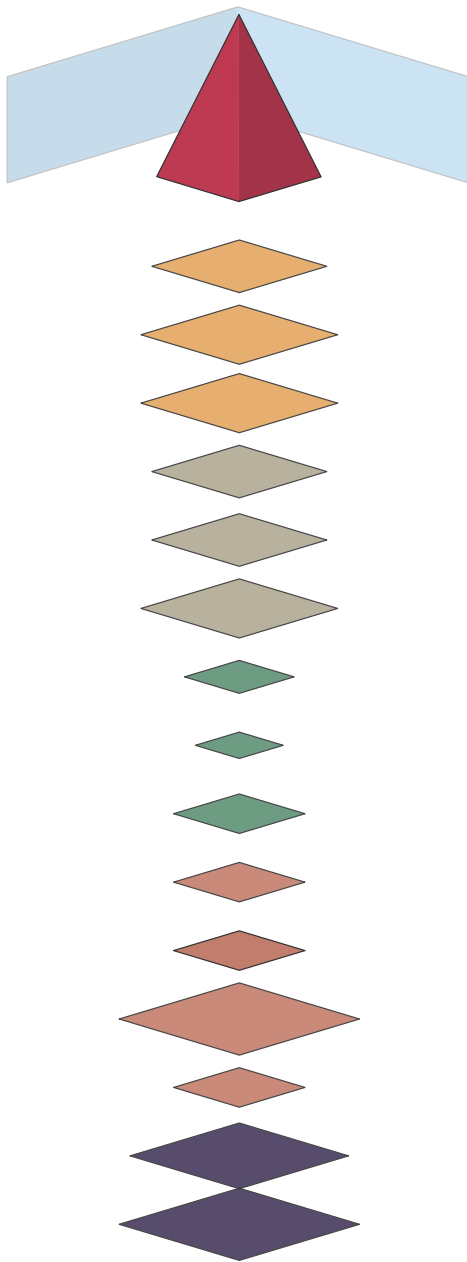




# ESWATINI



4.38

## CRIMINALITY SCORE

135<sup>th</sup> of 193 countries

42<sup>nd</sup> of 54 African countries

7<sup>th</sup> of 13 Southern African countries



### CRIMINAL MARKETS

**3.87**

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	4.00
HUMAN SMUGGLING	4.50
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	4.50
ARMS TRAFFICKING	4.00
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	4.00
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	4.50
FLORA CRIMES	2.50
FAUNA CRIMES	2.00
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	3.00
HEROIN TRADE	3.00
COCAINE TRADE	3.00
CANNABIS TRADE	5.50
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	3.00
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	5.00
FINANCIAL CRIMES	5.50



### CRIMINAL ACTORS

**4.90**

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	2.00
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	5.50
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	6.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	5.00
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	6.00



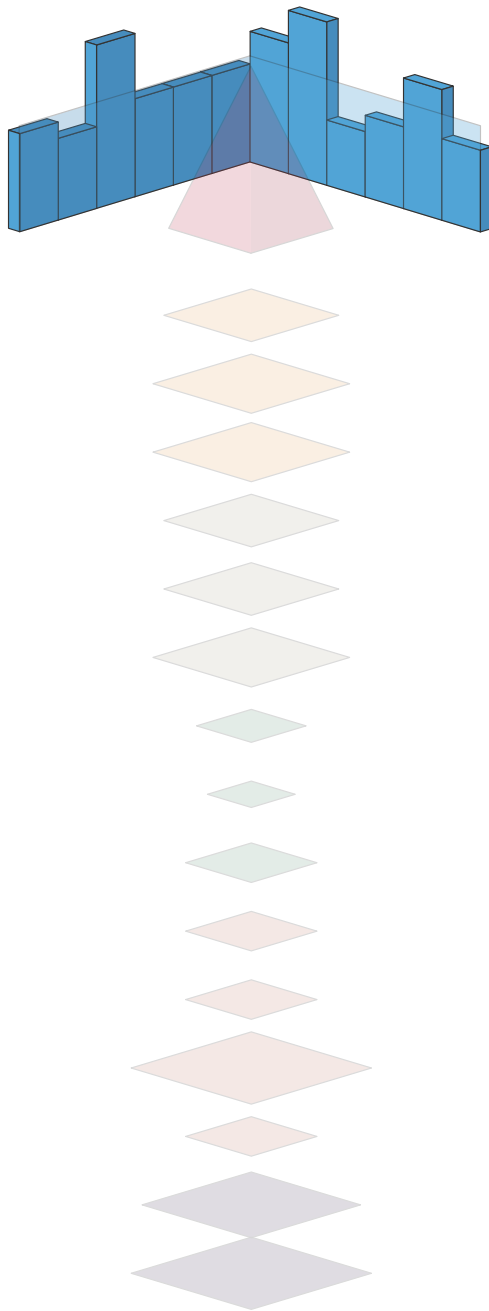
3.29

## RESILIENCE SCORE





# ESWATINI



3.29

## RESILIENCE SCORE

155<sup>th</sup> of 193 countries  
33<sup>rd</sup> of 54 African countries  
10<sup>th</sup> of 13 Southern African countries

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



4.38

## CRIMINALITY SCORE



CRIMINAL MARKETS 3.87



CRIMINAL ACTORS 4.90



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# CRIMINALITY

## CRIMINAL MARKETS

### PEOPLE

Human trafficking is a prevalent issue in Eswatini, with traffickers exploiting domestic and foreign victims for forced labour and sex trafficking. Vulnerable groups, such as girls, orphans, and foreign children, are forced into sex work, domestic servitude, and agricultural labour. Men in communities near the South African border are also recruited for forced labour in South Africa's timber industry. The main destination for Swazi victims is still South Africa, and forced labour remains the most prevalent purpose for this crime.

Poor socio-economic conditions and unregulated labour brokering have led to an increase in human smuggling in Eswatini, which is as a source and transit country for human smuggling. The main destination for Swazis is South Africa because it has better economic conditions. Eswatini is used as a transit country for people coming from Mozambique. The country is home to forcibly displaced people, including refugees, asylum seekers, and stateless people, who originate from different countries and have varying hopes and goals. There have been instances of immigration officials soliciting bribes to issue government documents like visas.

Extortion is becoming a prevalent criminal activity in the country with a growing number of kidnapping cases for extortion or ransom reported in recent years. The number of cases may be higher than documented, as some may not be reported because of threats made by perpetrators. Criminal networks are often involved in kidnapping for ransom, which they perceive as a relatively low-risk, high-reward activity.

### TRADE

Currently, Eswatini is not considered a major market for small arms exports and is not part of a significant transit route or destination for firearms trafficked in the region, although a substantial number of leftover arms from previous conflicts in neighbouring countries are still present. Despite a reduction in the total number of guns over the last 10 years, unlicensed ownership and use remain high. This is reflected in the escalation of armed robberies.

The trade in counterfeit goods, especially pharmaceutical products, is prevalent in the country. However, the Eswatini government does not track or report on seizures of counterfeit goods, and most operations against these products have been led by INTERPOL rather than by local initiatives. Counterfeit goods mostly enter Eswatini from South

Africa and Mozambique. Moreover, Eswatini continues to be a transit corridor for the smuggling of cigarettes and tobacco that are falsely declared and transported in container and commercial vehicles or hidden in passenger vehicles. However, the country does not track or report on this illicit trade, despite the significant black market for these goods. These products are smuggled into Eswatini from China through Mozambique and South Africa.

### ENVIRONMENT

Eswatini faces a small but persistent criminal market involving flora, with rare endemic cycad species poached and trafficked for thousands of dollars per plant on the international market. The Flora Protection Act regulates trade by making it illegal to export, sell, or purchase any protected plant from the country without a permit. However, unsustainable extraction of flora for traditional medicine, charcoal production, and firewood is driving the extinction of indigenous flora and animal species. Local and regional demand for these products exceeds sustainable consumption levels, and the conversion of natural forests into agricultural land for crops like sugarcane continues.

Eswatini has a low incidence of poaching and wildlife trafficking, owing to its small population of wild animals, as well as to the far-reaching powers and political support that anti-poaching teams have in the country. Eswatini's strict conservation strategy, backed by laws requiring mandatory prison sentences for poachers and financial incentives for those who report them, has been successful in combating fauna crimes. However, funding constraints have limited the government's ability to prosecute leaders of criminal networks involved in the pangolin trade, resulting in only low-profile poachers being arrested. Although Eswatini was previously implicated as a transit zone for the smuggling of abalone from South Africa, there is no recent evidence that this trade is using the country as a route.

Eswatini's involvement in criminal markets related to non-renewable resources is limited to being a transit country, with illegal gold being the primary illicit commodity. The country has only one legal industrial gold mine and minimal artisanal and small-scale mining activity. Illegal gold is usually transported in trucks carrying legal commodities from South Africa and laundered in Eswatini before being exported to jewellery manufacturing hubs in the Middle East and South Asia. Although some political elites are involved, the volumes of this trade are relatively small. Fuel smuggling also takes place in the country, and it is fuelled by the occasional difference in prices with Mozambique and South Africa.

## DRUGS

Heroin remains a small market in Eswatini with limited local consumption. The country's role in the regional drug trade is that of a transit point, with heroin entering from Mozambique and moving on to South Africa. Smugglers typically use commodity containers, commercial vehicles, or passenger vehicles to transport the drug, taking advantage of the country's porous borders and low-risk airport controls. West Africans living in Eswatini are the primary actors involved in this trade. Cocaine is the second most commonly used drug in Eswatini, with a stable user base. However, given the size of the population, the market remains relatively small. Most users consume the drug in powder form, with a minority using crack cocaine. Law enforcement officials are involved in sustaining the trade by providing territory, security, and impunity to cross-border traffickers. Eswatini also serves as a transit country for cocaine bound for the South African market, with trafficking typically occurring through the same channels as heroin.

Eswatini is a major cultivator of high-quality cannabis in Southern Africa, with thousands of hectares devoted to this cash crop. Despite being illegal, criminal networks profit from the cannabis trade, primarily by supplying South African markets. Routine border captures of smugglers have had little effect on the cannabis trade in Eswatini, and the recent legalization of cannabis in neighbouring countries such as South Africa and Lesotho presents opportunities for the expansion of the market. Cannabis remains the most commonly used drug. Crystal methamphetamine has gained ground in the country despite the small size of its user population. As there is no synthetic drug production in Eswatini, the country's role in the regional market is primarily as a transit point for precursors and finished synthetic products such as methaqualone, methcathinone, and Ecstasy. Meth arrives in Eswatini via Mozambique and Cape Town, with Asian and West African networks based in South Africa being the primary suppliers of the drug.

## CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Eswatini is vulnerable to cybercrimes because of a lack of public awareness of cyber-security. Cybercriminals target various sectors, financial institutions included, taking advantage of the increasing use of computers, smartphones, and the low public vigilance towards cyber-security. Consequently, there has been an increase in reported cybercrimes in recent years.

## FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crimes pose a significant problem in Eswatini, and online fraud is one of the most common forms of economic crime in the country. ATM fraud, card cloning, investment fraud, and internet fraud are among the most prevalent types of financial crimes, with banks frequently targeted or serving as intermediaries for victim compensation.

Embezzlement of public funds is widespread, with high-profile officials, including members of Parliament and the military command, investigated for a range of financial crimes. In the private sector, fraud is an issue in real estate and on plantations. Corruption and tax evasion are other main forms of financial crime in Eswatini, with the proceeds believed to be invested in the relatively unregulated real estate sector. Although the banking sector handles most formal financial transactions, cash transactions and cross-border cash transportation drive a large informal economy. Despite the prevalence of financial crimes, the rate of these crimes in Eswatini is probably underreported.

## CRIMINAL ACTORS

High-level corruption is still a major issue in the country. The main organized criminal activities in Eswatini are reportedly facilitated by the corruption of political elites, law enforcement and regulatory authorities. Various illicit economies, ranging from the illicit trade of counterfeit goods and precious minerals to stolen motor vehicles, textiles and pharmaceuticals, provide funds for high-level officials, contributing to their political dominance. Officials responsible for managing borders are positioned to either intercept or facilitate crime, and financial regulatory authorities facilitate the reinvestment of illicit funds in real estate, motor vehicles, and retail businesses. Serious allegations of trafficking and abuse of trafficking victims against senior government officials in protection roles have remained pending for many years. The private sector in Eswatini is closely linked to state-embedded actors. The most prominent businesspeople and high-level officials are said to be part of a business syndicate. This close relationship allows these individuals and businesses to acquire companies, public properties, and licences for mineral exploitation, consolidating their wealth and power legally and illegally.

There is no evidence to suggest the existence of sophisticated mafia-style groups in Eswatini. However, the growing number of extortion incidences may indicate the existence of mafia-style groups in the country, albeit limited. Instead, criminal networks are responsible for the majority of violent crimes in the country. These syndicates have links to criminal organizations in neighbouring countries and engage in a range of criminal activities, including the distribution of drugs, especially crystal meth, armed robbery, residential burglary, petty theft, and vehicle smuggling. They have access to firearms, vehicles, and extensive networks for moving illicit goods. There are concerns about the possible existence of regional organized networks involved in kidnapping. Despite their involvement in violent crimes, the murder rate in Eswatini remains lower than in other African countries.

Foreign actors in Eswatini mainly consist of small diasporas, with Asian and West African communities being the most prominent. They have connections with their counterparts

in neighbouring countries and engage in a range of criminal activities, including smuggling drugs such as heroin and meth, and the cannabis trade. Additionally, there is evidence of foreign residents engaging in cross-border fraud and cybercrime targeting individuals and institutions in South

Africa, with proceeds typically transferred out of Eswatini. Other foreign-led activities include the smuggling of commodities, contraband retail, and violent predatory crimes such as robberies. There is also evidence of foreign enterprises being involved in wildlife trade and money laundering.

# RESILIENCE

## LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Eswatini is an absolute monarchy in which the king has the power to dissolve Parliament and veto any decision, and governance structures are too outmoded to respond effectively to organized crime. Government institutions lack independence and their operations are characterized by opacity. Cases of significant human rights violations, including killings and violence against foreign journalists, restrictions on peaceful assembly and political participation have been documented. Eswatini's absolutist regime and patronage politics continue to provide a favourable environment for criminality. Corruption and criminal activity at high levels are not investigated, and transparency and accountability have deteriorated in recent years. The lack of transparency and enforcement mechanisms has resulted in the continued existence of corruption and nepotism.

Although Eswatini has signed most of the international treaties against organized crime, it is not responsive to legal assistance requests in matters involving transnational crime. Eswatini's main international relationships are with its largest trading partner South Africa, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the US, the EU, and Taiwan. However, Eswatini's legal framework against organized crime is underdeveloped, and laws are difficult to enforce because of selective control and slow legislative processes.

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

The judicial system in Eswatini is beset with challenges that undermine its independence and efficiency. The appointment and removal of judges by the king, who holds ultimate authority over the judiciary, creates concerns about impartiality and the potential for the king to influence judicial decisions. In addition, the judiciary is underfunded and inefficient, with serious crimes such as human trafficking often resulting in few convictions. There have however been instances in which judicial decisions in favour of civil rights have been delivered. Nevertheless, the lack of specialized units dedicated to combating organized crime presents another obstacle to effective law enforcement. Impunity for human rights abuses is widespread, and inadequate

transport infrastructure means that many rural residents cannot access the judicial system.

Law enforcement in Eswatini faces significant challenges due to corruption, lack of training, and underfunding. The police response is often slow, and officers frequently have to walk to crime scenes because of a lack of vehicles. A high percentage of the population has paid a bribe to the police, and the police's ability to investigate serious crimes is frequently criticized. Furthermore, police officers were accused of using excessive force and violence during pro-democracy demonstrations, resulting in deaths and injuries. Impunity for human rights abuses remains a significant problem within law enforcement.

The country's borders with Mozambique and South Africa are still vulnerable to smuggling contraband through unmonitored crossing points and with police complicity. Resource constraints hinder the effective checking of pedestrian and vehicular traffic at regulated crossing points, leading to contraband regularly crossing all border points. Although Eswatini's borders are not as porous as other countries in the SADC, it remains an attractive transit country for drugs and organized crime from Mozambique to South Africa. Despite these challenges, Eswatini is making efforts to address border security issues through various initiatives, including the use of technology such as drones, CCTV cameras, and biometric equipment.

## ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Eswatini has made efforts to establish a regulatory and supervisory regime for banks and non-banking financial institutions to combat money laundering. However, the Financial Intelligence Unit's successes are unclear as it has not published annual reports or media releases. The country requires accountable institutions to set up internal control measures under the supervision of the Central Bank of Eswatini, including monitoring transactions, keeping records, and reporting suspicious transactions. However, law enforcement appears to be weak, and Eswatini has significant technical compliance deficiencies despite efforts to combat money laundering.

A low degree of economic freedom for citizens has been reported in the country, accompanied by widespread corruption, lavish government spending, and mismanaged funds. Recently, the government received a loan from the World Bank to support post-COVID-19 economic recovery and implement reforms, including the creation of a single government treasury account, modernization of public procurement, and adoption of a state-owned enterprise framework to improve transparency.

## CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

The government of Eswatini has failed to adequately support victims of human trafficking, with only a few NGO-operated centres available. The lack of government shelters for human trafficking victims and only one centre in the capital offering support to gender-based violence victims is alarming. The country's anti-trafficking national plan is not being implemented, and there is an inconsistent understanding of victim protection. The Witness Protection Act has shown deficiencies in protecting and aiding victims of crime. Additionally, corruption and the lack of judicial independence have created an environment of impunity, making it unlikely for victims to report crimes.

The government has made no progress in preventing corruption or organized crime. Although there is a legal framework in place, the lack of willingness and capacity to enforce laws and implement policies, bureaucratic delays, lack of funding, and communication gaps have hampered prevention efforts. Patronage, which is at the centre of governance, is a source of persistent fragility in crime and corruption prevention.

Political participation and media freedom have deteriorated in the country since pro-democracy demonstrations were met with a strong and repressive response from the government. Eswatini restricts journalists from working freely and represses any attempt at oversight from civil society. The media, aside from exiled voices and news websites, are largely under state control, and the government bans publications it deems prejudicial to its interests. Moreover, the government rarely investigates, prosecutes, or punishes officials who commit human rights abuses.

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