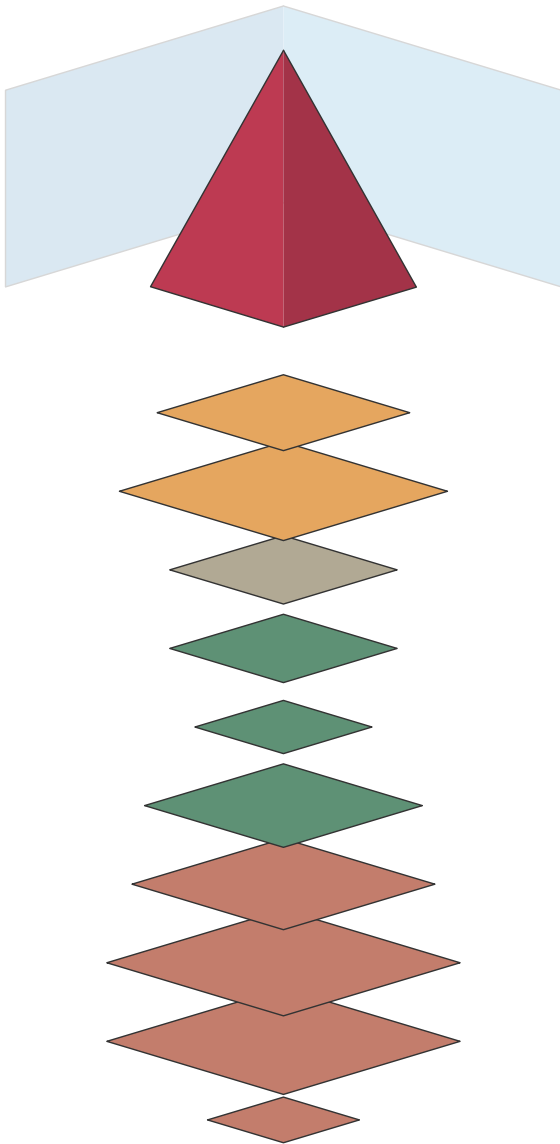


 **ALBANIA**



 **5.63**  
**CRIMINALITY SCORE**

61<sup>st</sup> of 193 countries  
9<sup>th</sup> of 44 European countries  
6<sup>th</sup> of 17 Central & Eastern European countries

 **CRIMINAL MARKETS** **5.25**

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	5.00
HUMAN SMUGGLING	6.50
ARMS TRAFFICKING	4.50
FLORA CRIMES	4.50
FAUNA CRIMES	3.50
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	5.50
HEROIN TRADE	6.00
COCAINE TRADE	7.00
CANNABIS TRADE	7.00
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	3.00

 **CRIMINAL ACTORS** **6.00**

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	7.00
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	7.50
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	7.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	2.50

 **5.04**  
**RESILIENCE SCORE**

87<sup>th</sup> of 193 countries  
36<sup>th</sup> of 44 European countries  
10<sup>th</sup> of 17 Central & Eastern European countries



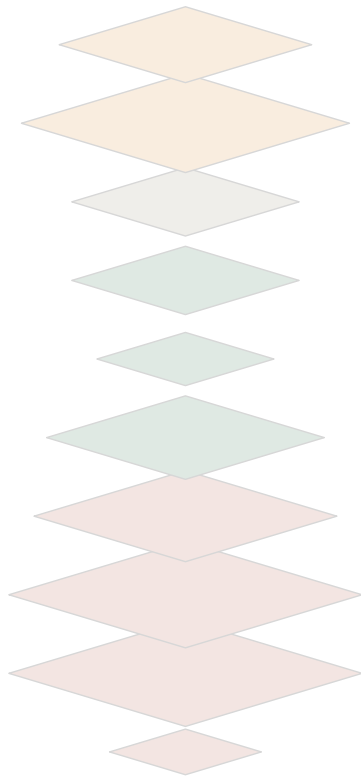
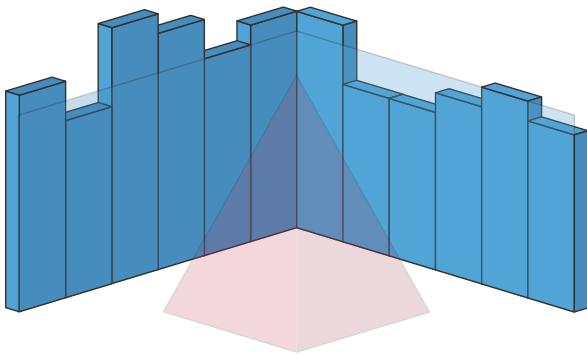
Funding provided by the United States Government.



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# ALBANIA



5.04

## RESILIENCE SCORE

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

36<sup>th</sup> of 44 European countries

10<sup>th</sup> of 17 Central & Eastern European countries

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE 5.50

GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY 4.50

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION 6.50

NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS 6.00

JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION 5.00

LAW ENFORCEMENT 5.50

TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY 5.50

ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING 4.00

ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY 4.00

VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT 4.50

PREVENTION 5.00

NON-STATE ACTORS 4.50



5.63

## CRIMINALITY SCORE

61<sup>st</sup> of 193 countries

9<sup>th</sup> of 44 European countries

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CRIMINAL MARKETS 5.25



CRIMINAL ACTORS 6.00



# CRIMINALITY

## CRIMINAL MARKETS

### PEOPLE

Albania serves as a source and transit country for human trafficking and a transit location for irregular migrants destined for Europe. Albanian criminal actors are allegedly responsible for a large number of trafficking victims detected in Western Europe. Albania is also a destination country for human trafficking with some irregular migrants from Asia subjected to forced labour in the country. Domestic trafficking of women for sexual exploitation continues, albeit on a smaller scale than it once was.

Albania serves primarily as a transit country for the smuggling of migrants from the Middle East and North Africa who travel through Greece and Montenegro, on their way to Western or Northern Europe. Albanian organized crime groups are involved in both international and domestic human smuggling operations and cooperate with human smugglers in surrounding countries to facilitate the journeys.

### TRADE

Compared to other Balkan states, arms trafficking is relatively limited in Albania, and there is no arms or ammunition production. However, there are still arms remaining from the civil unrest in Albania in 1997, creating the foundation for a limited criminal market in small arms, light weapons and dismantled weapon parts. Many of these small arms and light weapons (SALW) are destined for other European markets, but some appear to be sold on the domestic market as well. Arms trafficking routes from Albania to EU countries are either inland, moving north through the Balkans or Greece, or seaborne to Western Europe. Within Albania, the criminal market for SALW is mainly controlled by criminal networks from the country's northern regions.

### ENVIRONMENT

Although there is evidence of a decline in recent years, environmental criminal markets persist for both flora and fauna, as well as non-renewable natural resources. Illegal logging is an issue and is particularly widespread in the district of Elbasan and the southern district of Vlora. A 10-year export ban was imposed in 2016 and successfully curbed some illegal logging. However, it also created opportunities for small, well-organized criminal groups in Kosovo and Montenegro to smuggle illicit timber into and from Albania, causing illegal logging in border areas, where mountainous terrain makes it difficult for the police to contain the activity.

Illegal trade in birds, brown bears and wolves is believed to be a relatively common form of wildlife crime in Albania, with many protected species and other wildlife traded online or in shops. Furthermore, although a nationwide hunting ban has sought to limit it, poaching continues. Similarly, though it does not constitute a major criminal market, the illegal extraction of natural resources, such as chrome, remains an issue. An oil-producing country, Albania is home to a small but significant market for illegal oil extraction, which is facilitated by corrupt practices on the part of state officials. While the market does not involve major organized crime groups, there are reportedly links between the latter and state officials.

### DRUGS

Albania is a key transit country for heroin, as well as cocaine trafficked from Latin America. Albanian criminal actors also play central roles in Europe's heroin and cocaine markets. Mafia-style groups have formed associations with South American cartels, the 'Ndrangheta and cocaine producers, allowing them to import vast quantities of high-quality cocaine at competitive prices and giving them access to a complex global infrastructure. Albanian criminal groups, however, are not just engaged in trafficking cocaine to Europe, but are also involved in its storage and distribution, and have increasingly consolidated their influence over wholesalers and retail markets across the continent. As a result, Albanian organized criminals have come to control a significant share of Europe's cocaine trade.

Albania is also a transit country for heroin trafficked to Europe through the Balkan route from Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Trafficking is undertaken by mafia-style actors and criminal networks that are known to cooperate with other criminal actors involved in the heroin supply chain. Most heroin is trafficked into Albania by land, through North Macedonia, but heroin-processing laboratories have also been uncovered internally by Albanian police.

Albania has been one of the largest producers of cannabis in Europe for at least a decade. In recent years, however, cultivation has declined drastically, largely due to police intervention, the destruction of plantations, and state efforts to change the business model. Nevertheless, stockpiles remain and, for now, Albania continues to be a significant source of cannabis for the EU, with the drug reportedly transported by sea via Italy and by land through Greece and Montenegro. The criminal market for synthetic drugs in Albania is the smallest of the drug markets in the country. Synthetic drugs are imported into Albania primarily from neighbouring countries, such as Serbia and Bulgaria, as well as various EU countries. In general, while cannabis

appears to be relatively widely consumed domestically, consumption rates of harder drugs are low in Albania.

## CRIMINAL ACTORS

Albania's criminal ecosystem is dominated by overlapping criminal networks and family mafia-style actors. Mafia-style groups control the criminal markets for drugs, human trafficking, human smuggling and are reportedly moving into public procurement. They have positioned themselves as some of the most powerful criminal organizations in Europe. Albanian mafia-style groups differ from other major mafias (such as the Italian), in that they rarely identify themselves with names or symbols. With that said, Albanian groups exhibit a clear structure and loyalty to a single leader. They collude with state-embedded actors and are able to influence elections by pushing votes in one direction or the other. Mafia-style groups in Albania also allegedly create smaller, looser criminal networks that gravitate around them. These networks reportedly have a fluid organizational and operational structure and comprise of 3-4 members. They take a pragmatist-driven approach by seizing any opportunity for profit. They are highly violent but cooperate well with corrupt police and judiciary officials as well as with foreign actors, particularly the Sicilian mafia as well as Turkish organized

crime groups. They are known to have links to Kosovar and Montenegrin criminal networks and have a strong presence in Belgium, the Netherlands and the UK, among others. Due to specific socio-economic factors, a worrying trend of youth involvement in day-to-day criminal operations in various roles as part of criminal networks is observed. Albanian criminal networks are heavily involved in drug trafficking, especially the cannabis trade. They often pose as legal businesses to operate and different members are responsible for specific tasks within the organization, such as securing, transporting, distributing drugs, etc.

State-embedded actors also feature heavily in the criminal landscape of the country. Reportedly, crime group members have been appointed to political positions at various levels within the state apparatus. Criminal networks are highly embedded in local- and regional-level structures and operate with the police and receive political protection. Foreign actors also function within Albania but are less influential than domestic groups. Turkish crime groups for one are mainly involved in heroin trafficking, while Italian groups are influential in the southern part of the country. There is evidence that Albanian organized criminals interact with foreign crime groups from Kosovo and Montenegro, as well as South and Central American cartels.

# RESILIENCE

## LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Albania is an unconsolidated democracy where checks and balances on power structures are not always adequately ensured and often result in weak institutional capacity. Criminal state capture has reduced the state's ability to tackle organized crime. Under pressure from the European Union, the Albanian government has placed corruption and organized crime high on the political agenda, and a comprehensive judicial and anti-corruption reform programme is currently in implementation. Nevertheless, this process is slow, and the political environment remains characterized by polarization, frequent crises and persistent grand corruption.

Albania's legal framework on international judicial cooperation in criminal matters is well established, and Albanian law enforcement has partnered with various institutions at international and regional levels. Albania is a member of INTERPOL and a partner of the European Judicial Network; it has signed a strategic cooperation agreement with Europol; and is part of various regional law enforcement networks. Albania also has several extradition agreements in place and has ratified nearly all relevant organized crime treaties.

Overall, Albania has a fairly robust legislative framework to address organized crime. However, enforcement of this legal framework often falls short.

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Independence and capacity in Albania's judiciary are lacking, and corruption often undermines the integrity of the criminal justice system. The Albanian government is currently implementing a comprehensive justice reform package aimed at substantially strengthening the judicial system and the institutional safeguards against corruption. However, due to the scale and ambition of the judicial reforms, as well as delays, the country has at times lacked a functioning Constitutional Court. And because all judges have to go through an extensive vetting process, there is a severe backlog of cases. Detention facilities in Albania are reportedly lacking in quality, with accounts of abuse within Albanian prisons. Because of inadequate resources, low salaries, limited equipment, high turnover of staff, as well as corruption, the Albanian law enforcement's response to organized crime is often delayed and inadequate. Whereas some criminal groups have been effectively

dismantled and results have been achieved, investigations and prosecutions often fail to target the upper echelons of criminal organizations, and the number of final convictions is limited. Overall, this translates into little progress being made in the fight against organized crime.

## ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Albania is one of the poorest countries in Europe, and its social and economic policies have failed to generate sufficient employment, which may push people towards organized crime. At least a third of the country's GDP is thought to come from the informal economy, which, besides causing loss of tax revenue, makes the introduction of labour protection and competition rules difficult. The lack of contract enforcement, along with unclear property rights and the prevalence of corruption are also major constraints to private sector development. Corruption, weak regulatory frameworks and a significant informal economy render Albania vulnerable to money laundering. As a significant percentage of the country's economy is informal, the number of detected money laundering cases is low. Outside of the informal economy, many large-scale money-laundering projects are set up as prestigious public-private infrastructure projects, such as football stadiums, theatres and malls. Such large-scale projects often involve corrupt Albanian politicians and international 'starchitects', indicating the extent to which organized crime is able to capture state institutions.

Albanian police have approved a new action plan aimed at tackling money laundering, criminal assets and unjustified wealth. Moreover, under amendments to the country's anti-mafia law, tools have been developed for freezing, handling and confiscating criminal assets. However, implementation remains a significant challenge, particularly with regard to the confiscation of sequestered assets. Albania was grey-listed by the Financial Action Task Force in early 2020 due to its inability to address strategic deficiencies in its anti-money laundering regime.

## CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

The Albanian government has made significant progress in passing legislation that meets international standards, on the status and treatment of victims of crime. Nevertheless, challenges persist at the implementation level. There is lack of support programmes to ensure medical, psychological and social assistance to victims of crime, and only a limited number of public and private actors are involved in offering such services. Moreover, the country lacks an integrated victim support system, and victim and witness assassinations are not unheard of. Strong ties between mafia-style organizations and the Albanian legislature and law enforcement agencies often put witnesses in danger. As a result, many witnesses have been forced to skip court hearings and refrain from testifying. Legal aid schemes need to develop outreach mechanisms and access

to protection services. Civil society organizations (CSOs) with donor support remain the primary providers of aid for most cases involving vulnerable groups, rather than by government agencies.

The culture of crime prevention in Albania is relatively underdeveloped. Although legislation and law enforcement mechanisms do exist, prevention mechanisms are ineffective and lack creativity regarding engagement with citizens to prevent criminal activity from occurring in the first place. Additional prevention programmes must be established. Civil society and media engagement in countering organized crime is limited. Many civil society organizations are dependent on external donors for financial support while public funding for CSOs is minimal and not yet legally regulated. Press freedom is generally respected, but few media outlets in Albania enjoy financial and editorial independence, and many politicians use rhetoric that is not conducive to a free and independent media environment. Although rare, there have been instances in which journalists have been threatened with violence.

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