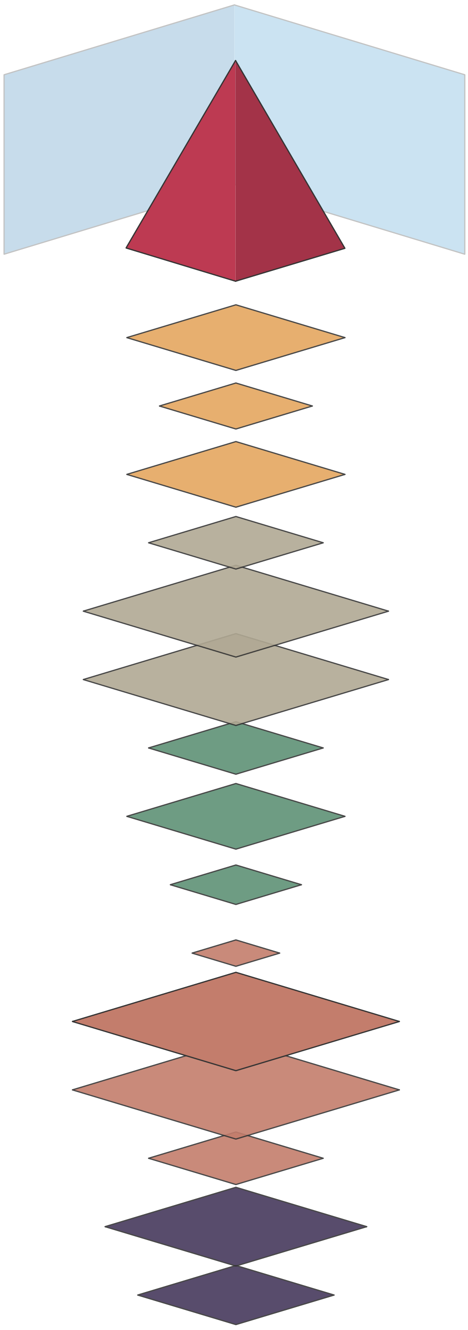
GLOBAL ORGANIZED CRIME INDEX

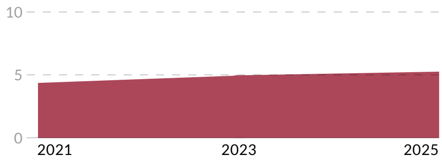
GLOBAL INITIATIVE AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

ARGENTINA



5.25 ↗0.25 CRIMINALITY SCORE

85th of 193 countries ↗10
19th of 35 American countries ↗2
9th of 12 South American countries -



CRIMINAL MARKETS	**5.00**	↗0.50
HUMAN TRAFFICKING	5.00	0.00
HUMAN SMUGGLING	3.50	0.00
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	5.00	0.00
ARMS TRAFFICKING	4.00	↗0.50
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	7.00	0.00
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	7.00	↗0.50
FLORA CRIMES	4.00	↗2.00
FAUNA CRIMES	5.00	↗1.00
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	3.00	↗0.50
HEROIN TRADE	2.00	0.00
COCAINE TRADE	7.50	↗0.50
CANNABIS TRADE	7.50	0.00
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	4.00	↗1.00
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	6.00	↗0.50
FINANCIAL CRIMES	4.50	↗1.00
CRIMINAL ACTORS	**5.50**	0.00
MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	5.00	0.00
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	6.00	0.00
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	6.00	0.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	5.50	0.00
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	5.00	0.00

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

enact

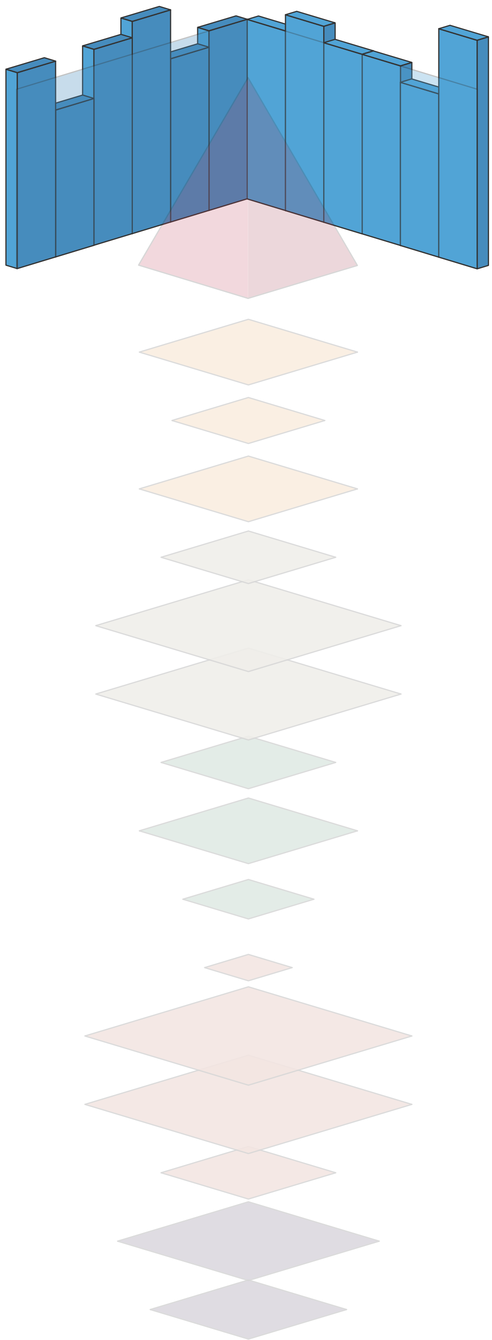
Funded by the European Union

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.

GLOBAL ORGANIZED CRIME INDEX

GLOBAL INITIATIVE AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

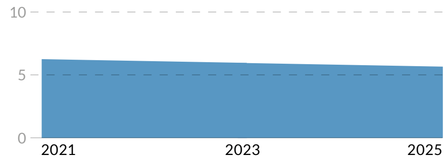
ARGENTINA



5.67 ↘0.29

RESILIENCE SCORE

44th of 193 countries ↘5
6th of 35 American countries -
3rd of 12 South American countries -



POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	**6.00**	↘0.50
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	**4.50**	0.00
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	**6.00**	0.00
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	**6.50**	↗0.50
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	**5.00**	↘0.50
LAW ENFORCEMENT	**5.50**	0.00
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	**5.50**	↘0.50
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	**6.00**	↘1.00
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	**5.50**	↘0.50
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	**5.50**	↘0.50
PREVENTION	**5.00**	0.00
NON-STATE ACTORS	**7.00**	↘0.50

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

enact

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.

CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

Argentina is a source, transit and destination country for human trafficking. Most registered cases are concentrated in Buenos Aires, but trafficking also occurs in other provinces. Trafficking networks operate both domestically and internationally, often facilitated by state-embedded actors. Victims include Argentine nationals and individuals from Latin America, the Caribbean, China and South Korea, with vulnerable groups including supermarket workers subjected to debt bondage, transgender individuals exploited for sex and people deceived by false modelling or sports club opportunities. Traffickers increasingly leverage social media for recruitment, while cash-based transactions complicate financial oversight. Increased reports of human trafficking may signal greater awareness rather than an actual rise in cases.

The country is also a transit and destination country for human smuggling, with irregular migration accounting for a significant portion of total immigration. While many individuals cross Argentina's porous borders independently, organized smuggling networks, particularly foreign-based groups, are increasingly active. The country's criminal landscape includes Chinese mafia-style groups smuggling Chinese nationals, often forcing them into exploitative labour, and Venezuelan networks facilitating continent-wide migration routes. Economic decline has reduced new migration flows and prompted many migrants to return home.

Extortion and protection racketeering are moderately prevalent in Argentina, particularly in Rosario and Greater Buenos Aires, with signs of expansion. Local groups dominate, although some extortion is linked to Chinese criminal organizations. Protection racketeering has surged since 2020, with armed individuals, including minors, extorting businesses. Larger groups target unions, financiers and betting agencies, often operating from prisons where internal corruption facilitates their activities. An increasing shift from drug trafficking to extortion is due to lower logistical demands as well as corruption in law enforcement and prisons that hampers state efforts to control these crimes.

TRADE

Argentina functions as a key transit country for arms trafficking, facilitating the movement of weapons primarily from European countries including Serbia, the Czech Republic and Slovenia, as well as Türkiye through Paraguay, to Brazilian groups like Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC) and Comando Vermelho. Previously, weapons parts from the United States passed through Argentina en route to Europe before being reassembled and re-exported, but recent sources suggest a shift to primarily European origins. Paraguay's 2018 arms import ban apparently led to expanded alternative smuggling routes through Argentina. Smaller-scale arms trafficking to Chile has also been observed, possibly linked to worsening security and organized crime networks. Reports suggest that Mapuche resistance groups may be involved in arms trafficking related to drug- or human-trafficking activities in Mendoza, Argentina. Investigations also highlight the involvement of Argentine businesses and state-embedded actors in arms trafficking, particularly in the flow of weapons between Europe and Brazil.

Argentina is among the top counterfeit markets in Latin America. The country imports large quantities of counterfeit goods, primarily from China, Bolivia and Paraguay, most of which are produced in China and India. This trade is dominated by loose criminal networks that occasionally engage in local manufacturing. Counterfeiting affects luxury and sportswear brands, particularly watches and clothing. Argentina remains a major importer of counterfeit medicines, with online purchases prevalent. Seizures of counterfeit automotive and industrial parts, as well as agrochemicals, often destined for Brazil, have increased.

Illicit trade in excisable goods, including alcohol, tobacco and cereals, is widespread in Argentina, both as a source and destination. Seizures occur frequently, especially in the tri-border region where smuggling networks operate fluidly. Smugglers hide goods in trucks and furniture, using border towns as transit points to Brazil and Paraguay. Smuggling may intersect with other illicit markets, but data is scarce. Argentina ranks among the top countries for tobacco seizures. Illicit cigarettes are sent abroad, notably to high-margin markets like Australia. Domestic demand for cheap cigarettes fuels the local illicit trade. Past reports noted the export of tobacco to Paraguay for processing into cigarettes before re-importation, but recent data is lacking. Both domestic and foreign actors profit from the trade.

ENVIRONMENT

The tri-border area remains a hotspot for illegal logging, involving multiple criminal networks and international coordination. Law enforcement operations carried out in 2024 uncovered criminal networks and several companies involved in illegal logging, document fraud and timber trafficking along the border between Brazil and Argentina – a region notorious for cross-border illicit activities – resulting in the seizure of significant amounts of valuable wood. Argentina is also home to several endemic cactus and succulent species that are highly sought after by collectors worldwide. This demand has led to instances of their illegal collection and exportation.

Argentina plays a multifaceted role in wildlife trafficking, acting as a source, transit and destination country. Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing is a major issue, with foreign vessels, notably from China and Spain, frequently violating Argentina's exclusive economic zone by disabling tracking systems. This illicit activity, particularly targeting squid, results in substantial economic losses and threatens marine biodiversity and local fishing-dependent communities. Wildlife smuggling includes both domestically sourced and imported species, with trafficked animals transported via land, sea and air to markets in the United States, Europe and Western Asia. Argentina also has a strong domestic demand for exotic pets, with endangered species widely sold in urban centres. Among the most commonly trafficked species are birds, turtles, monkeys, and felines. African and Asian animals, including Bengal tigers, ostriches, Fiji iguanas and cobras, have also been discovered and rescued in Argentina.

Non-renewable resource crimes in Argentina include copper theft, gasoline smuggling and the under-invoicing of lithium exports, each driven by economic incentives and regulatory gaps. Copper theft is prevalent in urban areas, linked to broader criminal networks and increasingly involves individuals affected by economic hardship. Gasoline smuggling, fuelled by price disparities, has surged, particularly into Paraguay and Brazil, which have expressed concern about its economic impact. Lithium under-invoicing by major companies has resulted in legal action, with authorities uncovering tactics that deprive Argentina of revenue. Oversight efforts are further complicated by transparency issues in provincial governance.

DRUGS

Argentina is a key transit hub for cocaine from Bolivia and Peru, serving rising domestic consumption and Europe as the primary market. Due to stricter controls, traditional trafficking routes have shifted towards non-traditional ports like Buenos Aires and Montevideo, while overland smuggling through Salta and aerial transport from Bolivia persist. Rosario, with its Paraná River port, remains a major redistribution centre. Regional cocaine trafficking is largely controlled by international mafia-style groups, while local gangs such as Los Monos and Alvarado in Rosario handle domestic distribution. These gangs are involved in various crimes and often clash over territory, fuelling violence, especially in Rosario. The Greater Buenos Aires area is also a key hub for organized crime, with several smaller yet powerful groups operating there. In both cities, these groups operate with the complicity of security forces and authorities. Meanwhile, concerns are growing over the Brazilian PCC establishing a presence in the country. Despite rising domestic demand, Argentina's cocaine trade remains export-focused. Some local actors process coca base into cocaine.

Cannabis trafficking is expanding because of increased demand for the most widely consumed drug in the country. Argentina has one of the highest cannabis consumption rates in South America, significantly above the regional average. The domestic market, valued at hundreds of millions of dollars annually, is largely supplied by Paraguay, the region's leading producer, with a portion also trafficked onwards to Chile. Consumption has surged over the past decade, fostering a growing local production sector, primarily through indoor cultivation. Distribution is controlled by local gangs, often with violent territorial disputes and collusion with security forces.

Argentina's synthetic drug market, though smaller than those for cocaine and cannabis, is growing, especially among young adults in nightlife settings. MDMA is the most prevalent, sourced locally and internationally, with Dutch imports costing significantly more. Tusi, derived from ketamine, has emerged but remains minor. While some methamphetamine is synthesized, most illicit use involves pharmaceutical amphetamines. LSD is imported, and fentanyl is rare. While sometimes found with cocaine and cannabis, synthetic drug markets largely remain distinct. Authorities have seized large quantities of MDMA, but this highly adaptable market regularly sees new substances. The trade is driven by fragmented networks and air couriers, and some international operations have been disrupted.

Heroin trafficking in Argentina remains infrequent and is not a significant concern. Occasional incidents indicate its presence. While the origin of the drug is uncertain, Argentina likely functions only as a transit point.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Cybercrime in Argentina has surged in recent years, driven by ransomware, malware and distributed denial-of-service attacks and cryptocurrency fraud. Both domestic and international cybercriminal networks, including sophisticated groups, have targeted public institutions, banks and corporations. The frequency and complexity of attacks have escalated, with advanced persistent threat cyberattacks targeting government and diplomatic entities. Unauthorized crypto-mining fuelled by subsidized electricity has led to enforcement actions. High-profile breaches, including the theft of national identification data and airport payroll hacking, underscore vulnerabilities in government systems.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crime in Argentina, particularly online fraud, phishing and tax evasion, is increasing. Sources rank the country fifth globally for tax evasion, with high tax burdens driving this illicit activity. Fraud, predominantly cyber-enabled, grew substantially in recent years, with identity theft and phishing becoming more pervasive. Common schemes involve fake social media profiles and impersonation of banks or institutions, undermining trust in financial entities. Perpetrators are generally in loosely organized domestic networks. Structural factors in the economy also contribute to these persistent challenges.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

Argentina's organized crime landscape is dominated by medium-sized mafia-style groups primarily operating locally. Often family-based clans, they exert territorial control over neighbourhoods, using coercion and community integration to sustain influence. Notable organizations, such as those in Rosario and the border regions, engage in drug and arms trafficking, money laundering and smuggling. They benefit from judicial and political protection, maintaining operations even from prison through corrupt networks. Violent territorial disputes, particularly over drug distribution, drive elevated homicide rates, especially in Rosario.

Criminal networks remain heavily involved in drug trafficking. This type of group distributes cocaine and marijuana in urban centres and processes coca base into cocaine, with micro-trafficking operations concentrated in informal settlements where law enforcement interventions are frequent. While border areas serve as key hubs for international smuggling, the networks' structures remain decentralized. Domestic groups involved in counterfeit goods, wildlife crime and non-renewable resource offences maintain links with foreign counterparts, facilitating transnational illicit trade. Despite the extent of these operations, levels of violence remain relatively low. Buenos Aires serves as the primary base for criminal organizations, reflecting the city's role as a focal point for both local and international illicit activities.

Argentina faces systemic vulnerabilities in law enforcement, politics and the judiciary that facilitate organized crime, particularly drug trafficking. Corruption is prevalent at municipal and provincial levels, with security forces, prison staff and politicians implicated in criminal activities. Police officers have been charged with fabricating evidence to manipulate drug-related conflicts, collaborating with criminal organizations and providing sensitive intelligence to violent groups. High-profile criminal networks, such as Los Monos and Los Gordos, allegedly maintain political and judicial connections to secure protection and lenient sentences. Local officials, including mayors, have been arrested for involvement in drug trafficking. Allegations of high-level corruption, including claims of money laundering and bribery linked to state contracts, further illustrate Argentina's vulnerability to organized crime.

Argentina's organized crime landscape is largely dominated by local groups, though foreign actors – mainly from Bolivia and Paraguay – participate in arms trafficking and have limited ties with domestic criminal clans. Foreign influence is more pronounced in the northern border regions near Brazil and Paraguay. The Chinese mafia operates in Buenos Aires, primarily engaging in extortion, and Chinese vessels have been implicated in illegal fishing in Argentine waters. There are concerns about Brazilian groups such as the PCC expanding into Argentina, but foreign entities have yet to gain significant control over criminal markets. Economic deregulation, corruption and weak money-laundering enforcement make Argentina an attractive refuge for high-profile criminals from Colombia and Ecuador seeking to evade justice, some of whom have been recently deported.

Private-sector actors in Argentina contribute to the illicit economy, particularly in the smuggling of excisable and counterfeit goods. Business figures are reportedly involved in trafficking tobacco from Brazil and Paraguay, processing it legally in Argentina and reintroducing it into the domestic market. Transportation companies are suspected of facilitating smuggling. Agricultural exporters of commodities like corn and soybeans may engage in contraband trade, exploiting financial ruses such as under-invoicing to evade taxes while blending legal and illegal trade. Regulatory bodies have investigated major firms implicated in these practices, exposing systemic vulnerabilities in oversight and enforcement that enable organized crime to operate within legitimate business structures.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Argentina operates as a democracy, but public distrust of the state affects voter participation, which recently reached its lowest level since the return to democracy in 1983. Electoral integrity varies by province. Corruption, inflation and insecurity continue to erode institutional trust, and surveys indicate widespread scepticism toward the government, judiciary and police. Political volatility remains high as the current administration faces resistance from labour unions and legislative opposition. Organized crime has also been a major policy issue, with past and current administrations advocating strong measures. The current government has proposed using the military in crime suppression and reforming the penitentiary system, but the details have not been set out. These changes, combined with ongoing economic hardship and rising poverty, have fuelled public dissatisfaction.

There are persistent challenges in combating corruption due to institutional weaknesses and perceived political interference. The judiciary is criticized for its lack of independence, and the anti-corruption office is viewed as politically influenced. Corruption allegations span political parties, as evidenced in high-profile fraud cases. Although there are efforts towards transparency at the federal level, municipal oversight remains weak. Argentina reports crime and corruption data internationally and has a national integrity strategy, but recent government proposals lack a structured approach and anti-corruption progress is inconsistent.

Argentina actively engages in international efforts to combat organized crime through multilateral cooperation, adherence to global conventions and intelligence-sharing. The country participates in major INTERPOL operations against criminal markets, including arms trafficking, drugs and child exploitation. It collaborates with regional partners on anti-trafficking and anti-smuggling initiatives and plays a key role in the Latin American Internal Security Committee. Specialized law enforcement units, including an anti-mafia task force linked to Italian authorities, address transnational criminal organizations. Argentina has numerous extradition agreements and has ratified UN treaties on organized crime, drug control, arms trade and corruption, incorporating them into domestic law.

The country's comprehensive legal framework for organized crime covers human trafficking, drug and arms trafficking, money laundering, extortion, cybercrime and intellectual property violations. Reforms to the Penal Code are underway to modernize cybercrime laws, alongside a proposed update to data protection legislation to emphasize individual rights. The country applied its Corporate Criminal Liability Law in a high-profile bribery case in 2024 that exposed governance failures. Argentina enforces laws against counterfeit goods and illicit trade and updated its customs code in 2023. Authorities have strengthened controls on synthetic drugs, including fentanyl.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Argentina's justice system operates on federal and provincial levels, with specialized units addressing organized crime. However, corruption undermines judicial integrity, particularly in the provincial courts. Public confidence is low, with a significant proportion perceiving the system as ineffective due to high impunity rates. A proposed judicial reform to alter the process for appointing judges failed in Congress. The prison system is severely overcrowded, with deteriorating conditions that force inmates' families to provide essentials. Drug-related offences have driven incarceration rates, and pretrial detention remains widespread. Corruption enables criminal activity within prisons, including extortion. Prison breakouts have increased with rising detainee numbers. Proposed reforms include lowering the age of criminal responsibility as well as semi-privatizing prisons to reduce state costs.

Security forces are composed of federal, provincial and local police units. The Federal Police operate nationwide alongside specialized agencies. The country has also introduced cybercrime-focused institutions and environmental enforcement brigades. Provincial police handle most law enforcement duties, and some cities have local forces. Despite a high police-to-citizen ratio, law enforcement is strained by organized crime. Efforts to combat trafficking are bolstered by international cooperation, yet gaps in drug enforcement persist. Corruption, police misconduct, human rights violations and failures in handling gender-based violence cases are all areas of concern.

Argentina faces significant challenges related to border security, organized crime and cyber threats. The country's extensive and largely unregulated land borders facilitate contraband and drug trafficking, particularly along its northern frontiers with Bolivia, Paraguay and Brazil. The tri-border region is a hotspot for smuggling activities, with the Paraná and other rivers serving as key narcotics routes. Illegal fishing, especially by foreign vessels, has prompted increased patrols in maritime areas. The government has bolstered border and port security through technological initiatives, including radars, scanners and blockchain-based port logistics modernization, although their effectiveness remains unclear. Cybersecurity vulnerabilities are particularly persistent in the private sector, which lacks widespread protective measures. The government has undertaken efforts to enhance cybersecurity through international cooperation, infrastructure improvements and national strategies. A plan to address technological crimes has been introduced, but the legal framework remains outdated and cybercrime continues to rise.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Argentina faces ongoing money laundering challenges, exacerbated by a large informal sector and cash-heavy economy. Some informal currency-exchange markets provide avenues for illicit financial flows. Local and international criminal organizations, including Mexican cartels, exploit these vulnerabilities. Despite anti-money laundering legislation and Financial Action Task Force membership since 2000, enforcement is weak, with few convictions and inefficient asset seizure mechanisms. Judicial inexperience and poor inter-agency coordination further hinder effectiveness. Argentina cooperates internationally, particularly with the United States, and has expanded its regulations to address cryptocurrency risks. However, reforms proposed by the current administration have raised concerns about relaxed oversight, potential tax amnesties and diminished due diligence by financial institutions.

The country faces severe economic instability with high inflation, poverty and political challenges. In 2024, a state of emergency was declared when inflation rose to almost 290% and poverty surpassed 50%, sparking protests and reliance on humanitarian aid. Cryptocurrency use grew amid currency instability, although the central bank banned transactions in banks. Under International Monetary Fund oversight, the government pursues deregulation and privatization, but legal challenges stall reform and austerity cuts hurt social programmes.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Argentina has established a comprehensive framework to support trafficking victims, offering psychological, legal, medical and social assistance from rescue through judicial proceedings. Victims receive restitution from seized assets, and authorities maintain a victim assistance registry and a reference guide for local anti-trafficking offices. The government has increased trafficking convictions and victim support initiatives, including housing and labour reintegration. However, funding limitations have hindered the construction of planned shelters and official complicity in trafficking remains a concern. The country also operates a national witness-protection programme for individuals involved in major federal investigations, although protections for whistle-blowers and human trafficking witnesses remain inadequate. The 2020 dissolution of the national agency for witness protection weakened safeguards, and corruption cases lack a legal witness-protection framework. Argentina's drug policy integrates mental health treatment, but its overall approach scores moderately in global evaluations. Recent budget cuts have significantly weakened victim support and human rights programmes, with some initiatives eliminated entirely.

Argentina has implemented various strategies to counter organized crime, including the Federal Plan against Organized Crime (2021–2023), which aimed to strengthen border security, combat cybercrime and enhance transnational crime investigations. Measures to combat human trafficking include national and international awareness campaigns and coordination with labour sectors. Drug policies mandate detention or treatment for possession, along with prevention efforts that focus on marginalized groups. Furthermore, in 2024, the Argentinian government announced the creation of an Artificial Intelligence Unit to predict and prevent crimes using machine learning, drones, facial recognition, and social media monitoring. While the government claims it will improve security, human rights groups have raised concerns about potential threats to privacy and freedom of expression, urging greater transparency and accountability in its implementation.

Argentina's civil society organizations operate with few restrictions and actively combat different forms of organized crime. NGOs collaborate with the government to support victims of crime and reintegrate seized wildlife. Freedom of expression is legally protected, but media ownership is highly concentrated among politically affiliated entities. While official censorship is absent, journalists face harassment, legal action and surveillance, especially when reporting on corruption and drug-related crime. The government has been accused of monitoring journalists and compiling ideological profiles. Under the current administration, the media environment has become increasingly volatile due to concerns over media plurality, economic pressures and political polarization. Government and corporate influence, coupled with the current government's open hostility toward the press, have exacerbated press freedom challenges.

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.