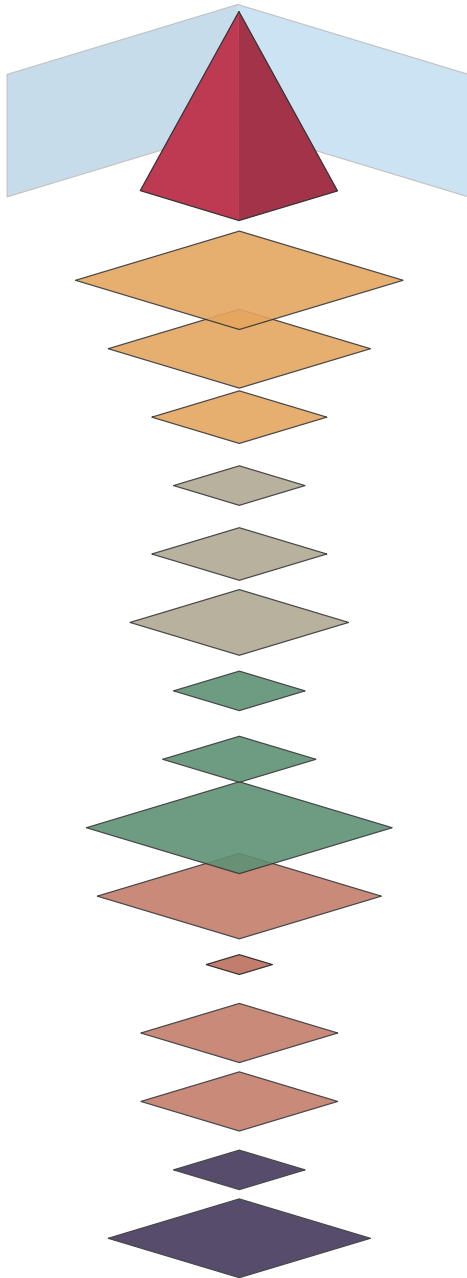


 **UZBEKISTAN**



 **4.95**
CRIMINALITY SCORE

100th of 193 countries
28th of 46 Asian countries
3rd of 8 Central Asian and Caucasian countries

 **CRIMINAL MARKETS** **4.60**

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	7.50
HUMAN SMUGGLING	6.00
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	4.00
ARMS TRAFFICKING	3.00
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	4.00
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	5.00
FLORA CRIMES	3.00
FAUNA CRIMES	3.50
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	7.00
HEROIN TRADE	6.50
COCAINE TRADE	1.50
CANNABIS TRADE	4.50
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	4.50
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	3.00
FINANCIAL CRIMES	6.00

 **CRIMINAL ACTORS** **5.30**

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	5.00
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	5.50
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	6.50
FOREIGN ACTORS	5.00
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	4.50

 **3.88**
RESILIENCE SCORE



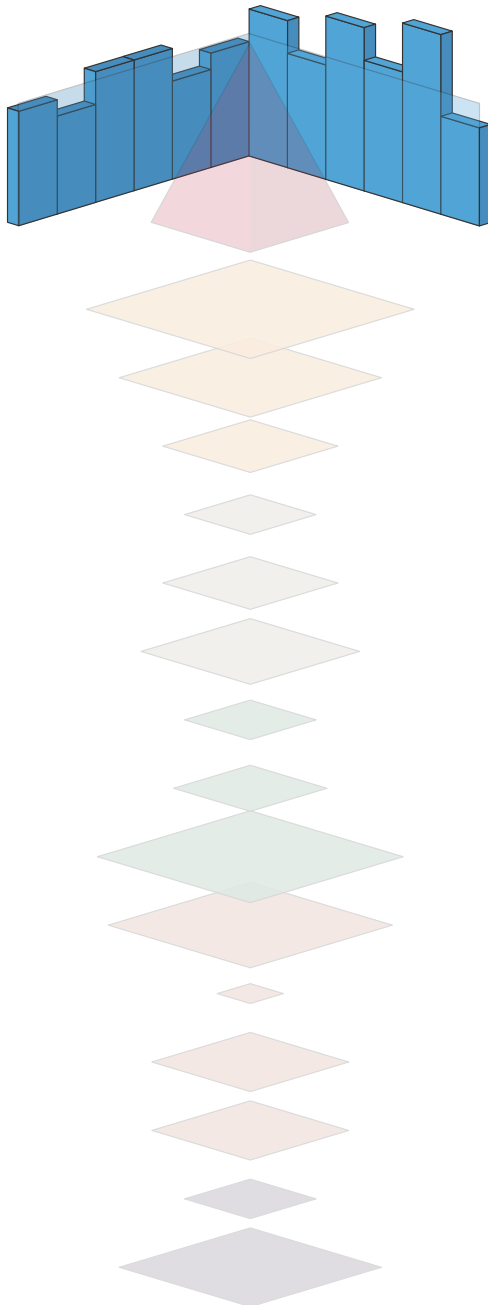
Funding provided by the United States Government.



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.

UZBEKISTAN



3.88
RESILIENCE SCORE

138th of 193 countries
30th of 46 Asian countries
5th of 8 Central Asian and Caucasian countries

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	3.50
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	3.00
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	4.00
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	4.00
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	3.00
LAW ENFORCEMENT	3.50
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	4.50
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	3.50
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	5.00
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	4.00
PREVENTION	5.50
NON-STATE ACTORS	3.00

4.95
CRIMINALITY SCORE

CRIMINAL MARKETS	4.60
CRIMINAL ACTORS	5.30



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.

CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

Uzbekistan is a source and destination country for human trafficking. Despite a notable decrease in forced labour during the annual cotton harvest, instances of nationals subject to this practice persist in several areas. Local officials in some districts continue to impose cotton production quotas, incentivizing recruitment. In the past few years, however, the government has made progress in reducing forced child labour in the cotton fields. Uzbek victims are locally exploited in other ways, including brothels, clubs and private residences. Children, women and members of the LGBTQ+ community are subjected to sex trafficking inside and outside the country. Over half of Uzbek migrant workers avoid the complex bureaucratic processes required to obtain proper documentation in Russia, which makes them vulnerable to human trafficking. Additionally, many migrant workers from Uzbekistan face high risks of trafficking within Russia itself, where migrants are charged high work permit fees that make them vulnerable to debt-based coercion. Corrupt, low-level officials are said to be involved in this market.

Uzbekistan is a source of migrant labour to other countries and presumably has a considerable human smuggling market. Given demand for cheap labour in Russia, some Uzbeki nationals are known to migrate to the country irregularly with the help of smugglers. (Although the recent economic uncertainty in Russia might push Uzbeki nationals to look for other countries to migrate to.) Uzbek nationals travel to Turkey, proceed to Central America and then Mexico to reach the southern US border, along widely used migratory routes. In the days after the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan, hundreds of Afghans arrived in Uzbekistan via land and air. Since Uzbekistan is not a signatory to the UN refugee convention, many of those Afghan refugees face the risk of deportation and are vulnerable to crime and corruption in the country. Uzbekistan reports sporadic and unorganized extortion incidents targeting local businesses.

TRADE

Uzbekistan has low levels of illicit arms trading. One contributing factor is the strength of the border monitoring with Tajikistan and Afghanistan, significantly restricting the movement of people. Negative cultural attitudes towards firearms inherited from Soviet times is believed to be the reason behind the low level of privately owned firearms.

Trade in counterfeit goods is prevalent in Uzbekistan, especially food products, household chemicals, cosmetics

and medicines that can be found in domestic markets. High level of corruption facilitates this illicit trade. The illegal sale and purchase of alcohol and tobacco products is a ubiquitous issue in Uzbekistan, especially in the Fergana region. To fight against the illicit trade in excise goods, the government banned the sale of non-labelled products.

ENVIRONMENT

Illicit logging appears to be the most prolific flora crime in Uzbekistan. This issue is exacerbated by the need for wood to heat homes and cook food in autumn and winter, when natural gas supplies in many regions are cut off to households and businesses. The government has made efforts to preserve valuable tree species by extending the moratorium on cutting down certain protected species that are not part of the state forest. Despite the prevalence of such illicit activities, there is sporadic evidence highlighting the involvement of organized crime groups in this market. Poaching, illicit trade and possession of protected animals, as well as illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, occur in the country albeit on a smaller scale. The criminal market for fauna-related crime is transnational in nature, which would suggest profits are accrued by domestic and foreign actors alike. Wildlife smuggling also happens along existing drug trade routes.

The illicit extraction, smuggling, and mining of natural resources, including gold and other commodities, are common occurrences in Uzbekistan. Although private gold mining was legalized in 2019, illegal mining continues to be prevalent. Given that gold is seen as a safe investment during financial turmoil, the global financial crisis in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic might have provided more incentives for people to continue with illegal gold extraction. This criminal market is transnational in nature and profits are accrued to domestic and foreign actors alike.

DRUGS

Uzbekistan is a transit country for Afghan heroin bound for Russia, and for heroin precursors bound for Afghanistan. The Uzbek market is relatively modest compared to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. This is largely due to tighter controls over the borders with Tajikistan and Afghanistan, which has shifted a significant part of opiate trafficking to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. The heroin trade involves more foreign actors than domestic criminal organizations. While corruption is widespread in Uzbekistan, collusion between drug trafficking groups and law enforcement is not pervasive. Furthermore, COVID-19-related issues like less disposable income, lower quality of drugs, an increase in the price of drugs and a decrease in the supply of opiates,

have resulted in an overall decrease or at least a change in drug use in Uzbekistan.

Cocaine is not widely consumed in Uzbekistan due to the high price of the drug and low purchasing power in the country. Its consumption is limited to wealthy urban residents who use cocaine recreationally. Similarly, cannabis use and cultivation seem to be limited, although the country does act as a transit point for drugs trafficked from Afghanistan to Russia. The consumption, distribution and sale of synthetic drugs, especially tramadol, are all on the rise in Uzbekistan. Organised crime groups are involved in the production of these drugs, which are mostly sold online.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Uzbekistan's digital ecosystem has evolved rapidly since the government embarked on its ambitious national economic and government reform agenda in 2016. In the last year, internet access rates have improved across the country, and the cost of mobile broadband has decreased. This has led to a rise in cyber-dependent crime, with several high profile cyberattacks occurring in 2021. During the reporting period, hackers targeted 11 regional authority websites, encrypted databases in a large ministry, and attacked the systems of two insurance companies and one private bank. Even though the government is trying to enhance the security of personal data, certain initiatives are lacking.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crimes, especially embezzlement, fraud and the misuse of public funds, committed by both public and private actors are widespread in the country. Uzbekistani political elites and business groups have allegedly been involved in fraudulent practices. Uzbekistan is currently undergoing a series of economic reforms that promote private investment and the privatization of the economy, but this process is accompanied by accusations of corruption and kickbacks. Cases of financial fraud are prevalent in the country. These cases are often related to deceptive offers of work abroad; selling or buying real estate or plots of land; and applying for fake university courses or jobs, among others.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

It is difficult to distinguish between loose networks, mafia-style groups and state-embedded actors in Uzbekistan since all are intertwined. State-embedded actors are known to be involved in illicit activities and corrupt practices especially in certain industries, including cotton production and the natural gas sector, resulting in significant losses to state resources. That said, collusion between drug traffickers and law enforcement is not common. The influence of loose criminal-style networks has been on the rise in recent years. This increase can be attributed to the growing numbers of these criminal networks, driven by the economic crisis resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. These networks operate with transnational links to other foreign networks. They tend to operate in major criminal markets like human trafficking, flora crimes, non-renewable resource crimes, the heroin trade and the synthetic drug trade, and they are known to perpetrate medium to high levels of violence.

Private sector actors, specifically those who are politically exposed, often launder the proceeds of crime. Business groups with connections to the political elite have expanded at an exponential rate, through preferential commercial relationships with the state or with state-owned entities. Private commercial banks continue to be operated by politically exposed people, shadowy oligarchs and – perhaps most worryingly – individuals implicated in money laundering and corruption scandals. Additionally, former mafia-style groups (remnants of the Soviet period) have been integrated into the business community where they combine legal and illicit activities and benefit from the protection afforded by certain government representatives. These groups engage in a variety of crimes such as money laundering, extortion, bribery and robbery. Foreign diasporas do not exert control over any of the organized criminal markets in Uzbekistan, and the level of interaction with foreign criminal actors within the country is minimal to moderate. Nevertheless, owing to Uzbekistan's historical links to the Soviet Union, criminal networks maintain close ties with Russia and neighbouring Central Asian nations.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

The Uzbekistan government encourages cooperation and interaction among the special services of each of the counties in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), including exchange of information and joint activities to combat drug trafficking and organized crime. However,

public perception of the Uzbek state itself is poor, as it is perceived to be corrupt and unreliable. Additionally, the democratic process is not independent and not protected from criminal influence. Although the country has low levels of state legitimacy, governance and the efficiency of political leadership have improved steadily over the last

decade. Uzbekistan has little state transparency. Public resources are misused to benefit those close to the ruling elite. Corruption is widespread and affects the daily lives of citizens. The government's response to widespread and systemic corruption has been weak, with extensive emphasis given to ineffectual initiatives like anti-corruption training. Legal and institutional reform is needed to ensure meaningful separation of powers and adequate public accountability of government bodies. That being said, the government has a number of anti-corruption and organized crime policies in place. Recent reforms include the development of a database in 2021 that contains the names of former corrupt government officials, to prevent their re-employment within the government; and the creation of a national anti-corruption council that includes civil society representatives. Additionally, in 2022, the government launched an electronic platform where public organizations can monitor and evaluate anti-corruption activities. Despite these efforts, however, there are still numerous reports of corruption in the country, especially at a local level.

Uzbekistan has ratified most of relevant international treaties related to organize crime, except the Arms Trade Treaty of 2013, and two UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) protocols – against the smuggling of migrants and against the illicit manufacture and trafficking in firearms. Though Uzbekistan promotes international cooperation to combat organized crime, its efforts are undermined by corruption and insufficient institutional capacity. Uzbekistan is a member of the Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre (CARICC) for combating the illicit trafficking of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and their precursors. Uzbekistan's national legal framework criminalizes human trafficking, arms trafficking, flora and fauna crimes, non-renewable resource crimes and the illicit drug trade. Forced labour violations are considered administrative in nature for first offense, with fines levied by the labour inspectorate; repeat offenses are considered criminal. The legal framework regarding human smuggling is most lacking, but the government has enforced a number of amendments to strengthen the country's fight against illicit flora and non-renewable resources crime, specifically targeting illicit logging and mining. The Uzbek government adopted its first laws related to cyber-security in 2022, but the implementation of these regulations remains ineffective.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

In line with the entire political system in the country, the judicial system in Uzbekistan is highly corrupt. It is not independent either, despite constitutional provisions. Judges usually act together with prosecutors and the police to produce convictions. As a result of corruption and lack of training, courts do not adequately protect victims of various human rights violations, nor do they bring perpetrators to justice. However, under the new political leadership, the

country has embarked on a process of judicial reform: a supreme judicial council has been established to put an end to external pressure and strengthen the system as a whole. With regard to the detention system, Uzbekistan's prisons are notorious for physical abuse and torture, and they lack adequate medical care. However, the government has recently taken steps to increase transparency when it comes to issues plaguing the country's penitentiaries.

Corruption in law enforcement remains rampant through the entire chain of command, including among senior officers. Police detain people on false charges in an attempt to intimidate whistle-blowers and prevent them from exposing corruption. In theory, the state security service and the department responsible for combating corruption, extortion and racketeering have mandates to deal with economic crimes and corruption, but reports suggest that law enforcement authorities are used to implementing corrupt schemes to undermine political and business rivals, and to detain and prosecute business executives, as an integral part of their extortion and expropriation mechanisms. Police violence is also common in the country. In terms of drug control, law enforcement in Uzbekistan continues to focus mainly on the smuggling of narcotics from Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Implementing effective counter-narcotic policies is hindered by a lack of regional and international cooperation, limited technical and analytical capacities due to insufficient funding, and law enforcement's need for advanced investigation techniques. The government has cyber-security and environmental policy divisions in place to keep related criminal activities in check.

Given its geographic location in the heart of Central Asia, Uzbekistan is a major transit point for most organized criminal markets. The country is located along major trafficking routes, such as the opium and heroin markets of Afghanistan, which exacerbates its vulnerability to criminal flows. The country's extensive borders are challenging to monitor and police, making them fairly porous. The mountainous terrain on the borders with Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Kyrgyzstan presents an additional challenge. However, due to the perceived dangers of a spill-over of Islamist insurgency in recent years, protection along the borders with Afghanistan and Tajikistan has increased. Uzbekistan's digital ecosystem has also evolved rapidly since the government embarked on its national economic and government reform agenda in 2016. The issue of cyber-security is poorly formulated in the strategy, however, and lacks a holistic national approach.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Uzbekistan has anti-money laundering (AML) measures in place, and an interdepartmental commission has been established to adhere to international Financial Action Task Force (FATF) recommendations to combat money laundering, the financing of terrorism and the financing of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The country has made some credible efforts to conduct financial

investigations related to organized crime, and during 2021 it continued to improve its anti-money laundering framework. In the same year, parliament adopted regulations related to AML information-sharing; it passed a decree on the development of an AML strategy; and it amended legislation on bank secrecy. Despite these efforts, the risk of money laundering and terrorist financing remains quite high, and the long-term effects of prevention efforts are yet to be observed in practice.

The capacity of the government to ensure that legitimate businesses are able to operate free from the influence of criminal groups has improved over the past two decades. The state has taken measures to simplify the procedure for registering new businesses, reduce interference by regulatory authorities in business activities, and abolish currency controls. Although the current economic environment allows for businesses to expand, there is still lots of red tape that business owners have to reckon with – in addition to land and property rights not being effectively upheld. The COVID-19 pandemic and its subsequent effects on the global economy have impeded the progress of many governmental reforms and led several private businesses to bankruptcy.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

The state places some focus on treating and caring for victims of organized crime, but non-state actors are more active in this area. The government has operated as many as 197 centres to assist victims of violence and trafficking, but some of these centres did not provide adequate protection when research was conducted. There have also been ongoing delays with registering NGOs, which has constrained efforts by civil society to monitor and assist victims. The government requires victims to file a criminal complaint with their community authorities to be eligible for government-provided rehabilitation and protection services. However, the majority of identified victims were reluctant to contact or cooperate with law enforcement because of their distrust for the system, and because they feared for their own safety or the safety of their families. The government also lacks a standardized process to identify victims from vulnerable populations and refer them to protective services, especially those subjected to internal trafficking. This has led to potential victims being penalized, particularly those involved in sex work. Despite these negatives, the Uzbekistan government has made some efforts in recent years to increase protection for victims of human trafficking. As of 2021, the government managed around 20 centres for drug treatment and rehabilitation, but these are reported to have limited capabilities.

The Uzbekistan government has campaigns in place to ensure that all citizens are aware of their labour rights. With respect to human trafficking, Uzbekistan has maintained its prevention efforts. Prevention efforts against systemic child labour and forced labour in the cotton harvest industry have resulted in a notable decrease in these crimes. Still, cotton production quotas imposed by local officials of some districts inevitably lead to some adults entering into forced labour. The government continued activities under its National Commission on Trafficking in Persons and Forced Labour, even during the pandemic, but there remains a lack of communication and coordination between the commission and civil society, along with an absence of funding. This has led to an overreliance on assistance from NGOs and other international groups. There are whistle-blowing mechanisms in place for certain crimes, such as illicit logging and the distribution and sale of synthetic drugs, but the whistle-blowing role is mainly carried out by journalists, bloggers and environmental activists. There has been a reported decrease in drug users in Uzbekistan, which might be a result of law enforcement's ongoing outreach activities aimed at preventing drug use among the youth.

Civil society organizations (CSOs) and independent human rights activists have played an active role in recent years, such as drawing the attention of the international community to the problems of government-compelled forced labour among adults and children during the annual cotton harvest. The government is not open to criticism and officials perceive some CSOs to be hostile. However, there are some instances of cooperation between the government and CSOs, especially in areas related to organized crime. When it comes to non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the government has controls in place. While the law allows for freedom of association, the government restricts this by requiring NGOs to obtain permission for their activities from the Ministry of Justice. Media freedom is extremely limited, but there has been some progress on this front: imprisoned journalists have been freed, access to censored websites has been granted, and the process of media registration has improved. Despite this, criticism of government remains out of the question. The state exercises control over all media coverage and requires all media to be registered with the authorities – and to provide copies of publications to the government. The same restrictions extend to independent online media.

This summary was funded in part by a grant from the United States Department of State. The opinions, findings and conclusions stated herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the United States Department of State.