaries known as *wasta* is prevalent in the country and is vital for the illegal trade in goods and drug trafficking to prosper. The revenues from drug trafficking and human smuggling feed into corruption at all state levels, making these networks hard to dismantle.

Foreign criminal groups have strong ties to domestic criminal networks in Morocco, but their degree of activity in the country is limited. Although Latin American drug trafficking organizations have been involved in cocaine trafficking and refining in the country and Italian organized crime groups have played a role in transporting Moroccan kif to Europe, their presence has not had a significant impact on violence or government corruption. There is little evidence that specific areas of the private sector are controlled by criminals. However, the financial sector is at high risk of infiltration. There are also concerns that the real estate sector is exposed to the risk of money laundering from domestic and transnational crime.



# RESILIENCE

## LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Morocco faces significant challenges in combating organized crime due to political interests and a focus on stability over the rule of law. While the government has made efforts to combat the illicit arms trade and has introduced changes aimed at reducing the use of cannabis, corruption remains systemic and chronic and there has been no tangible progress in the fight against it. However, an entire chapter of the country's Constitution is devoted to the principle of good governance and Morocco has taken steps to ensure integrity and transparency, such as strengthening the National Commission on Probity, Prevention, and Fight against Corruption, in 2021. Nevertheless, the country's ranking in several governance indicators has declined in recent years and anti-corruption efforts have been hampered by weak institutional capacity and the influence of elites' interests. Chronic corruption was highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the government awarded public contracts with little transparency or oversight. Although the authorities communicate crime statistics and seizure data, law enforcement and military personnel remain insufficiently accountable.

Morocco has been engaging in effective international cooperation, particularly intelligence sharing with the European Union, and aims to strengthen regional and international cooperation to combat and eliminate smuggling networks. While the country is not a signatory to the UN Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants, it has signed the Council of Europe Convention on the counterfeiting of medical products and has made progress in cybersecurity, including the establishment of the Cyber Security Center for Africa and a new Cyber Security Operations Center. The country has also made strides in developing a path toward cyber resilience and readiness and has partnered with NATO in training initiatives in this field.

At the national level, Morocco has strong anti-organized crime legislation and a legal framework based on civil law, but the effective implementation of these laws and frameworks remains a challenge. Moreover, the country has approved a bill to legalize the use of the cannabis plant, aiming to attract global investment for medical and industrial purposes and establish a legal framework for its development. However, it remains unclear how partial legalization will impact small farmers in northern Morocco, who, together with their representatives, have

voiced concerns that the new law is set to primarily benefit well connected individuals with access to substantial capital. Because of this, there is a risk that a two-track system is emerging in Morocco, with both illicit and licit cultivation in key grow areas.

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Although the judiciary's independence is guaranteed by law and the prosecutor is institutionally separated from the Ministry of Justice, the judiciary has little independence. The country's courts are frequently used to target opposition voices and magistrates continue to suffer from an antiquated system. The judiciary faces numerous challenges, including weak logistics inside the courts, heavy caseloads and limited financial incentives for exceptional work. Prisons are overcrowded and prisoners are frequently subjected to human rights abuses.

Special investigative units have been established to combat organized crime and the national security agency has improved its scientific and technical ability to investigate crime. In terms of territorial integrity, Morocco has established a military zone on the eastern border with Algeria. Land and sea borders are fairly porous, with significant drug trafficking and irregular migration flows at crossing points, such as the Ceuta enclave. The Royal Moroccan Armed Forces oversee the development of cyber-security and cyber-defence capabilities, with a 'Cyber Center of Excellence' created to carry out cyber-defence exercises and provide technical support and incident response services to ensure integrity within the cyber space.

## ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Morocco's anti-money laundering legislation continues to lag behind international norms, despite some advances in related sections of the criminal code. In February 2021, the country was greylisted for its lack of alignment with international measures against money laundering and terrorist financing (but it was removed from the list two years later, in February 2023, because of recent tangible improvements in its anti-money laundering processes).

Although the country has made significant economic progress in the past three decades by adopting a liberal approach, diversifying economic activities and encouraging the industrial and service sectors, there



are still challenges related to the informal economy. The high unemployment rate, the inflation of public debt and the resulting increase in social disparities are among the challenges.

## CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Despite the existence of a legal framework pertaining to victim protection, consisting of legal aid, housing assistance and medical care among other facilities, the laws are inadequately implemented. The country continues to provide assistance for drug addicts through drug treatment and rehabilitation centres, although there are not enough of these. Crime prevention activities take place in Morocco but are limited in practice and implemented mostly by foundations and NGOs. In relation to cybersecurity, the government has implemented preventive measures to protect Moroccan systems, monitoring them constantly and alerting the relevant authorities about security threats. Law enforcement agencies have also developed several encryption programmes to prevent attacks and improve the national telecommunications system.

Although civil society has become increasingly active in recent years, freedom of speech remains restricted. Moroccan authorities detain or prosecute journalists and civil and human rights activists for expressing their opinions through the media or social networking sites and courts impose harsh sentences on journalists and opposition activists after questionable trials. Despite the adoption of a press law, authorities continue to use criminal law to prosecute and imprison defendants instead of using the law applicable to these cases.

