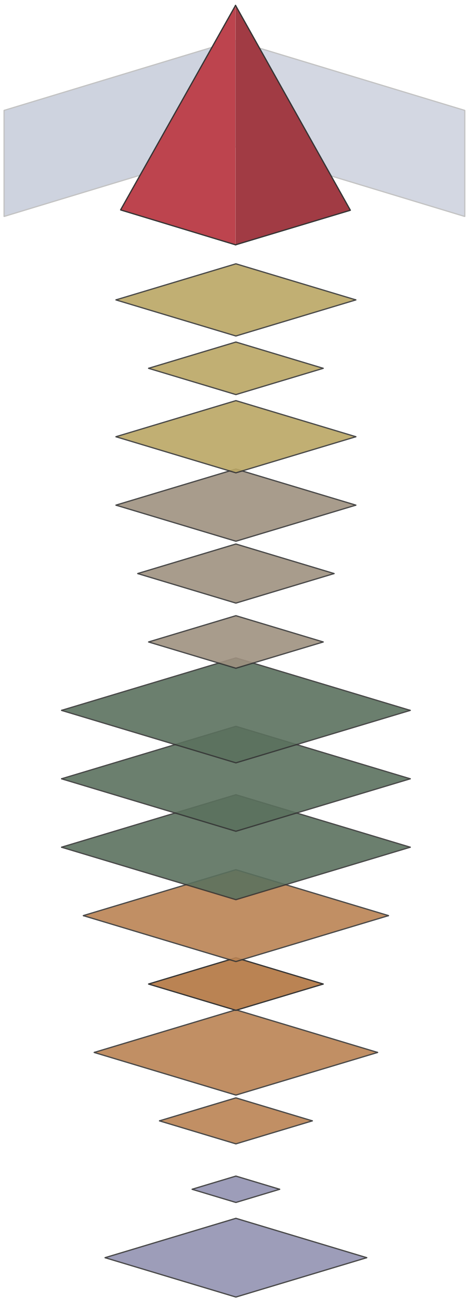
Africa
ORGANISED CRIME
INDEX 2025

enact
Enhancing Africa's response to transnational organised crime

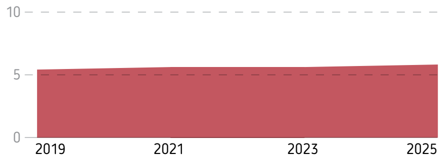
This project is funded by the European Union

MADAGASCAR



5.83 ↗0.25
CRIMINALITY SCORE

19th of 54 African countries ↗
3rd of 13 Southern African countries -



CRIMINAL MARKETS	5.47	↗0.20
HUMAN TRAFFICKING	5.50	↘0.50
HUMAN SMUGGLING	4.00	↗1.00
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	5.50	0.00
ARMS TRAFFICKING	5.50	↘0.50
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	4.50	↗0.50
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	4.00	0.00
FLORA CRIMES	8.00	0.00
FAUNA CRIMES	8.00	↗0.50
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	8.00	0.00
HEROIN TRADE	7.00	0.00
COCAINE TRADE	4.00	↗1.00
CANNABIS TRADE	6.50	0.00
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	3.50	↗1.00
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	2.00	0.00
FINANCIAL CRIMES	6.00	0.00

CRIMINAL ACTORS	6.20	↗0.30
MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	5.00	↗0.50
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	6.00	↗1.00
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	8.00	0.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	6.50	0.00
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	5.50	0.00

ISS INSTITUTE FOR SECURITY STUDIES

INTERPOL

GLOBAL INITIATIVE AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

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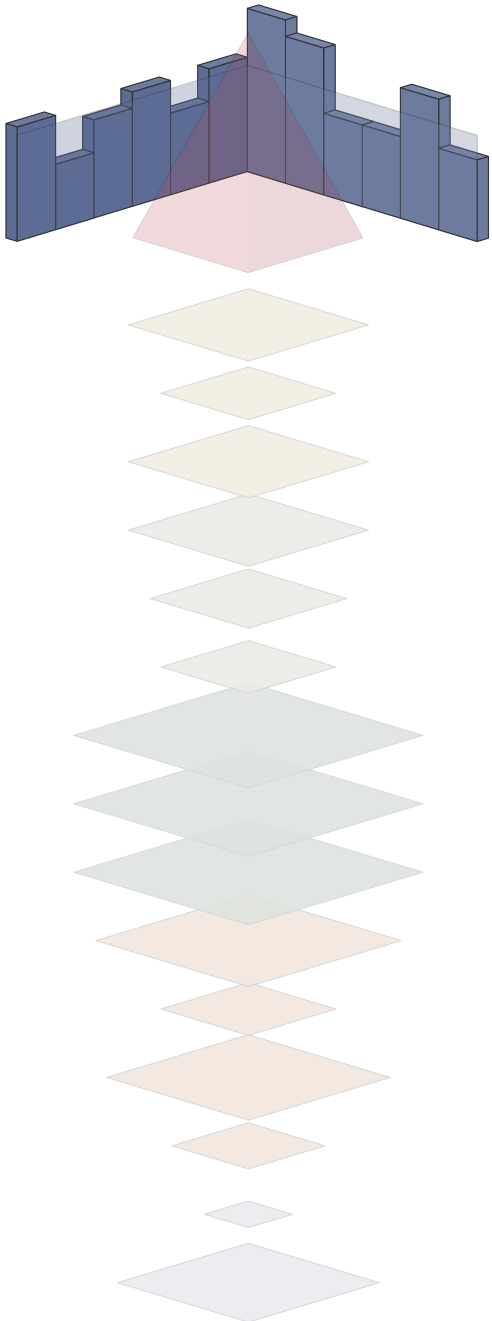
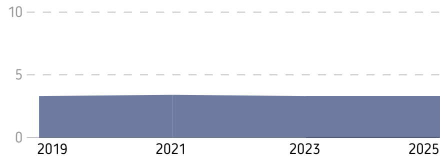


3.25 ↘0.08
RESILIENCE SCORE

32nd of 54 African countries
9th of 13 Southern African countries



POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	3.50	↘0.50
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	2.00	0.00
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	3.00	0.00
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	3.50	0.00
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	2.50	0.00
LAW ENFORCEMENT	3.50	↘0.50
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	5.00	↘0.50
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	4.50	0.00
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	2.50	↗0.50
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	2.50	0.00
PREVENTION	4.00	0.00
NON-STATE ACTORS	2.50	0.00

CRIMINALITY

Criminal markets

PEOPLE

Madagascar is a source and a destination country for human trafficking, sustained by economic disparities, weak enforcement and systemic corruption. Victims, particularly children from rural and coastal areas, continue to be exploited, despite government interventions. Tourist areas and urban centres are also hotspots for the exploitation of children and young women. Trafficked individuals are forced into sex work, domestic servitude, and labour in mining, agriculture and textile production. Internationally, Malagasy women are particularly vulnerable to trafficking for domestic servitude in western Asian countries, including Lebanon, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Many victims are lured under false pretences with promises of legitimate employment opportunities abroad, only to be subjected to exploitative conditions. Reports indicate that informal placement agencies and recruitment networks play a key role in facilitating human trafficking, often exploiting legal loopholes and weak enforcement measures to move victims domestically and internationally. Cases of forced labour often involve passport confiscation, threats of violence and withholding of wages, making escape difficult for victims.

Human smuggling is a transnational issue, and Madagascar is primarily a source country for migrants seeking employment abroad. It plays a key role along the eastern migration route, particularly towards Mayotte, an appealing destination due to its status as part of EU territory. The smuggling process is often organized and facilitated by networks operating through informal placement agencies, which manage the illicit movement of individuals – predominantly women – to Gulf states and beyond. Economically, this market generates substantial profits driven by strong external demand, particularly from Gulf states seeking domestic workers. The proceeds benefit both domestic and foreign actors. Many smuggling operations rely on forged documents and corrupt officials to navigate restrictions, despite prohibitions on labour export.

Extortion and protection racketeering are prevalent, though the extent of these markets is difficult to quantify due to limited data. Criminal groups, particularly the dahalo armed militias, engage in widespread kidnapping and coercion. Kidnappings have been widely documented in recent years, with ransom demands reportedly rising in value. Reports indicate that in certain districts, such as Ankazobe in Analamanga Region, many kidnappings occur each month, with high ransom demands.

TRADE

Arms trafficking is closely linked to the operations of the dahalo, which use illicit weapons to enforce territorial control and conduct cattle raids. Recent seizures indicate a steady flow of firearms, including automatic weapons and military-grade ammunition. Arms are primarily smuggled into Madagascar but their origins are unclear. Law enforcement operations have occasionally disrupted arms shipments but the persistent availability of illicit weapons indicates ongoing supply. The market for counterfeit goods is moderate, particularly in urban centres where a significant percentage of the population buy counterfeit everyday items, including sunglasses, pens, watches and pharmaceuticals. Weak enforcement and limited public awareness about intellectual property violations have allowed the counterfeit market to thrive.

The illicit trade in excise goods, particularly cigarettes, persists due to high taxation and weak border enforcement. Smugglers exploit maritime routes to bring contraband into Madagascar and corruption among customs officials facilitates this trade. The country's high smoking rate sustains demand, ensuring the continued profitability of the market despite occasional crackdowns.

ENVIRONMENT

Madagascar's flora crimes market is significant, driven by high international demand for rare plants, particularly rosewood. Despite export bans, illegal logging and trafficking remain lucrative due to corruption and weak regulatory enforcement. Criminal networks, colluding with state-embedded actors, facilitate the movement of timber through clandestine offshore transfers. The scale of this trade is pervasive, and authorities continue to seize shipments bound for Asian markets. Additionally, demand has grown for endemic plant species, such as dwarf baobab trees, leading to increased trafficking incidents. Recent reports suggest the lucrative vanilla trade has drawn growing criminal interest, and there are concerns about the potential rise of cartels and associated violence. Reports also indicate that escalating vanilla prices may be incentivizing illicit activity. The fauna crimes market is equally significant, particularly concerning the smuggling of endemic species such as lemurs, tortoises, seahorses and black corals. Seizures in international transit points, particularly Thailand, underscore Madagascar's role as a major source country for wildlife trafficking. Corruption, inadequate airport scanning infrastructure and persistent demand in Asia contribute to this trade. Criminal networks involved in fauna crimes often operate with flora traffickers, using the same illicit supply chains. Non-renewable resource crimes involve the illegal extraction and smuggling of precious stones, gold and sand. This sector is deeply entangled in a network of related crimes, including arms smuggling, human trafficking and various forms of corruption. Moreover, this illicit market is sustained by weak governance and collusion between local actors and foreign buyers, and state-embedded figures play key roles in facilitating operations. Gold smuggling is rampant and continues to thrive despite the introduction of laws aimed at easing the legal export of the precious metal. Reports indicate that criminal networks use established smuggling routes to move gold, often concealing shipments in legitimate cargo.

DRUGS

Madagascar is a notable transit hub and destination for heroin. The country is a crucial link in the southern route for heroin trafficking, shipments moving from east Africa to Indian Ocean nations. From there, heroin is often repackaged and distributed to destinations such as Seychelles and Mauritius. Domestic consumption has risen, particularly in urban areas, shifting Madagascar from being primarily a transit point to an emerging hub for drug use. The market is largely controlled by sophisticated criminal networks, including state-embedded actors and foreign criminal groups. These networks exploit weak government structures to facilitate the smuggling of heroin alongside other illicit drugs.

The cocaine market appears to be growing. Madagascar is increasingly being used as a key node in the global cocaine distribution network for shipments destined for Asia and Europe, leveraging its strategic geographic position. The illicit cocaine trade is intertwined with other trafficking networks, making enforcement efforts complex.

The cannabis market is entrenched and widespread cultivation makes it a key source for domestic use and regional distribution. The country has become a primary supplier for neighbouring Indian Ocean islands, leveraging its geographic position as a strategic transit hub for illicit drug trafficking. Production is particularly prominent in rural areas, where cannabis cultivation is often an integral part of local economies. Social acceptance of cannabis use in some communities has contributed to the trade's resilience despite periodic government crackdowns. Organized criminal groups facilitate the trade, ensuring that cannabis continues to be a significant illicit commodity in Madagascar's broader narcotics economy.

Synthetic drug trafficking is an emerging issue and Madagascar is a key trans-shipment point for synthetic cannabinoids, methamphetamine and synthetic precursors. Domestic consumption is relatively low but law enforcement has recorded a steady rise in seizures, indicating increased regional trafficking activity. The country's strategic location has made it an attractive transit hub for traffickers moving synthetic drugs in the region. Trafficking networks involved in the trade appear to collaborate with overseas groups for international distribution and with lower-level local networks to supply the domestic market.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Cybercrime in Madagascar is relatively limited due to low internet penetration. The high cost of internet access, exacerbated by the recent removal of subsidies on social media platforms, has further restricted digital connectivity. As a result, the scope of cyber-dependent crimes is small compared to other forms of organized crime. In 2024, Madagascar was linked to an international law enforcement operation targeting phishing and ransomware, suggesting a link (albeit a limited one) to cyber-criminal activity.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Madagascar struggles with widespread financial crimes, including tax evasion, corruption and fraudulent financial activities. These illicit practices result in significant losses of government revenue and facilitate broader criminal operations. Tax evasion is a persistent issue, particularly among businesses and high-income individuals who exploit regulatory gaps to avoid paying dues. Fraudulent procurement schemes, often involving inflated contracts and misallocation of public resources, are widespread, exacerbating financial mismanagement. There has also been an increase in cyber-enabled financial crimes, including credit card fraud and unauthorized online transactions.

Criminal actors

Madagascar's primary mafia-style groups are the dahalo, organized criminal entities predominantly involved in cattle rustling. Though not fitting the conventional mafia model, the dahalo operate under a structured leadership system, coordinating their activities across many regions. Over the years they have expanded beyond livestock theft, engaging in violent acts such as kidnappings, targeted killings and extortion. Equipped with military-grade firearms, the groups maintain a persistent and influential presence. Their influence extends beyond criminal activities, affecting local economies and political dynamics, particularly in rural areas where they maintain strong ethnic and social ties.

Criminal networks in Madagascar play a dominant role in various illicit markets, demonstrating adaptability and resilience over time. These decentralized groups lack a rigid hierarchy but maintain extensive influence across many sectors, including human trafficking, arms trafficking, flora and fauna crimes, non-renewable resource exploitation and drug trafficking. They operate across different regions, strategically adjusting their activities to the geographic and economic landscape. Criminal networks involved in wildlife trafficking operate in areas rich in biodiversity, particularly where rare and protected species are found. Similarly, illegal mining and gemstone smuggling networks are concentrated in regions known for their mineral wealth, where weak oversight enables illicit extraction and trade. Many of these networks engage in transnational crimes, using Madagascar as a source and a transit hub for illicit goods. Their international reach is evident in human smuggling operations, as well as the trafficking of precious stones and endangered species. These groups tend to employ lower levels of violence than criminal organizations in other regions. Their ability to function in deeply entrenched corruption networks enables them to evade law enforcement, embedding themselves in Madagascar's socio-economic systems.

Corruption among state-embedded actors is a key enabler of organized crime. Government officials, law enforcement personnel and local administrators have been implicated in crimes such as human trafficking, arms trafficking and the illegal exploitation of fauna and non-renewable resources. Many state actors facilitate these activities by issuing falsified documents, providing protection for smuggling operations and obstructing law enforcement efforts. Substantial financial losses were reported in recent years due to corruption, and misappropriation of public funds is a major concern. Investigations have implicated a range of officials, including senior authorities and public agents, in illicit financial activities.

Foreign criminal actors maintain a significant presence in Madagascar, engaging in a range of illicit activities. Their influence is particularly strong in the trafficking of flora and fauna, non-renewable resources and narcotics. Criminal elements from France, Italy and southeast Asia play a notable role in these markets, often working in collaboration with local networks. Southeast Asian actors, in particular, are heavily involved in illegal wildlife trade and precious stone smuggling. Child sex tourism is a major concern, with western Europeans, especially from France and Italy, frequently exploiting vulnerable children. Foreign actors from Nigeria, South Africa, Mauritius, Guinea and Comoros are implicated in drug trafficking, further integrating Madagascar into transnational narcotics supply chains.

The role of private sector actors in Madagascar's organized crime landscape is notable. Reports have indicated an increase in illicit financial flows in recent years, primarily driven by tax fraud, money laundering and other financial crimes in the private sector. These findings highlight how certain businesses exploit regulatory loopholes and weak enforcement to facilitate and benefit from organized crime. Accusations of corruption are prevalent and some private entities allegedly work with public officials to evade taxes, manipulate customs processes and gain unfair advantages in public contracts.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Madagascar's government has faced persistent challenges in effectively addressing organized crime, largely due to corruption, insufficient resources and limited enforcement capacity. Many agencies exist to combat specific forms of crime but their efforts are often undermined by political instability and the discontinuation of key initiatives. The dismantling of regulatory frameworks pertaining to prevalent criminal markets, such as drug trafficking and human trafficking, exemplifies the lack of sustained commitment to combating organized crime. Despite these systemic weaknesses, Madagascar has received recognition for environmental crime enforcement efforts. The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species acknowledged Madagascar's actions against tortoise trafficking and its broader efforts in forestry crime prevention. The security situation, particularly in rural areas, underscores the government's limited capacity to combat organized crime. The dahalo pose a major threat and violent incidents demonstrate the state's inability to assert control over all regions. Madagascar's political landscape is fragile. The November 2023 presidential election, marked by low voter turnout and an opposition boycott, reinforced concerns about political instability and lack of public trust in the electoral process.

The government transparency and accountability framework in Madagascar has seen little improvement and corruption undermines governance structures. Although the country has established independent institutions to counter systemic corruption, these agencies face significant challenges in tackling high-level corruption. Investigations primarily focus on lower-ranking officials, while senior figures implicated in corruption often evade prosecution. The lack of transparency in government financial management exacerbates governance challenges. Reports indicate that budgetary processes are opaque, and there is frequent executive interference in judicial and audit institutions. A notable example involved the suppression of four audit reports detailing the use of public funds allocated for pandemic response efforts, reinforcing concerns about systemic opacity. Furthermore, the weak enforcement of asset declaration requirements for public officials has limited efforts to curb financial misconduct at the highest levels of government. Public trust in government institutions has continued to erode, contributing to a rise in incidents of mob justice and community-led enforcement actions. This decline in confidence is fuelled by the lack of independence among anti-corruption and human rights bodies, which are susceptible to political influence.

Madagascar has ratified key international treaties addressing transnational organized crime and maintains several extradition and mutual legal assistance agreements. However, nearly all its organized crime prevention efforts rely on international donors and external funding. The government collaborates with global partners, including CITES and regional organizations, to address environmental crime, particularly in relation to rosewood trafficking. Madagascar is also a signatory to regional anti-trafficking agreements, including an accord aimed at countering human trafficking and migrant smuggling. Despite these commitments, implementation is inconsistent due to resource limitations and governance weaknesses.

Madagascar has enacted legislation targeting various forms of crime, including wildlife trafficking, cybercrime and drug trafficking. However, the legal framework for drug-related offences is outdated and lacks comprehensive provisions to address evolving challenges. Despite the existence of these laws, enforcement has been weak and inconsistent due to limited institutional capacity and systemic corruption, hindering efforts to combat organized crime effectively.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Madagascar's criminal justice system faces significant obstacles, particularly in terms of judicial independence and resource allocation. The judiciary is widely perceived as being influenced by political and private interests and there are reports of judicial decisions being swayed by interference from high-ranking officials and economic elites. Despite calls for greater judicial independence, magistrates and judges are vulnerable to external pressure, which undermines the credibility of the legal system. The judiciary has struggled to effectively prosecute cases related to organized crime, including human trafficking, drug trafficking and environmental offences. Corruption in the judiciary contributes to a culture of impunity, high-level traffickers and corrupt officials rarely facing legal consequences. Madagascar's prison system suffers from severe overcrowding and inadequate conditions. Malnutrition is a significant issue, and access to healthcare and psychological support in prisons is limited. The government has tried to establish new prison facilities but access to improved conditions is uneven and favouritism plays a role in determining inmate placement. This systemic corruption exacerbates broader human rights concerns in the detention system.

Law enforcement efforts against organized crime are constrained by corruption, limited resources and internal inefficiencies. Smuggling of timber, drugs and firearms flourishes due to the inability of authorities to secure key entry and exit points. Supply reduction strategies dominate the response to drug trafficking and there is little focus on harm reduction or preventive measures. The government's reliance on reactive rather than proactive enforcement has resulted in inconsistent efforts to combat organized crime. Poor coordination among law enforcement agencies, lack of inter-agency data sharing, and weak oversight mechanisms have contributed to systemic inefficiencies. Recent heavy-handed enforcement measures have diminished public trust, as concerns grow over human rights violations and excessive use of force.

Madagascar's territorial integrity is a critical concern, particularly in relation to border control and maritime security. The country's extensive coastline, spanning 5 000 kilometres, presents significant enforcement challenges. The lack of sufficient patrol resources has enabled criminal networks to exploit weak enforcement, particularly in remote coastal regions. Smugglers favour smaller ports such as Vohemar, where minimal law enforcement presence means illicit goods can be moved with ease. Corruption in customs agencies weakens border security, facilitating the illicit export of high-value resources, including rosewood and precious minerals.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Efforts to combat financial crime in Madagascar have been led by its specialized anti-money laundering institution, which has increased the detection of illicit financial flows in recent years. Despite this progress, enforcement challenges remain, judicial capacity is limited and regulatory gaps inhibit effective prosecution. Tax evasion, customs fraud and the laundering of proceeds from illegal mining and resource trafficking undermine economic governance. Madagascar has updated its anti-money laundering framework and aligned certain laws with international standards, but it is still categorized as a moderately high-risk jurisdiction for money laundering.

The economic regulatory environment is weak and a significant portion of the economy operates in the informal sector. High inflation rates and economic instability have complicated regulatory oversight. The banking sector is underdeveloped and low levels of financial inclusion limit formal economic participation. Government tax policies have sought to attract investment, but the dominance of a small group of economic elites over key industries has limited broader economic growth. Corruption in the customs sector undermines regulatory efforts, leading to revenue losses and entrenching illicit financial flows.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Support for victims and witnesses of organized crime is inconsistent in Madagascar. Although the number of government-operated victim support centres has increased, services remain limited outside the capital. Despite the 2014 anti-trafficking law providing for victim restitution, this has yet to be implemented, and courts have denied compensation due to lack of documentation. NGOs and international organizations continue to provide most support services, as government-run programmes remain underfunded.

Crime prevention strategies primarily revolve around awareness campaigns and international cooperation, and there is limited emphasis on proactive enforcement and structural interventions. The country relies heavily on partnerships with NGOs and international organizations, which provide technical expertise and financial support for crime prevention initiatives. The government has implemented restrictions on labour migration to Gulf countries and strengthened passport regulations for women travelling abroad to curb human trafficking, but enforcement is inconsistent. Efforts to combat flora and fauna-related crimes include community-based awareness initiatives that encourage local citizens to report illegal activities. However, these measures are often hampered by economic hardships, resource constraints and a lack of institutional capacity, limiting their overall effectiveness.

Non-state actors play a crucial role in shaping resilience to organized crime. Civil society organizations, including human rights groups, anti-corruption watchdogs and environmental advocacy groups, have contributed to exposing criminal activities and raising public awareness. However, their efforts are frequently hindered by government-imposed restrictions, legal challenges and security threats against activists. The media landscape also faces significant constraints, and independent journalists are subject to intimidation and legal repercussions when reporting on corruption and organized crime. Access to information has become increasingly difficult for media outlets, particularly those perceived as critical of the government. These restrictions have undermined media independence and the overall quality of investigative journalism, limiting public access to crucial information on organized crime and corruption. Despite these challenges, civil society organizations play a vital role in denouncing illicit activities, calling for policy reforms and supporting law enforcement and prevention initiatives. However, the government's engagement with these groups is limited, communication between authorities and civil society actors frequently being obstructed by political interference and conflicting interests.