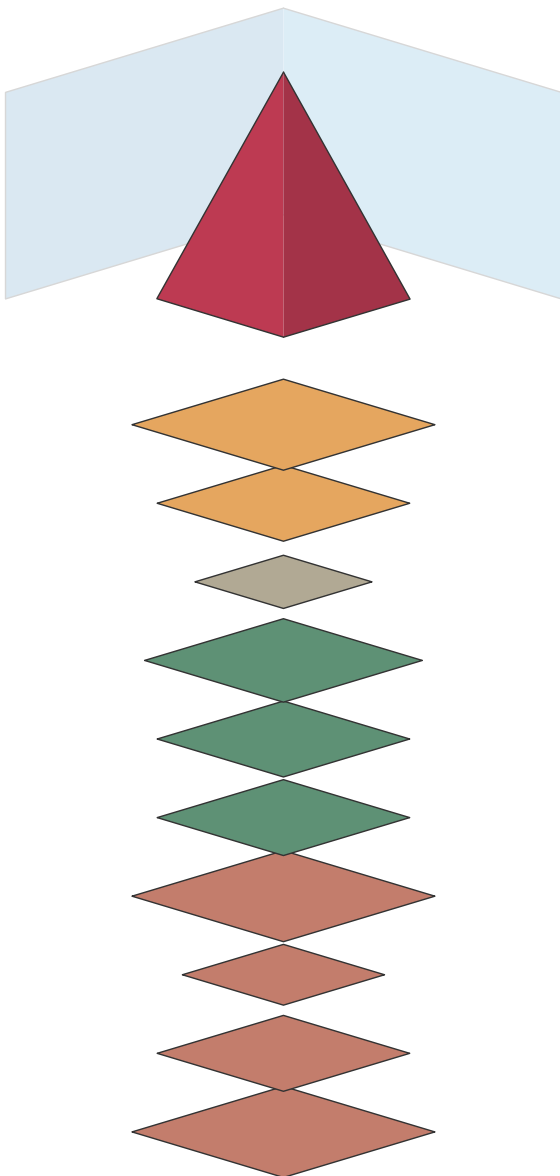


 **BULGARIA**



 **5.43**
CRIMINALITY SCORE

70th of 193 countries
10th of 44 European countries
7th of 17 Central & Eastern European countries

 **CRIMINAL MARKETS** **5.10**

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	6.00
HUMAN SMUGGLING	5.00
ARMS TRAFFICKING	3.50
FLORA CRIMES	5.50
FAUNA CRIMES	5.00
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	5.00
HEROIN TRADE	6.00
COCAINE TRADE	4.00
CANNABIS TRADE	5.00
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	6.00

 **CRIMINAL ACTORS** **5.75**

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	4.50
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	6.50
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	7.50
FOREIGN ACTORS	4.50

 **5.29**
RESILIENCE SCORE

71st of 193 countries
30th of 44 European countries
7th of 17 Central & Eastern European countries

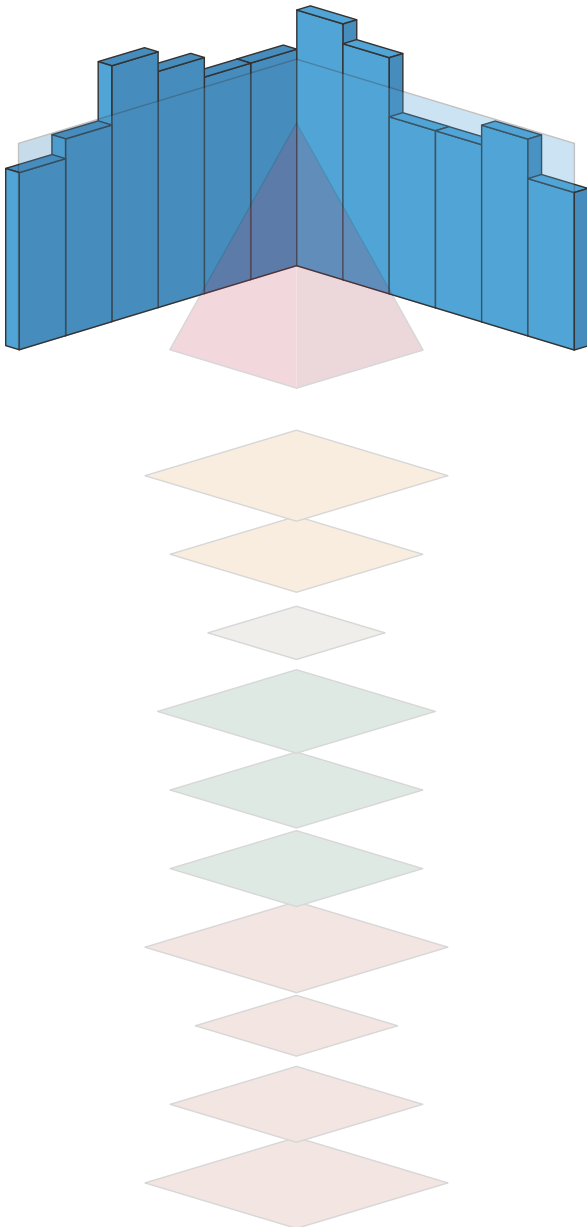


Funding provided by the United States Government.



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.

 **BULGARIA**





 **5.29**
RESILIENCE SCORE

71st of 193 countries
30th of 44 European countries
7th of 17 Central & Eastern European countries

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	4.50
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	5.00
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	6.50
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	6.00
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	5.50
LAW ENFORCEMENT	5.50
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	6.50
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	6.00
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	4.50
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	4.50
PREVENTION	5.00
NON-STATE ACTORS	4.00

 **5.43**
CRIMINALITY SCORE

70th of 193 countries
10th of 44 European countries
7th of 17 Central & Eastern European countries

 CRIMINAL MARKETS	5.10
 CRIMINAL ACTORS	5.75



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CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

Bulgaria is a country of origin for victims of human trafficking who are taken to and exploited in Western Europe. Several types of criminal structures operate within the market, each having a specific modus operandi, but no single criminal actor holds a monopoly. A local demand for victims of human trafficking also exists, primarily in Bulgaria's larger cities and resorts. The internet plays a large role in the disjointed nature of the market as it allows independent workers to enter the sex trade freely. While criminal structures now work with contracts and exert control over their victims by means of market mechanisms, those trafficked to Western and Northern Europe to work as beggars are still punished and experience a significant degree of cruelty if their daily quotas are not met. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, many victims of trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation have returned home to Bulgaria.

In general, Bulgarian-based human smuggling networks provide in-transit logistics for the smuggling of migrants from Turkey to Serbia or Romania. However, some well-organized groups may also smuggle people all the way to their intended destinations. Most human smuggling groups have a foreign national as an organizer – someone who is based elsewhere and recruits migrants. Corruption is an important factor in human smuggling, with border officials facilitating the market and organizing boutique smuggling channels. Since the peak of the migrant crisis in 2015, flows have reduced and the market has shrunk significantly. However, it still has an impact on communities near Bulgaria's borders with Greece, Romania and Serbia, as well as in Sofia, which is a transit point for smugglers. Given that Bulgaria is an important part of the Balkan route, there may be a significant increase in the market if new irregular-migrant waves follow.

TRADE

Although arms trafficking is not extensive, Bulgaria is an important transit country for Turkish-manufactured gas pistols trafficked to Western Europe, where they are converted to fire live ammunition. Information suggests that workers in arms-manufacturing facilities smuggle and sell weapons or parts to poachers on the local market. To a much more limited extent, Bulgaria is a source country for firearms trafficking, mostly into Greece. The grey market generates much of the profit from arms trafficking. It involves intermediaries who, using falsified end-user

certificates, sell arms to terrorist organizations and militias. The arms production sector is prone to corruption due to the economic dependence of some cities on arms manufacturing. It is highly likely that low- and mid-level officials at border checkpoints, especially on the Turkish border, are paid to facilitate arms trafficking.

ENVIRONMENT

Widespread corruption in the forestry sector in Bulgaria enables a significant illicit logging market. Legitimate companies take part in illicit logging, using corruption or fraud to avoid regulation. There are instances of government officials being part of the organized networks who illegally extract timber, and allegations exist of links between major political parties and the so-called wood mafia. Private business interests also contribute to the illegal logging industry – entire forests have been unlawfully felled to make way for the construction of resorts and their infrastructure. Fauna crimes are much smaller in comparison.

Poaching occurs in Bulgaria, but it is uncommon and small scale, linked to individuals rather than organized crime. The illegal caviar trade and sturgeon overexploitation are a concern. Only few countries, including Bulgaria, have viable populations of wild caviar, and Bulgarian sturgeon farms are known to launder wild-caught sturgeon and market the caviar through fraud and counterfeiting. The market for non-renewable resource crimes is significant. Oil trafficking is especially prominent in Bulgaria, with estimates of illegal oil sales accounting for a 20-40% share of the total market. Illegal diesel fuel sales are also a problem. Illicit coal mining is recorded, but it is small scale, perpetrated by groups of two to three people extracting fuel for heat.

DRUGS

Bulgaria is an important transit country for the heroin market, with domestic networks being involved mostly in logistics. Sources point to more than 70% of the heroin in Western and Central Europe transiting the Balkan route, with most of the drug passing through Bulgaria, although quantities moved through the country are likely to have decreased somewhat following the COVID-19 lockdowns.* Most of the heroin is bound for Western Europe and comes from Turkey. Local demand accounts for a small part of the profits made. Heroin is the preferred drug of the marginalized, especially the Roma community, who are allegedly involved in trafficking small quantities of heroin from Turkey and distributing it in Bulgaria. Corruption is

**Correction note: a previous version of the summary profile incorrectly stated that 20% of the heroin travelling through the Balkans passed through Bulgaria*

an important element of heroin trafficking, yet there are low levels of violence within the drug market in general.

Although Serbia was a primary entry point for cocaine in the past, recent reports claim that flows have shifted to Romania and Bulgaria. The latter is primarily a transit country, but a small market exists in the larger cities and resorts. Bulgarian-based criminal networks have traditionally played a logistical role in cocaine trafficking, successfully facilitating large-scale operations from South America to Western Europe. However, they are now increasingly organizing their own operations and recruiting mules to traffic cocaine directly to their destination markets.

Bulgaria is mainly a transit country for the illegal cannabis market, which has grown massively since 2018. Criminal networks are involved in the logistics of cannabis trafficking from Albania to Turkey, Serbia and Romania. Recently, increasing quantities of cannabis grown in Bulgaria have been exported to Turkey and Greece. Cannabis is the most prevalent drug in the country and demand is widespread, which has prompted organized-crime groups to enter the market. Corruption most likely plays an important role in cannabis trafficking, with checkpoints on the Macedonian, Romanian and Turkish borders being the most vulnerable. The consumption of synthetic drugs is also on the rise in Bulgaria. Groups from the Sofia region have established themselves as amphetamine producers, while groups in the southeast of the country specialize in methamphetamine production. Police reports indicate a rise in courier deliveries of synthetic drugs purchased online. Precursors also transit through or are destined for Bulgaria, while synthetic drugs arriving from the Netherlands, Belgium and the Czech Republic are trafficked through Bulgaria to Turkey, the Middle East and North Africa. Foreign criminal actors, mostly of Turkish origin and based in Western Europe, reportedly organize these flows.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

High-level political figures are implicated in numerous illicit activities, from illegal logging to the smuggling of drugs and cigarettes. There are allegedly two groups that are deeply rooted within the highest echelons of government and cooperate with each other. The influence of state-embedded actors extends from Bulgaria's government to its justice system, allowing them near-full control over the state apparatus. For the most part, state actors facilitate criminal markets by providing protection. There are a number of public-procurement contracts awarded to specific companies that do not follow proper protocols, and officials at the highest political levels trade in influence. The traditional mafia's influence has declined as most groups have been dissolved. Those who remain have set up legitimate businesses and established their influence in the legal economy and politics, but they are still involved in criminal operations as well, primarily extortion and drug trafficking.

A number of criminal networks, differing in structure and size, operate in almost all the traditional criminal markets and also engage in vehicle theft, loan sharking and phone fraud. They target Bulgaria's larger cities and resorts, but may also be based in its smaller municipalities and border regions. These criminal networks are now less violent towards trafficking victims, with the exception of forced begging. Drug markets are also relatively unaffected by violence, with force rarely being used. Criminal networks cooperate closely with both state-embedded and foreign criminal actors (Albanians, Turks, Latin Americans and Italians, who operate in their own countries). Foreign criminal actors rarely operate within the country itself, with the notable exception of Afghani human-smuggling networks, which conduct their business in Bulgaria but are controlled from Afghanistan.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Bulgaria's political elite put countering organized crime high on the agenda and boast successes in the field. The primary concerns of the international community stem from issues of corruption and the rule of law. In general, there is the political will to tackle all major forms of organized crime, although the response is weak in countering white-collar crime and corruption, where political interests persist. Corruption is extensive and public trust in institutions is low. Notably, criminal influence threatens the democratic process, with the buying of election votes being a common practice. There is an anti-corruption body, but it is neither

effective nor independent. Transparency has improved significantly, with institutions now publishing annual reports and statistics on their activities, but shortcomings still exist. Major issues are public accountability, control of the prosecution service and difficult access to public information.

Bulgaria is party to most international treaties and conventions pertaining to organized crime. The country generally adheres to all relevant mechanisms, but it has been criticized for its lack of compliance with the UN Convention against Corruption. Bulgaria is a member of and an active contributor to a number of regional and global

counterterrorism and anti-organized crime initiatives, and there have been a number of successful international operations in the field. While laws adequately account for organized crime threats, there is no national anti-organized crime strategy. Instead, policies are typically designed in an ad-hoc manner, in the form of measures against different types of organized crime, and sentences for certain offences have been lax. Progress has been made in anti-corruption reforms, but proper enforcement is lacking.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Bulgaria has a specialized court tasked with presiding mainly over organized crime related hearings as well as a specialized anti-organized crime unit within the judiciary, the Specialized Prosecutor's Office, but there are concerns about the latter's independence. Corruption within the judiciary continues to mar its work, and the criminal justice process remains outdated and slow, making prosecution difficult. The prison system has been criticized for overcrowding, ill-treatment of inmates, poor material conditions and inadequate health care – all issues which are reportedly being addressed. There are specialized law enforcement units tasked with countering organized crime, but it is difficult to assess their effectiveness. The main factors diminishing their success are linked to a lack of political will to tackle certain forms of organized crime. Corruption within law enforcement, including the customs and border police, is problematic, as is political influence. Bulgaria's borders are under constant pressure from illicit flows, made worse by the hard-to-police terrain and strategic position of the country on the Balkan route. In spite of these issues, Bulgaria's capacity to control and protect its borders has improved significantly in recent years and is now on par with best practices.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

While the Bulgarian government has put emphasis on the development of adequate anti-money-laundering (AML) legislation that complies with EU regulations, practical enforcement is weak (in spite of there being a financial crimes unit) and money-laundering investigations are rare. The country is nonetheless perceived as being highly resilient to money laundering, mainly because of the good performance of its AML framework.

Bulgaria's economic regulatory environment has improved slowly over the years, largely due to the growing number of electronic services and the resultant electronic exchange of data between institutions. Nevertheless, the results are negligible when compared to the billions that have been spent on e-government. The state's capacity to ensure that legitimate businesses are able to operate without interference from criminal groups has improved, but there are still entities and state actors who are able to extort and appropriate businesses with the help of the judiciary and the National Revenue Agency. Corruption, a lack of

political independence and ineffective administrative processes in other key regulatory bodies also contribute to a permissive environment where organized crime is able to proliferate. Criminal groups are not directly involved in economic market regulation; however, they have influence over the authorities responsible for this regulation.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

The government has a framework in place to provide shelter and support to victims of trafficking, while state and non-state institutions treat drug dependencies. There is legislation that regulates witness support and protection, but amendments made in 2018 have contributed to the opaqueness of the witness-protection bureau, which falls under the supervision of the prosecutor general – who allegedly uses the organization as a private army rather than for its intended purpose. Witnesses of corruption and organized crime are therefore fearful of collaborating with the authorities.

There are prevention strategies that cover general and organized crime, but these are not as efficient as initially envisioned and a culture of crime prevention is still weak. While NGOs and citizens are officially considered an integral part of the state's efforts to tackle crime, the government is not very open to criticism. Civil society organizations do their best to improve the country, but the state is not fully committed to promoting their independence.

Corruption and collusion between politicians and the media is widespread in Bulgaria, but there are also independent media outlets. These are often the target of smear campaigns, and their journalists have suffered physical attacks on themselves and their property.

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.