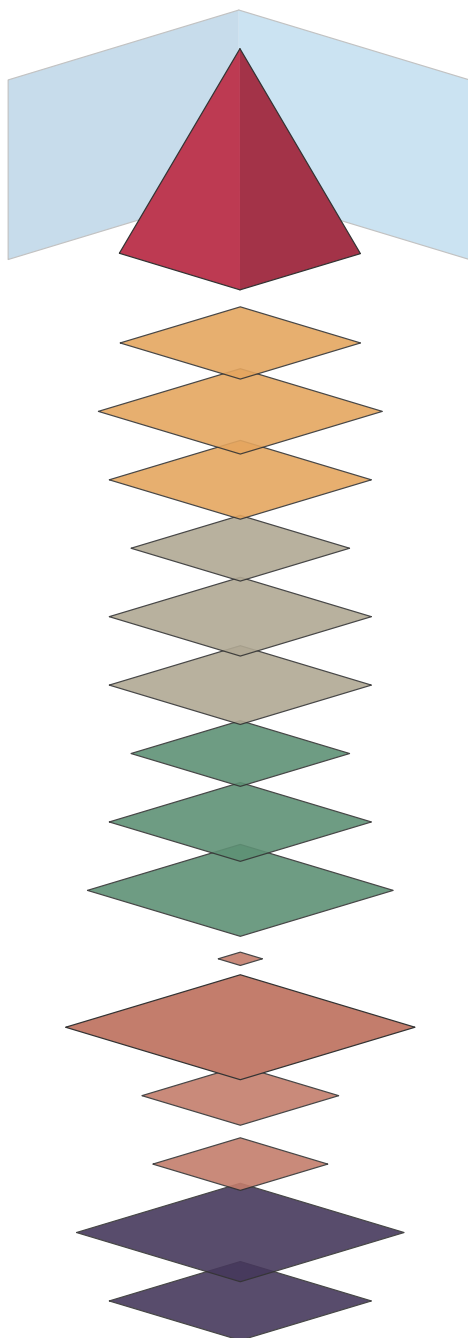




COSTA RICA



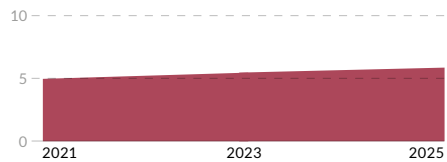
5.90 $\nearrow 0.37$

CRIMINALITY SCORE

58th of 193 countries $\nearrow 14$

13th of 35 American countries $\nearrow 4$

5th of 8 Central American countries $\nearrow 2$



CRIMINAL MARKETS

5.60 $\nearrow 0.23$

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	5.50 $\nearrow 0.50$
HUMAN SMUGGLING	6.50 $\nearrow 0.50$
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	6.00 0.00
ARMS TRAFFICKING	5.00 0.00
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	6.00 $\nearrow 0.50$
ILLCIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	6.00 0.00
FLORA CRIMES	5.00 0.00
FAUNA CRIMES	6.00 0.00
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	7.00 0.00
HEROIN TRADE	1.00 0.00
COCAINE TRADE	8.00 $\nearrow 0.50$
CANNABIS TRADE	4.50 0.00
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	4.00 $\nearrow 0.50$
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	7.50 $\nearrow 0.50$
FINANCIAL CRIMES	6.00 $\nearrow 0.50$



CRIMINAL ACTORS

6.20 $\nearrow 0.50$

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	8.00 $\nearrow 1.00$
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	6.00 0.00
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	3.50 $\nearrow 1.00$
FOREIGN ACTORS	7.50 $\nearrow 0.50$
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	6.00 0.00



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

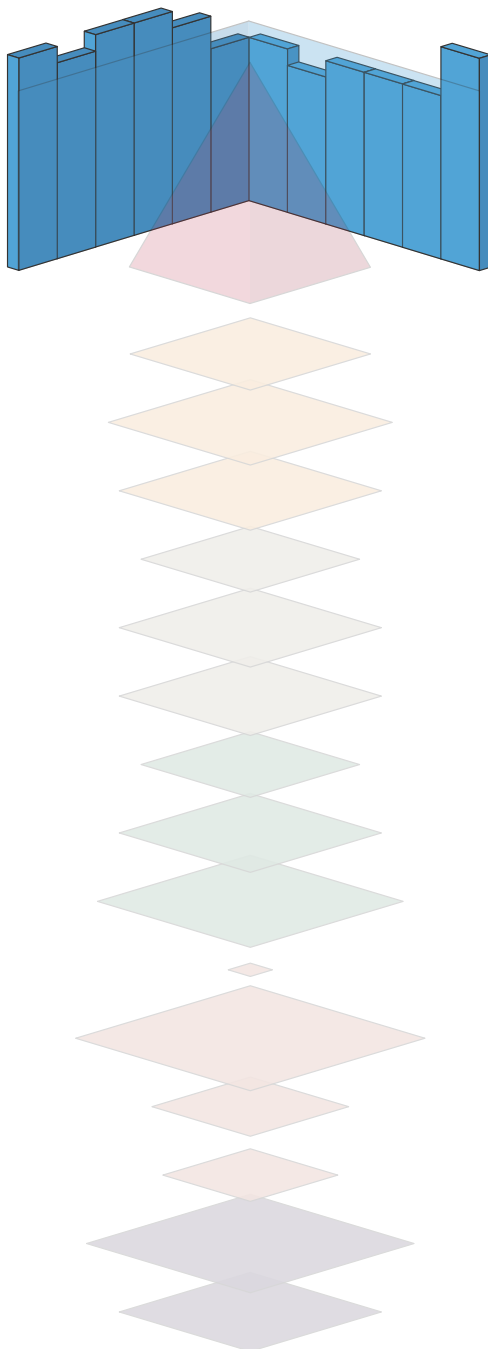


Funded by
the European Union

ENACT is funded by the European Union
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COSTA RICA



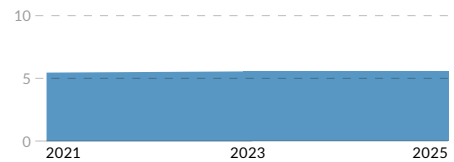
5.63_{0.00}

RESILIENCE SCORE

47th of 193 countries ↗3

7th of 35 American countries -

1st of 8 Central American countries -



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



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CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

Costa Rica serves as a source, transit and destination country for human trafficking. Vulnerable migrants from Central America, the Caribbean, China and South America are frequently targeted by traffickers, with many victims ultimately bound for the US. The country also receives victims from Colombia, Venezuela, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic, who are trafficked for commercial sex, domestic servitude and agricultural labour. Child sex tourism, particularly in areas like Jacó, remains a major concern, with international demand fuelling the exploitation of minors. Individuals from minority groups, particularly transgender people, are often coerced into sex work, facilitated by traffickers who use social media to lure and control victims. Reports indicate that traffickers use threats of exposing personal information as leverage over their victims. Agricultural labour exploitation is a growing concern, with workers subjected to harsh conditions and limited means of escape. Additionally, criminal groups coerce homeless individuals into smuggling drugs into prisons. Children are reportedly used to transport illicit substances or engage in violent crime, exposing them to trafficking networks. Costa Rica has also been identified as a location for criminal organ trafficking, with evidence pointing to the involvement of medical personnel and tourism operators in transplant-related crimes. Despite a lack of recent official investigations, the persistence of organ trafficking networks remains a possibility.

Human smuggling is a significant issue, with Costa Rica acting as both a transit and destination country. Migrants from Venezuela, Haiti and Ecuador transit through Costa Rica en route to North America, while others, including Nicaraguans and Colombians, arrive for work or tourism. The country's primary smuggling route spans from Panama to Nicaragua. Smuggling networks use formal and informal transport services, often assisted by local facilitators known as talibanes to evade border fees. Recent joint agreements between Costa Rica and Panama have formalized transit routes, limiting migrants' ability to stay in the country. However, unsafe conditions persist, with several migrant deaths reported in transit. In 2024, Costa Rican authorities dismantled a major migrant smuggling ring operating between Ecuador and the US, which charged migrants high fees and used complex transportation routes.

Extortion and protection racketeering are on the rise in Costa Rica. The gota a gota loan scheme, involving high-interest informal loans, has become widespread, with reports indicating that hundreds of thousands of Costa Ricans have been targeted. Extortion via social

media and telecommunications is also prevalent, with perpetrators making threats or impersonating kidnapped family members. Organized criminal groups have begun demanding illegal 'taxes' from businesses, particularly in San José and Cartago, where violence against victims has escalated. Criminal groups engaged in extortion have attacked law enforcement officers, further demonstrating their violent tactics.

TRADE

Arms trafficking is a critical issue, with most homicides in Costa Rica involving firearms. The country is a destination and transit point for illicit arms, primarily sourced from Honduras, Guatemala, Mexico and the US. Criminal groups acquire weapons, including AK-47s and AR-15s, to facilitate their involvement in drug trafficking. Seizures of illicit firearms remain high, but less than 5% of weapons used in homicides are legal. The link between arms trafficking and escalating violence is evident in the country's rising homicide rate.

The trade in counterfeit goods is growing rapidly in Costa Rica, with products like fertilizers, shoes, hygiene items and clothing imitating various brands widely sold. Counterfeits appear to have gained social acceptance, with the illicit market estimated at around 2% of GDP. Beyond the economic effects, the trade poses serious health risks, particularly as counterfeit pharmaceuticals – which tripled in 2023 – dominate the market, often sourced from Nicaragua. Illicit trade in excise goods, such as alcohol and cigarettes, is a thriving market. Contraband cigarettes, largely smuggled from Panama, Paraguay and China, account for nearly half of the country's total cigarette consumption. Government revenue losses from this illicit trade are considerable, and the sale of contraband products is widely accepted by consumers.

ENVIRONMENT

Flora crimes, particularly illegal logging, are widespread. Reports suggest that the majority of environmental crime complaints in Costa Rica relate to illegal timber extraction, with species like cocobolo and chilamate being heavily trafficked to China. Corrupt forestry regulators facilitate this illicit trade, and deforestation continues to threaten biodiversity. Fauna crimes are highly prevalent, with Costa Rica serving as a major source for wildlife trafficking. Species such as glass frogs, butterflies and birds are smuggled to North America and Europe for the exotic pet trade, while sea turtles and hammerhead sharks are targeted for their commercial value. Wildlife trafficking is facilitated by online platforms and drug trafficking networks, further complicating enforcement efforts.

Non-renewable resource crimes, particularly illegal gold mining, remain a major issue, with the Crucitas mine serving as a focal point for illicit activity. Nicaraguan migrants engage in unauthorized gold extraction, leading to severe environmental contamination from mercury use. Authorities have struggled to control the problem, and illegal mining operations have continued to grow. Reports indicate that artisanal miners are now targeting other protected areas, exacerbating environmental damage.

DRUGS

Costa Rica does not have a consolidated heroin market as local demand remains low and the country is not considered to be at the centre of the international heroin trade. However, Costa Rica is a key transit hub for cocaine trafficking, with shipments moving from Colombia through Costa Rica to the US and Europe. Mexican and Colombian cartels, including the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, play a central role in trafficking operations. Cocaine seizures have fluctuated. Despite intensified interdiction efforts, trafficking networks continue to evolve, employing advanced concealment methods such as smuggling drugs in shipments of fruit and coffee. Rising cocaine consumption in Costa Rica has further fuelled violence, with the majority of homicides linked to drug trafficking.

The cannabis trade is well established, with Costa Rica acting as a source, transit and destination country. Although local cultivation occurs, most cannabis is trafficked from Colombia and stored by Costa Rican gangs before being distributed locally or exported. Seizures of cannabis and related products have remained high, and the legal landscape surrounding cannabis use continues to influence the illicit market.

Synthetic drugs, including MDMA, LSD and ketamine, are increasingly trafficked into Costa Rica from Europe via postal shipments. The emergence of fentanyl in the country has raised concerns, with authorities dismantling fentanyl trafficking networks in recent years. Young consumers in nightlife districts and tourist areas are primary targets for synthetic drug distribution.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Cybercrime is a rapidly growing market in Costa Rica. The country has been heavily affected by ransomware attacks, with government institutions frequently targeted. Cybercriminals use deceptive messages and malware to disrupt business operations. Reports indicate that cybercrime complaints surged dramatically in recent years.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Costa Rica has a well-established financial crime market, including tax evasion, identity theft and online fraud. Criminal groups employ techniques such as fake lottery scams and counterfeit checks to defraud individuals and businesses. AI-generated scams impersonating public figures have also become common. Suspicious financial transactions linked to multiple economic sectors, including real estate and local trade, are recurrent. Fraudulent schemes have resulted in multimillion-dollar losses, and international cases involving Costa Rican actors have underscored the country's role in global financial crime networks.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

Organized crime in Costa Rica has grown significantly, with thousands linked to criminal groups, which have surged from 35 to 340 over the past decade. Major organizations like Los Picudos, Carryway and La Narco Familia vie for control of the drug trade in violent San José neighbourhoods such as La Carpio and Pavas. The Diablo Gang, now the country's most powerful, dominates cocaine trafficking, extortion and contract killings, with nationwide influence and documented ties to corrupt police officers. Authorities fear the rise of a 'mega cartel' as drug trafficking escalates. While some groups, like Los Moreco, have weakened after leadership arrests, others persist, operating from prison or reorganizing under new leaders.

Criminal networks in Costa Rica have established strong transnational ties, particularly in drug trafficking. Many of these groups collaborate with the Jalisco New Generation Cartel and Colombia's Clan del Golfo, facilitating cocaine shipments by providing logistical support such as fuel and motorboats. Additionally, some networks operate within the cybercrime sector, engaging in financial fraud, identity theft and ransomware attacks. The increasing presence of criminal networks across multiple sectors has contributed to rising levels of violence, as groups resort to both psychological and physical coercion to maintain control. Organ trafficking rings, often linked to corrupt medical personnel, have also been uncovered in recent years, further underscoring the complexity of Costa Rica's criminal landscape.

Despite public commitments to combat organized crime, Costa Rica faces challenges with corruption among state-embedded actors. Investigations into corruption have revealed systemic misconduct within state institutions, with multiple high-profile officials implicated in financial irregularities and misuse of public funds. The deputy prosecutor's office for probity, transparency and anti-corruption has identified significant corruption across nearly all state institutions, though progress has been made in reducing case backlogs. In 2024, allegations surfaced that the president had attempted to bribe the congress president, prompting an ongoing investigation by the

public prosecutor's office. Additionally, cases involving large-scale financial fraud, such as the disappearance of almost US\$6 million from the national bank and irregular construction permits, indicate deep-seated vulnerabilities within state structures.

Foreign criminal actors are increasingly active in Costa Rica, particularly in drug and arms trafficking. Mexican cartels, including the Jalisco New Generation and Sinaloa cartels, collaborate with local groups, while Colombia's Clan del Golfo dominates cocaine trafficking alongside remnants of the FARC. These groups also supply weapons to local gangs, fuelling violence and rising homicides. Intelligence points to the presence of Italy's 'Ndrangheta and efforts by MS-13 to expand after crackdowns in El Salvador. Venezuelan groups like Tren de Aragua have been identified among migrants, raising concerns over smuggling and extortion. While no direct links to high-ranking officials have been confirmed, authorities have noted possible ties between local political

figures and international cartels. Financial intelligence also highlights suspicious transactions involving actors from Nicaragua, Colombia and the US, suggesting transnational criminal activity in Costa Rica's financial system.

Costa Rica's private sector plays a significant role in facilitating organized crime, especially in illicit excisable goods and financial crimes. Sectors like construction, real estate and hospitality are commonly used for money laundering, with traffickers investing in legitimate businesses to hide illicit funds. Contraband cigarettes and alcohol remain widespread, with over 100 retail outlets in San José suspected of tax evasion and illegal sales. A notable case revealed a network laundering drug profits through tire shops, bars and restaurants, highlighting how legitimate enterprises can serve as fronts for crime. Despite stricter financial regulations, the private sector remains vulnerable to tax evasion, embezzlement and fraud.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Costa Rica's government has publicly committed to combating organized crime, but its efforts have been met with criticism. The current leadership has spearheaded reforms, including a revision of the Law on Organized Crime to strengthen specialized courts handling cases related to criminal organizations. However, opposition parties argue that the administration lacks effective measures to counteract rising drug-related violence. A dispute has emerged between the executive, legislative and judicial branches, with each entity attributing responsibility for the surge in crime to the other. The current president has frequently criticized the judiciary and congress for failing to curb crime, while the effectiveness of government measures remains unclear. Reports also indicate that some mayors and congress members have ties to criminal organizations, further complicating governance. Despite challenges, Costa Rica is recognized as a fully democratic country with a robust governance framework. However, ongoing investigations into influence peddling, corruption and abuse of power have impacted the administration's credibility. Although Costa Rica maintains strong governance indicators, institutional capacity constraints have hindered the effective coordination necessary to combat organized crime.

Costa Rica has a well-established legal framework for combating corruption, including the Law against Corruption and Illicit Enrichment in Public Function, and a long-standing anti-corruption office. Transparency initiatives have resulted in high rankings for administrative and budget transparency, with digital governance efforts receiving

international recognition. Recent anti-corruption efforts include the passage of the Comprehensive Anti-Corruption Law, which protects whistleblowers in both public and private sectors. However, weaknesses persist, particularly in financial disclosure requirements for public officials and transparency in mining and infrastructure permits. The ongoing investigation into bribery allegations involving the president has further underscored existing governance vulnerabilities. Although the government continues to allocate resources to counter organized crime, corruption at multiple levels has hindered effective enforcement and regulation. The proposed Jaguar Bill, which seeks to reduce the oversight powers of the office of the comptroller general, has been criticized as a potential setback in anti-corruption efforts.

Costa Rica actively engages in international efforts to combat organized crime. The country has ratified key international agreements, including the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and multiple extradition treaties with nations such as the US, Mexico and Colombia. Bilateral agreements addressing drug trafficking and money laundering exist with Argentina, Chile, Panama and other regional partners. The US is Costa Rica's primary external supporter in combating organized crime, recently providing funds to enhance digital infrastructure for counter-narcotics efforts. Additionally, Costa Rica has strengthened cooperation with the EU to tackle drug trafficking. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has established a permanent presence in Costa Rica to assist in border security enhancements, including

installing scanners at key entry points. Despite these positive developments, Costa Rica remains vulnerable to transnational organized crime. The country's cooperation with regional neighbours such as Panama and Nicaragua has focused on border security improvements, yet challenges remain in managing smuggling routes and illicit trade.

Costa Rica has enacted various laws addressing organized crime, including the Law against Organized Crime, human trafficking laws and narcotics regulations. A national strategy to combat public security challenges has been introduced, but concerns persist over the effectiveness of its implementation. A recent law reform aims to strengthen specialized courts handling organized crime cases, while newly enacted legislation targets extortionate lending schemes. However, Costa Rica has yet to adopt a forfeiture law similar to those in Panama and Colombia, which could enhance efforts to dismantle transnational criminal networks. Additionally, delays in legislative processes have hindered further reforms. A proposed constitutional amendment allowing the extradition of Costa Rican nationals involved in drug trafficking is currently under debate, reflecting efforts to strengthen legal frameworks against organized crime.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

The judicial system in Costa Rica operates independently and upholds fair trial standards, but delays in criminal case processing persist. The penitentiary system is experiencing severe overcrowding, with facilities housing 15 000 inmates despite a maximum capacity of 13 000. Allegations of torture and inadequate prison funding have further exposed weaknesses in the detention system. Although a monitoring mechanism for prison violence has been implemented, challenges remain in ensuring humane conditions for detainees.

Costa Rica's main law enforcement bodies are the Judicial Investigation Agency, which handles serious national and transnational crimes, and the national police, responsible for general policing. The national police also includes specialized units – such as the drug control police, border police and special intervention units – designed to address specific threats like drug trafficking and border-related crime. Despite this institutional framework, Costa Rica continues to face significant challenges in tackling organized crime. Persistent resource and personnel shortages hinder the national police's capacity to effectively respond to growing criminal markets, particularly drug trafficking and associated violence. While public trust in law enforcement remains relatively high, these limitations have constrained the overall effectiveness of policing efforts. In response, the government has proposed a major expansion of the police force, aiming to add up to 9 500 officers. Complementing these efforts, targeted operations such as 'Operativo Pacífico' have been launched in violence-prone areas like Puntarenas to disrupt gang activity and reduce crime.

Costa Rica's strategic geographic location – bordered by Nicaragua and Panama and flanked by the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean – makes it a key transit point for various illicit activities. These include drug trafficking, the smuggling of non-renewable resources and human smuggling routes used by migrants heading towards the US, often passing through Costa Rica's Limón region, an area known for high levels of violence. In response to the growing smuggling markets, Costa Rica has implemented several border management initiatives, including the Integrated Control Center and the Border Integration Program, aimed at modernizing border infrastructure and enhancing control over cross-border movement. The border police oversee port security, while airport authorities focus on preventing trafficking, particularly of wildlife. Costa Rica also collaborates with Panama on a shared border control system to streamline migrant registration and improve oversight of imports from Asia and Europe. Additionally, it is working with Nicaragua to address informal crossing points and strengthen northern border security. In 2023, the UNODC established its first permanent office in Costa Rica, with the goal of installing scanning systems at all ports, airports and border crossings to combat transnational organized crime. Meanwhile, Costa Rica remains vulnerable to cyber threats. Following the 2022 Conti ransomware attack, the country has continued to face cyberattacks, including recent incidents targeting the health ministry, underscoring the need for stronger digital infrastructure and cybersecurity measures.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Costa Rica has a robust banking system that adheres to international regulations, yet it remains a hub for international money laundering. Despite multiple anti-money laundering laws and oversight institutions, convictions for financial crimes remain low. In 2024, Costa Rica was re-listed on the EU's grey list for tax evasion concerns, though improvements in anti-money laundering measures have been recognized by global financial monitoring bodies.

Costa Rica enjoys a generally favourable economic environment, marked by steady growth and strong foreign direct investment, a major driver of its economy. Nonetheless, challenges persist, including high operational costs, a complex legal framework, infrastructure gaps and structural issues like poverty, inequality and a segmented labour market. The government's 2023–2026 development agenda prioritizes recovery, fiscal sustainability and macroeconomic stability, but progress is hindered by bureaucratic inefficiencies and political constraints. Although the economy shows resilience, GDP has yet to fully recover to pre-pandemic levels. Notably, the private sector has taken steps to counter organized crime, including initiatives like the Business Alliance for Secure Commerce, which promotes corporate responsibility in addressing these challenges.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Costa Rica has established two primary support mechanisms for victims and witnesses of crime: the Victim and Witness Protection Unit within the Judicial Investigation Agency and the Office for the Attention and Protection of the Victim under the Public Prosecution Office. These bodies provide protection and care to individuals involved in judicial proceedings, especially those facing threats or in vulnerable situations. Notably, the protection programme experienced a sharp rise in caseloads, highlighting growing demand for protective services. Despite these efforts, funding shortfalls remain a key obstacle to expanding and strengthening victim support systems, particularly for trafficking cases. Costa Rica's prevention efforts include programmes targeting communities, youth and the commercial sector, aimed at promoting crime awareness and collaboration with police. Additionally, the National Coalition Against the Illicit Smuggling of Migrants and Human Trafficking leads public campaigns to discourage involvement in these criminal markets. The country's anti-trafficking efforts have been recognized in international assessments, with increased resource allocation for prevention programmes, among others, though they fall short of the highest standards. Costa Rica's approach to drug policy has also received mixed evaluations. The country demonstrates moderate success but still falls short in areas such as harm reduction, support for people who use drugs, and proportionality in criminal justice. Non-state actors, including human rights organizations and research institutions, play an active role in addressing organized crime. Costa Rica maintains strong press freedom protections, with media outlets frequently reporting on crime and corruption. However, tensions between the government and critical journalists have escalated, with allegations of state-led harassment of reporters. The government has also been criticized for reducing support for human rights movements, particularly LGBTQI+ advocacy groups.

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.