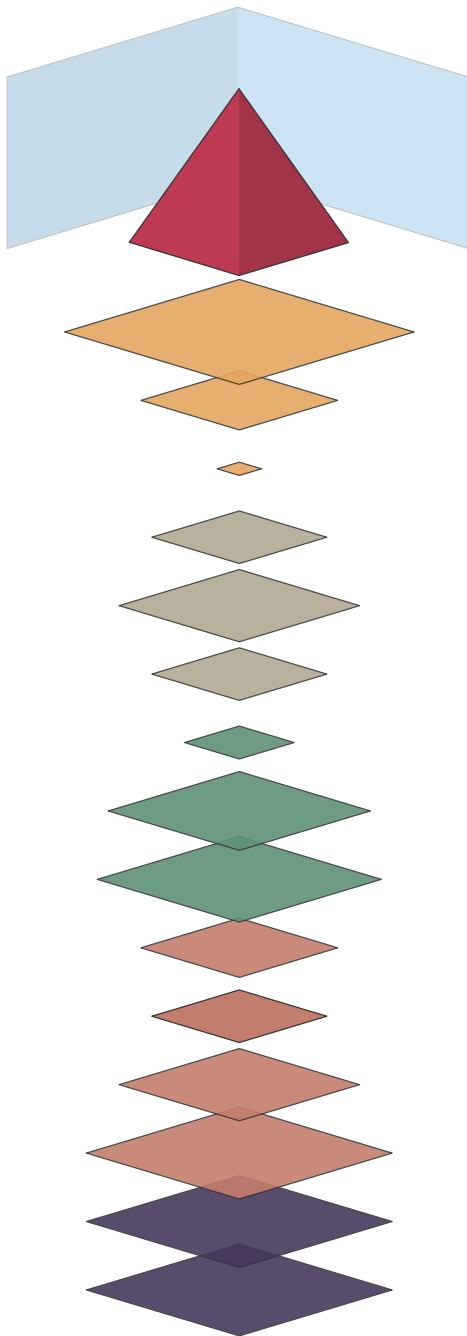
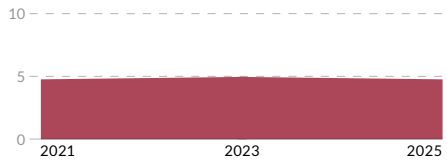


 **BAHRAIN**



 **4.82** $\triangleright 0.13$
CRIMINALITY SCORE

114th of 193 countries $\triangleright 16$
32nd of 46 Asian countries $\triangleright 5$
13th of 14 Western Asian countries $\triangleright 2$



 **CRIMINAL MARKETS** **5.13** $\triangleright 0.27$

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	8.00	0.00
HUMAN SMUGGLING	4.50	$\triangleright 1.00$
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	1.00	$\triangleright 0.50$
ARMS TRAFFICKING	4.00	$\triangleright 1.00$
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	5.50	0.00
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	4.00	0.00
FLORA CRIMES	2.50	$\triangleright 1.00$
FAUNA CRIMES	6.00	0.00
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	6.50	0.00
HEROIN TRADE	4.50	$\triangleright 0.50$
COCAINE TRADE	4.00	0.00
CANNABIS TRADE	5.50	0.00
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	7.00	0.00
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	7.00	0.00
FINANCIAL CRIMES	7.00	0.00

 **CRIMINAL ACTORS** **4.50** 0.00

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	1.00	$\triangleright 0.50$
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	6.00	0.00
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	4.50	$\triangleright 0.50$
FOREIGN ACTORS	5.00	0.00
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	6.00	0.00



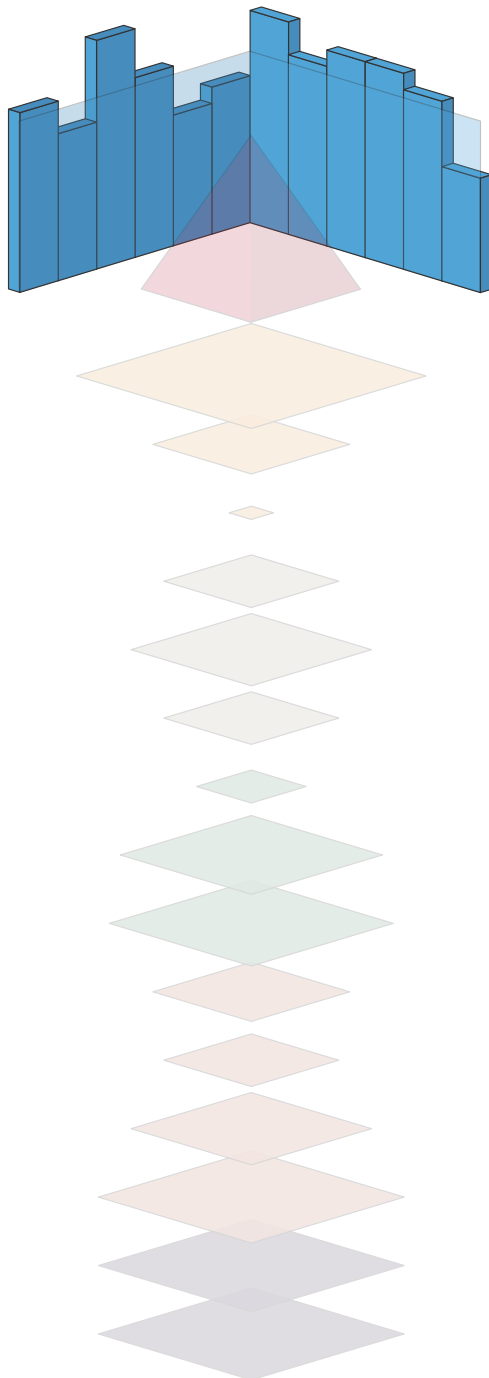
This project was funded in part by a grant from the United States Department of State.



Funded by the European Union

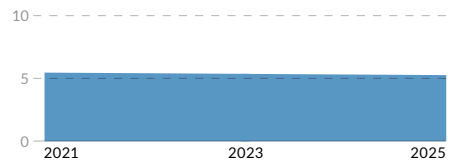
ENACT is funded by the European Union and implemented by the Institute for Security Studies and INTERPOL, in affiliation with the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.

 **BAHRAIN**



 **5.33** $\downarrow 0.09$
RESILIENCE SCORE

66th of 193 countries $\downarrow 4$
12th of 46 Asian countries $\downarrow 2$
5th of 14 Western Asian countries $\downarrow 1$



POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	5.50	$\downarrow 0.50$
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	4.50	0.00
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	7.00	0.00
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	5.50	0.00
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	4.00	$\downarrow 0.50$
LAW ENFORCEMENT	4.50	0.00
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	6.50	0.00
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	5.50	0.00
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	6.00	0.00
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	6.00	$\uparrow 0.50$
PREVENTION	5.50	0.00
NON-STATE ACTORS	3.50	$\downarrow 0.50$



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



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

Bahrain remains a prominent destination for human trafficking, particularly affecting migrant workers from South and South East Asia, as well as parts of Africa. The country's reliance on foreign labour, combined with the Kafala sponsorship system and weak enforcement of labour protections, significantly increases the migrant workers' vulnerability to exploitation. These people are frequently employed in the construction, service and domestic sectors – including as agricultural workers, drivers, guards, cooks and nannies – and many face conditions of forced labour, wage theft, document confiscation and physical or sexual abuse. Female domestic workers from Asian countries are particularly susceptible to sexual exploitation and coercion, with some trafficked into Bahrain under false pretences before being subjected to forced prostitution. Criminal groups, often operating through legally registered recruitment agencies, are active in facilitating labour trafficking. These actors function throughout the country, but cases are most frequently detected in the capital, Manama. Sexual exploitation is also prevalent, with foreign intermediaries orchestrating the trafficking process and local landlords providing venues for the abuse. Victims are often misled about the nature of the work, stripped of their documents and threatened to prevent resistance or escape. This is despite Bahrain's formal alignment with international anti-trafficking standards.

Human smuggling is less pervasive in Bahrain relative to other countries in the region. Bahrain's compact geography and limited border crossings, alongside the greater attractiveness of neighbouring destinations such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar, limit the scale of smuggling activity. Most migrants arrive through formal immigration procedures, not irregular channels. Nonetheless, there have been some instances of informal entry, including by young Saudi nationals seeking increased personal freedoms, although these are rarely coordinated by structured smuggling networks. Smuggling is, however, facilitated by corruption within certain state institutions. Bribery schemes have been documented involving public employees who have accepted payments to facilitate illegal visa renewals and unauthorized cross-border movements, particularly through the main land route connecting Bahrain to Saudi Arabia. Sudanese nationals have also been reported entering Bahrain using the Bahrain bridge without appropriate visas or overstaying permitted durations, prompting an indefinite ban on such entries by Bahraini authorities. While not a major smuggling hub, the presence of corruption and occasional systemic abuse indicates vulnerabilities that facilitate limited smuggling operations.

Extortion and protection racketeering appear to be non-existent in Bahrain. There are no substantial reports indicating the existence of organized racketeering networks or widespread use of extortion to control markets or territories.

TRADE

Arms trafficking in Bahrain remains relatively limited in scale, although the country has experienced intermittent incidents involving the smuggling of weapons and explosives, primarily sourced from Iran. These cases typically involve shipments allegedly intended for opposition groups or local affiliates. Despite the lack of consistent open-source data, Bahraini authorities have highlighted regional maritime smuggling networks as the main conduit for such trafficking. Weapons reportedly enter Bahrain through its territorial waters or through regional transit, with maritime routes serving as the primary vector. However, Bahrain's domestic arms trafficking market is subject to strict controls and enforcement measures, including enhanced surveillance at entry ports and improved maritime monitoring through regional cooperation. These efforts have proven relatively effective at limiting the spread of illicit arms within the country.

Bahrain functions as both a destination and transit point for counterfeit goods. The market includes high-end luxury items, such as fake watches, jewellery and fashion products, as well as counterfeit vehicle parts and textiles. Products like the traditional shemagh have also been subject to trademark infringements. The counterfeit goods market in Bahrain also includes imitated tobacco products, which have been found circulating alongside other illicit items. Markets in Manama are common sites for counterfeit sales, often facilitated by social media and e-commerce platforms.

Illicit trade in excisable goods, particularly tobacco, occurs in Bahrain but remains limited in scope. The country serves as a destination for smuggled tobacco products originating from regional suppliers, such as other Gulf countries, Jordan, Türkiye and India. Recent arrests highlighted the role of foreign nationals in distributing illicit tobacco products, often concealed in shipping containers or disguised within legitimate goods. Although alcohol smuggling is present, it occurs on a smaller scale. Social media platforms also serve as a distribution channel for excisable consumer goods. The Bahraini government has taken steps to address this market, such as introducing a digital stamp system for tobacco products aimed at improving traceability and enforcement. These initiatives reflect a proactive stance, although the illicit market retains some resilience due to ongoing demand and transnational supply routes.

ENVIRONMENT

Bahrain's involvement in flora crimes is minimal. While reports occasionally surface regarding the illegal import of plants such as agarwood, cedar, olive trees and frankincense, evidence of systematic criminal involvement remains scarce. Consequently, the country's role in the transnational flora trade is negligible and the impact on environmental criminality is limited.

Fauna crimes are more common and consolidated, with wildlife trafficking as well as illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing being the most prevalent fauna crimes. Bahrain's small landmass limits the feasibility of large-scale wildlife trafficking operations. Nonetheless, isolated incidents of illegal wildlife importation, such as the trafficking of baboon monkeys, suggest the presence of transnational smuggling networks exploiting jurisdictional gaps. IUU fishing, particularly of shrimp, remains a concern, with certain coastal areas, notably Damistan, experiencing notable illicit activity. Techniques such as the use of banned bottom trawl nets and unlicensed fishing operations are prevalent, and periodic enforcement campaigns have led to the seizure of prohibited gear and the arrest of violators.

Non-renewable resource crimes in Bahrain primarily involve oil and precious metal trafficking, typically of gold and diamonds. There have been reports of crude oil theft from tanker trucks, with the stolen fuel allegedly sold across borders at elevated prices. Participants in this market include both Bahraini nationals and foreign actors. Bahrain also serves as a source country for gold smuggling, with people attempting to transport gold and diamonds to destinations such as Egypt and India. Online platforms are increasingly used to facilitate the trade of smuggled gold and rough diamonds, typically at a small scale.

DRUGS

The heroin market in Bahrain remains relatively small, with low levels of domestic consumption likely attributable to the social stigma surrounding the drug. Most heroin enters the country via smuggling operations originating in South Asia, with Pakistan cited in recent cases involving capsule concealment. Despite these occasional smuggling attempts – some intercepted at Bahrain International Airport – the demand for heroin is limited, and the market is not well-developed compared to other drug types. Cocaine trafficking is similarly constrained. The limited data available suggest occasional incidents of smuggling, often through air transport and parcel concealment. A recent case involved a multi-national network smuggling both cannabis and cocaine via Bahrain Airport. These networks appear to target a select clientele, particularly youth. Nonetheless, there is little evidence of widespread distribution or high demand for cocaine, and the market remains underdeveloped relative to cannabis and synthetic drugs.

Cannabis is more prevalent in Bahrain's drug landscape. The country serves as both a transit and destination point,

with notable seizures including shipments concealed in consumer goods and smuggled by boat from Iran. Cannabis trafficking is facilitated by transnational criminal networks, which often include private sector accomplices such as import-export companies. Cannabis is frequently smuggled alongside other substances and has been linked to illicit financial flows, including money laundering operations involving cash businesses and religious charities. Despite regular seizures and arrests, the cannabis trade retains a foothold in Bahrain because of persistent demand and multiple entry routes, including postal services and maritime smuggling.

Synthetic drugs constitute the most consolidated and concerning drug market in Bahrain. Substances such as Captagon, crystal meth (known locally as shabu), and newer psychoactive substances are widely available. Captagon, largely produced in Syria and Lebanon, enters Bahrain through neighbouring countries. Shabu, sourced primarily from South East Asia, is trafficked by air and increasingly produced locally. Recent raids uncovering domestic methamphetamine manufacturing operations indicate an evolving domestic capacity. Smuggling methods are diverse, ranging from postal parcels and air cargo to maritime routes. Social media platforms are commonly used for promotion and distribution. Despite robust enforcement actions, including large-scale seizures and arrests, synthetic drug trafficking continues to rise.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Cyber-dependent crime is a significant concern in Bahrain, with state and private sector entities increasingly targeted by malicious actors. Notably, recent cyberattacks on multiple government websites underscored the vulnerability of Bahrain's digital infrastructure. A politically motivated hacking group claimed responsibility for the recent cyber attacks, and the breach reportedly involved the theft of sensitive personal data. Additionally, cryptocurrency scams have become particularly widespread, often targeting individuals through social media platforms. Fraudsters posing as representatives of reputable cryptocurrency platforms lure victims into bogus investment opportunities, resulting in significant financial losses. While the government has made investments in cybersecurity infrastructure – reflected in the projected growth of the sector – cyber-dependent crime continues to pose a persistent threat.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Bahrain continues to face significant challenges related to financial crime. Cyber-enabled financial fraud is widespread, often involving international actors. Common schemes include investment scams, phishing attacks, unauthorized access to bank accounts and the use of mobile payment platforms to defraud individuals and businesses. Authorities have reported messaging platform-based scams and phishing attacks exploiting the names of legitimate firms to

solicit funds and confidential data. Several of these cases involved foreign actors, including organized groups from Asia and suspected perpetrators from China, highlighting the cross-border nature of these crimes. Beyond cyber fraud, Bahrain also contends with traditional financial crimes such as embezzlement and unlicensed banking activities. High-level corruption cases have also emerged, including allegations involving a senior government official accused of misappropriating significant public funds.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

There is currently no evidence of mafia-style groups operating in Bahrain. The available information does not suggest the presence of highly structured, hierarchical criminal organizations that maintain territorial control or wield significant influence over the country's illicit economy. On the other hand, the country hosts several small-scale, loosely structured domestic criminal networks that are primarily involved in drug trafficking. These groups focus on the distribution of cannabis, heroin and synthetic drugs, particularly shabu. Operating largely in underground economies, these networks exploit demand for illicit substances and weaknesses in oversight along supply chains. Although they are active throughout the country, their operations are often concentrated along strategic entry points such as the King Fahd Causeway and the country's main international airport. Unlike more violent organized groups elsewhere, Bahraini criminal networks tend to avoid large-scale territorial control and are rarely involved in armed conflict. Acts of violence are usually opportunistic or intended to intimidate, rather than a central part of their operations.

While Bahrain is not widely known for extensive criminal infiltration into state institutions, corruption among public officials has become a concern. Persistent reports of misconduct – ranging from embezzlement and bribery to money laundering – have particularly affected mid-level administrative bodies such as customs and port authorities, where staff have repeatedly been implicated and convicted for accepting bribes. High-profile embezzlement cases involving senior officials have further underscored ongoing

concerns about transparency and the uneven enforcement of anti-corruption frameworks.

Foreign actors, particularly from Asian countries, play a notable role in Bahrain's criminal landscape. These people are often involved in drug trafficking operations, working in tandem with local networks to receive, process and distribute narcotic substances. In the synthetic drug market, foreign criminal groups, particularly from Thailand and Malaysia, have considerable influence, especially in trafficking shabu. Cannabis smuggling networks also reflect this division, with Saudi and Bahraini actors managing smaller operations, while more structured trafficking from Iran involves larger, more formalized groups. Iranian actors reportedly play a central role in arms trafficking, particularly in smuggling weapons to opposition groups. In the counterfeit goods market, criminal networks of Indian origin are especially active, highlighting the diverse and transnational nature of foreign actor involvement in Bahrain's organized crime ecosystem.

Private-sector actors in Bahrain are implicated in organized criminal activities, often serving as enablers through negligence or direct complicity. Legally registered and unlicensed employment agencies have been found to be complicit in human trafficking, often advertising false job opportunities on social media platforms and taking payments from vulnerable people seeking work. Some of these agencies operate without the required licences from regulatory authorities, facilitating exploitation through fraudulent recruitment schemes. Additionally, private shipping and import companies have been used to smuggle goods while evading customs duties, illustrating how commercial infrastructure can be co-opted for illicit purposes. The counterfeit goods trade also reveals transnational collaboration among private-sector entities, with cross-border networks coordinating the production and distribution of fake items. Furthermore, financial intermediaries and bank employees have been involved in enabling economic crimes such as embezzlement and money laundering, reinforcing the need for stronger compliance and oversight within Bahrain's financial and commercial sectors.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Bahrain's political leadership is characterized by an absolute monarchy, with the royal family maintaining overarching control across all branches of government. While some public declarations reaffirm the monarchy's commitment to democratic principles, there is little evidence of substantive

political reconciliation, with the continuing suppression of opposition forces. Nevertheless, the country exhibits relative political stability and engages internationally on organized crime issues. Furthermore, Bahrain's leadership continues to demonstrate rhetorical and symbolic commitment to countering organized crime, particularly at international

fora. Bahraini representatives have emphasized the regional threat posed by illicit markets, notably the arms trade, and advocated for collaborative efforts to reduce criminal activity. However, although organized crime is not a central topic in national political discourse – partly because of its relatively low visibility – the government takes a more proactive stance on such issues compared to several of its regional counterparts.

The country's record on transparency and accountability presents a more mixed picture. Bahrain has enacted anti-corruption laws, but enforcement remains inconsistent, especially in cases involving high-ranking officials. While legal frameworks prescribe penalties for offences such as bribery and embezzlement, implementation is limited. Key oversight institutions such as the National Audit Office report fiscal violations regularly but lack the authority to launch independent investigations or compel reforms. Other bodies, including the Anti-Corruption Crimes Department and Financial Supervision Bureau, exist to monitor misuse of public funds and prosecute wrongdoing, yet their efforts are often curtailed by institutional constraints or political considerations. There are no requirements for officials to disclose assets, and critical areas of public finance – including military and royal family expenditures – remain opaque. Media restrictions and the limited role of civil society further weaken oversight.

Bahrain participates actively in international cooperation mechanisms targeting organized crime. The country is party to most major treaties, including the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Arms Trade Treaty, and maintains bilateral agreements on extradition and information-sharing with various states. It is also a signatory to the Jeddah Amendment to the Djibouti Code of Conduct, a maritime security framework addressing arms smuggling and piracy. Bahrain regularly engages in multilateral operations, resulting in major seizures. The government also supports global initiatives such as the Global Commission on Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking. However, gaps remain, such as the absence of extradition treaties with counterparts, among others.

Bahrain has developed a comparatively robust national legislative framework addressing organized crime, with statutes spanning drug trafficking, human trafficking, weapons circulation and cybercrime. Several administrative reforms have been introduced, such as a digital stamp initiative to combat excise smuggling and safeguard public revenue. In the cyber domain, Bahrain has implemented a national strategy and introduced reforms aimed at aligning its regulations with international standards. The government has also taken steps to regulate employment practices more strictly through the replacement of the Flexi Permit with the Labor Registration Program, although protection gaps for migrant workers remain. Elsewhere, legislative reforms aim to combat overfishing and protect marine biodiversity, reflecting an integrated approach to environmental crime.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

The judicial system in Bahrain comprises civil and Sharia courts, with ultimate authority vested in the Court of Cassation. The monarch appoints all judges, and the judiciary is managed by a council also led by the royal family. This structure has led to widespread concerns about the judiciary's independence, particularly in politically sensitive cases. Reports indicate that courts are used to silence dissent, and defence lawyers have faced retaliation for representing political detainees. Although reforms have been introduced – such as allowing English in certain financial and commercial court proceedings – these have not fully addressed the perceived politicization of the judiciary. Detention conditions in Bahrain are a persistent concern, with reports of torture, mistreatment and denial of medical care continuing.

Bahrain maintains a wide array of specialized law enforcement units targeting different forms of organized crime. These include divisions focused on narcotics, economic crimes, cybercrime and human trafficking. The Anti-Narcotics Directorate, for example, is tasked with combating drug markets through targeted raids, while other units work in coordination with regulatory bodies to monitor financial crimes and employment violations. Training programmes on identification and investigation techniques are conducted for police and immigration officers. Despite these structures, serious allegations persist about the conduct of law enforcement officers. Documented instances of abuse, arbitrary detention and sexual violence by police illustrate enduring problems in accountability and human rights compliance.

The country's geographical characteristics contribute to a relatively contained trafficking environment. Bahrain's island status and limited land access – only via the King Fahd Causeway – create natural barriers to certain forms of trafficking. Nevertheless, authorities have reported continued smuggling attempts through postal and air cargo. In response, customs enforcement has deployed technological tools such as scanners, surveillance systems and chemical detection devices at entry points. Bahrain also engages in regional military and naval operations, reflecting broader strategic efforts to maintain territorial integrity. In terms of its digital infrastructure, Bahrain has been recognized for its proactive digital security measures.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Anti-money laundering (AML) remains a priority area for Bahrain's financial institutions. The country hosts the headquarters of Western Asia and North Africa Financial Action Task Force and participates actively in international networks such as the Egmont Group. The National Financial Investigation Center plays a leading role in identifying suspicious transactions, while legislative reforms and updates to the central bank's Financial Crime Module aim to strengthen compliance across sectors. Bahrain was

removed from the EU's tax haven blacklist in 2018, and its performance in regional AML benchmarks is comparatively strong. However, enforcement is hampered by entrenched corruption, particularly involving public officials. High-profile cases of embezzlement remain unresolved, and perceptions of impunity among elites persist, undermining the credibility of anti-money laundering efforts.

Bahrain's economic regulatory environment is generally liberal, supporting private enterprise and foreign investment. Businesses benefit from relatively low operating costs and a bilingual workforce. While the oil and gas sector remains state-dominated, other industries such as banking, healthcare and telecommunications allow full foreign ownership. Bilateral trade agreements with over 40 countries facilitate international business engagement. The regulatory system allows for agency and distributorship arrangements, and financial institutions are increasingly incorporating fintech and digital payment systems to improve transparency. Nonetheless, organized crime remains a threat in specific sectors, particularly in the cyber domain.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Bahrain continues to take steps to support victims of trafficking and related crimes. Authorities have expanded the use of screening forms and identification tools, particularly for sex trafficking victims and migrant workers. Dedicated shelters offer legal, medical and psychological support, while legal penalties incurred due to trafficking are routinely waived for recognized victims. In 2024, additional support measures were introduced, including job placement programmes and financial aid through the Victim Assistance Fund. Although participation in employment programmes was limited, these initiatives underscore Bahrain's intent to provide integrated assistance. A 24-hour trafficking hotline operates in multiple languages, though the government has not reported any victims identified through this channel. Plans are also under way to establish a formal office for witness protection in cooperation with the Public Prosecution and Labor Market Regulatory Authority.

The government continues to emphasize organized crime prevention through media campaigns, training sessions and policy reforms. The Labor Registration Program, alongside expanded airport screening and multilingual contracts, aims to reduce recruitment fraud and improve working conditions for migrants. However, there are limitations to enforcement. Many migrant workers still report paying recruitment fees, and legal protections for domestic workers are inconsistently applied. Gaps persist in the screening of vulnerable populations and the enforcement of wage protections. Efforts to combat drug abuse include participation in regional forums and advisory boards. In the cyber domain, Bahrain launched the Himaya campaign, a national effort to raise awareness of online threats to children. The campaign complements the country's broader strategy to combat online exploitation and cyber-dependent crime.

The environment for civil society in Bahrain remains highly constrained. NGOs must register with authorities who exercise broad discretion to approve or deny permits. Activists and their families continue to face harassment, and many are either imprisoned or living in exile. Independent civic engagement in combating organized crime is minimal, and media freedom is severely restricted. Since the suspension of Bahrain's last independent newspaper in 2017, the press has operated under strict governmental control. Laws governing the media are vaguely worded, encouraging self-censorship. Journalists face legal and bureaucratic barriers, and foreign reporters are often denied entry. Government surveillance extends to digital platforms, with arrests linked to online dissent and continued reports of spyware use against critics.

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.