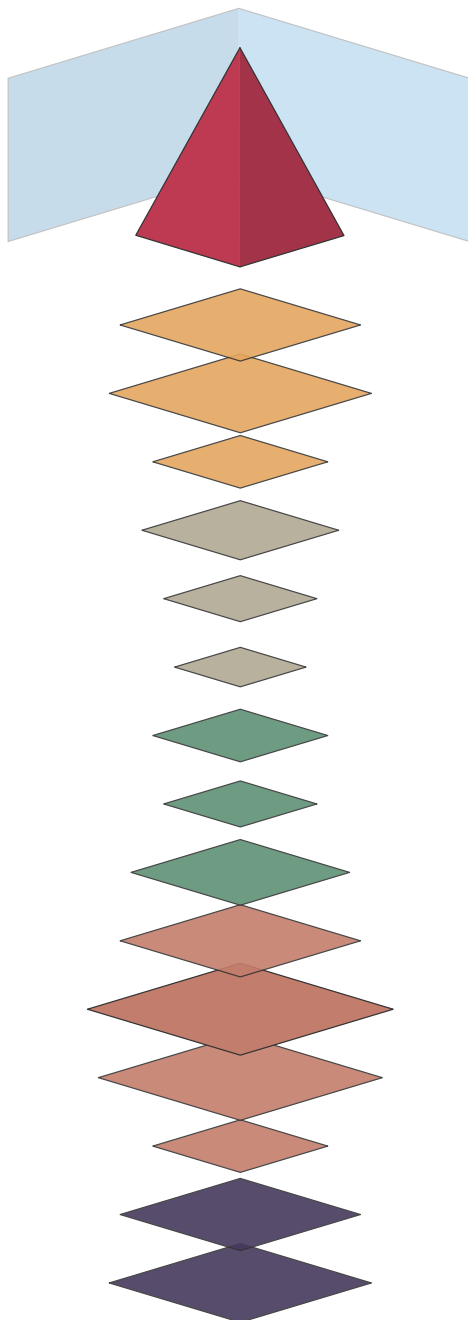




ALBANIA



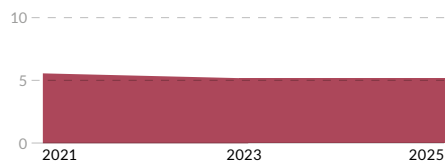
5.20 $\nearrow 0.03$

CRIMINALITY SCORE

90th of 193 countries $\searrow 3$

15th of 44 European countries -

9th of 17 Central and Eastern European countries -



CRIMINAL MARKETS

4.90 $\nearrow 0.07$

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	5.50 $\nearrow 0.50$
HUMAN SMUGGLING	6.00 0.00
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	4.00 $\nearrow 0.50$
ARMS TRAFFICKING	4.50 0.00
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	3.50 $\nearrow 0.50$
ILLCIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	3.00 0.00
FLORA CRIMES	4.00 $\searrow 0.50$
FAUNA CRIMES	3.50 0.00
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	5.00 0.00
HEROIN TRADE	5.50 $\searrow 0.50$
COCAINE TRADE	7.00 $\nearrow 0.50$
CANNABIS TRADE	6.50 0.00
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	4.00 $\nearrow 0.50$
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	5.50 $\searrow 0.50$
FINANCIAL CRIMES	6.00 0.00



CRIMINAL ACTORS

5.50 0.00

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	6.50 0.00
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	7.00 0.00
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	6.50 0.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	3.00 0.00
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	4.50 0.00



This project was funded in part
by a grant from the United
States Department of State.

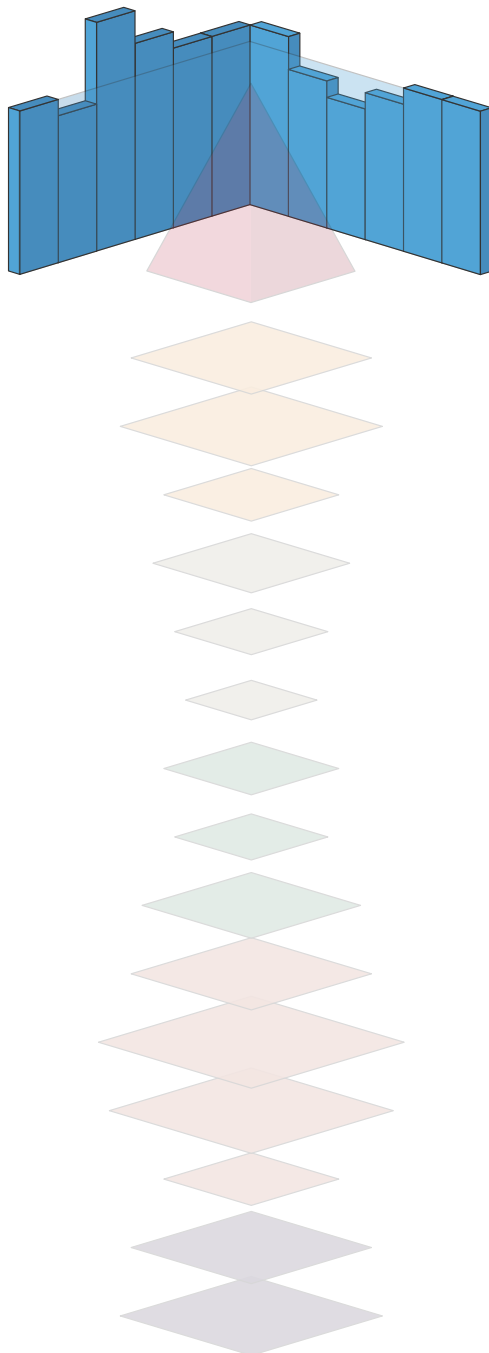


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ALBANIA



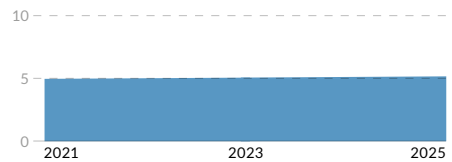
5.17 $\nearrow 0.04$

RESILIENCE SCORE

75th of 193 countries $\nearrow 9$

32nd of 44 European countries $\nearrow 2$

8th of 17 Central and Eastern European countries $\nearrow 1$



POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	5.00	0.00
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	4.50	0.00
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	7.00	0.00
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	6.00	0.00
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	5.50	$\searrow 0.50$
LAW ENFORCEMENT	5.50	$\nearrow 0.50$
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	5.50	0.00
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	4.50	$\nearrow 0.50$
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	4.00	0.00
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	4.50	0.00
PREVENTION	5.00	0.00
NON-STATE ACTORS	5.00	0.00



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CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

The criminal market of human trafficking in Albania is a well-established enterprise involving both domestic and foreign actors, with the country serving as a country of origin, transit and, to a lesser extent, destination for human trafficking. In some instances, Albanian women and children are trafficked for sexual exploitation, forced labour and coerced criminal activities across numerous European countries, including Italy, the UK, Germany, Greece and Switzerland. Children from the Roma and Balkan–Egyptian communities are particularly vulnerable, often being forced into seasonal labour and street begging. Albanian migrants seeking employment in Western Europe also face significant risks of labour exploitation, particularly in sectors such as agriculture and construction. At the same time, foreign migrants within the country are subjected to various forms of exploitation. International cooperation has facilitated joint operations with European law enforcement; however, traffickers continue to exploit gaps in employment regulations and social protection systems.

Human smuggling continues to be a consolidated criminal market in Albania, characterized by highly organized networks that have connections to state-embedded actors. Albania serves as both a source country for Albanians being smuggled to the UK and a transit hub for migrants from West Asia, North Africa and South Asia who are attempting to reach the EU. Criminal groups exploit businesses and charities to facilitate smuggling operations, with Albanian nationals frequently serving as drivers. Corruption within law enforcement has allowed for the passage of irregular migrants, with reports indicating that officers accept bribes to facilitate illegal border crossings. Smuggling routes typically involve transportation by trucks and vehicles, with networks operating through Montenegro, Kosovo and Greece. Although recent crackdowns have resulted in arrests, the smuggling industry remains lucrative, with payments often exceeding several thousand euros per individual.

Extortion and protection racketeering are prevalent in Albania, with organized crime groups employing intimidation tactics to control businesses. For example, in cities such as Shkodra, the situation is particularly dire, with many businesses compelled to make monthly payments in a structured manner to avoid being targeted by criminal groups. These payments are often framed as ‘protection’ money, further entrenching the influence of organized crime in these areas. It is believed that some large businesses are forced to pay substantial sums to organized crime groups. These activities are largely underreported due

to fear of retaliation. While extortion is legally recognized and prosecuted, organized racketeering is not explicitly defined in Albania’s criminal code, which poses challenges for enforcement. Despite the limited data on the full extent of these activities, the ongoing violence associated with organized crime indicates that extortion remains a deeply entrenched criminal practice.

TRADE

Arms trafficking is a persistent issue in Albania, exacerbated by a history of widespread civilian firearm possession and the availability of weapons from past conflicts. Criminal networks and mafia-style groups are deeply involved in arms smuggling, supplying both domestic markets and neighbouring countries such as Kosovo, Italy and North Macedonia. The smuggling of ammunition to North Macedonia and Greece is also a consolidated phenomenon. Law enforcement operations have uncovered illegal weapons depots, including caches of automatic rifles and explosives, highlighting the scale of the trade. The presence of military-grade weapons in the hands of criminals contributes to local violence, including homicides and armed robberies. While recent seizures have disrupted some networks, the trade remains a significant security concern, with transnational links to organized crime groups within the EU.

The counterfeit goods market in Albania is well established, with organized criminal networks involved in smuggling and distribution. Albania acts as a transit hub for counterfeit products originating from China and Türkiye, which are subsequently sold both domestically and in EU markets. These counterfeit goods encompass a range of items, including clothing, electronics, pharmaceuticals and luxury products. Despite ongoing enforcement efforts, counterfeit markets continue to thrive in urban areas. Additionally, social media platforms are increasingly utilized for the sale of fake branded goods, complicating law enforcement efforts. Despite its harmful impact on legitimate businesses, consumer demand for low-cost alternatives has perpetuated this illicit trade.

While the illicit trade in excise goods, such as alcohol and tobacco, is relatively limited, it continues to impact Albania’s economy. Cigarettes smuggled from neighbouring countries constitute a substantial portion of the informal market, resulting in considerable tax revenue losses. Organized crime groups often exploit corruption within customs agencies to evade enforcement measures. Although Albania’s participation in regional anti-smuggling initiatives has led to arrests and product seizures, the involvement of state-embedded actors complicates efforts to dismantle these networks entirely. The illicit trade in excise goods

remains a lucrative enterprise, particularly in border areas with well-established smuggling routes.

ENVIRONMENT

Illegal logging accounts for the majority of flora crimes in Albania. Despite government pledges to combat illegal logging, the practice persists, particularly in protected areas such as the Albanian Alps. The domestic market for illicit timber is mainly driven by demand for firewood and construction materials. Although some private sector and state-affiliated actors are involved, most of these crimes are carried out by individuals and do not involve organized crime groups.

Fauna crimes in Albania primarily involve the illegal capture and trade of birds and other wildlife species. Bird trafficking is particularly prevalent, with tens of thousands of birds captured annually and sold domestically or trafficked to neighbouring countries. Despite existing regulations, illegal hunting remains widespread, often facilitated by weak enforcement. Reports indicate that ownership of exotic animals is becoming a status symbol among organized crime figures, with law enforcement struggling to curb this illicit trade.

Non-renewable resource crimes, particularly oil smuggling, continue to pose a significant challenge. Smuggling operations exploit Albania's maritime routes, allowing illicit fuel to infiltrate the market through seaports. The absence of stringent regulatory oversight facilitates the manipulation of fuel pricing and distribution. Corruption further exacerbates the issue, with government-affiliated individuals implicated in facilitating illegal transactions. Additionally, Albania's chromium extraction industry suffers from corruption and poor labour conditions. The exploitation of non-renewable resources remains a pressing concern, as criminal groups leverage political connections to secure lucrative deals.

DRUGS

The heroin trade in Albania is highly organized, with the country serving as both a transit and distribution hub. Albanian criminal groups play a crucial role in smuggling Afghan heroin into Europe through the Balkan route. Albania primarily functions as a transit country for heroin trafficked from Türkiye, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan along the Balkan route to Europe. Most heroin enters Albania by land through North Macedonia and Kosovo and several internal heroin-processing laboratories have also been uncovered by the Albanian police in the past. Although local consumption remains limited, heroin trafficking generates substantial profits for organized crime. Law enforcement efforts have resulted in periodic seizures; however, the market remains resilient due to transnational trafficking networks and corruption among border control personnel.

Albania has emerged as a key player in the European cocaine trade, with organized criminal groups facilitating the movement of substantial quantities from Latin America. The Port of Durrës serves as a major entry point for these shipments, which are often concealed within cargo containers. Albanian traffickers maintain strong ties with suppliers in Colombia and Ecuador, enabling them to expand their influence in European cocaine markets. In addition to maritime shipments, organized crime groups are increasingly utilizing overland routes through Spain and the Netherlands to distribute cocaine across the continent. Despite notable arrests and drug seizures, cocaine trafficking continues to be a prevalent criminal activity.

Cannabis remains the most prevalent illicit drug traded in Albania, with domestic cultivation continuing despite law enforcement crackdowns. The shift from outdoor to indoor cultivation has made detection more challenging, as greenhouses and hydroponic systems are employed to support year-round production. Albanian criminal groups dominate cannabis supply chains in Western Europe, particularly in the UK and Spain. Although Albania legalized medical cannabis in 2023, the illicit market persists, driven by high demand and established trafficking networks that utilize encrypted communication platforms to coordinate shipments.

The synthetic drug trade, although smaller than other drug markets, has experienced growth in recent years. Substances such as MDMA, amphetamines and methamphetamine are becoming increasingly prevalent, particularly in urban nightlife and tourist hotspots. These synthetic drugs are often smuggled from neighbouring countries, with Albania primarily serving as a destination point. Albanian criminal groups have formed partnerships with producers based in the Netherlands and the Balkans to supply synthetic drugs to both local and international markets. Law enforcement efforts have concentrated on disrupting distribution networks; however, the rapid evolution of synthetic drug markets continues to increase availability and presents ongoing challenges for detection.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Cybercrime in Albania has expanded in recent years, with offences such as ransomware attacks and data breaches targeting individuals as well as the private and public sectors. Both international and local cybercriminal groups have targeted financial institutions, exploiting weak regulatory frameworks.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crime continues to pose a significant challenge in Albania, characterized by notable instances of financial fraud, tax evasion and the misuse of funds. In certain cases, organized crime groups collaborate with public officials to engage in tax evasion and misinvoicing through a network

of private entities associated with public concession and procurement contracts. The construction and real estate sectors are particularly vulnerable, being exploited for intricate tax fraud schemes and trade misinvoicing practices, further compounded by insufficient regulatory oversight. Furthermore, some microcredit companies, which have rapidly expanded in recent years to offer loans to those underserved by traditional banks with aggressive repayment practices, have been investigated for fraudulent schemes. Despite recent high-profile investigations and arrests, financial crime remains a widespread issue in Albania.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

Well-established mafia-style groups characterize Albania's criminal landscape, although the exact number remains unknown due to the lack of public documentation. Some of these groups have gained notoriety for their transnational operations, while others primarily operate within Albania. These groups are highly organized and exhibit hierarchical structures, with a defined leadership directing their criminal enterprises. Over time, family-based criminal groups have evolved into consolidated mafia-style organizations, exerting significant control over economic and political structures. Despite their extensive reach, Albanian mafia-style groups are generally smaller than their Italian and Russian counterparts. Their modus operandi often involves smaller, adaptable factions that engage in temporary alliances based on emerging criminal opportunities. Many members frequently break away to establish their factions, resulting in an increase in the number of groups rather than an overall increase in size. These groups have strong ties to international criminal networks, particularly those originating from Italy. Initially providing logistical support to these groups, Albanian mafias have become increasingly autonomous. Their activities encompass large-scale money laundering, drug trafficking and contract killings, often employing extreme violence, such as car bombings and targeted assassinations, to assert control over their territories.

Albanian criminal networks are among the most influential in the region, operating both domestically and internationally. They engage in a variety of illicit activities, including drug trafficking, arms smuggling, contract killings and human trafficking. Recent findings indicate that Albanian criminal networks dominate the cocaine trade in Europe, maintaining strong connections with suppliers in Latin America. Additionally, these groups have established deep-rooted connections to Turkish and Kosovar criminal organizations, further strengthening their influence in both regional and transnational markets. Violence continues to be a prominent feature of Albanian criminal networks. Several cases of contract killings and targeted assassinations have been reported, particularly in urban areas. The widespread availability of firearms and explosives in these regions intensifies the levels of violence. Recent law enforcement crackdowns have revealed the existence of 'killing squads',

often comprised of former military personnel, who enforce territorial control and eliminate rivals. In addition to violent crimes, Albanian criminal networks are heavily engaged in money laundering, primarily through investments in the construction and tourism sectors, fuelling economic informality and corruption.

Corruption within Albania's political and law enforcement institutions continues to facilitate organized crime. Investigations utilizing encrypted communication platforms have revealed deep ties between high-ranking officials and criminal actors. Several police officers and judicial officials have been implicated in aiding criminal networks, with some directly engaging in illegal activities. The involvement of state-embedded actors extends to public tenders and government contracts, where criminal groups employ bribery and blackmail to secure lucrative deals. Efforts by the Special Prosecution Against Corruption and Organized Crime (SPAK) have led to the arrest of several senior government officials; however, entrenched corruption within other prosecutorial and law enforcement agencies continues to hinder investigations. Concerns have been raised about the level of police collusion with organized crime, highlighting cases where internal leaks have undermined operations. Some high-ranking officers within specialized units have been implicated in facilitating or even leading criminal groups.

While Albanian criminal groups dominate the country's organized crime landscape, foreign actors maintain a presence, particularly in human smuggling and drug trafficking. Reports indicate that Palestinian, Iraqi, Iranian and Moroccan criminal groups are active in human smuggling operations. Turkish criminal organizations control heroin trafficking routes into Albania, while Italian mafia groups maintain influence in southern Albania and Tirana. Additionally, the Russian criminal underworld has been linked to Albanian criminal organizations, although their cooperation appears to be limited compared to other foreign networks. Intercepts of encrypted platforms indicate that Albanian criminals have also employed foreign operatives for contract killings.

The private sector in Albania, particularly the construction, real estate and gambling industries, plays a role in money laundering and illicit financial flows. Criminal organizations exploit these sectors to launder proceeds from drug trafficking and other illegal activities. While the government has imposed partial bans on gambling, criminal infiltration remains pervasive, especially in urban and tourist areas. Reports indicate that several businesses in these areas have direct ties to criminal groups, with hotels and resorts often serving as fronts for money laundering operations. The prevalence of informality in the private sector exacerbates these issues, enabling illicit financial flows to circulate within the formal economy. Furthermore, some financial institutions, including banks and foreign exchange offices, have been implicated in facilitating money laundering schemes. The rise of online fraud has further exposed the vulnerabilities of the private sector. Call centre fraud

has been linked to criminal networks, with operations targeting foreign nationals through elaborate scams. While some private-sector actors actively engage in criminal enterprises, others unwittingly facilitate financial crimes

due to weak oversight mechanisms. The increasing use of cryptocurrency for money laundering presents new challenges, as regulatory frameworks struggle to keep pace with evolving criminal tactics.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Albania's political leadership has prioritized the fight against organized crime and corruption, allocating sufficient resources to the SPAK. However, opposition parties frequently criticize the government, alleging ties to criminal entities. Despite the government's efforts to implement justice reform, accusations persist that elements within the political system have been infiltrated by organized crime, resulting in low public trust in government institutions. Opposition parties and civil society have raised concerns about criminal interference in elections and economic activities, although the government denies these allegations. Although governance in Albania has seen some improvements, political polarization remains a significant challenge. Tensions escalated in late 2024 following the house arrest of the opposition leader on corruption charges, which led to violent protests in Tirana. This unrest underscores the country's deep political divisions and raises concerns about the integrity of its democratic processes.

Albania's government transparency and accountability continue to face scrutiny. SPAK has initiated high-profile investigations, resulting in the prosecution of senior government officials. Although the international community has acknowledged some progress, corruption remains widespread, particularly within the judicial system. The effectiveness of oversight institutions is limited due to allegations of political influence. While the country's anti-corruption framework has led to certain improvements, unresolved high-profile cases continue to erode public trust. The government has promoted digital governance initiatives, such as the E-Albania platform, to enhance transparency; however, critics argue that political impunity persists.

Albania actively participates in international efforts to combat organized crime, maintaining extradition agreements and partnerships with institutions such as Europol and INTERPOL. The country has ratified key UN conventions on transnational organized crime and corruption and collaborates with the European Judicial Network. Albania's cooperation with regional bodies, including the Southeast European Law Enforcement Centre, enhances intelligence sharing. However, corruption within law enforcement agencies hinders effective international cooperation.

Albania's national policies and laws incorporate stringent measures against organized crime, imposing penalties of five to fifteen years for individuals in leadership roles within criminal organizations. Recent justice reforms and legal amendments, including modifications to the Criminal Procedure Code and the Anti-Mafia Law, have enhanced investigative efficiency. The country has adopted several strategies to combat various forms of organized crime. However, challenges in implementation persist, as enforcement mechanisms often falter due to political interference and inadequate institutional coordination.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

SPAK has intensified investigations into corruption and organized crime, with improved efficiency in prosecution and asset confiscation. However, overall, judicial independence remains a concern, with reports of selective prosecutions and undue political influence. While high-profile convictions have been secured, systemic corruption within the judiciary continues to erode public confidence. Frequent harsh sentences for minor offences and lenient ones for organized crime figures or officials undermine public trust in the justice system, which remains perceived as corrupt. Although citizens' confidence has not improved significantly, the strong political will for reform is notable. Additionally, Albania's prison system faces significant challenges, with some facilities experiencing overcrowding and concerns regarding criminal activity within prisons. Reports indicate that some organized crime leaders continue to direct operations from behind bars, undermining the effectiveness of the judiciary.

Operations led by SPAK have successfully dismantled various criminal networks; however, entrenched corruption within police ranks undermines overall effectiveness. Reports suggest that some high-ranking police officers are directly involved in organized crime, further complicating efforts to combat illicit activities. While international collaborations have strengthened Albania's crime-fighting capabilities, local law enforcement faces challenges due to limited resources and internal corruption. Nevertheless, during the reporting period, law enforcement's capacity to investigate complex organized crime cases has improved, supported by stronger institutional integrity. In fact, SPAK has pursued high-level corruption cases, including investigations into the deputy

prime minister and other current and former officials. At the same time, SPAK and other bodies have worked to remove law enforcement's links to crime, leading to the arrest of several police officers, the chief state prosecutor of Vlora and other officials.

Albania faces significant border security challenges, particularly along its porous land borders with Kosovo and Montenegro. These vulnerabilities have been exploited for human smuggling and drug trafficking. Although maritime security has improved, previous allegations of misuse of the Integrated Sea Surveillance System have raised concerns about potential collusion between officials and traffickers. Furthermore, Albania has been the target of cyberattacks, highlighting weaknesses in its national cybersecurity infrastructure. Despite government claims that border security has been enhanced, illicit activities persist, casting doubt on the effectiveness of current measures.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Albania continues to be a prominent destination for money laundering, with criminal organizations exploiting the real estate, tourism and construction sectors to legitimize illicit profits. Authorities have made notable progress in investigating financial crimes, with a record €50 million in assets seized in 2024. However, detecting money laundering remains challenging due to high levels of economic informality. The construction sector, in particular, is heavily infiltrated by illicit funds, resulting in market distortions. While Albania was removed from the Financial Action Task Force's grey list in 2023, reports indicate that the country still faces significant challenges.

A moderately free market characterizes Albania's economic regulatory environment, though bureaucratic inefficiencies and corruption hinder sustainable growth. Private businesses face challenges due to unfair competition from criminal enterprises linked to corrupt government officials. The high level of informality in financial transactions further complicates efforts to combat illicit financial flows. Weak contract enforcement and deficiencies in the rule of law deter foreign investment. Additionally, criminal organizations continue to exert influence over key economic sectors, particularly construction, hospitality and energy.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Albania has made progress in strengthening support mechanisms for victims and witnesses, particularly for survivors of human trafficking. The government collaborates with civil society organizations to provide services; however, funding constraints hinder their overall effectiveness. Although Albania has established a national referral mechanism for victims, gaps still exist in victim identification, particularly among irregular migrants. While witness protection programs are in place, they have faced criticism for lacking adequate resources to ensure long-term security.

Efforts to combat organized crime encompass national strategies and regional cooperation initiatives. However, local-level crime prevention measures remain weak, as law enforcement agencies often lack the capacity for proactive investigations. Corruption within police ranks further undermines these preventive efforts.

Non-state actors play a crucial role in combating organized crime; however, their effectiveness is frequently compromised by financial reliance on the government and donors. The media serves as an essential watchdog, yet political and criminal threats often constrain investigative journalism. Journalists reporting on organized crime encounter intimidation, and instances of self-censorship are becoming increasingly prevalent. Although press freedom in Albania is generally recognized, concerns remain regarding editorial independence and government influence over media outlets.

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.