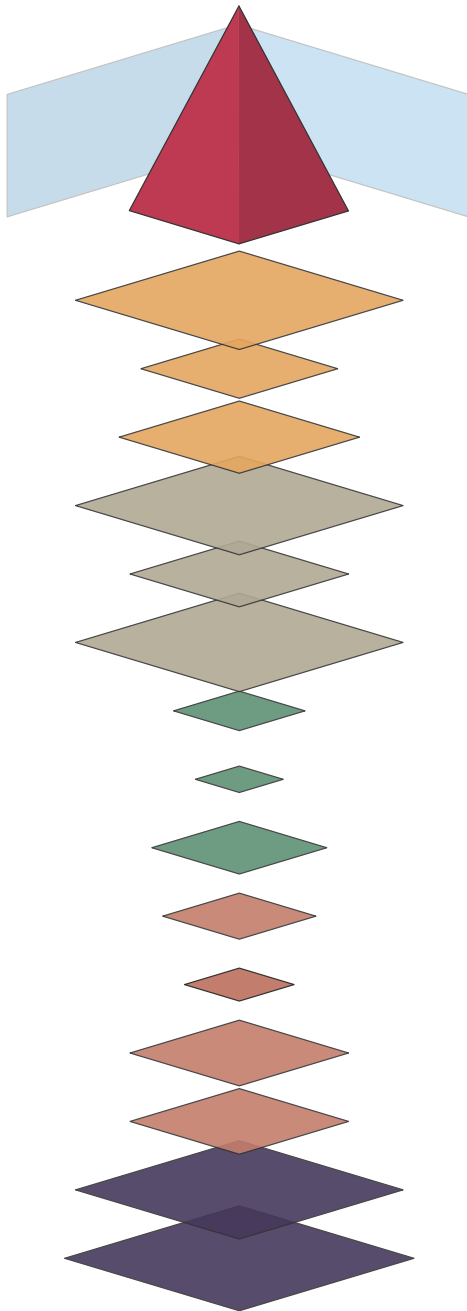


 **MOLDOVA**



 **5.60**
CRIMINALITY SCORE

69th of 193 countries
12th of 44 European countries
8th of 17 Central & Eastern European countries

 **CRIMINAL MARKETS** **5.20**

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	7.50
HUMAN SMUGGLING	4.50
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	5.50
ARMS TRAFFICKING	7.50
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	5.00
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	7.50
FLORA CRIMES	3.00
FAUNA CRIMES	2.00
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	4.00
HEROIN TRADE	3.50
COCAINE TRADE	2.50
CANNABIS TRADE	5.00
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	5.00
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	7.50
FINANCIAL CRIMES	8.00

 **CRIMINAL ACTORS** **6.00**

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	5.00
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	5.00
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	8.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	5.00
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	7.00

 **3.92**
RESILIENCE SCORE



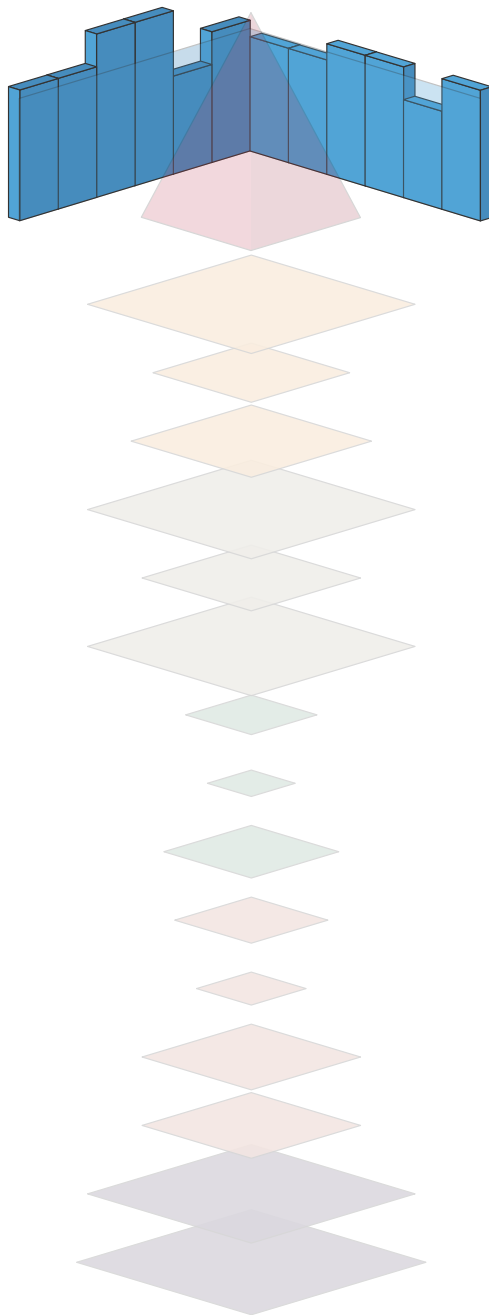
Funding provided by the United States Government.



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.

 **MOLDOVA**



 **3.92**
RESILIENCE SCORE

136th of 193 countries
41st of 44 European countries
14th of 17 Central & Eastern European countries

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

 **5.60**
CRIMINALITY SCORE

 CRIMINAL MARKETS	5.20
 CRIMINAL ACTORS	6.00



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CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

The human trafficking market is virulent and pervasive in Moldova, which is principally a source country for this trade. Victims are often trafficked to Russia, Turkey, Italy, Cyprus, Germany and the UAE. The principal form of trafficking in the country is sex trafficking, while labour trafficking and forced begging occur to a lesser extent. Women and girls are exploited within sex trafficking circles, while men and boys mostly fall victims to labour trafficking. In addition, the undocumented or stateless population, including the Romani community, are vulnerable to exploitation, primarily in the agricultural sector. Child sex tourism remains a concern, with many children being exploited for online child pornography. The increase of Ukrainian migrants in the country due to the war in Ukraine and the higher inflation and resulting economic downturn in Moldova have created a larger group of vulnerable individuals who may be susceptible to human trafficking. Furthermore, corrupt high-level government officials are known to facilitate human trafficking activities.

Alongside the human trafficking market, criminal networks are known to be involved in cross-border human smuggling. These activities are facilitated through the use of fraudulent documents for victims who do not have the legal documents required for cross-border human smuggling. Smugglers are increasingly taking advantage of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent refugee crisis by enticing vulnerable refugees fleeing the conflict in Ukraine with the promise of 'a better life abroad'. The human smuggling market in Moldova still fuels the trafficking trade and no other impact within the market can be found. Cross-border organized crime groups are known to be involved within the human smuggling market in Moldova. Extortion and protection racketeering practices are known to happen in the country, although there is limited information on them. These activities are reported to be mostly carried out by influential and infamous organized crime groups in the country. Intimidation and extortion are also part of Moldova's prison subculture.

TRADE

Moldova is a source and transit country for the arms trafficking trade in the region. The organized criminal groups that dominate the market run sophisticated and well-structured operations. Some of these groups are also reported to use legitimate companies as a front to mask their involvement in arms trafficking. Transnistria is also thought to have large quantities of surplus weapons and

ammunition left over from the Soviet era, which has aided the trade. Efforts have been made to dismantle parts of this illicit market in cooperation with the EU, UN and Russia. However, despite these efforts there have been reports of alleged schemes to bypass EU sanctions and smuggle arms to Belarus and Russia. Moldova has also become an important route for arms trade in and out of Ukraine.

The trade in counterfeit goods has been on the rise in Moldova, as it remains the top source country producing packaging materials for counterfeit goods. The smuggling of illicit or counterfeit goods is particularly profitable through Transnistria. Counterfeit goods sold in Moldova generally include counterfeit clothing of famous brands, sewing machines and raw materials for sewing counterfeits. Moldova also continues to be an important source country for counterfeit alcoholic beverages smuggled into the EU. Organized crime group composed of Moldovan nationals are known to be involved in this market.

There is a pervasive market for illicit cigarettes in the Republic of Moldova largely due to an increase in excise taxes. This makes Moldova vulnerable to tobacco and cigarette smuggling and illicit production for internal consumption. Cigarette smuggling generates huge illicit cashflows and is considered to have a corrupting influence on the country's economy and political system. The COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, along with their associated socio-economic consequences, have also affected this market.

ENVIRONMENT

Illegal logging and deforestation are the main flora crimes that occur in Moldova, despite the country having very low forest coverage. This is because most forest thefts are almost never criminally punished due to the loopholes in the regulations and high levels of corruption. The fauna crime market is also limited in Moldova, although the country occasionally serves as a source and transit point for these types of crime. For instance, black caviar sourced in Russia is reportedly trafficked through Moldova into Italy. High levels of corruption in Moldova facilitate the activities of criminal smuggling rings involved in illegal wildlife trade in and out of the country. Non-renewable resource crimes are not prevalent in Moldova, although the country's high dependency on oil imports creates an opportunity for criminal networks to become involved in oil smuggling. There is strong evidence to suggest that Moldova is a transit country for nuclear and/or radioactive materials sold to extremist groups in the region.

DRUGS

Moldova operates as a transit country for heroin destined for countries bordering the Black Sea and throughout Eurasia. However, the heroin market in Moldova continues to be small in scope. Evidence suggests the involvement of foreign transnational organized crime groups in this illicit market. International crime groups are known to hide the illicit heroin trade under the guise of construction companies specializing in the export and import of construction materials. Additionally, Moldova is a source country for cannabis, which remains the most used drug in the country. The northern part of Moldova ranks first in terms of cannabis growing and trafficking, followed by the central part of the country. Profits are generated mainly by local demand, with limited demand generated by Ukraine and Russia. Corruption related to this crime appears to involve low-level officials and political leaders. Cocaine trade is limited with little presence of organized crime groups involved in the trade in Moldova.

Moldova is both a source and transit country for the synthetic drug trade, although the Russian invasion of Ukraine has altered some circumstances slightly. Ecstasy is the second most consumed drug, while synthetic stimulants, mainly amphetamines, remain the most produced drugs in Moldova. Furthermore, harm reduction programmes have recently reported higher rates of synthetic cannabinoid and synthetic cathinone use, indicating an increasing prevalence in Moldova. Even though COVID-19-related measures led to a dramatic decrease of synthetic cathinone trafficking, the trade in synthetic substances rose to almost pre-pandemic levels after the loosening of these measures and the opening of borders. Profits are accrued both to foreign and domestic actors. Social media platforms, including Odnoklassniki, Instagram and Facebook, are used to facilitate the sale of new psychoactive substances.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Cyber-dependent crimes are prevalent in Moldova, with the risk of cyber-attacks on critical infrastructure remaining high due to technical, procedural and human vulnerabilities. Ransomware and malware attacks targeting the public sector as well as the private sector have increased recently in Moldova. The criminals' *modi operandi* include social engineering and vulnerability scanning. The digitalization of all public spheres of government administration and communication adds to the risk of cybercrimes and digital leaks. Public institutions are also sometimes targeted by cybercrime, resulting in the destruction of public databases and audits. The war in Ukraine has resulted in an increase in geo-political cybercriminality in the region, resulting in higher vulnerability to cybercriminality in Moldova.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crimes in Moldova have a negative effect on the country's economy and society and are mostly perpetrated by wealthy individuals with political power. High-ranking public officials in collusion with the banking system in Moldova have been known to participate in high-level financial crimes, including embezzlement. Cash smuggling is of particular concern, as the country lacks efficient cash control and confiscation mechanisms. Furthermore, the Moldovan authorities are unable to deal with the illicit financing schemes conducted in the Transnistria.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

State-embedded actors seem to be a prominent criminal actor type in the country, mainly involved in organized crime through corruption, money laundering and fraud. The situation involving state-embedded actors is worse in Transnistria, as prominent political figures participate in transnational drug trafficking and attempts to influence the democratic process. Furthermore, some politicians are sometimes involved in organized crime, with multiple cases reported of collaboration between Russian mafias and Moldovan politicians. Private sector actors are also heavily involved in a variety of criminal markets in the country, especially smuggling goods as well as financial crimes. Some of the criminal groups are also known to use legal entities as a front to disguise illicit activities. In addition, the banking sector plays a significant role in enabling financial crimes.

Loose criminal networks appear to be prevalent in Moldova. These criminal networks are embedded in almost all illicit markets in the country including, but not limited to, human trafficking, the drug trade, cigarette smuggling, arms trafficking and financial crimes. According to reports, recent law enforcement operations have usually found and in most cases arrested smaller, loosely organized criminal networks involving Moldovan citizens. These networks are concentrated in Transnistria and other territories bordering Ukraine, as trafficking victims and illicit products are transported to the port of Odessa for wider distribution in Europe and Asia.

Local Moldovan mafias are purported to exist, but little is known about them. Group membership can be described as moderate, owing to the combined presence of both established mafia-style groups and smaller, local mafias in Moldova. Mafia-style groups are mainly confined to Transnistria and operate in human and drug trafficking and money laundering. Meanwhile, foreign criminal actors in Moldova participate in almost all criminal markets and exert significant influence on democratic processes in the country. Most of these actors are loosely organized criminal networks that often interact with local criminal groups. Foreign criminal actors in Moldova include the Russian mafia and, more loosely, the Georgian mafia. Most of the criminal

activity involving foreign actors occurs along the border with Ukraine, with some exceptions within criminal markets such as drug trafficking. Foreign actors partly occupy the human trafficking and arms trafficking markets, but not

to the extent that they control the markets. Furthermore, cybercrime activities involving foreign actors have also increased in Moldova.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

The current government came to power on an anti-corruption campaign and has prioritized reforming the justice system and the prosecutor general's office. However, corruption remains the focus of the Moldovan political scene with no reference to other criminal markets. When it comes to policy implementation, the current government has implemented several projects with an anti-corruption agenda, including a new anti-corruption body. However, trust in government has not improved in recent years, with only 20% of Moldovans showing confidence in political parties and politicians. Policy implementation against organized crime has also been inefficient in the country. However, the current government places cyber-security and cyber-governance high on the agenda of political and security priorities. In line with this agenda, the government has been increasing its efforts to establish legal frameworks and strengthen cyber-governance with its National Information Security Strategy. The government has shown limited efforts to fulfill their election campaign promises, leading to concern of state capture by powerful criminal groups.

As the new Moldovan government elected in 2021 ran on an anti-corruption campaign, several legislative proposals and oversight mechanisms were implemented shortly after the elections. Moldova's Independent Anti-Corruption Advisory Committee was formed with members drawn equally from Moldovan civil society and the international community to examine corruption issues within the state's own anti-corruption institutions. However, cooperation between public authorities and civil society continues to be limited, which hinders government transparency and renders anti-corruption efforts inefficient. Despite the government's anti-corruption pledges, acts of embezzlement committed by public officials have not been investigated in line with the risks of diversion of property by public officials.

Within the last few years, Moldova's international and transnational cooperation to fight organized crime has increased. It is a signatory to various international treaties focused on tackling organized crime. However, these conventions are only fully implemented in areas outside Transnistria, as the conflict still lacks resolution, and an autonomous government oversees the territory. Moldova is also a founding member of the Police Cooperation Convention for Southeast Europe, which allows the

exchange of data related to individuals involved in organized crime, and intelligence on links between suspects and those under suspicion of committing criminal offences. Moldavian authorities have also cooperated with the Russian government, the EU and the UNDP on arms destruction programmes to destroy a stockpile of Soviet-era ammunition.

Moldova has also built collaboration with neighbouring countries and has been partnering closely with NATO to strengthen cyber-security. Moreover, international cooperation in Moldova in relation to cyber-dependent crimes increased significantly following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Moldova has a moderately comprehensive legal framework pertaining to organized crime. Even though Moldova has laws that cover the prosecution of human traffickers, it does not distinguish between human smuggling and human trafficking. There are also minimal and poorly developed laws relating to fauna, flora and non-renewable resource crimes, although these crime markets are not well established in the country. However, Moldova continues to make efforts to establish a more comprehensive legal framework. For instance, the Parliament has approved a cyber-security strategy that aims to create an integrated system for reporting and assessing information security threats and developing rapid response mechanisms against such threats.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

The judicial system in Moldova is reported to be ineffective and prone to political interference. While increasingly well protected in law, outdated structures and widespread corruption have undermined judicial progress in recent years. The independence of judges has been a priority on Moldova's agenda and some legislation to achieve independence has been enacted. However, public trust in judges in Moldova remains among the lowest in Europe because of serious allegations of corruption, vested interests and other ethical issues. As for the penitentiary system, there have been continuous reports of violence, informal hierarchies, low staffing levels and a lack of adequate health-care services in Moldovan prisons.

There have been multiple cases of Moldovan police showing neglect toward victims of crime and actively abusing their powers, and law enforcement officials have been known

to facilitate and actively participate in human trafficking. The police also take small-scale bribes from civilians, which probably facilitates an environment in which organized crime can thrive. The Moldovan government has implemented some changes in recent years to its law enforcement apparatus, although widespread corruption is still present, making it one of the least trusted institutions in the country.

The continuing conflict with Transnistria and the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine are the main predicaments facing Moldovan territorial integrity. The volatile situation on the Moldovan border enables organized crime groups to flourish while posing great difficulties for the already weak law enforcement apparatus in the country. The Transnistria state is known to have extensive links with organized crime and holds large quantities of firearms and ammunition, stored there since the end of the Soviet era, making it a hub for arms trafficking. A large proportion of the funding for Moldovan border control and protection comes from outside parties such as the EU, the US and, most recently, the UN, because of the refugee crisis. These funds, together with increased border protection efforts, seem to have slightly improved the country's territorial integrity levels. However, weak cyber-defence systems represent another threat to Moldova's internal stability, as systems are outdated and inefficient to prevent potential cyber-attacks. In the presence of weak critical infrastructure security efforts, such systems remain vulnerable to cybercrime infiltration.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Money laundering has been an issue at the forefront of Moldova's corruption problem for years. Moldova does not have effective anti-money laundering measures in place, and it is rated as a high risk for money laundering and terrorism financing. Moreover, the Moldovan government is unable to monitor money flows in the breakaway region of Transnistria or enforce the relevant laws in this territory, which makes Transnistria highly susceptible to money laundering schemes. The economic regulatory environment in Moldova is not conducive to businesses, as bribery for services and money laundering have been rampant in the recent past. Even though a legal framework aiming to prevent criminal involvement in legitimate businesses is in place, its enforcement has been lacking, something which has led to several financial scandals in recent years.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Overall, Moldova has a moderately efficient framework in place to provide support to victims of modern slavery. In recent years, Moldova has tried to increase victim support and provide protection from re-victimization by establishing

standards within its legislation, particularly for human trafficking crimes. Practically, however, little has changed for the victims of such crimes, as they still do not receive adequate support from the state and remain vulnerable to intimidation by traffickers. The government relies to a certain extent on NGOs and other non-state actors to fund victim support. However, Moldova was among the first countries in the region to implement harm-reduction programmes in the country's prisons, where opioid-substitution therapy and needle-and-syringe programmes are available to varying degrees in its numerous detention institutions. Although a witness protection programme exists in Moldova, it is not particularly effective in practice. Overall, the law enforcement system remains riddled with corruption and there is no effective system for protecting former members of organized criminal groups who testify against their bosses.

Although the government of Moldova made increasing efforts to prevent human trafficking over the past two years, several recent developments have complicated the overall trafficking situation in the country, including the Ukrainian refugee crisis created by the war. The Moldovan authorities continue to implement their strategies and action plans against organized crime. The plans include prevention methods to combat arms trafficking as well as drug smuggling in the country. However, these prevention methods largely depend on international partners for funding because of Moldova's unfavourable economic situation.

Non-state actors and civil society in Moldova mainly focus on countering human trafficking and drug trafficking, both preventatively and by providing support to victims and by funding government initiatives. The media in Moldova are highly polarized and vulnerable to external influences, which results in editorial censorship. In general, media outlets rarely present critical views, as journalists follow the political line of the party with which they are affiliated. Independent media rely on funding from foreign donors and are often overshadowed by large media outlets tied to powerful political figures. Cyber-harassment against journalists has also been documented.

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