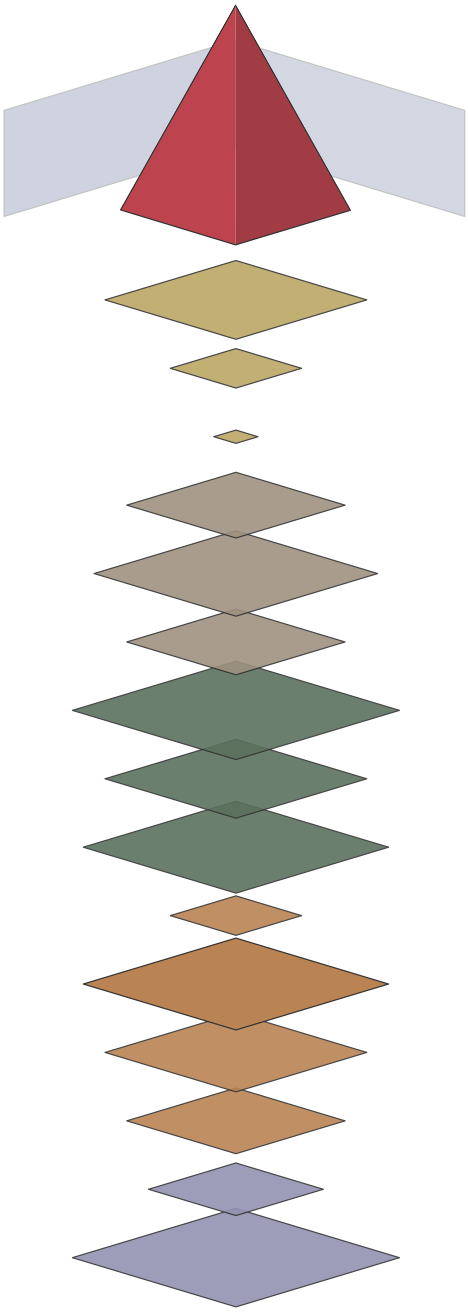
Africa **ORGANISED CRIME INDEX** 2025

Enhancing Africa's response to transnational organised crime

This project is funded by the European Union

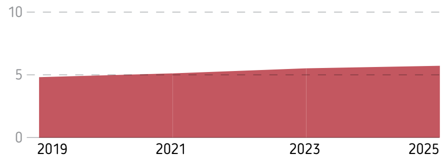
LIBERIA



5.65 ↗0.15

CRIMINALITY SCORE

22nd of 54 African countries ↗1
7th of 15 West African countries ↗1



CRIMINAL MARKETS	5.30	↘0.10
HUMAN TRAFFICKING	6.00	0.00
HUMAN SMUGGLING	3.00	0.00
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	1.00	↘3.00
ARMS TRAFFICKING	5.00	0.00
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	6.50	0.00
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	5.00	↗0.50
FLORA CRIMES	7.50	↗1.50
FAUNA CRIMES	6.00	0.00
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	7.00	0.00
HEROIN TRADE	3.00	↘2.00
COCAINE TRADE	7.00	↗0.50
CANNABIS TRADE	6.00	0.00
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	5.00	↗1.50
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	4.00	↘0.50
FINANCIAL CRIMES	7.50	0.00

CRIMINAL ACTORS	6.00	↗0.40
MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	3.00	0.00
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	7.00	↗0.50
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	7.50	↗1.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	6.50	↗0.50
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	6.00	0.00

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INTERPOL

GLOBAL INITIATIVE AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

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enact
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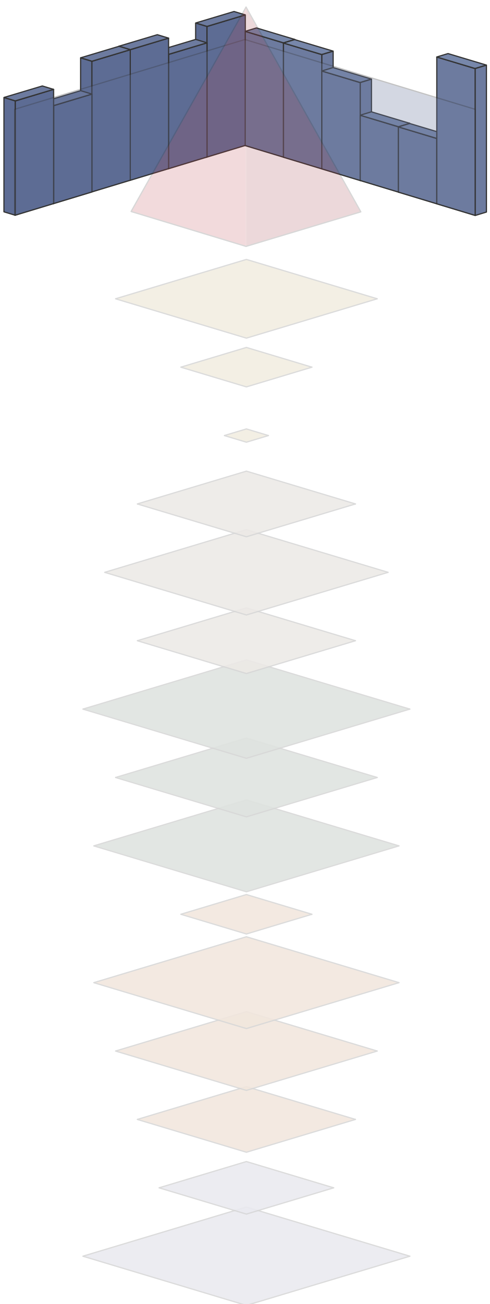
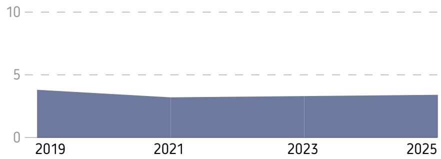


3.38 ↗0.13
RESILIENCE SCORE

31st of 54 African countries ↗4
10th of 15 West African countries ↗2



POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	3.50	0.00
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	3.00	0.00
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	4.00	↗0.50
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	4.00	0.00
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	3.50	0.00
LAW ENFORCEMENT	4.00	0.00
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	3.50	0.00
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	3.50	0.00
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	3.00	0.00
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	2.00	↗0.50
PREVENTION	2.00	0.00
NON-STATE ACTORS	4.50	↗0.50

ISS INSTITUTE FOR SECURITY STUDIES

INTERPOL

GLOBAL INITIATIVE AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

CRIMINALITY

Criminal markets

PEOPLE

Human trafficking is both internal and transnational in Liberia. Foreign nationals fill the ranks of both victims and perpetrators. Traffickers commonly exploit social vulnerabilities, including the cultural practice of sending children to live with relatives or acquaintances under the pretext of offering better education or care. This frequently results in them being pushed into forced labour or street-based exploitation. Trafficking to Western Asia is a key international route. In late 2022, reports over women being trafficked through Roberts International Airport in Monrovia towards Western Asia prompted increased scrutiny of passengers travelling on this route. Since then a growing number of Liberian women have been sent across the Guinean border from the town of Ganta; travelling to Conakry before catching flights to places such as Oman. Internally, labour and sex trafficking are the dominant forms, with victims typically being exploited in mining, agriculture and domestic work. Although Liberia criminalizes these practices under both national and international legal frameworks, cultural norms blur the public perception of trafficking. The market continues to exert downward pressure on labour standards and wages, particularly in informal sectors.

Human smuggling in Liberia operates at a low intensity, largely due to the free movement protocols of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which reduce the need for clandestine migration across borders. Nonetheless, the country's porous and weakly monitored borders make it susceptible to irregular movement. Overland smuggling routes involve people departing Liberia for Guinea, then onward to Mali, Algeria, Tunisia and potentially Europe or Asia. These movements are largely voluntary, with people seeking better living conditions.

Extortion and protection racketeering are virtually non-existent in the country, with no recent incidents reported.

TRADE

Arms trafficking is not uncommon in Liberia, with its porous borders enabling the cross-border trade of both commercial and artisanal weapons. The demand in rural areas for self-defence weapons and hunting rifles is, to a large extent, met by locally produced artisanal guns. Although seizures of commercial weapons at the Freeport of Monrovia are rare, authorities believe there is a steady trickle of weapons from the US, often brought in by people in their personal luggage. Some operations have involved concealing weapons in shipping containers routed through the Freeport of Monrovia, leveraging gaps there in scanning and screening capacity. The high availability of weapons contributes to local insecurity and enhances the operational power of criminal groups.

The trade in counterfeit goods in Liberia is widespread and deeply entrenched in the domestic economy. Counterfeit medicines, food, cosmetics, clothing and mobile phones are openly sold in markets across the country. Concerns have been raised about the number of fake and substandard pharmaceuticals circulating in Liberia, a significant proportion of which are imported via Ganta across the Guinean border. Awareness of intellectual property violations is low among the population, and corruption exacerbates the problem, allowing smuggling and market distribution to continue largely unchecked.

The illicit trade in excisable goods – particularly tobacco and alcohol – is reasonably consolidated in Liberia, with criminal networks exploiting the country's systemic vulnerabilities of high excise taxes, porous borders and widespread corruption. Seizures of large quantities of cigarettes point to sustained local demand. Criminal groups often operate through informal distribution networks, especially in rural areas, and are known to smuggle contraband across borders, particularly from Guinea and Sierra Leone. Some smuggling operations have been linked to foreign companies, and suspect procurement processes within the Liberian government have raised concerns about possible complicity.

ENVIRONMENT

Flora crimes, particularly illegal logging and timber trafficking, are a significant criminal market in Liberia. Evidence points to collusion among customs officials, police, forestry officers and businesses from Türkiye, China, Lebanon and Liberia itself. These actors often operate under the cover of legal businesses or exploit lax permit processes to harvest beyond approved limits. There is also a parallel system for illegal log exports, which operates through unofficial channels and often directed toward markets in Asia, notably China and Vietnam. Illegal practices like chainsaw milling large blocks of timber for export, known locally as kpokolo, further contribute to the scale of the trade. Large volumes of illicitly felled timber are transported by road on trucks towards the Freeport of Monrovia, and to a lesser extent Buchanan Port, for export, predominantly towards China and Asia more generally. These operations undermine the legal timber trade, erode state revenues and are linked to other criminal markets through their shared logistics and financial flows. Illegal logging has sharply expanded in recent years, and poses an enormous threat to biodiversity in the country.

Fauna crimes are also widespread in Liberia, with the country acting as both a source and transit hub for wildlife trafficking. Illegal hunting and trade in bushmeat are prevalent, including the capture and sale of critically endangered species such as pangolins, primates and certain birds. The trade is fuelled by the domestic demand for bushmeat, foreign demand for rare species used in traditional medicines, and by economic hardship. Women play a significant role in the bushmeat trade, often in pre-financing activities, and supplying hunters with ammunition. Illegal wildlife products are often concealed in goods such as charcoal and rice, and smuggled using informal land crossings and maritime routes. Exports, often to Asia, are sent via Monrovia, using air and maritime routes. This was highlighted in 2024 when significant volumes of pangolin scales were seized in the capital, and periodic arrests were made in relation to chimpanzee trafficking. Key smuggling hubs include the south-eastern border with Côte d'Ivoire and Bushrod Island near the capital. The domestic pet trade and local fishing practices also contribute to the pressure on protected species. Liberia is particularly vulnerable to illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, which has severely degraded the country's marine biodiversity.

Non-renewable resource crimes, particularly involving gold and diamond smuggling, are pervasive in Liberia and deeply rooted in the informal economy. Artisanal and small-scale mining is widespread and largely unregulated, especially in remote forested areas, including protected zones. Government oversight is minimal due to logistical and resource constraints, which allows illegal mining to flourish in places like River Gee, Gbarpolu and Sapo National Park. The sector involves a mix of local and foreign actors, including miners from Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, as well as Asian and Lebanese nationals. These mines often operate with expired licenses or have informal agreements with local authorities. The diamond trade is allegedly dominated by well-connected Lebanese families linked to international markets such as Belgium and the UAE, and who are suspected of engaging in broader illicit financial flows. The illicit mining market affects both legal mining operations and the environment, contributing to deforestation, habitat destruction and water pollution. Liberia has also been implicated in the smuggling of sanctioned petroleum products.

DRUGS

Heroin trafficking in Liberia exists within a broader context of regional drug flows and domestic drug consumption. Though Liberia is not a major hub, it functions as a minor transit point and a site of local heroin use. The market is linked to transnational criminal networks which use complex smuggling routes and methods.

The cocaine market in Liberia is expanding, in line with regional trends. Regional actors – most prominently Nigerian and Bissau-Guinean networks – are key players, and state-embedded actors are suspected of benefiting from the trade. In some cases, smugglers have exploited legitimate import channels, such as frozen food shipments, to conceal cocaine. Liberia serves as a logistics and redistribution hub on routes from Latin America towards Europe. Local consumption is reported to be increasing, particularly in the form of crack, although it is still lower than for synthetic drugs.

Cannabis is widely consumed and locally cultivated in Liberia. Although it remains illegal, enforcement is generally lax, with only occasional operations to target suspected traffickers. Liberia functions as a transit country for the rest of West Africa, with its porous borders enabling cannabis smuggling alongside more dangerous substances. Some cannabis on the domestic market is cultivated in neighbouring Sierra Leone and is trafficked using informal border crossings.

The synthetic drug market in Liberia is expanding sharply, with particular concern around 'kush', a drug consisting of synthetic cannabinoids or nitazenes (potent synthetic opioids), that emerged in the country in 2021. Kush is predominantly brought in from Sierra Leone and is widely consumed among young people. Tramadol and codeine are also widely available, imported overland from neighbouring states and directly by sea. The market is transnational, involving local and foreign actors, but relies on informal networks rather than centralized control. The accelerated spread of kush and other synthetic drugs in Liberia presents a major risk to development in the country.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Cyber-dependent crimes in Liberia are facilitated by the country's fragmented cyber infrastructure and weak enforcement. Criminal actors range from individual hackers to loosely organized groups capable of executing website attacks and account breaches. These activities often involve the sale or misuse of personal data and digital credentials, with varying levels of technical sophistication. A lack of resources and poor public education, combined with outdated or unenforced legal frameworks, allow cybercriminals to operate with relative impunity in the country.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crimes in Liberia are fragmented but systemic, with high levels of perceived corruption and several documented cases of public sector malfeasance. Corruption scandals involving senior officials have highlighted the pervasiveness of corruption among state institutions in Liberia, with indictments for financial misconduct, embezzlement and misuse of public funds. International sanctions have been imposed in recent years targeting government figures accused of taking bribes, embezzling funds and using their positions to influence political decisions for personal gain. The impact of financial crimes is significant. It undermines public trust and diverts critical resources away from development. Monrovia's counterfeit currency market, led mostly by Fulani and some Lebanese traders, is also a major issue – driven by the ease of converting fake Liberian dollars into US dollars through banks and foreign exchange bureaus in the region. Despite limited data, it is clear that fake Liberian dollars remain widespread, weakening the state's control over exchange rates.

Criminal actors

Liberia does not have a consolidated presence of traditional mafia-style groups, although some community-based youth gangs in Monrovia have exhibited forms of structured organization. These gangs, often based within local neighbourhoods, have sometimes adopted hierarchies modelled on wartime command structures and international gang culture. Many groups have taken their names from foreign gangs, including those in Europe, the US, or violent extremist groups in Africa such as Boko Haram. Their operations span theft, armed robbery, extortion and facilitation of both drug trafficking and human trafficking. While these groups primarily rely on machetes and knives, some acquire firearms to enhance their status and operational capacity. However, the criminal activities of such gangs have reportedly decreased, with expanding drug use – particularly of kush – undermining their hierarchies and levels of organization.

Criminal networks in Liberia are generally composed of youths connected by ethnic, familial or wartime ties, and most members are Liberian nationals. Although they typically operate on an opportunistic basis with minimal formal structure, successful tactics are often replicated by other gangs, contributing to a perception of organized behaviour. The more efficient networks are smaller and more targeted in their approach, sometimes enjoying support from state actors. These networks maintain a broad geographical presence, affecting various parts of the country, including the capital, Monrovia, border areas and mining regions. Transnational connections are evident, particularly in human, non-renewable resource and drug trafficking, where collaborations have been identified with actors from across West Africa and beyond. Although specific group names are not consistently documented, individuals involved in arms smuggling and other illicit activities indicate the presence of sophisticated criminal links. These networks also interact with private-sector actors, enabling a wider range of operations that cut across regulatory jurisdictions.

State-embedded actors in Liberia play a significant and detrimental role in sustaining and profiting from organized crime. Across multiple levels of governance, officials have been implicated in drug trafficking, illegal logging and various other forms of corruption. Furthermore, reports of extortion by public officials reflect systemic abuse of power for personal gain. State-embedded actors have also been accused of facilitating illicit activity, and diminishing state revenues, by granting concessions and misappropriating natural resources. Corruption has compromised the credibility of public institutions such as the police, legislature and executive. Several Liberian officials have also been sanctioned in recent years for alleged corruption and human rights violations. A scandal involving senior figures in the government and the Financial Intelligence Agency (FIA) in 2024 resulted in upheaval within the leadership and undermined public trust in the agency. These developments underscore the entrenched nature of state complicity in organized crime and its impact on public trust and institutional effectiveness.

Foreign actors are entrenched in Liberia's organized crime landscape, particularly within drug trafficking, illegal mining, timber smuggling and counterfeit goods markets. Nationals from Nigeria, Guinea-Bissau, Lebanon, Brazil, Portugal, India and China have been implicated in criminal operations that span both urban and rural areas. Both Lebanese and Chinese-owned firms have also faced accusations of labour exploitation and abuse. Collaboration between foreign and domestic criminal elements appears common, with foreign actors often leveraging their legitimate business operations to conceal illicit activity.

Private-sector actors in Liberia play a central role in facilitating organized crime, especially in smuggling, customs evasion, illegal logging and the extractive industries. These actors exploit weaknesses in import/export procedures to under-declare the quantities of goods, smuggle high-value items such as cocaine, evade tax obligations and extract resources far beyond the licensed allowance. Despite existing transparency regulations in the extractive sector, compliance is weak, allowing illegal exploitation to persist. Through their actions, private-sector actors significantly undermine state revenue collection and contribute to the entrenchment of illicit financial practices in the broader economy.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Liberia's political leadership has had both advances and setbacks in addressing organized crime. The peaceful transfer of power following a contentious election in October 2023 was a reflection of its democratic stability. The previous administration was marred by allegations of corruption, financial mismanagement and weak institutions, including the removal of tenure for some officials in oversight roles and the appointment of underqualified political allies. The new administration, on the other hand, has pledged greater transparency. However, entrenched corruption and institutional fragility continue to hinder effective governance. Public trust in political institutions is low, and efforts to combat organized crime have not been prioritized. Reports of political violence, kidnappings and fraud persist, alongside limited government investment in prevention measures. Officials have been implicated in trafficking and extortion, and some are believed to benefit from drug trafficking. Although the peaceful handover of power demonstrates a degree of political maturity, instability is evident in multiple indicators.

Government transparency and accountability therefore remains a significant challenge for Liberia. Weakened accountability mechanisms under the previous administration and endemic corruption in public institutions have led to systemic issues. The current administration has made anti-corruption a central theme, launching a task force on asset recovery and implementing audits of financial institutions. However, there is still widespread scepticism over the ability of these mechanisms to enact lasting change. Previous scandals involving senior officials have eroded public confidence. Many government officials have failed to declare assets as mandated, and the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act remains limited. Some anti-corruption legislation and international transparency initiatives have been introduced, but enforcement is uneven.

Liberia has made moderate progress in enhancing international cooperation, particularly through the ratification and implementation of key international conventions on organized crime, arms control and human trafficking. The country is a signatory to the three major drug control treaties and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons. Legal reforms have aligned domestic legislation with international obligations, such as amending firearms control laws in accordance with the Arms Trade Treaty. Liberia's collaboration with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime under the West Africa Coast Initiative has strengthened the capacity of national law enforcement agencies and promoted cross-border cooperation. International bodies have supported efforts to improve border management and address the smuggling of individuals. Nevertheless, concerns about corruption in Liberian law enforcement and public institutions have created hesitancy among foreign partners to share sensitive information. Liberia's engagement in regional initiatives addressing environmental crimes and cybersecurity illustrates its broader commitment, though its dependence on foreign donors limits the sustainability of such efforts.

Liberia's national policy and legislative framework addressing organized crime has expanded in recent years, with significant reforms in arms control, drug policy and human trafficking legislation. Key developments include updates to anti-trafficking laws, firearms controls as well as guidelines for artisanal miners. However, gaps remain in addressing migrant smuggling and ensuring consistency with international human rights instruments. Liberia's drug control regime continues to favour penalties for people who use drugs over traffickers, contributing to unequal justice outcomes. Although laws criminalizing various aspects of organized crime exist, their enforcement is constrained by systemic corruption and institutional capacity limitations.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Liberia's judiciary faces profound challenges in addressing organized crime, despite some targeted reforms and external support. Judicial processes are hampered by corruption, limited capacity and inefficiency. Courts suffer from personnel shortages, including insufficient numbers of prosecutors and public defenders, which contributes to delays and backlogs. Public confidence in the judicial system is low. Prison conditions are similarly problematic, with overcrowding, inadequate infrastructure and corruption among prison personnel. High numbers of pretrial detainees' reports of arbitrary arrests further undermine the credibility of the Liberian justice system. Bail processes are vulnerable to abuse, and prolonged periods of pretrial detention often exceed final sentences.

Law enforcement agencies – including the Liberia Drug Enforcement Agency and the Liberia National Police – are active in combating organized crime but face structural and operational limitations, including resource constraints and inadequate training. Public trust in law enforcement remains low. Despite these challenges, the government has supported specialized law enforcement units and sought international cooperation to build capacity. The establishment of community policing initiatives and partnerships with foreign agencies has enhanced intelligence-sharing capabilities. The agencies' collaboration with Interpol and participation in regional programmes reflect these efforts.

Liberia's territorial integrity is compromised by its porous borders and the state's limited capacity to monitor or secure entry points. The government has attempted to reinforce security, particularly along the border with Guinea, in response to regional instability. Joint security operations with neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire have sought to address cross-border violence and smuggling. However, vast stretches of land and coastal waters remain vulnerable to trafficking and the attentions of transnational organized crime. Maritime vulnerabilities are especially acute, as coastguard units face equipment and staffing shortages. These gaps in territorial control facilitate the movement of arms, drugs and smuggled people, undermining broader security efforts.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Liberia has taken steps to strengthen its anti-money laundering (AML) framework, including by adopting a multi-year strategy and completing a national risk assessment. The Financial Intelligence Agency has received positive evaluations for its analysis and was accepted into the Egmont Group in 2024, which has enabled better international cooperation on financial intelligence. Despite this progress, enforcement remains limited. Law enforcement agencies have not consistently integrated financial intelligence into their investigations, and are often hampered by political interference and corruption. Capacity constraints in the judiciary and limited investigative resources further restrict the application of AML laws. Moreover, limited transparency in financial records, inadequate training and a lack of specialized investigative tools exacerbate these challenges. Although mechanisms exist to combat money laundering, their practical impact is constrained by systemic issues.

Liberia's economic regulatory capacity is marked by significant weaknesses, stemming from systemic corruption, a fragile legal framework and a largely informal economy. While the government has attempted to modernize the regulatory landscape and support key industries, its regulatory enforcement is inconsistent and frequently undermined by bribery and informal practices. Weak protection of property rights and limited access to judicial recourse have disincentivized legitimate business operations. The Central Bank of Liberia's oversight capacity is limited. High levels of corruption in regulatory institutions continue to deter investment from foreign businesses which are bound by international compliance standards. Although Liberia possesses substantial natural resources, including timber, rubber and minerals, its business environment remains challenging. The regulations around cross-border trade are complex and costly to navigate, increasing the burden on legitimate economic activity. Informal practices pervade the business sector, with many regulators accepting kickbacks in exchange for favourable treatment, further weakening institutional authority and encouraging illicit business operations.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Victim and witness support in Liberia is underdeveloped, despite some initiatives aimed at improving services for those affected by organized crime. Shelters and assistance programs are available but limited in scope and capacity, with many lacking basic amenities. Services for male victims and those with disabilities are largely unavailable. Although the government has renovated some shelters and provides intermittent logistical support to victims during legal proceedings, there is no formal policy for long-term protection or alternatives to repatriation. Training for law enforcement and social services personnel remains inadequate, and awareness of referral mechanisms is low, contributing to poor victim identification rates. Witness protection is similarly weak, with short-term safeguards available only in select cases. Budgetary constraints and insufficient political prioritization have hindered the expansion of these services. Victims of drug abuse and other marginalized groups face social stigma and are often discouraged from seeking legal recourse or support.

There are prevention strategies targeting organized crime in Liberia, but these are also hampered by corruption, resource constraints and sporadic implementation. National strategies have been adopted in areas such as human trafficking, money laundering and arms control, and the country participates in awareness initiatives supported by international actors. The country also maintains an anti-trafficking hotline and conducts radio campaigns in multiple languages to raise awareness. Despite this, law enforcement and judicial personnel often lack the training and resources needed to act effectively, and major operations frequently depend on foreign assistance. While tools for tracking the logging supply chain and other new technologies represent significant innovation in prevention measures, their adoption is uneven. Budgetary limitations and a reliance on donor funding further reduce the sustainability and effectiveness of these measures.

Liberia benefits from a relatively active civil society sector, which plays a role in responding to organized crime, particularly through advocacy, awareness campaigns and victim support. Civil society organizations are instrumental in areas such as anti-trafficking, environmental protection and government transparency. Media outlets and watchdog groups have exposed corrupt practices, prompting government responses. Despite these successes, challenges persist. Journalists face intimidation and legal harassment, as exemplified by the closure of the country's largest independent media group for 40 days in 2023. While press freedom indicators have slightly improved, a climate of self-censorship and fear continues to limit investigative reporting. Non-governmental organizations operate with relative independence, though their reach and capacity are uneven across regions. The government has shown some willingness to collaborate with civil society, particularly in areas tied to donor-funded initiatives. However, systemic corruption, limited funding and political interference remain barriers to the full realization of Liberian civil society's potential to boost the country's resilience to organized crime.