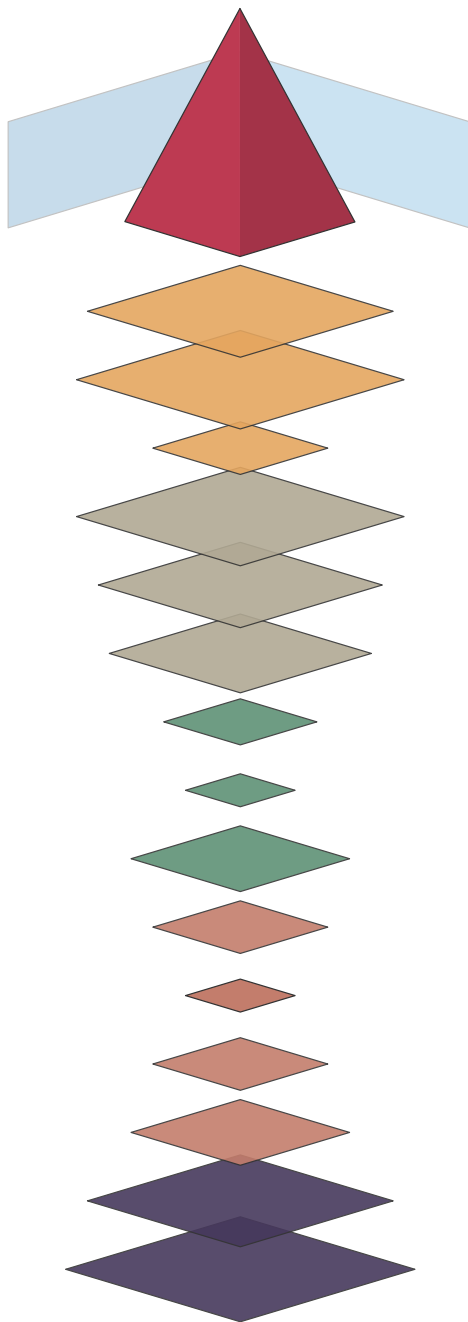


 **BELARUS**



 **5.87**
CRIMINALITY SCORE

56th of 193 countries
7th of 44 European countries
5th of 17 Central & Eastern European countries

 **CRIMINAL MARKETS** **5.33**

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	7.00
HUMAN SMUGGLING	7.50
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	4.00
ARMS TRAFFICKING	7.50
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	6.50
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	6.00
FLORA CRIMES	3.50
FAUNA CRIMES	2.50
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	5.00
HEROIN TRADE	4.00
COCAINE TRADE	2.50
CANNABIS TRADE	4.00
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	5.00
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	7.00
FINANCIAL CRIMES	8.00

 **CRIMINAL ACTORS** **6.40**

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	4.00
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	5.00
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	9.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	6.50
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	7.50

 **3.25**
RESILIENCE SCORE



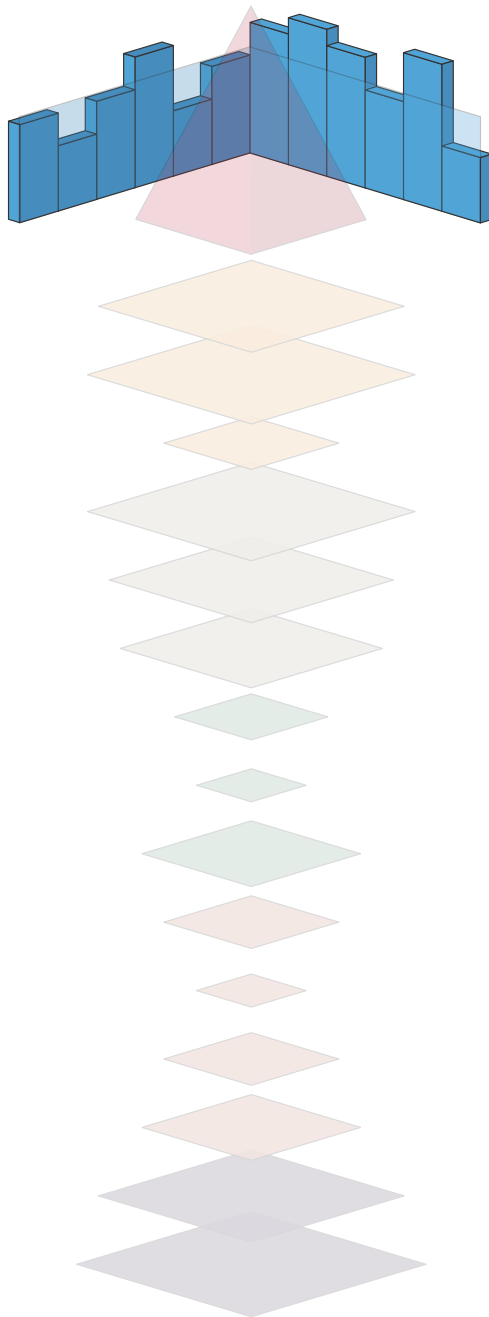
Funding provided by the United States Government.



Funded by the European Union

ENACT is funded by the European Union and implemented by the Institute for Security Studies and INTERPOL, in affiliation with the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.

 **BELARUS**



3.25
RESILIENCE SCORE

159th of 193 countries
44th of 44 European countries
17th of 17 Central & Eastern European countries

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

5.87
CRIMINALITY SCORE

CRIMINAL MARKETS	5.33
CRIMINAL ACTORS	6.40



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CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

Belarus is a source, transit, and destination country for human trafficking. Traffickers exploit Belarusian nationals and foreign victims from Moldova, the Russian Federation, Ukraine, and Vietnam domestically and abroad in countries such as Russia, Turkey, and Poland. Trafficking victims are primarily men who are subjected to labour exploitation in Russia. Belarusian women who travel to work in hotels or adult entertainment venues are subjected to sex trafficking. Human trafficking in Belarus appears to be carried out by a mix of individuals, mafia-style criminal groups, international criminal networks, and state-embedded actors such as low-level customs and border officials. Belarus is also a source and transit country for human smuggling in the region. During the reporting period, there has been a significant increase in human smuggling from the country to the EU, especially to Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland, with Belarusian authorities facilitating the entry and irregular border crossing of migrants and asylum seekers who mostly originate from Middle Eastern, sub-Saharan African, and Central Asian countries. Different stakeholders are reported to play a role in the influx of migrants through Belarus including travel agencies, state-owned airlines, state-run hotels, and law enforcement and governmental officials. There is evidence of migrants and asylum seekers who had been promised passage into the EU being pushed to cross the border with war-torn Ukraine.

There is little information about criminal groups participating in extortion and protection racketeering in the country, as most of the reports of this crime relate to state institutions and public officials. However, violent and property crime rates have increased in the country, with extortion reportedly rising especially among mafia groups and criminal networks as a means to perpetrate other illicit activities. Groups that are engaged in extortion and protection racketeering are probably active in various other markets, including drug trafficking, arms trafficking, and human trafficking.

TRADE

Belarus is a source and transit country for illicit arms. This market is mainly structured around illegal arms stolen from former Soviet stockpiles. Arms trafficking in the country is mainly facilitated by its unique geographical position. Since it borders on the EU to the west and the Russian Federation to the east, the country is often viewed by criminal groups as a convenient transit corridor for illegal arms trafficking. There is significant evidence of state-facilitated arms trafficking into conflict zones or countries

under sanctions. Furthermore, there have been allegations pertaining to arms smuggling into Belarus by EU-based firms despite EU sanctions, indicating the possible existence of a large black market. In recent years, several reports have recorded armed irregular migrants crossing into the EU, which have raised concerns about the transfer of combat groups into Europe via Belarus.

Because of its geographical location between Russia and Western Europe, Belarus is a transit country for counterfeit goods between Asian and European markets. There are major hotspots in the country where counterfeit goods, including clothing, tools, footwear, and toys imported from outside the country, are openly sold. E-commerce platforms play a significant role in the trade of such goods. Counterfeit goods smuggled into and out of the country originate mainly from China and Hong Kong. The country has also become a point of entry for European goods destined for Russia following EU sanctions. Here, EU goods are relabelled and smuggled into the Russian Federation.

Belarus is a major source country for illicit cigarettes in Europe. In Latvia, Lithuania, and Russia, most of the smuggled cigarettes seized originate in Belarus. This smuggling activity is facilitated by the significant difference between border countries and Belarus in pricing of tobacco products, as well as widespread corruption and favouritism within the tobacco industry in the country. Tobacco-producing companies in Belarus are known to manufacture more than the local demand, which is probably linked to smuggling activities allegedly facilitated by state protection. Increased seizures of smuggled tobacco products in countries such as Lithuania suggest an increase in illicit trade in tobacco products because of EU sanctions imposed in 2021.

ENVIRONMENT

Flora crimes in Belarus are generally limited to illegal logging for fuel by local communities. These crimes are perpetrated by individuals as well as legitimate businesses that fell more trees than is legally allowed. Organized crime groups are only present to a limited extent. There are no significant flows out of the country and any market that does exist is small-scale, with Belarus acting as a source and transit country. There are indications that Belarus continues to act as a transit country for illegal wildlife trafficking in Europe, specifically for illegal wildlife moving from Poland to Russia. Although no estimates of the value of this market are available, it is possible that poaching under the guise of hunting tourism may increase in the coming years as supply chains to China are strengthened.

In terms of non-renewable resource crimes, most are related to illegal sand and amber mining as well as illegal

amber trafficking, interest in which has been growing in recent years. Large-scale work is carried out by irregular migrants, with possible links to human trafficking. Although illegal mining of sand is largely viewed as a domestic issue, illicit amber mining has been tied to organized crime groups. With a highly developed shadow economy and high rates of corruption, the capital Minsk is said to be following the so-called 'amber fever' in Ukraine, where government forces are struggling to contain amber mafias. Furthermore, since the large-scale excavation of sand is labour-intensive and requires large machines, it is likely that groups involved either own or are supported by companies that own the necessary machinery, indicating a mafia-style organization. Russian officials have suspected Belarus of avoiding export duties on petroleum products by shipping them under different names.

DRUGS

Because of its location, Belarus is an important transit country for heroin trafficked from the Middle East into Europe. The criminal actors involved in the country's heroin market are mostly organized crime groups working as part of larger transnational networks. Organized crime groups transport heroin from Central and South Asia and the Middle East through Belarus to the EU, which is facilitated by lax controls on Belarus's eastern border with Russia. Although demand has grown over the last two decades, heroin is not popular on the Belarusian market as it is an expensive drug; it represents less than 1% of the entire drug market. Similarly, cocaine consumption remains limited. There is a lack of information about cocaine trafficking channels, which indicates either an inability of law enforcement to tackle cocaine trafficking and/or the exclusion of Belarus as a transit route for cocaine. Nevertheless, the country can be classified as a transit country for cocaine trafficked from the Caribbean and the Baltics through Belarus to Russia.

Conversely, cannabis, alongside synthetic drugs, is the most common drug consumed in Belarus. Despite limited information, it is suspected that the cannabis market is dominated by people growing cannabis for personal use. Even though domestic demand is largely met by local suppliers, the recent detection of a large cannabis trade channel suggests that Belarus is also an important transit point for cannabis. Synthetic drugs are the fastest-growing criminal market in Belarus. Local producers, consisting of smaller mafia-style groups, run the market, while larger transnational networks involving foreign producers sell the drugs online. There has been a significant increase in synthetic drugs such as methadone in the country.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Belarus has become an origin country for cyber-dependent crimes following the war in Ukraine. Groups linked to the country and carrying out such activities have targeted government agencies in different countries including

Ukraine, Germany, Lithuania, and Poland. There is evidence suggesting that the Belarusian regime has been weaponizing organized crime, including cyber-dependent crimes, to pursue its political objectives. In recent years, Belarusian institutions, television channels, and other important organizations have been targeted by hacktivist groups who have attacked databases to access sensitive government information. These groups also infiltrated the Belarusian rail network to disrupt the movement of Russian troops into the country during the conflict with Ukraine.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

In Belarus, private sector actors from a variety of industries including energy, oil, construction, and tobacco, and who are allied with the Belarusian regime, receive preferential treatment in the form of monopolies, tax breaks, favourable contracts, and other mechanisms, often codified by presidential decrees. This has enabled financial crimes, including tax evasion, embezzlement, and misuse of public funds, to be carried out by such companies. In exchange, they are reported to provide funds to the country's political elite and support the regime publicly. It is also important to note that there is a significant number of shell companies with unknown beneficiaries that serve as intermediaries to fraudulently sell products and services mainly produced by state-owned enterprises.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

The frequent recurrence of large-scale, high-level corruption cases involving government officials suggests that there is still a significant relationship between criminal markets and state actors in areas such as banking, finance, law enforcement, and the public sector. The state-controlled economy as well as the lack of transparency in the procurement system facilitate corruption schemes through state monopolies and privileges granted to specific actors. Some of the sectors, such as public procurement, customs, and construction, are particularly open to corruption as top public officials or their proxies are granted privileges. State-embedded actors are reportedly responsible for major national and municipal budgetary losses. It is likely that customs and border officials are involved in the trafficking of goods in the region, and the government has been accused of smuggling arms to conflict zones and controversial regimes. Furthermore, it is alleged that Belarusian officials were involved in the 2021-2022 migrant crisis when thousands of migrants were brought into the country through the alleged orchestrated efforts of state-owned airlines, hotels, travel agencies, and border guards promising passage into the EU. Recently, President Aleksandr Lukashenko was accused of alleged corrupt and illicit schemes, including channelling state money to a series of oligarchs close to his family, intercepting a Ryanair passenger plane carrying a Belarusian dissident and forcing it to land in Minsk in violation of international aviation laws, manufacturing a

border crisis with the EU by luring thousands of refugees to the borders of the bloc, and promulgating misinformation and fake cures for COVID-19. Private sector actors are also reported to be involved in illicit activities, most notably financial crimes including tax evasion, embezzlement and misuse of funds, among others, which are enabled by preferential treatment from the government as well as state protection.

There is evidence that criminal networks in Belarus are involved in mostly local drug distribution and trafficking, while groups involved in arms and human trafficking networks, as well as cybercrime and financial fraud, are more international but less violent in nature. Connections have been found between criminal networks and travel agencies in the provision of fake documents. Even though several criminal networks were suppressed by law enforcement in recent years, there is a continuing lack of information as to the names and defined leadership of criminal networks in the country. Criminal networks in Belarus are closely related

to Russian organized crime groups. There is cooperation with criminal networks from neighbouring countries, as well as with states and regions that do not share borders with Belarus. Overall, foreign actors are probably active across all criminal markets, but mostly in drug trafficking and human smuggling in Belarus, with most of these engaging in operations using their ethnic ties.

There is a lack of current information on mafia-style groups in Belarus, as several former members of such groups have, since the 1990s, incrementally moved their activities into the legal realm and become public officials and business owners. Although active mafia-style groups still exist in various criminal markets, it is likely that they are keeping a low profile because of harsh punishments and extensive resources spent on policing. Nonetheless, these groups are known to be active in various illegal activities, including extortion and racketeering, drug and arms trafficking, sex work, and human trafficking.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Belarus continues to be characterized as an authoritarian regime where, despite technically having a democratic process, there is no separation of powers and the president has full executive control and significant legislative power. Even though the regime has made strong statements against organized crime, specifically human trafficking, and has taken steps to counter such activities, there is little publicly available information regarding the implementation and results of these efforts. Furthermore, there is no proof of the regime's direct involvement in typical organized crime activities, but they are known to engage in practices akin to financial scams. It is said that the current regime has been weaponizing organized crime, letting such groups work with virtually no oversight and even with the complicity of the state. European neighbours, international organizations, and opposition groups have raised concerns about corruption, violations of human rights, and undemocratic activities in Belarus since the 1990s, leading to international isolation and repeated sanctions imposed by countries in the West. Although the government has introduced laws to combat corruption and declared the fight against corruption the most important priority of the state, the regime continues to lack transparency and accountability in decision-making as well as public procurement systems. At the same time, the government retains power to shut down any corruption-related publications or reports based on a range of restrictions. Additionally, most political decisions and legislative bodies are controlled and influenced by the presidential administration with no transparency,

and there is a complete lack of accountability within the security agencies. The government withholds and obscures information from the public regarding significant issues such as the increased numbers of economic migrants, and negotiations with Russia. While powerful oligarchs enjoy the protection of the government and the adjustment of regulations and government policies in their favour, spurious bribery and tax evasion charges have been used against Lukashenko's political opponents in recent years.

At the international level, Belarus is party to several relevant international treaties and conventions pertaining to organized crime. In addition, it has signed several extradition treaties, and cooperates with several law enforcement agencies across the globe. However, Belarus is not considered a trusted international partner in the fight against organized crime, probably because of its corruption scandals. Furthermore, international cooperation has significantly been impaired following restrictive measures imposed by Western countries including the EU, US, and UK against Belarus in recent years. This resulted in an increase in economic and trade cooperation with Russia in different fields ranging from military-strategic fields to banking systems. At the national level, Belarus has a robust legal framework regulating a variety of organized crime activities, including human trafficking, drug trafficking, and flora and fauna crimes. However, relevant legislations have not been implemented properly, rendering them ineffective in combating organized crime.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Belarus's judicial system lacks independence and is under the strict control of the executive branch, which appoints most judges and has allegedly used the system as a tool to crack down on opponents. The procedures regarding tenure, discipline, and dismissal of judges do not comply with the principle of an independent judiciary. The right to a fair trial is not respected and often flatly dismissed in cases with political overtones, which has become more evident following the 2020 post-election violence. Furthermore, the freedom and independence of the legal profession has been heavily affected by the authoritarian regime since August 2020 with the revocation of the licences of multiple Belarusian attorneys at law. The numbers of political prisoners, including politicians, activists, and journalists, have been continuing to grow in recent years. Harsh treatment, including torture, in prisons and detention facilities has been extensively documented with political prisoners being deprived of food, personal hygiene, medical care, and adequate legal representation.

In terms of law enforcement services, Belarus has various national bodies responsible for specific aspects of national law enforcement and different types of police, including organized crime and corruption police. The police force in the country suffers from widespread corruption, inadequate training, resource shortages, and poor working conditions. Following the 2020 post-election protests, police violence, arbitrary arrests, as well as torture and the denial of due process rights by police officers continue to occur in the country with impunity, something which is only exacerbated by the absence of independent overview. Moreover, the new legislation enacted in 2021 exempts law enforcement officers from responsibility for damages inflicted on protesters by physical attack, firearms, and combatant and special equipment if in such cases the actions are deemed legal.

With respect to territorial integrity, Belarus is a transit country for various criminal markets given its geographic location. However, it has significantly strengthened the control of its western and southern borders because of the conflict in Ukraine and NATO's reinforced presence in the Baltic states and Poland. Meanwhile, its border with Russia remains vulnerable. Efforts have been made to achieve a developed integration and military cooperation between Russia and Belarus, including the establishment of air border patrols. Furthermore, the government announced the deployment of Russian forces in addition to the Belarusian forces on the Belarus-Ukraine border.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Belarus has relevant legal framework and institutions to prevent money laundering, and it is claimed that these comply with international standards. Furthermore, Belarus is not recognized as having strategic anti-money laundering shortcomings. Nonetheless, it is difficult to assess the implementation of the relevant legal framework to address

money laundering activities in the country because of the structure of the political system and corruption allegations.

The government continues to retain tight control over the economy, with its jurisdiction covering both market and non-market institutions. Its ability to coerce economic outcomes through the dilution of property rights severely inhibits competition. Limited foreign investment has deteriorated further in recent years with numerous foreign companies located in Belarus ceasing their activities following the worsening human rights situation, widespread government abuse, the country's involvement in the invasion of Ukraine, and additional sectoral sanctions imposed by the West adversely affecting the country's economy. Moreover, the banking and finance sectors were adversely affected by the disruption of trade, payment, and logistics, withdrawal of international companies, restricted supplies from foreign companies, and the loss of markets as well as disconnection of Belarusian banks from the SWIFT system.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Despite the existence of relevant legal frameworks and mechanisms for supporting victims of human trafficking, the government's assistance services continue to be underutilized and suffer from burdensome bureaucratic requirements, delays in service delivery, and inconsistent quality of service. As a result, civil society plays an important role in victim support with several NGOs and volunteering organizations, and most victims seek assistance at private shelters managed by NGOs. However, there is a lack of financial support provided by the government to NGOs that help trafficking victims. Conversely, victims of drug-related crimes are perceived as enemies of the public and face severe punishment because of the country's harsh drug laws, rather than receiving support from the government. As for witness support, the country has the relevant legislation and mechanisms to provide protection to witnesses including personal security, protection of housing and property, the issuance of special personal protective equipment and hazard warnings, temporary placement in a safe place, transfer of jobs, relocation, and change of identity. The Belarusian government has maintained efforts to prevent organized crime, specifically human trafficking, by establishing hotlines, promoting social advertising, and rehabilitating victims. Nonetheless, no public awareness campaigns, assistance to NGOs, or anti-trafficking training to law enforcement officials have been carried out in recent years.

Even though civil society organizations play an important role in tackling organized crime, the legal environment that these organizations operate in is highly restrictive, with limited access to funding and almost no space for independent advocacy. Moreover, civil society organizations have been under pressure and face raids, arrests, seizures, and closures, which result in a decrease of the involvement of such organizations in tackling organized crime. Similarly, the

media environment is severely restricted, with censorship, threats, violence, and arbitrary arrests against critical journalists and bloggers being the norm in the country. In recent years, government crackdown on the independent media in the country has been observed, with increasing arbitrary detention of journalists and the blocking of access to media sites.

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