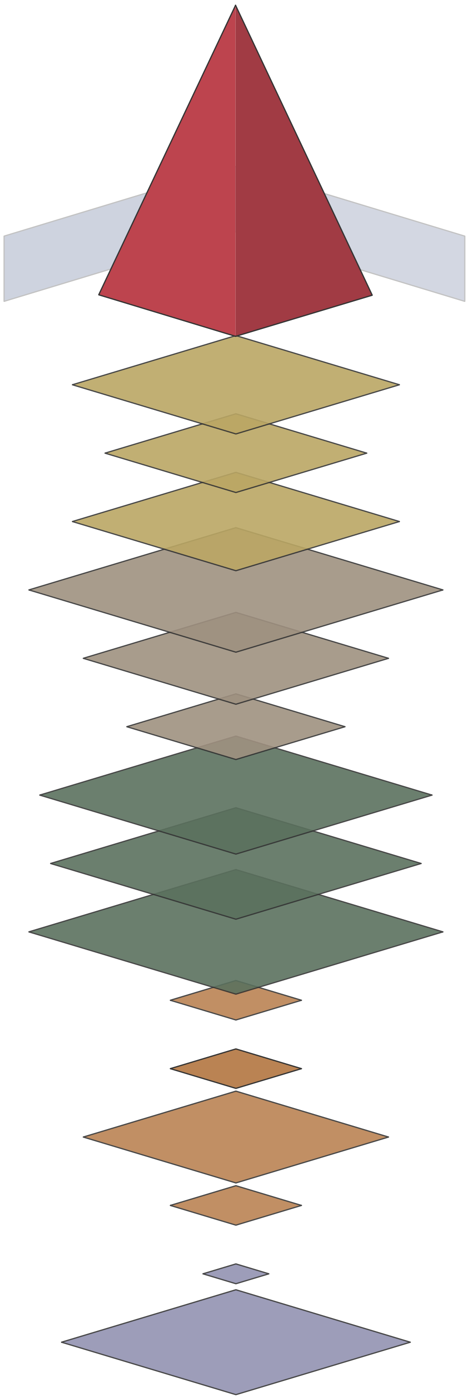
enact
Enhancing Africa's response to transnational organised crime

This project is funded by the European Union

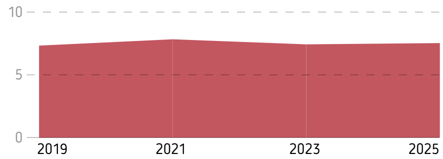
CONGO, DEM. REP.



7.47 ↗0.12

CRIMINALITY SCORE

1st of 54 African countries
1st of 11 Central African countries



CRIMINAL MARKETS	6.33	↗0.13
HUMAN TRAFFICKING	7.50	0.00
HUMAN SMUGGLING	6.00	↗0.50
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	7.50	0.00
ARMS TRAFFICKING	9.50	↗0.50
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	7.00	↗1.00
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	5.00	↗1.00
FLORA CRIMES	9.00	0.00
FAUNA CRIMES	8.50	↗0.50
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	9.50	0.00
HEROIN TRADE	3.00	↘1.00
COCAINE TRADE	3.00	↘1.00
CANNABIS TRADE	7.00	0.00
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	3.00	↗0.50
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	1.50	↘1.00
FINANCIAL CRIMES	8.00	↗1.00

CRIMINAL ACTORS	8.60	↗0.10
MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	9.00	0.00
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	9.00	0.00
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	9.00	0.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	9.00	0.00
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	7.00	↗0.50

ISS INSTITUTE FOR SECURITY STUDIES
INTERPOL
GLOBAL INITIATIVE AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

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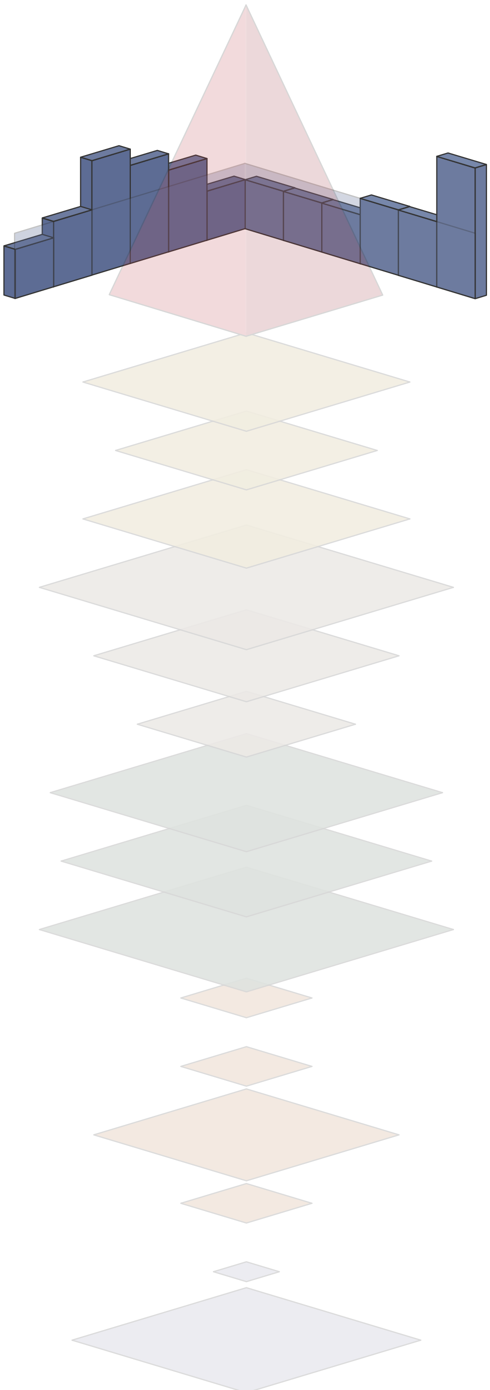
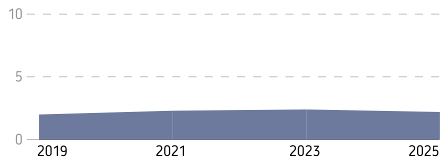


2.21 ↘0.17

RESILIENCE SCORE

47th of 54 African countries ↘2
9th of 11 Central African countries ↘1



POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	1.50	↗0.50
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	2.00	↗0.50
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	3.50	↘0.50
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	3.00	0.00
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	2.50	0.00
LAW ENFORCEMENT	1.50	0.00
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	1.50	↘0.50
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	1.50	↘1.00
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	1.50	0.00
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	2.00	0.00
PREVENTION	2.00	0.00
NON-STATE ACTORS	4.00	↘1.00

CRIMINALITY

Criminal markets

PEOPLE

Human trafficking in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is rampant due to conflict, poverty and political instability. Thousands of people are subjected to forced labour, particularly in mining, agriculture and domestic servitude, while armed groups recruit children for combat. Women and girls face forced marriages, which in many cases lead to domestic servitude or sexual exploitation. Human trafficking fuels violence by exploiting vulnerable groups, including refugees and internally displaced persons, and local actors profit from the illegal trade amid conflict and displacement. Criminal networks, sometimes involving corrupt officials, traffic children for forced labour or begging. The DRC is a trafficking hub where domestic and foreign victims, including migrant workers, face exploitative conditions.

Human smuggling is a significant component of the criminal economy, facilitated by porous borders, weak law enforcement and governance challenges. Organized networks operate independently, often collaborating with corrupt officials to facilitate illegal migration. Conflict, displacement and economic hardship fuel demand for smuggling, many using it to escape violence or navigate bureaucratic barriers. Escalating violence in eastern DRC has increased numbers of internally displaced persons, fuelling reliance on smugglers. Smuggling is often seen as a survival strategy, reinforcing its social acceptance. The DRC is a key transit hub for transnational smuggling networks, complicating enforcement.

Extortion and protection racketeering are dominant criminal markets, driven by conflict, corruption and weak law enforcement. Armed groups impose illicit taxes on businesses, including mining, fishing and trade, generating significant revenue. In major cities, youth gangs engage in theft and extortion, and kidnappings have become increasingly common in conflict zones. Unlike neighbouring countries, where extortion is more localized, the DRC's criminal networks target large industries, making these activities highly profitable.

TRADE

Arms trafficking persists despite international restrictions, and armed groups and state-embedded actors acquire weapons through illicit networks. Reports indicate military support from neighbouring countries and the provision of arms to local militias. The M23 conflict has intensified regional arms trafficking, and advanced weaponry, including drones, has been used in clashes. Armed groups exploit these weapons to control resource-rich areas, fuelling illicit economies. Violence has expanded to new regions, leading to mass displacement and civilian casualties. Despite sanctions and regulatory measures, weak enforcement and corruption undermine efforts to curb arms proliferation, perpetuating instability and benefiting foreign actors involved in the trade.

The DRC faces a significant challenge with illegal trade of counterfeit pharmaceuticals, particularly fake antimalarial drugs, which are widely sold. These falsified medicines undermine public health, contribute to preventable deaths and erode trust in healthcare. The issue extends beyond national borders, and counterfeit drugs are linked to regional and global supply chains. Experts warn counterfeit pharmaceuticals could outpace other criminal markets, and weak enforcement allows domestic actors to operate independently. Illicit trade in excisable goods such as cigarettes is widespread and a significant portion of products lack proper tax stamps, despite regulatory efforts. The persistence of outdated tax stamps and widespread tax evasion undermine government revenue, while corruption among customs and border officials facilitates smuggling from neighbouring countries. Available information highlights Uganda and the UAE as the sources of illicit cigarettes, which are increasing in popularity as the number of smokers grows. While local traders dominate the market, external influences are suspected. Organized crime networks control distribution, particularly in conflict-affected regions, where illicit cigarettes are more prevalent. The production and consumption of unregulated alcohol, such as lotoko, also contribute to the criminal economy. Weak enforcement, porous borders and ineffective control policies exacerbate the challenge and broader governance issues further enable illicit trade.

ENVIRONMENT

Flora crimes are extensive, and illegal charcoal, timber, coffee and cocoa production fuels deforestation, environmental degradation and armed group financing. High local demand and transnational smuggling, particularly to Uganda and occasionally Rwanda, sustain the illicit trade. Despite restrictions on raw timber exports, corruption and armed group involvement hinder enforcement. Illegal logging is a major revenue source and armed groups extract significant volumes weekly. The convergence of timber smuggling with mineral extraction exacerbates environmental and security challenges. International actors have also been linked to illicit timber trade, compounding the region's political and economic instability.

Wildlife trafficking is also extensive and there are frequent seizures of ivory and protected wildlife species, including primates. Despite enforcement measures, corruption and weak storage protocols enable traffickers to reclaim contraband. The trade is transnational, driven by domestic bushmeat demand and high-value markets in Asia and the US. Armed groups increasingly exploit wildlife crimes to fund operations, particularly in the east. High-level officials have been implicated in facilitating wildlife trafficking, and they are accused of abusing their positions to enable trafficking through falsified permits in exchange for bribes. The illegal trade is concentrated in biodiversity-rich areas, where it threatens endangered species and conservation efforts.

The illicit trade in gold, diamonds and conflict minerals (tin, tungsten, tantalum) is deeply entrenched, and armed groups and state-embedded actors control mines and smuggling routes. Since the escalation of conflict in 2024, gold smuggling to neighbouring countries has increased, and Rwanda and Uganda are key transit hubs. Most gold mines are uncertified, fuelling unrest. Armed groups impose taxes or directly control mining operations, using revenues to finance their activities. Cobalt and coltan extraction also face challenges, including forced labour and environmental degradation. Corruption and porous borders facilitate the trade, depriving the DRC of significant revenue while contributing to regional instability.

DRUGS

The heroin trade is limited compared with other illicit markets. Unlike larger transnational criminal markets, heroin trafficking in the DRC primarily benefits domestic actors, with lower levels of external involvement. Similarly, the cocaine trade has a relatively modest impact, though recent arrests highlight trafficking activities. Cocaine trafficking is less prominent than in neighbouring countries and there is little involvement from foreign actors, indicating that profits are largely retained by domestic participants. The trade does not appear to significantly contribute to violence.

The cannabis market is well-established, despite strict laws against cultivation, sale and possession. Most cannabis is consumed locally, and a small portion is smuggled to neighbouring countries, including Rwanda, Angola and Uganda. Smuggling routes include Kinshasa's N'djili International Airport and the Port of Matadi. Cannabis is a significant source of income for many Congolese, particularly indigenous communities, and has become socially accepted. However, it is less lucrative than other criminal markets.

The synthetic drug trade is growing, driven by the rising use of bombé, an artisanal drug made from crushed pills – often opioids – combined with chemical residue filtered through exhaust pipes. Bombé's simple composition and increasing demand have led to a rise in related incidents and seizures. The drug's prevalence is especially notable among young Congolese. Eastern DRC, particularly zones affected by armed conflict, is seeing increasing stimulant use, though data on methamphetamine trafficking is scarce.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

After a period of increased activity, the DRC has seen a notable decline in reported cyber-dependent crimes. Independent reports do not identify trends or threats and it is unclear if cybercrime is no longer a significant issue or if it is simply underreported. Low levels of cybersecurity awareness hinder accurate assessment of the market.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

The economy relies heavily on mining, but mining revenues are often diverted by the ruling elite. Embezzlement and tax evasion are widespread among political and business actors. Investigations have uncovered strong links between government officials, banks and national and foreign companies, leading to prosecutions abroad. The financial crime landscape is deeply entrenched and transnational. Public institutions, including state-owned enterprises, have been riddled with fictitious employees and misappropriated funds, reflecting a broader pattern of systemic corruption and tax evasion. Financial crimes also fund rebel activity, contributing to insecurity. While cyber-enabled financial crime is still emerging, the state's capacity to detect and respond to such threats is low.

Criminal actors

Several mafia-style groups, including M23 and Mai-Mai Yakutumba, dominate the organized crime landscape in eastern Congo. They fund their operations through extortion and illicit trade, particularly gold for weapons. More than 150 armed groups are active, exploiting resources such as timber, charcoal and minerals. These groups are heavily armed, and M23 receives military support from neighbouring Rwanda and Uganda, enabling their control over key regions in North Kivu province, such as Goma. In response, the Congolese army is joining forces with other local militias to counteract M23.

More loose criminal networks are widespread but generally not linked to violence. Urban gangs, once confined to Kinshasa, are spreading to other cities, exacerbating insecurity through theft, kidnapping and drug trafficking. They are mainly driven by weak urban governance and connections to local security forces and politicians. Transnational criminal networks, often involving local and foreign actors, operate across various illicit markets, especially non-renewable resources such as gold. These networks engage in the illegal export of ivory, pangolin scales and minerals alongside illicit arms, fuel and drugs. Collaborations between Congolese and foreign security personnel, customs officials, business leaders and politicians facilitate these activities, further complicating efforts to combat the illegal trade domestically and across borders.

State-embedded actors, including government officials and the military, play a central role in organized crime. Their involvement spans a range of illicit activities, including kidnappings, extortion, financial crimes, human trafficking and wildlife trafficking, as well as crimes related to non-renewable resources. Corruption is widespread and significant cases have involved fraud in the oil and gas sector, embezzlement in education, and fictitious employees on the public payroll. These actors are also implicated in election-related fraud and voter intimidation. The pervasive nature of corruption in the state severely undermines governance and contributes to the perpetuation of organized crime.

In terms of foreign influence on criminal markets, Rwanda and Uganda have been key players in the conflict in eastern DRC. Rwanda supports the M23 rebellion, while Uganda's rebel Allied Democratic Forces are responsible for significant killings. Foreign companies, particularly in the mining sector, have been linked to significant financial and resource crimes, and allegations of embezzlement and corruption involve Chinese firms and global entities such as Glencore and Ivanhoe Mines. Mercenaries from France and Romania are active in the region, assisting the army with military expertise and protection. These transnational actors are deeply intertwined with local criminal networks.

Domestic private sector actors are heavily involved in illicit activities, particularly the trade in counterfeit goods, cigarettes and minerals. The artisanal mining sector, which includes numerous local cooperatives, is a significant source of illegal trade and has links to armed groups and military officials, especially in the eastern region. Businesses have been implicated in laundering conflict minerals and often partner foreign firms in these illicit ventures due to legal requirements. Investigative efforts such as the Congo Hold-up project have highlighted widespread corruption and money laundering in the private sector, further complicating efforts to curb the criminal economy.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

The DRC struggles with weak governance, corruption and political instability, as reflected in global indicators. Despite electoral promises, the government has failed to improve conditions or resolve persistent conflicts, particularly in eastern regions. Tensions fuelled by armed groups such as M23 and local militias exacerbate human rights violations and resource exploitation. The political system is marred by electoral fraud, lack of transparency and violence, while foreign involvement, including the support of armed groups by neighbouring countries, complicates peace efforts. The UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC faces operational challenges and the government has demanded its withdrawal, which could worsen the crisis.

The DRC faces significant challenges in combating corruption despite the existence of anti-corruption legislation and institutions such as the Agency for the Prevention and Combating of Corruption. Lack of institutional independence and political interference hinder effective enforcement. While progress has been made in financial transparency, such as e-payment systems and improved procurement processes, these efforts are limited by infrastructure and capacity issues. The DRC has joined the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative but accountability gaps persist in the extractive sector. Political accountability is weak, as many members of the former regime continue to hold key government positions instead of being prosecuted for their involvement in organized crime and corruption.

The DRC has ratified several international conventions related to organized crime but faces enforcement challenges due to conflict and weak governance. While it has improved diplomatic relations with international bodies, its dependence on foreign assistance, particularly for security, underscores its fragile statehood. Regional cooperation has been hindered by the M23 conflict, causing a breakdown in relations with Rwanda, Uganda and the East African Community. Efforts to combat organized crime have targeted extortion, arms trafficking and wildlife crimes, with international sanctions supporting these actions. Notably, the DRC became the first African country to endorse recognizing ecocide as an international crime, aiming to protect its environment from destructive practices.

Internally, the DRC has a legal framework to address organized crime but implementation is hindered by corruption, weak enforcement and legislative gaps. Laws struggle to tackle issues such as the illicit cigarette trade and human trafficking, despite efforts for stricter enforcement. Environmental concerns are partly addressed by revised timber export policies. Recent progress includes legislation aimed at protecting digital rights and addressing online violence.

The government's response to the M23 conflict led to the suspension of a death penalty moratorium in March 2024, resulting in the sentencing of military personnel. No executions have occurred, but this highlights ongoing challenges in the rule of law and governance.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

The judicial system has specialized units for organized crime, such as the Military Tribunal, but faces significant challenges, including corruption, political interference and inadequate resources. While war crime victims are exempt from court fees, persistent issues include bias against opposition figures and civil society. The judiciary is influenced by political pressures, exemplified by selective arrests and acquittals. Rural areas lack proper legal infrastructure and military courts often handle criminal cases with limited defendant rights. Armed groups exacerbate violence, while prison conditions are poor due to overcrowding, corruption and violence. Despite reforms, civilian oversight is weak and state control over prisons is limited.

The DRC struggles to combat organized crime due to systemic corruption, weak institutions and limited resources. Law enforcement agencies tasked with addressing crimes such as human trafficking, smuggling and arms trade are undermined by politicization, inefficiency and low public trust. Many have become profit-driven and anti-corruption laws are rarely enforced, allowing impunity for officials. Security forces are fragmented and subject to political influence. Arbitrary arrests and abuses are common, while intelligence-led operations are rare. Prosecutions for organized crime are hampered by delays and corruption. Smuggling, extortion and racketeering persist, often facilitated by state actors. Progress has been made in areas such as cigarette smuggling through data initiatives, and environmental crimes are addressed through reforestation programmes and trade bans. Drug market responses vary. Cannabis is repressed but regulated for export, while synthetic drugs are addressed mainly through arrests. Despite efforts to strengthen financial crime units, broader structural issues limit progress.

Overall, the DRC faces significant challenges in securing its extensive borders, and porous and inadequately policed crossings contribute to trafficking and organized crime. The eastern borders, especially around Ariwara, are hotspots for smuggling linked to South Sudan and Uganda. Uncontrolled areas, such as the DRC-Central African Republic border, allow armed groups to move freely, exacerbating local tensions. Tensions with Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda further strain border security, particularly with Rwanda's support of M23 and military presence in North Kivu. The DRC performs poorly in cyber security, achieving low scores in international indices measuring cyber risk mitigation and infrastructure.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

The banking system is highly vulnerable to money laundering due to widespread corruption and weak supervision. Recent reports also highlight significant deficiencies in anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism frameworks. Despite the establishment of bodies such as the National Financial Intelligence Unit, enforcement is inadequate due to corruption and insufficient resources. The DRC was added to the Financial Action Task Force grey list in 2022. While political commitments have been made to improve anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism practices, institutional weaknesses and corruption hinder progress.

Overall, the DRC faces significant economic and governance challenges and scores poorly on economic freedom and political transformation indices. Despite improvements in international relations, elite-driven corruption hampers sustainable development and about 25 per cent of the population faces severe food insecurity. The government struggles to enforce regulations, particularly in informal sectors such as mining and cigarette trading, where organized crime thrives. The eastern DRC, affected by conflict and hybrid governance, lacks effective economic oversight. Weak law enforcement, political instability and inadequate enforcement of sanctions contribute to illicit activities. The private sector has limited influence and economic reforms are stalled due to systemic corruption.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Victim support for those affected by organized crime is limited. While displaced persons and trafficking victims receive shelter, reports of sexual abuse persist in refugee camps. Government initiatives, such as witness protection, are underdeveloped and lack resources and coordination. Victims face challenges accessing help due to widespread impunity and fear of reprisals, especially when perpetrators are connected to government authorities. There are insufficient national procedures to identify and refer trafficking victims, who rely on ad hoc NGO efforts. Civil society organizations play a critical role in victim assistance and advocacy but struggle with societal stigma, especially regarding drug users involved in theft.

Efforts to combat organized crime, including human trafficking and smuggling, are hindered by weak governance, limited resources and conflict. While there is a national anti-trafficking action plan, implementation faces significant challenges. Despite improvements such as convicting traffickers and raising public awareness, the scope of these measures is limited, especially outside the capital. Corruption, collaboration between armed groups and the military, and child soldier recruitment further contribute to impunity. The government has tried to address child labour in mining but progress is slow. Public education campaigns on issues such as counterfeit drugs and illicit trade are under way, with support from civil society and international organizations.

Non-state actors, particularly civil society organizations and churches, play a vital role in combating organized crime through advocacy and support services. These organizations advocate for peace and address environmental crimes such as deforestation and wildlife trafficking. Civil society organizations fill gaps in victim support services and raise awareness of corruption and conflict. Government support for these entities varies, however, and there are restrictions on media freedom and increased hostility towards journalists, including arrests and expulsions. Media pluralism exists but conflicts undermine journalists' ability to work safely. Many have been forced to abandon their posts, facing attacks, persecution and even forced disappearance. Assaults, threats and executions occur with alarming frequency, while media outlets are routinely suspended, looted or ransacked. Efforts to enhance journalist security and press freedom are under way, though risks persist due to a restrictive political environment and media censorship.