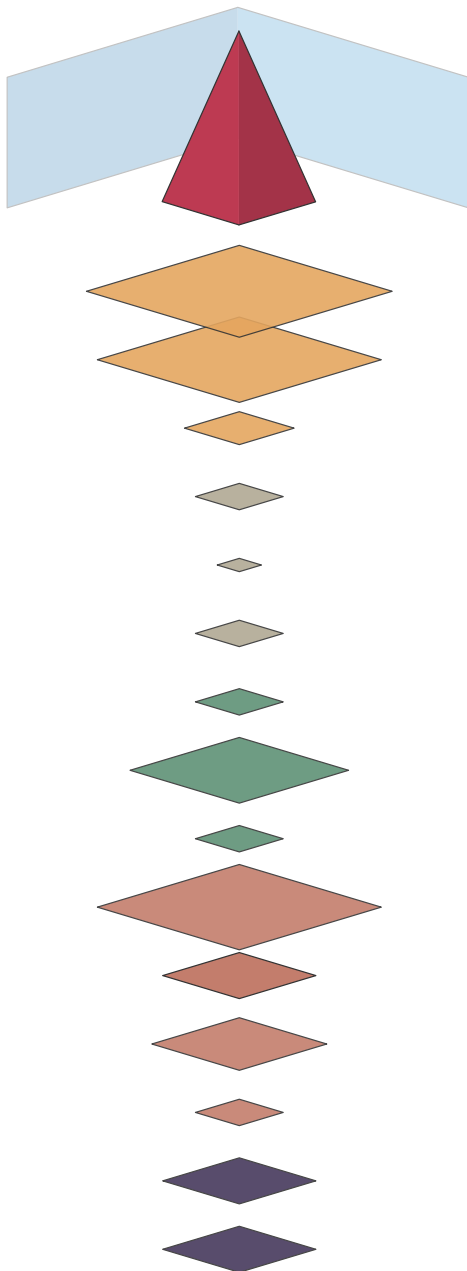


 **MALDIVES**



 **4.27**  
**CRIMINALITY SCORE**

144<sup>th</sup> of 193 countries  
39<sup>th</sup> of 46 Asian countries  
7<sup>th</sup> of 8 Southern Asian countries

 **CRIMINAL MARKETS** **3.53**

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	7.00
HUMAN SMUGGLING	6.50
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	2.50
ARMS TRAFFICKING	2.00
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	1.00
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	2.00
FLORA CRIMES	2.00
FAUNA CRIMES	5.00
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	2.00
HEROIN TRADE	6.50
COCAINE TRADE	3.50
CANNABIS TRADE	4.00
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	2.00
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	3.50
FINANCIAL CRIMES	3.50

 **CRIMINAL ACTORS** **5.00**

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	6.50
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	6.00
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	5.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	4.50
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	3.00

 **4.08**  
**RESILIENCE SCORE**



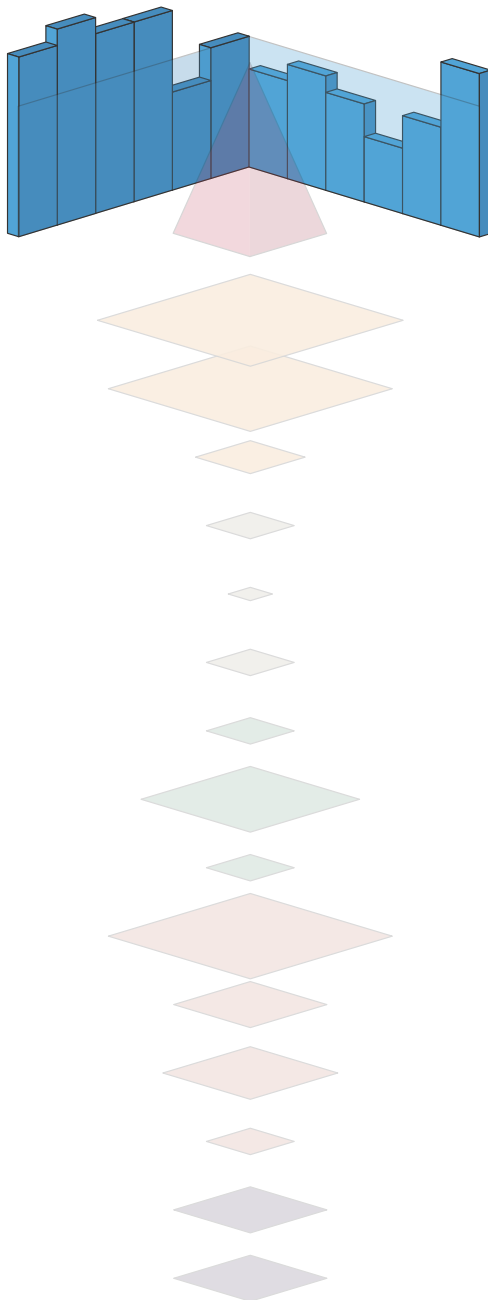
Funding provided by the United States Government.



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.

 **MALDIVES**





 **4.08**  
**RESILIENCE SCORE**

127<sup>th</sup> of 193 countries  
25<sup>th</sup> of 46 Asian countries  
4<sup>th</sup> of 8 Southern Asian countries

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	5.50
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	6.00
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	5.50
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	5.50
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	3.00
LAW ENFORCEMENT	4.00
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	3.00
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	3.50
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	3.00
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	2.00
PREVENTION	3.00
NON-STATE ACTORS	5.00

 **4.27**  
**CRIMINALITY SCORE**

 <b>CRIMINAL MARKETS</b>	3.53
 <b>CRIMINAL ACTORS</b>	5.00



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# CRIMINALITY

## CRIMINAL MARKETS

### PEOPLE

The Maldives is a hub for transnational human trafficking, serving as an origin, transit, and destination country. The country's reliance on foreign workers in key industries such as tourism and construction enables the market, with documented and undocumented workers subjected to forced labour, fraudulent recruitment, and other forms of exploitation. Women and children from the Maldives as well as Southern Asia are particularly vulnerable to trafficking for sexual exploitation or forced domestic service. Recent incidents of sex and human trafficking related to online networks have also been reported. Effective policymaking and enforcement in this area are hindered by demand and interests behind key economic sectors. Maldivian minors are sometimes forced into criminal activities such as drug transportation, and foreign women are trafficked to tourist resorts for sexual exploitation.

Human smuggling is prevalent in the Maldives, particularly of undocumented workers from countries such as Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal, and the Philippines. These workers are also vulnerable to human trafficking activities through the use of debt-based coercion after irregularly arriving into the country. Criminal groups involved in human smuggling and trafficking increasingly carry out their activities by issuing fake work visas to undocumented workers in collaboration with recruitment agencies in the countries of origin. Even though there are increasing reports of extortion targeting individuals in the country, including politicians, these cases are mostly not linked to organized crime.

### TRADE

There is no substantial evidence of arms trafficking and ammunition smuggling in the Maldives, but the presence of terrorist groups in the country, particularly in the capital Malé, suggests a potential increase in activity in this market. Although these groups have been active recently, no sophisticated weaponry has been found, only materials that could be used to make improvised explosive devices.

The Maldives does not have a notable counterfeit goods market. However, recent seizures, arrests and prosecutions indicate the existence of a black market for contraband alcohol in the country. Additionally, the country has a low capacity to counter the illicit trade of tobacco products.

### ENVIRONMENT

Flora crimes in the Maldives are not prevalent. However, the illegal wildlife trade in the country is an environmental issue because of high demand from international markets. Illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing is becoming a problem, with local and foreign vessels violating the laws promulgated by the Maldives within its territory and maritime zones. Several species, such as hawksbill turtle, have been declared endangered by international laws, but the illicit market for turtle egg harvesting and poaching still exists. Lack of enforcement of turtle conservation measures, particularly on outer islands, and low levels of punishment for violations contribute to these crimes. Smugglers are illegally transporting turtle eggs and other wildlife products into Pakistan, China, and South East Asia through Sri Lanka and India.

The illegal mining of sand, which is used mainly for construction materials, is common in the Maldives. This activity is widely practiced in the country, and there are several reports of police interdiction of vessels carrying locally mined sand. However, there is no information available on enforcement action or prosecution of environmental crimes. Additionally, there have been instances of illegal sand mining by public companies, indicating the complicity of state-embedded actors in this market.

### DRUGS

The Maldives remains a strategic transit country for heroin trafficking, with foreign criminal networks based in Pakistan controlling a large portion of the trade. Heroin is sourced from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran and then transported to the Maldives and other nearby islands using the sea route. The Maldives also has its own considerable local supply and consumption market for heroin. The cocaine trade is also present in the Maldives, primarily as a transit country to Thailand and the Philippines. The trade is presumably managed by international criminal groups in collaboration with local gangs, and although there are reports of established supply routes of cocaine to tourist resorts, the local market for cocaine is thought to be small, only supplying tourists and wealthy locals.

The Maldives is a transit country for cannabis trafficking, particularly to South and South East Asia, and there is also a local market. In fact, sections of the Maldivian population hold a more positive attitude towards the use of cannabis as opposed to other narcotic drugs. For this reason, home-hashish cartels have extended their reach in the country. Although the local market for synthetic drugs is small, the country's strategic location for warehousing and trans-shipment of narcotics makes it a soft target for global drug cartels. There are also concerns about the Maldives'

proximity to India, which is one of the primary suppliers of precursor substances for synthetic drugs. Even though an increase in the use of crystal methamphetamine in the country has been observed, the overall synthetic drug trade has remained stable in recent years.

## CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

The Maldives is considered a low-risk country for serious cyber offences despite a surge in cybercrimes such as spyware and identity theft during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. It is worth noting that the Maldivian government has not established concrete policies to combat cybercrimes in terms of legal framework, technical measures, capacity development, and cooperative measures.

## FINANCIAL CRIMES

Even though financial crime is rare in the Maldives, evidence indicating its growing prevalence has emerged in the last two years.

## CRIMINAL ACTORS

Mafia-style groups are a growing issue in the Maldives, with gang violence taking place in many parts of the country. The groups are not clearly defined or structured, and are often connected to political and religious extremists, making it difficult to identify members. Although violence remains

at a moderate level, these gangs are involved in organized crimes including drug trafficking, human trafficking, and money laundering, with links to Pakistani and Iranian supply networks. They are also involved in acts that restrict press freedom, with some journalists reporting receiving threats and media outlets being targeted for publishing content related to gang violence. In addition to mafia-style groups, the Maldives is a host to a wide range of criminal networks involved in almost all criminal markets. These are also politically motivated and have targeted politicians, activists, writers, and lawyers who promote open democracy and fundamental human rights.

The Maldives continues to struggle with corruption. State-embedded actors have been able to carry out acts of embezzlement and bribery because of institutional weaknesses. Parliamentarians, ministers, and judges have been involved in corruption cases amounting to hundreds of millions of dollars in losses for the state. Although information on the role of foreign groups involved in criminal activity in the Maldives remains limited, foreign actors are believed to use their financial power to influence the democratic process through bribery. On the other hand, private sector actors are also known to take advantage of the weak rule of law and high levels of corruption in the Maldives to carry out illegal activities such as bribery and tax evasion, often in collaboration with corrupt politicians. There are also allegations that the local private sector is directly and indirectly influencing the political process to their advantage using its financial resources.

# RESILIENCE

## LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

After decades of authoritarian rule, the Maldives has had stable multi-party presidential elections since 2008. Despite the implementation of policies and the suspension of two government ministers charged with corruption, the Maldives still has institutional weaknesses and experiences the politicization of governance structures. Also, the Maldives struggles with systemic corruption, particularly in government procurement. Petty corruption has decreased in recent years, but the Maldives Anti-Corruption Commission lacks the authority to investigate corruption in the private sector. Despite the positive outcomes of the recent efforts, accountability and transparency institutions remain weak and entangled in partisan politics.

The Maldives has maintained its efforts to combat organized crime through policies and collaborations with international organizations and regional partners. In 2021, with international cooperation, the Maldives

launched a programme to increase its capacity to screen illicit international travel, and a trilateral security meeting between the Maldives, India, and Sri Lanka resulted in specific policy proposals for cooperation in areas such as terrorism, marine safety and security, and organized crime. The Maldives has also passed amendments to laws pertaining to human trafficking, migrant workers' rights, and cybercrimes in line with UN recommendations, and published new foreign worker rules to regulate employer responsibility for arranging migrants' arrivals in the country. The Maldives has also made efforts to strengthen the rule of law through independent investigations into criminal activities, corruption, and human rights violations.

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

The judicial system in the Maldives is criticized for lacking proper access to justice, especially in high-profile organized crime cases. External pressure from criminal groups such as extremists has affected the independence of the judiciary, despite consistent demands for reform from the international community. Under the previous government the judiciary's independence was severely affected. Several judges were arrested, and opposition leaders were prosecuted unconstitutionally. However, since the current government came to power in 2018, imprisoned former judges and unjustly arrested officials have been released, and the Supreme Court has been reshaped within constitutional provisions. The prison system in the Maldives is weak and corrupt, with many complaints about prison conditions.

The Maldives' law enforcement continues to struggle with a lack of public trust, weak anti-corruption measures, and reports of rampant police brutality. However, some progress has been made in creating a new agency to prevent and counter violent extremism and developing a cybercrime department to tackle internet-related crimes. Despite these efforts, corruption and fraud are still prevalent, and there are no specific procedures to combat police-related corruption.

The Maldives' location along crucial shipping routes and its scattered islands make it vulnerable to transnational organized crime, particularly the trafficking of opium and heroin from Asia's illicit opium-producing areas. Customs and port administrations are notoriously corrupt institutions, and weakly controlled borders contribute to the smuggling activities.

## ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

The Maldives has a weak financial regulatory environment, making it vulnerable to money laundering and terrorist financing. Despite the establishment of the Maldives Monetary Authority's Financial Intelligence Unit (MMA-FIU), it remains understaffed and lacks technical assistance and training from international partners. Moreover, the previous head of the MMA-FIU was accused of being involved in a corruption scandal, highlighting the embedded nature of criminal activity within federal infrastructure.

The Maldives' economic environment is difficult, with low access to credit, procedural difficulties in obtaining permanent electricity connections, and weak minority

investor protections. Many industries are subject to monopolistic influences, with the economy controlled by a small group of ultra-rich resort owners and oligarchs. Because of these structural challenges, nationals are engaging in illicit markets such as the drug trade, illicit labour market, and gang-related activity, leading to money laundering and transfer of funds between islands, possibly offshore, using informal systems. The economy is projected to recover fully by 2023, but current imports of fossil fuels and decreasing tourists are a cause for concern.

## CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

The Maldives provides a certain level of assistance to trafficking victims. For instance, the country provides identity protection in cases of threats. A victims' shelter was also completed recently but was unable to house trafficking victims because of structural damage. The government also provided temporary shelter in guesthouses to identified victims. A drug treatment facility for the prison population was established by the National Drug Agency. Moreover, the prosecutor general's office has launched handbooks on support and services available for victims and witnesses of crime, however, there is no evidence that there are sufficient witness protection programmes in place. In fact, there are challenges and weaknesses in the institutional framework, and much of the policy and legal framework are designed to take a punitive approach rather than restorative or preventive approaches. The Maldives does not have clear strategies in place to tackle its core transnational organized crimes issues, and there is a need for law enforcement and the judiciary to rebuild trust within the local communities.

The government recently proposed the Evidence Bill, which is being opposed by journalist organizations and NGOs. Some provisions in the legislation grant the court power to demand the disclosure of journalists' sources under certain circumstances. This is seen as a threat to press freedom. Some civil society organizations were the object of political persecution under the previous government, but the new government is making positive changes.

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