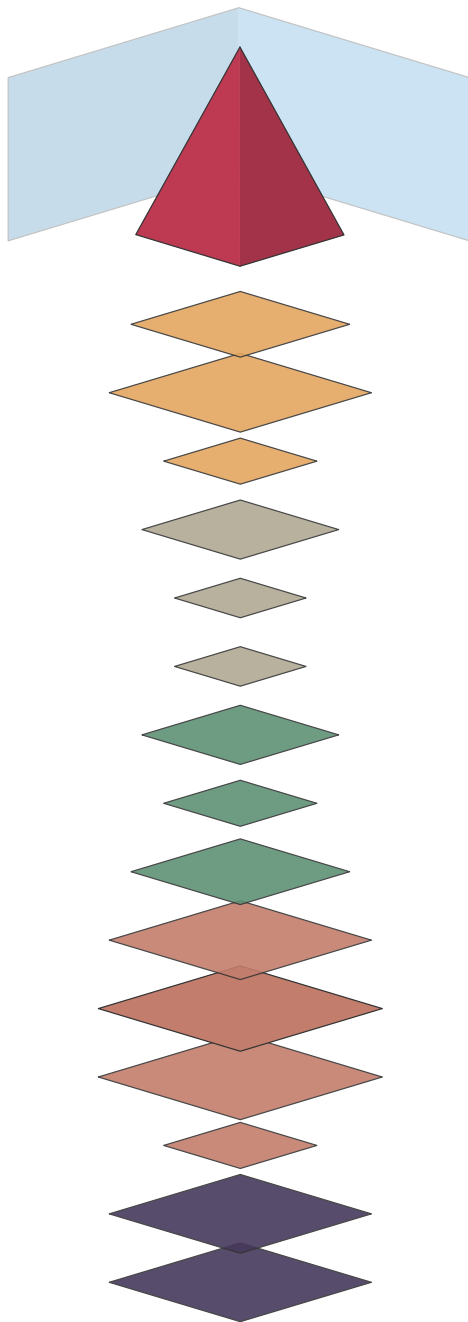




ALBANIA



5.17

CRIMINALITY SCORE

87th of 193 countries

15th of 44 European countries

9th of 17 Central & Eastern European countries



CRIMINAL MARKETS

4.83

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	5.00
HUMAN SMUGGLING	6.00
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	3.50
ARMS TRAFFICKING	4.50
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	3.00
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	3.00
FLORA CRIMES	4.50
FAUNA CRIMES	3.50
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	5.00
HEROIN TRADE	6.00
COCAINE TRADE	6.50
CANNABIS TRADE	6.50
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	3.50
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	6.00
FINANCIAL CRIMES	6.00



CRIMINAL ACTORS

5.50

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	6.50
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	7.00
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	6.50
FOREIGN ACTORS	3.00
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	4.50

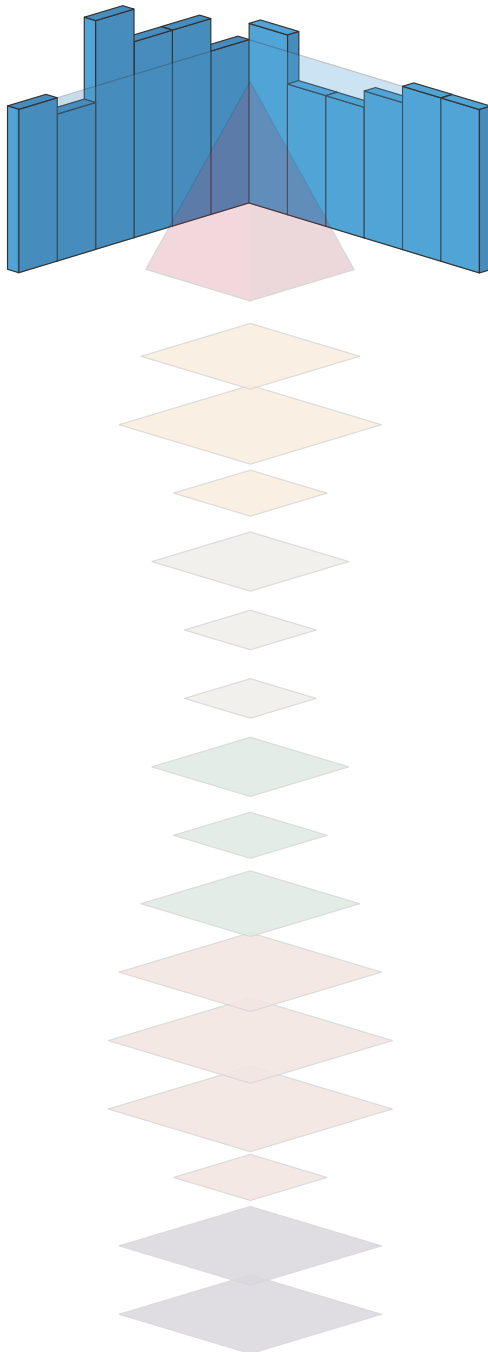


5.13

RESILIENCE SCORE



 **ALBANIA**





 **5.13**
RESILIENCE SCORE

84th of 193 countries
34th of 44 European countries
9th of 17 Central & Eastern European countries

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	5.00
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	4.50
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	7.00
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	6.00
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	6.00
LAW ENFORCEMENT	5.00
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	5.50
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	4.00
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	4.00
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	4.50
PREVENTION	5.00
NON-STATE ACTORS	5.00

 **5.17**
CRIMINALITY SCORE

 CRIMINAL MARKETS	4.83
 CRIMINAL ACTORS	5.50



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CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

Albania is a source, transit, and destination country for human trafficking. Albanian criminal actors are allegedly responsible for a large number of trafficking victims in Western Europe, especially in the UK, with the majority of women and children transferred from Albania. Sexual exploitation of Albanian victims in Western European countries remains the most prevalent form of this crime. Albania is a destination country for human trafficking, with some irregular migrants from Asia subjected to forced labour and domestic servitude in the country. Domestic trafficking of women and children for sexual exploitation continues, and increases during tourist seasons. There are also reports indicating the exploitation of Roma children in street begging within the country.

Albania is a transit zone for smuggled individuals, asylum seekers, and refugees in the region, especially for individuals smuggled from the Middle East and North Africa who travel through Greece and Montenegro on their way to Western or Northern Europe. However, the number of irregular crossings recorded on this route towards the end of 2022 is slightly lower than previous years because of tighter border controls by Greece. Albanian organised crime groups are involved in international and domestic human smuggling operations in cooperation with human smugglers in surrounding countries, specifically in Western Europe where they have been consolidating their activities. Albania serves as a source country for irregular migration headed for the UK, where an increase in the activity of Albanian criminal groups who are involved in human smuggling has been recorded.

With regards to the extortion and protection-racketeering criminal market, there are reports that extortion is carried out by criminal groups who use compromising materials to target businesspeople and high-level officials. It is alleged that, in some cases, these criminal activities are employed by media companies to extort businesses and high-level state officials.

TRADE

Arms trafficking in Albania remains relatively more limited, than in other Balkan states, as the country is not a producer of weapons or ammunition. Arms from the 1997 civil unrest in Albania are still in circulation, creating the foundation for a limited criminal market in small arms and light weapons (SALWs), and dismantled weapon parts. Many of these SALWs are destined for other European markets, but

some appear to be sold on the domestic market. Arms trafficking routes from Albania to EU countries are either inland, moving north through the Balkans or Greece, or seaborne to Western Europe. Corrupt police and army officers are involved in arms trafficking, either by assisting or playing a leading role in these criminal operations. Illegal modification of convertible weapons as well as the 3D printing of firearms are increasingly being recorded in the country.

Albania is a destination and transit country for counterfeit goods from China and Turkey. It is also a source country, but to a lesser extent. Counterfeit items including clothing, accessories, and makeup can be found in shops and online marketplaces. Furthermore, smuggled and counterfeited pharmaceutical products are increasingly becoming widespread in the country. There are instances of informal cultivation and smuggling of tobacco products, e.g. sometimes Albanian farmers do not report their entire yield and illicitly sell some of the product to domestic or foreign producers in neighbouring countries (mostly Montenegro), but trade in tobacco products and other excise goods remains a negligible criminal market in Albania and has limited bearing on society.

ENVIRONMENT

Albania is a source and transit country for illegal timber in Europe. Illegal logging is particularly widespread in the north-eastern district of Elbasan and the southern district of Vlora. A 10-year export ban was imposed in 2016 and successfully curbed some illegal logging. However, it created opportunities for small, well-organized criminal groups in Kosovo and Montenegro to smuggle illicit timber into and from Albania, causing illegal logging in border areas where the mountainous terrain makes it difficult for the police to contain the activity. Corruption, the shadow economy, and the violence used by organized crime groups to protect the timber business complicate attempts to curb illegal logging. There are instances of smuggling of specific trees from Albania, such as old olive trees, although to a lesser extent. Illegal trade in birds, brown bears, and wolves continues to be a relatively common form of fauna crime in Albania, with many protected species and other wildlife traded online or in physical shops. Furthermore, although a nationwide hunting ban has sought to limit poaching, such activities continue to be prevalent because of the inadequate implementation of this ban. Illicit online trafficking of donkey skin has become widespread in recent years.

The illegal extraction of natural resources, such as oil and chrome, remains an issue. As an oil-producing country, Albania is home to a small but notable market for illegal oil extraction, which is facilitated by corrupt practices

on the part of state officials. While the market itself may not involve major organized crime groups, reports have indicated the presence of organized crime in certain segments of the oil industry that are still under state control. The illicit extraction of stone and marble has also been identified in the Tomorr mountain range, despite its special protected status.

DRUGS

Albania is a transit country for heroin trafficked from Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan through the Balkan route to Europe. Trafficking is undertaken by organized criminal actors who are known to cooperate with other criminal actors involved in the heroin supply chain. Most heroin is trafficked into Albania by land through North Macedonia, but heroin-processing laboratories have been uncovered internally by Albanian police. Despite the continuing role of the country in transnational heroin trade, its local consumption remains limited. Albania is a transit country for cocaine trafficked from Latin America to Europe. Albanian criminal groups involved in the cocaine market in Western Europe carry out trafficking as well as storage and distribution activities across EU countries. Albanian mafia-style groups are known to create Albanian-speaking satellite communities abroad that recruit fellow citizens, with an aim to expand drug trafficking in major cities across the UK, Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany, among others. Albania is also a destination country for cocaine but to a lesser extent because domestic consumption is relatively low.

Albania has been one of the largest producers of cannabis in Europe for at least a decade, making the cannabis market more widespread than other drug markets in the country. However, police intervention, the destruction of plantations, and state efforts to change the business model have caused a drastic decline in cannabis cultivation since 2016. Despite the decline in cannabis production, Albania remains a source country for cannabis specifically for the EU, with sea and land routes being used to traffic the drug. The production of cannabis in the country has shifted from outdoor cultivation to indoor methods. Moreover, Albanian criminal networks are increasingly carrying out the production, processing, and distribution of cannabis in foreign countries such as the UK and Spain. While the synthetic drug market in Albania is the smallest drug market in the country because of the lack of production and low levels of consumption of such drugs, it has been expanding in recent years. Synthetic drugs are imported into Albania primarily from neighbouring countries, such as Serbia and Bulgaria, as well as various EU countries.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Cyber-dependent crimes are prevalent in the country, increasingly targeting private and public sectors and rendering websites and services unavailable. Most common cyber-attacks targeting Albanian infrastructure involve viruses and malware such as Trojan horses and ransomware. Recently, many private companies have been targeted through ransomware and forced to pay fines. Albania is a source country for cyber-dependent crimes in Europe which are carried out by domestic and foreign perpetrators, accounting for more than 10% of all cyber-attacks occurring in Europe. Financial fraud using cryptocurrency trading is on the rise in the country despite the relevant legislations being in place. Crypto activities, largely controlled by well-known organized crime groups, and fraudulent financial cyber-activities are becoming major concerns.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crimes, including telephone scams, tax evasion and VAT fraud, pyramid schemes, embezzlement, misuse of public funds, as well as corruption carried out by criminal organizations, private sector actors, and state-embedded actors are widespread in Albania. These crimes are facilitated by the large informal economy in the country. Technology has enabled sophisticated scamming operations, often involving fraudulent online investment platforms or call centres. Other methods used for fraud are the foreign exchange market and taking advantage of the VAT scheme. Financial crimes, specifically tax evasion carried out by private sector actors, are enabled by corruption in the state administration.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

Even though Albanian mafia-style groups are facilitated by family ties, they are mostly organized in smaller pragmatic and flexible groups with temporary relationships, differing from other major mafia groups such as the Italian mafia. Nonetheless, Albanian groups have a clear structure and members exhibit loyalty to a single leader. These groups are mainly involved in drug trafficking, human smuggling, and human trafficking. Mafia-style groups influence politics and public procurement in the country, especially in towns where they maintain a strong presence. Albanian mafia-style groups are prevalent in other countries, where they have integrated themselves into local criminality. In recent years, Albanian mafia-style groups have gone from providing the Italian mafia with logistical assistance in drug trafficking, to managing the resources and means to run this trade on their own throughout the harbours of Italy and greater Europe. Mafia-style groups in Albania allegedly create smaller, looser criminal networks that gravitate around them. These networks reportedly have a fluid organizational and operational structure with three to four members who take a pragmatic approach by seizing any opportunity for profit. They are responsible for most of the criminal

activity, especially the distribution of narcotics in Albania and Western European countries. They are highly violent but cooperate with corrupt police and judiciary officials as well as with foreign actors, particularly the Italian mafia, including 'Ndrangheta and Sacra Corona Unita as well as Turkish organized crime groups. They are known to have links to Kosovar and Montenegrin criminal networks and have a strong presence in Belgium, the Netherlands, and the UK, among others. There is also evidence that Albanian organized crime groups interact with South and Central American crime groups. Because of socio-economic factors such as the lack of employment and education opportunities in Albania, a worrying trend of youth involvement in day-to-day criminal operations in various roles as part of criminal networks is being observed. Albanian criminal networks continue to be heavily involved in drug trafficking, especially the cannabis trade. They often pose as legal businesses and different members are responsible for specific tasks within the organization, such as securing, transporting, and distributing drugs. These networks are connected by temporary and occasional opportunities for illegal activities, especially human smuggling, hence adapting rapidly to needs and circumstances.

State-embedded actors continue to be heavily involved in Albania's criminal landscape. Members of criminal groups have reportedly been appointed to political positions at

various levels of the state apparatus. Criminal networks are highly embedded in local- and regional-level structures, operate with the police, and receive political protection. Infiltration by organized crime of the state apparatus is evidenced by the protection of drug trafficking through bribery and corruption, specifically among border police. There are allegations indicating high-level state actors' involvement in corrupt transactions. Moreover, politicians reportedly use large criminal groups and networks to control the electoral behaviour of citizens through pressure, blackmail and vote buying.

Private sector actors, specifically ones involved in real estate and tourism, are increasingly linked to organized crime. Furthermore, the increasing informality of the private sector is fuelling the black market and illicit financial flows. Some segments of the financial services industry and some public-private partnerships demonstrate the interwoven nature of the relationship between organized crime and the private sector. Foreign actors function within Albania but are less influential than domestic groups. For example, Turkish crime groups are mainly involved in heroin trafficking, while Italian groups are influential in the southern part of the country. There are reports of Palestinian, Iraqi, Iranian, and Moroccan organized crime groups' involvement in human smuggling in the country.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Even though the trust of most stakeholders was regained following the 2021 elections, political polarization and corruption continue to be key issues in the governance of the country. Albania continues to struggle with criminal influence, which creates mutual dependence between political parties and criminal groups, and which reduces the state's ability to combat organized crime. The transformation and governance of the country is hindered by the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as corruption, informal power held by organized crime groups, and political nepotism. In recent years, efforts have been made to combat corruption in the country by increasing transparency of public service delivery, procurement, and recruitment procedures, as well as public participation in local decision-making. Despite these efforts, high levels of corruption and a lack of transparency in many aspects of public and private life persist. Moreover, prominent political members allegedly take part in corrupt or unethical practices with impunity.

Albania's legal framework on international judicial cooperation in criminal matters is well established, and Albanian law

enforcement has partnered with various institutions at international and regional levels. Albania is a member of INTERPOL and a partner of the European Judicial Network; it has signed a strategic cooperation agreement with Europol; and is part of various regional law enforcement networks. The country has several extradition agreements in place and has ratified nearly all relevant organized crime treaties. It continues to pursue a foreign-oriented and EU-focused strategy, thanks to which the country benefits from great provisions of technical assistance and allocations of funding, not only from the EU but also from Turkey and the UAE. As for the national framework, Albania has a fairly robust legislative framework to address organized crime. However, enforcement of this framework often falls short, especially because of the justice system's lack of independence, efficiency, and professionalism.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Positive results have been observed in recent years following the implementation of a comprehensive reform aimed at strengthening the judicial system and bolstering the fight against corruption. Nevertheless, internal and

external interference with the judicial system continues to be a concern. The perception of corruption in the justice system remains high, which is based on continual reports of heavy sentences for non-serious criminal offences committed by ordinary citizens and light sentences for members of organized crime groups or corrupt state officials. Furthermore, implementation of this justice reform, including the vetting process, resulted in increased backlogs and decreased technical ability, hence affecting the efficiency of the judicial system. The detention system in Albania continues to record the highest proportion of prisoners in pre-trial detainment of all Western Balkan countries, despite a decrease in recent years.

Even though positive results have been achieved by law enforcement agencies, especially in the fight against drug trafficking, and some criminal groups have been effectively dismantled, investigations and prosecutions often fail to target the upper echelons of criminal organizations, and the number of convictions is limited. Overall, this translates into little progress being made in the fight against organized crime.

The smuggling of illicit goods and people in and out of the country through its land borders, particularly those shared with Kosovo and Montenegro, continues to persist, posing a notable challenge to the country's territorial integrity. Even though the integrity of Albania's long coastline is constantly being challenged by criminal organizations, the country manages its coastline more effectively because of efforts made to strengthen the state's control over its borders in recent years. Albania lacks the necessary cybersecurity infrastructure and technical and logistical capacities to protect its digital infrastructure.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

The limited ability to enforce the law, combined with corruption, weak institutions, and a significant informal economy, renders Albania vulnerable to money laundering despite recent efforts to strengthen the anti-money laundering system in the country. These efforts include the introduction of temporary preventative measures such as confiscation of assets, limiting the movements of suspected criminals, and restricting their economic activities. Albania has become an important destination for money laundering and the preferred sectors are the construction, service, and tourism industries. Despite the prevalence of such activities, the number of money seizures and convictions remain low.

At least a third of the country's GDP is thought to come from the informal economy, which, besides the loss of tax revenue, makes the introduction of labour protection and competition rules difficult. Weaknesses in contract enforcement, high levels of informality in financial intermediation, unclear property rights, and widespread corruption are major constraints to private sector development. Business-relevant regulations remain cumbersome, and shortcomings in the rule of law continue to hamper businesses and deter investments.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

The Albanian government has made notable progress in passing legislation on the status and treatment of victims of crime that meets international standards. But challenges persist at the implementation level. There is a lack of support programmes that provide medical, psychological, and social assistance to victims of crime, and only a limited number of public and private actors are involved in offering such services. The country lacks an integrated victim support system, and victim and witness assassinations are not unheard of. Strong ties between mafia-style organizations and the Albanian legislature and law enforcement agencies often put witnesses in danger. As a result, many witnesses have been forced to skip court hearings and refrain from testifying. Civil society organizations with donor support, as opposed to support from government agencies, remain the primary providers of aid for most cases involving vulnerable groups. Nonetheless, there have been some improvements in victim and witness support in recent years, including access to an interpreter, inclusion of additional rights for victims of sexual exploitation and human trafficking, and the creation of a web-based reporting helpline.

The culture of crime prevention in Albania is relatively less developed than in other Western Balkan countries. Although legislation and law enforcement mechanisms do exist, prevention mechanisms are ineffective and lack creativity regarding how citizens are engaged with to prevent criminal activity from occurring in the first place. Corruption in the ranks of police and the justice system contributes to the lack of efficient crime prevention. Nonetheless, new action plans and strategies have been adopted by the country which aim to implement awareness-raising campaigns to prevent organized crime with the involvement of central and local institutions, civil society, business, media, and other actors.

Even though civil society organizations play a prominent role in providing support to trafficking victims, civil society and media engagement in countering organized crime remains limited. Many civil society organizations are dependent on external donors for financial support while public funding for civil society organizations is minimal and not yet legally regulated. Press freedom is generally respected, but few media outlets in Albania enjoy financial and editorial independence, and many politicians use rhetoric that is not conducive to a free and independent media environment. There have been instances in which journalists have been threatened with violence and intimidation in recent years.

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