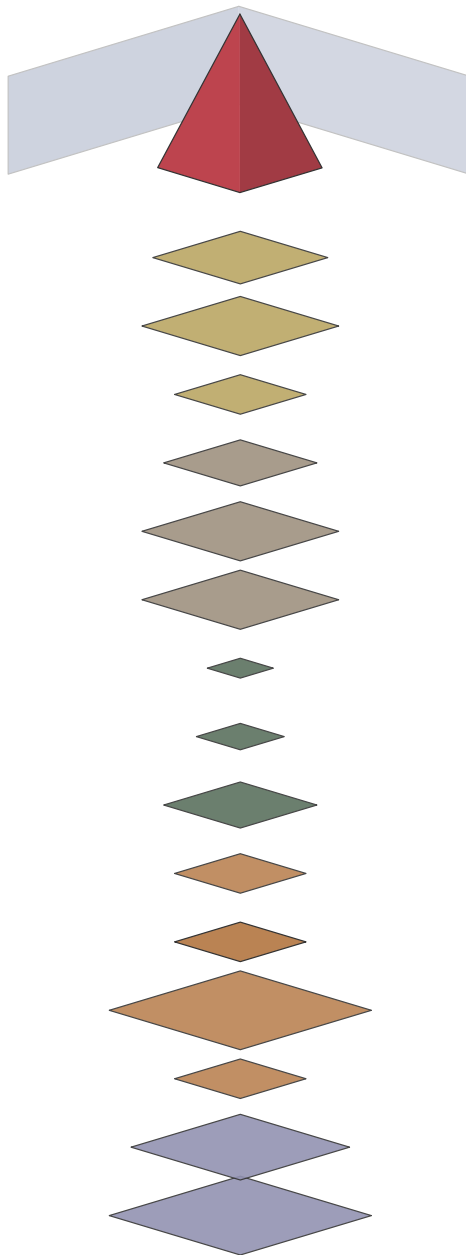


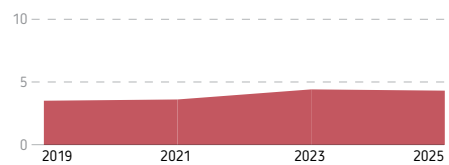


# ESWATINI



**4.25**  $\triangleright 0.13$   
**CRIMINALITY SCORE**

**45<sup>th</sup>** of 54 African countries  $\triangleright 3$   
**8<sup>th</sup>** of 13 Southern African countries  $\triangleright 1$



**CRIMINAL MARKETS** **3.80**  $\triangleright 0.07$

|                                     |      |                       |
|-------------------------------------|------|-----------------------|
| HUMAN TRAFFICKING                   | 4.00 | 0.00                  |
| HUMAN SMUGGLING                     | 4.50 | 0.00                  |
| EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING | 3.00 | $\triangleright 1.50$ |
| ARMS TRAFFICKING                    | 3.50 | $\triangleright 0.50$ |
| TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS          | 4.50 | $\triangleright 0.50$ |
| ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS    | 4.50 | 0.00                  |
| FLORA CRIMES                        | 1.50 | $\triangleright 1.00$ |
| FAUNA CRIMES                        | 2.00 | 0.00                  |
| NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES       | 3.50 | $\triangleright 0.50$ |
| HEROIN TRADE                        | 3.00 | 0.00                  |
| COCAINE TRADE                       | 3.00 | 0.00                  |
| CANNABIS TRADE                      | 6.00 | $\triangleright 0.50$ |
| SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE                | 3.00 | 0.00                  |
| CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES              | 5.00 | 0.00                  |
| FINANCIAL CRIMES                    | 6.00 | $\triangleright 0.50$ |



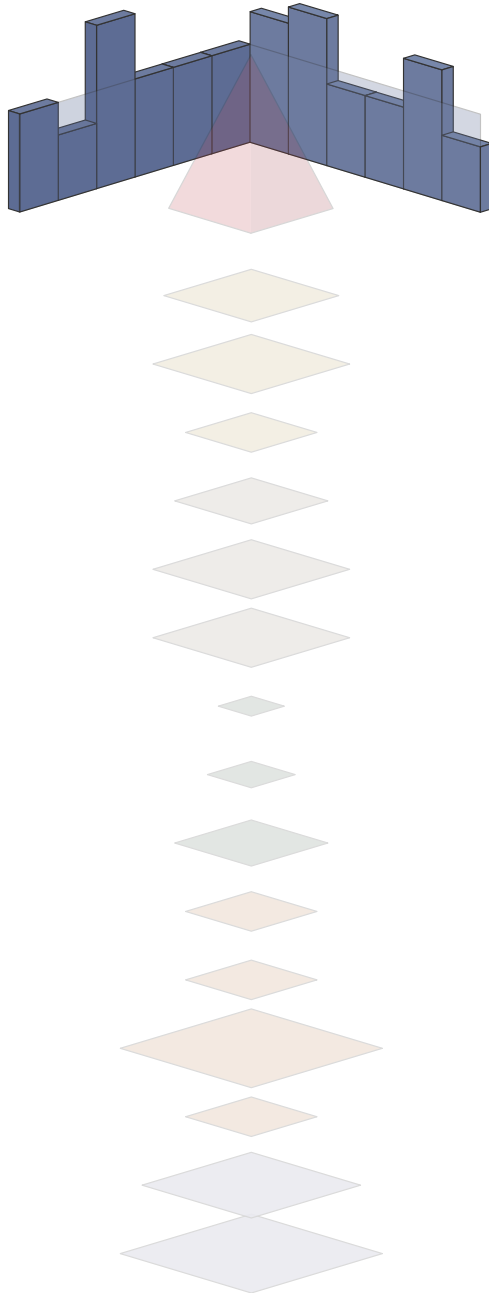
**CRIMINAL ACTORS** **4.70**  $\triangleright 0.20$

|                       |      |                       |
|-----------------------|------|-----------------------|
| MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS    | 1.00 | $\triangleright 1.00$ |
| CRIMINAL NETWORKS     | 5.50 | 0.00                  |
| STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS | 6.50 | $\triangleright 0.50$ |
| FOREIGN ACTORS        | 4.50 | $\triangleright 0.50$ |
| PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS | 6.00 | 0.00                  |





# ESWATINI

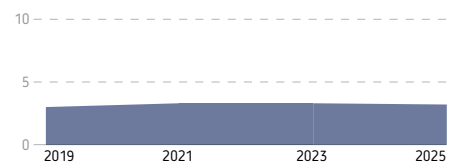


3.21  $\downarrow 0.08$

## RESILIENCE SCORE

35<sup>th</sup> of 54 African countries  $\downarrow 2$

11<sup>th</sup> of 13 Southern African countries  $\downarrow 1$



|                                            |      |                   |
|--------------------------------------------|------|-------------------|
| POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE        | 3.00 | 0.00              |
| GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY | 2.00 | $\downarrow 0.50$ |
| INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION                  | 5.00 | 0.00              |
| NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS                 | 3.00 | 0.00              |
| JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION              | 3.00 | 0.00              |
| LAW ENFORCEMENT                            | 3.00 | 0.00              |
| TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY                      | 4.00 | 0.00              |
| ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING                      | 4.50 | $\downarrow 0.50$ |
| ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY               | 2.50 | $\uparrow 0.50$   |
| VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT                 | 2.50 | 0.00              |
| PREVENTION                                 | 4.00 | 0.00              |
| NON-STATE ACTORS                           | 2.00 | $\downarrow 0.50$ |



# CRIMINALITY

## Criminal markets

### PEOPLE

Human trafficking in Eswatini is a notable concern and various forms of exploitation target vulnerable populations. The market is largely decentralized but involves many actors, including labour brokers, recruiters and foreign business owners from South Africa and Mozambique. Traffickers exploit orphans and individuals in areas with high HIV/AIDS prevalence, forcing them into labour in agriculture, market vending and marijuana cultivation. Young girls from low-income backgrounds are particularly at risk of being trafficked for sexual exploitation, especially when seeking employment opportunities in South Africa.

Human smuggling in Eswatini is closely intertwined with human trafficking, largely driven by economic hardship and high unemployment. Many Eswatini voluntarily seek smuggling services to enter South Africa for better economic opportunities, and Mozambicans also use Eswatini as a transit point. Most smuggled individuals end up working in South African forests, farms or domestic service under exploitative conditions. Despite government training for immigration officers and law enforcement, informal crossings persist, exacerbated by poor wages that leave officials susceptible to corruption. Corruption among immigration officers and senior government officials has been reported, facilitating smuggling operations through bribes and fraudulent documentation. Cases of extortion and protection racketeering are relatively limited but have been reported in certain industries. The perpetrators involved appear to operate in organized networks, demonstrating a degree of coordination and structure. Only a few arrests have been made and the broader scale and organizational level of the extortion market is unclear.

### TRADE

The arms trafficking market in Eswatini is not well documented but is evident in the presence of unregistered firearms, some of which have been seized during arrests. Cannabis is sometimes exchanged for firearms, creating a link between the arms trade and drug markets. Law enforcement efforts include firearm destruction and arrests, but arms trafficking is a priority concern due to its connection with other criminal markets. Recent arrests of South Africans smuggling illegal firearms into Eswatini indicate the country's involvement, albeit on a small scale, in regional arms trafficking. The arms flowing into Eswatini primarily come from Mozambique and South Africa.

The trade in counterfeit goods is widespread, affecting many sectors, including food, pharmaceuticals, clothing and electronics. This illicit market has a strong transnational component and counterfeit products are imported through informal channels from neighbouring countries such as South Africa and Mozambique, as well as from China and India. Foreign actors, primarily from China and India, dominate the importation and distribution of these goods. State-embedded actors, including customs and police officers, have also been implicated in facilitating the trade, enabling its persistence. Demand for counterfeit goods in Eswatini is driven by affordability, limited awareness and enforcement of intellectual property rights, and inadequate consumer protection and education. These factors play a significant role in sustaining demand for illicit products.

Eswatini is a key transit point for the smuggling of cigarettes and other tobacco products into South Africa. The illicit trade in excise goods has increased, organized crime groups leveraging weak border controls and corrupt officials to facilitate the movement of contraband. Furthermore, cigarettes and alcohol are smuggled into Eswatini from Mozambique, driven by price disparities between the two countries. However, these smuggling activities may have declined recently due to growing instability in Mozambique and its border regions.

### ENVIRONMENT

Flora crimes in Eswatini are primarily driven by local demand for firewood, charcoal production and medicinal plants. Although the government has taken steps to enforce flora protection laws and has designated conservation areas, illegal harvesting of indigenous medicinal plants persists due to weak enforcement mechanisms.

Fauna crimes are relatively rare, with isolated incidents of poaching rather than a consolidated criminal market. Armed poaching networks, some linked to South Africa, operate near Jozini Dam and other border areas. Violent encounters between poachers and game rangers occasionally result in fatalities, exacerbated by a controversial shoot-to-kill policy enforced in private game reserves.

Non-renewable resource crimes primarily involve illegal mining, particularly the extraction of green chert stone in Malolotja Nature Reserve. Unregulated mining is common, often involving artisanal miners smuggling precious stones into South Africa. Environmental damage from unregulated mining is a significant concern, and there are recorded instances of artisanal miners being killed while attempting to access restricted areas. Some reports indicate collusion between mining companies and senior government officials to illegally export minerals during the prospecting phase.



Recent investigations have also revealed Eswatini's potential links to a broader gold smuggling network spanning southern Africa and beyond. Millions of dollars allegedly flowed from a notorious South African cash-in-transit company through an Eswatini gold refinery and onwards to Dubai. Authorities fear these refineries are exploiting special economic zone loopholes to launder money, evade taxes and channel illicit funds through the kingdom.

## DRUGS

The heroin trade in Eswatini is largely undocumented, though police and border security have occasionally intercepted shipments. Reports suggest that heroin is trafficked through Mozambique before reaching South Africa. Eswatini is a possible transit point. Heroin abuse is an emerging concern, particularly among youth, but there is limited evidence of an organized distribution network.

The cocaine trade is small, primarily serving domestic consumers. The drug is supplied from Mozambique and demand is concentrated in urban centres such as Nhlanguano. Law enforcement occasionally intercepts cocaine shipments but they are primarily destined for South Africa as Eswatini is a minor transit route. Its overall role in the regional cocaine trade is limited.

Cultivation of cannabis is entrenched and thousands of citizens are involved in its production. The trade is organized, local criminal networks and foreign actors facilitating smuggling into South Africa. Major cannabis-producing regions include Hhohho, Shiselweni and Lubombo. Efforts to legalize cannabis cultivation for medicinal purposes have gained traction but the illicit market remains dominant. Eswatini's cannabis, often known as 'Swazi Gold', is highly valued, making the country a key player in the regional trade.

The synthetic drug market is relatively underdeveloped and mandrax is the most common substance. It is mainly imported from South Africa and local demand is moderate. There are reports of occasional seizures but little evidence of a structured synthetic drug market. Methamphetamine use remains limited, with a small user base reportedly consisting largely of foreign nationals, particularly Chinese workers. Authorities often describe meth as a 'foreign' drug, implying it holds little appeal for local users. Meth typically enters Eswatini through Mozambique and Cape Town. There are no wholesale market hubs or local production facilities; instead, distribution is managed by a handful of high-level importers who traffic various illicit commodities. Open street sales of meth are rare, due to the small market and limited urban areas for discreet dealing. Overall, meth supply in Eswatini is scarce and inconsistent, with no domestic manufacturing to support sustained availability.

## CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Cyber-dependent crimes are increasing in Eswatini, primarily involving hacking and data breaches, and malware attacks target businesses and public institutions. In 2024, according to the Central Bank of Eswatini, the country saw a rise in cryptocurrency scams, with scammers using a variety of techniques including unsolicited calls or text messages, social group investment schemes and phishing attacks. The country's vulnerability to cyber threats has been attributed to a lack of citizen awareness compounded by the police being ill-equipped to tackle cybercrimes.

## FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crimes, including investment fraud, pyramid schemes and embezzlement, are widespread in Eswatini. Criminal networks operate online scams targeting citizens through fraudulent job offers, social grants and fake sales. Public institutions have also been affected and major fraud cases have been reported in several industries. The banking sector is vulnerable to cyber-enabled financial crimes and millions are lost annually to digital fraud. Criminals exploit digital platforms to gain unauthorized access to financial institutions, and recent arrests highlight the role of insider threats.

## Criminal actors

There is no evidence of mafia-style groups in Eswatini. Organized crime does not exhibit a clear hierarchical structure or centralized leadership akin to traditional mafia organizations.

However, the country is home to fragmented criminal networks that operate across several illicit markets. Their activities are transnational and resource-driven, sustained by corruption and facilitated by weak governance structures that often enable rather than deter crime. Criminal networks operate in a decentralized manner and no well-defined entrepreneurs or leaders have been identified. Low-level violence associated with their activities has been observed. A concerning trend is the expansion of gang-related activity, particularly in schools. The 'Numbers' gangs, collectively known as inombolo, have been increasing recruitment efforts, targeting school-age boys, particularly in Manzini. These gangs include the 26s, 28s, K9 and emaBenjamin. Violence among rival gangs has escalated and there have been reports of weapons being carried into schools and violent incidents on school premises. While these gangs display certain traits typical of mafia-style groups, there is no credible evidence about their internal structures or any form of territorial control.



Corruption in Eswatini's government has become increasingly entrenched and senior officials have been implicated in illicit activities, particularly in procurement and public service delivery. The tendering process is widely perceived as corrupt, affecting sectors such as construction, medical supplies, and government procurement of vehicles and furniture. Investigations have revealed that fraudulent practices, including the awarding of tenders to politically connected entities, have led to severe shortages in essential services. Despite forensic audits by the auditor general revealing significant financial mismanagement, implicated officials have not been arrested or blacklisted; instead, some have been transferred to other ministries while those who exposed the corruption face retaliation. Additionally, criminal actors in state institutions have been implicated in embezzlement, fraudulent financial practices and the smuggling of non-renewable resources.

Foreign actors also play a role in Eswatini's criminal markets and various diaspora communities are involved in different forms of organized crime. South African, Mozambican, Chinese and Indian groups are particularly

prominent. Chinese and Indian actors have been linked to the sale of counterfeit goods, while illicit cigarettes from Mozambique have flooded local markets. There are allegations that international actors have been involved in money laundering schemes benefiting Zimbabwean criminal networks.

The private sector in Eswatini is involved in the financial crimes market, and professional intermediaries such as lawyers, pension fund managers and estate agents are implicated in money laundering schemes. The sectors identified at high risk of financial crimes include property, automotive sales, NGOs, hardware stores and law firms. The housing and property industry is particularly susceptible, with most laundered money in the private sector being funnelled through property transactions. Investigations have uncovered ties between politically connected individuals and transnational money laundering networks. Regulatory loopholes and weak enforcement mechanisms have created opportunities for illicit financial flows to pass through the country undetected.

# RESILIENCE

## LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Eswatini operates under an absolute monarchy and the king exercises significant control over all branches of government. The governance landscape is characterized by limited political freedoms and restricted civic space. Since the escalation of pro-democracy protests, the government has responded with crackdowns, including detentions, and there have been allegations of human rights violations. Despite growing calls for political reform, including the emergence of new parties calling for electoral participation, the government has resisted substantive dialogue on democratization. There are no indications of organized crime directly influencing the political process but allegations have surfaced about the misuse of special economic zones for illicit financial activities, including gold smuggling.

Eswatini faces significant transparency and accountability challenges. Public perception of corruption has worsened and there have been reports of infighting among senior officials over the implementation of anti-corruption measures. Legal and institutional measures have been introduced to address corruption but there are concerns about their effectiveness. The competent authorities have reportedly recovered misappropriated funds yet high-profile figures linked to financial misconduct have not faced legal consequences. This has fuelled the perception that

accountability mechanisms disproportionately target lower-level officials while shielding politically connected individuals from scrutiny. Eswatini lacks access-to-information laws and has no culture of proactively disclosing government information. In practice, public requests for information are largely ignored, and the budgeting process is opaque. Authorities also strictly limit access to data on spending by the royal family and security forces.

Eswatini has ratified several international conventions related to organized crime and participates in regional law enforcement collaborations, including through INTERPOL. However, its limited diplomatic presence and lack of bilateral agreements hinder deeper international cooperation. It engages in regional frameworks, such as the Southern African Development Community Protocol on Extradition, but there is limited evidence of transborder asset seizures.

Legislation addresses various forms of organized crime, including participation in criminal groups, racketeering, money laundering, trafficking in persons and cybercrime – areas that align with the country's major criminal markets. To tackle cybercrime, the government enacted the Computer Crime and Cybercrime Act in 2022. In addition, to strengthen its response to human trafficking, Eswatini extended its 2019–2023 National Action Plan to 2025 and allocated funding to support related initiatives. However, enforcement



challenges persist and certain areas require further attention. Regarding cannabis regulation, Eswatini is following the lead of many other African countries by legalizing cannabis for medical purposes, revising a colonial-era drug law that has been in place for nearly a century.

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

The judicial system in Eswatini plays a role in combating organized crime, yet it has structural inefficiencies. Courts have successfully prosecuted corruption cases but resource shortages and case backlogs hamper their effectiveness. Reports indicate that some individuals accused of organized crime-related offences have remained on bail for extended periods due to judicial delays. There are also concerns about political interference, particularly in cases involving opposition figures and activists. The prison system faces challenges such as overcrowding and inadequate healthcare, and reports suggest conditions do not meet international standards. However, there is no evidence that criminal groups exert control over prison operations.

Eswatini does not have specialized law enforcement units dedicated to organized crime, though it participates in regional policing collaborations. The INTERPOL National Central Bureau in Mbabane facilitates cross-border cooperation on criminal investigations. Despite financial and resource constraints, Eswatini has engaged in intelligence-sharing initiatives with regional law enforcement agencies. However, trust in the police is low and nearly half of the population express scepticism about professionalism and human rights adherence. The country has taken steps to bolster cybersecurity but information on intelligence-gathering capabilities against organized crime is limited.

Border security is a challenge for Eswatini, particularly due to its loosely regulated borders with South Africa and Mozambique, which facilitate illicit flows. The Umbutfo Eswatini Defence Force is responsible for border monitoring but its enforcement methods have drawn criticism. The government has acknowledged the need to improve cybersecurity measures and has worked on strengthening critical information infrastructure security and governance frameworks. Efforts have been made to enhance border security but infrastructure and resource limitations affect overall enforcement capabilities.

## ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Eswatini has taken steps to combat money laundering by enacting laws such as the Prevention of Corruption Act and the Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism (Prevention) Act. The Eswatini Financial Intelligence Unit plays a role in detecting and reporting suspicious transactions. Interagency coordination is regarded as a crucial step in strengthening the anti-money laundering

framework. Collaborative efforts involving the Financial Intelligence Unit, law enforcement, financial institutions and civil society have contributed to identifying potentially illicit financial activities. These initiatives have enhanced the country's ability to track financial flows. Eswatini is not blacklisted for money laundering concerns but challenges persist in effectively addressing illicit financial activities. The risk of greylisting remains, as the country complies with only a fraction of the Financial Action Task Force's recommendations.

The economy is relatively diverse but regulatory inefficiencies and legal constraints hinder private sector development. Bureaucratic obstacles raise the cost of doing business and the absence of a well-developed formal labour market sustains significant informal employment. Business conditions are shaped by political influences, which affect market dynamics and economic opportunities. Regulatory oversight is a challenge, allowing businesses with questionable backgrounds to establish operations with limited scrutiny. This raises concerns about the ease with which unverified entities can secure licences and operate.

## CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

The government provides victim and witness support services, though these are inadequate. There are shelters for victims of human trafficking and gender-based violence but no formal witness protection programme. Reports indicate that victims and witnesses often face intimidation, and alleged offenders are frequently granted bail, which discourages reporting. Civil society organizations contribute to victim rehabilitation efforts, including drug treatment programmes, but their capacity is limited. There are no whistle-blower protection laws but some institutions operate fraud and corruption hotlines.

Community organizations, including faith-based groups, contribute to crime prevention efforts by supporting rehabilitation programmes and addressing social vulnerabilities. Consumer and community awareness initiatives are in place to promote behavioural change and mitigate crime-related risks, though details on their effectiveness are limited. Implementation challenges persist due to resource constraints and lack of coordination. The Royal Eswatini Police Service has prioritized community engagement through initiatives such as policing forums and school-based anti-crime programmes, though the overall impact of these efforts is unclear. Several online safety initiatives have been undertaken, including public warnings about fake social media pages and awareness campaigns led by the Ministry of Information, Communications and Technology and the Royal Eswatini Police Service fraud department.



Civil society organizations and non-state actors operate in a constrained environment and the government maintains strict control over media and public discourse. Journalists and activists who report on government misconduct or call for political reforms face harassment and legal reprisals. The government has labelled some opposition-aligned media outlets 'terrorist entities', and reports suggest that critical voices in civil society have been targeted. The broader human rights environment has deteriorated and there are increasing reports of extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detentions and political repression.

