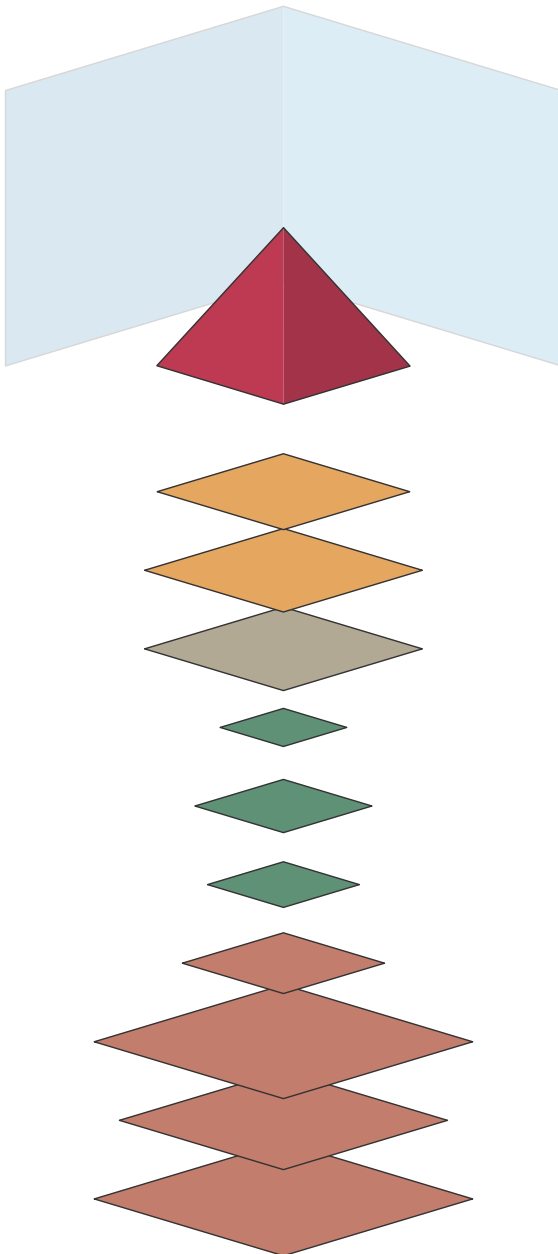


# BELGIUM



## 4.34

### CRIMINALITY SCORE

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

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

6<sup>th</sup> of 11 Western European countries



### CRIMINAL MARKETS

**5.05**

HUMAN TRAFFICKING **5.00**

HUMAN SMUGGLING **5.50**

ARMS TRAFFICKING **5.50**

FLORA CRIMES **2.50**

FAUNA CRIMES **3.50**

NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES **3.00**

HEROIN TRADE **4.00**

COCAINE TRADE **7.50**

CANNABIS TRADE **6.50**

SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE **7.50**



### CRIMINAL ACTORS

**3.63**

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS **3.00**

CRIMINAL NETWORKS **4.50**

STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS **2.00**

FOREIGN ACTORS **5.00**



## 7.00

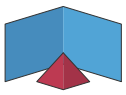
### RESILIENCE SCORE

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

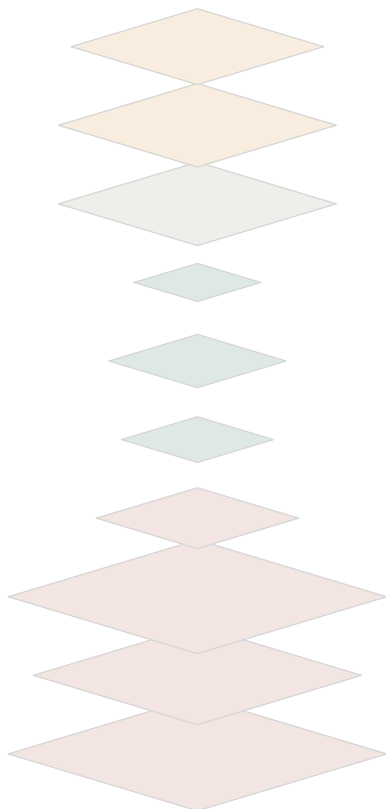
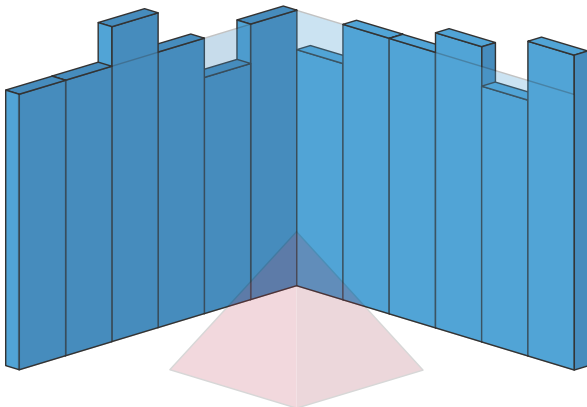
18<sup>th</sup> of 44 European countries

10<sup>th</sup> of 11 Western European countries





# BELGIUM



7.00

## RESILIENCE SCORE

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

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

10<sup>th</sup> of 11 Western European countries

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE **7.00**

GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY **7.00**

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION **8.00**

NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS **7.00**

JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION **6.00**

LAW ENFORCEMENT **7.00**

TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY **6.00**

ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING **7.00**

ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY **7.00**

VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT **7.50**

PREVENTION **6.50**

NON-STATE ACTORS **8.00**



4.34

## CRIMINALITY SCORE

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

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**CRIMINAL MARKETS** **5.05**



**CRIMINAL ACTORS** **3.63**



# CRIMINALITY

## CRIMINAL MARKETS

### PEOPLE

Belgium is primarily a destination and transit country for human trafficking and human smuggling. The criminal market for human trafficking is centred on the larger cities, such as Brussels, Antwerp and Liège. In Brussels and Antwerp, most human trafficking offences are for sexual exploitation; the majority of offences in Liège are linked to labour exploitation. There are some cases of forced begging and coerced criminal activities across Belgium. The victims are usually Nigerian, Moroccan and Hungarian. The recruitment process for trafficking victims starts in their home country and often involves false promises that lure victims into financial and psychological dependency.

Belgium's market for human smuggling has been expanding in recent years, with a rise in the number of recorded offences. The country's geographic proximity to Germany, the Netherlands and France makes it an ideal transit country. Victims tend to be from African and Middle Eastern countries. Belgian human-smuggling networks involve large organized networks, often based on kin. It is believed that some human-trafficking networks are also involved in human smuggling. In some cases, human smuggling constitutes the first phase of human trafficking.

### TRADE

Given its geographic location at the heart of Europe and its long-standing history as a major producer and exporter of firearms, Belgium is a transit, source and destination country for trafficked firearms. The country is among the top three civilian firearms producers in the EU and Belgian-produced firearms are frequently seized in other countries. Nevertheless, illegally smuggled, foreign-produced arms make up the largest part of the domestic criminal firearms market. Firearms seized in Belgium are primarily from the Balkan region. They are smuggled in by road in cars, as well as in passenger buses and vans, which are used by courier companies. Alternatively, weapons enter the country via the port of Antwerp. In these cases, however, weapons do not seem to be intended for the Belgian market but the country is used to transit the weapons destined for other countries. The number of seized firearms annually has risen substantially and are high by European standards.

### ENVIRONMENT

Although the domestic demand for illicit environment products is moderate, Belgium is an important hub for global environment crimes in resources, such as diamonds, fauna

– ivory and live species and flora products, such as illegally harvested timber. Belgium has one of the leading diamond industries in the world and Antwerp is an important hub for the global diamond trade, where several crime groups are active. Diamonds are illegally smuggled into Belgium, then sold in the country and used to launder money. Because of its connections to former African colonies, Belgium has historically played an important role in the ivory trade. The country has stockpiles of ivory and continues to be a transit hub for the illicit trade in wildlife products, including live birds, primate species and ivory, exported from African countries, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea and Liberia, to Asia, North America and the Middle East. Belgium is a destination country for illegal flora markets, such as plants from Thailand and traditional medicinal herbs from Asia and North America. The port of Antwerp has been a major point of entry for large amounts of illicit timber headed for Europe. Timber is shipped from Central Africa and is imported by a number of Belgian companies.

### DRUGS

In addition to being a destination country, Belgium is one of the most important European transit countries for drugs. It is responsible for a disproportionately large share of Europe's cocaine seizures. This is largely because Antwerp, Europe's second-largest port, has emerged as a significant international drug trafficking hub and one of the most important ports of entry for cocaine into Europe. Cocaine, imported in containers entering the port, is predominantly destined for the Netherlands and elsewhere in Europe. Belgium is a notable source and destination country and transit zone for new psychoactive substances and synthetic drugs. Many of the synthetic drugs are believed to come from China, but the production of synthetic drugs, such as MDMA, commonly known as Ecstasy or molly, amphetamines, ketamine and synthetic cannabinoids are expanding in the Belgian-Dutch border region. Several drug labs and warehouses have been dismantled in recent years. These production and conversion facilities appear to be operated predominantly by Dutch organized-crime groups and there are very links between the Dutch and Belgian crime markets for synthetic drugs.

Belgium is predominantly a destination for heroin and seizures indicate that its markets appear to be relatively sizeable. Heroin destined for Belgium enters the country via the Balkan route, the southern route (transiting in African countries before reaching Europe), or the northern route (transiting in Central Asia and Russia). The country is a producer, consumer and transit country for cannabis destined for markets in other European countries. Most herbal cannabis consumed in Belgium is either cultivated locally or imported from Spain, the Netherlands and some

North African countries; cannabis resin comes mostly from Morocco and is trafficked mainly by road through Spain and France. Professional cultivation of cannabis is expanding in Belgium, with some involvement of crime organizations. Criminals from the Netherlands play an important role in the Belgian crime market for cannabis.

## CRIMINAL ACTORS

A mix of mafia-style groups of foreign and domestic origin, as well as loose networks, are the main actors involved in Belgium's crime markets. Foreign actors wield considerable influence over the country's organized-crime markets. Notably, Albanian and multiple Italian organized-crime groups are involved in drug trafficking, arms trafficking and human smuggling, frequently in collaboration with Turkish mafia-style groups. Turkish actors are also involved in murder-for-hire against Turkish and Kurdish dissidents. Dutch groups are involved in drug trafficking, cannabis production, import and export, cocaine production and

export, and the export of synthetic drugs. They are involved in money laundering and labour exploitation. Romanian organized-crime groups operating in the Belgian market are involved in human trafficking for sexual and labour exploitation. Additionally, Nigerian organized-crime groups are involved in human smuggling which often results in human trafficking.

In addition to these groups, there are numerous 'loose' crime networks in Belgium, supporting drug trafficking, cultivation and production. The networks are relatively widespread but are concentrated more in city areas, such as Brussels and Antwerp, or at the Dutch border. Mafia-style outlaw biker gangs play an important role in crime. These include the Hells Angels, No Surrender, Diablo, MC Mongols, Satudah MC and the Bandidos. Biker gangs are involved in arms trafficking, cannabis production, synthetic drugs production and sexual exploitation. Aside from isolated cases, there is minimal data to suggest the involvement of state-embedded actors in Belgium's crime markets.

# RESILIENCE

## LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Belgium is a mature democracy with a record of good governance, respect for political rights and liberties, and high levels of stability. A complex political structure and political polarization can hinder efficient policymaking, but the Belgian government has prioritized issues related to organized crime. The country performs comparatively well in the fight against corruption and, for the most part, is governed with transparency, accountability and integrity. However, corruption in government is a problem and Belgium's safeguards against corruption have not always been fully effective.

The country has signed and ratified the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, its three protocols and the UN Convention against Corruption. It is dedicated to international and regional cooperation in the fight against organized crime, hosting an Interpol National Central Bureau and participating in several regional cooperation bodies. It has signed and ratified the European Convention on Extradition and its first and second protocols. However, its third and fourth protocols have not been signed. Belgium has signed bilateral extradition agreements with many countries. Its national legal framework covers all major crime markets of interest, apart from non-renewable resource crimes, and its criminal code criminalizes any involvement in organized-crime activities.

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Belgium's judiciary is fully independent and guarantees due process in criminal trials. Under the federal public prosecutor's office there exists a specific section with jurisdiction over organized-crime matters. Belgium is vulnerable to transnational organized crime, largely because of its geographic position at the heart of Europe. The country's ports and airports are key transit hubs for illicit products. However, border authorities have sought to strengthen port security in recent years. The country's law enforcement is made up of federal and local police forces. The federal police carry out expert operations at national and regional levels and support local and federal units. The federal police have a specialized body dedicated to the fight against organized crime. Additionally, there are a number of units specialized in prioritized crime markets, such as human, drug and arms trafficking. The federal public prosecutor's office contains a dedicated organized-crime section. Facilities in Belgian prisons are generally good and free from abuse and corruption, but there are occasional reports of problematic conditions, such as overcrowding. Belgium reportedly had the most overcrowded prison facilities in the EU, where inmates suffered insufficient access to healthcare and sanitary facilities. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an increase in early, conditional as well as temporary release. This response has, at least temporarily, reduced overcrowding.

## ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Belgium has an open and competitive service- and export-oriented economy. Doing business in the country is relatively easy despite rigid labour and tax regulations. Belgium has a large financial industry but has taken steps to improve transparency. Although it is still considered a tax haven and it might continue to attract dirty money, Belgium has become significantly less secretive, probably making it a more difficult jurisdiction for money launderers. The country is believed to have a relatively resilient Anti-Money Laundering/Combating the Financing of Terrorism (AML-CFT) framework. It has an adequate legal and institutional AML-CFT framework, but one remaining vulnerability is the trade in diamonds.

## CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Belgium has introduced a number of protection mechanisms and procedures for victims of human trafficking and certain forms of human smuggling, such as residence permit rights upon cooperation with investigators. The Belgian system has worked in some cases, but very few victims enter victim procedures. Because of police officers' lack of knowledge, limited appropriate opportunities are offered to victims when they are first encountered. The country has set up a number of preventative strategies to tackle organized crime at federal and local levels. Some of these address specific crime markets and bring together various public institutions to form a coherent and comprehensive approach. Other strategies are more locally oriented and tackle crimes specific to their area. Civil society plays an important role in Belgian social and political life, as well as in responding to some crime markets, such as human trafficking and wildlife crimes. Belgium enjoys a high level of media freedom and any attempts to silence critical journalism is considered anti-constitutional.

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