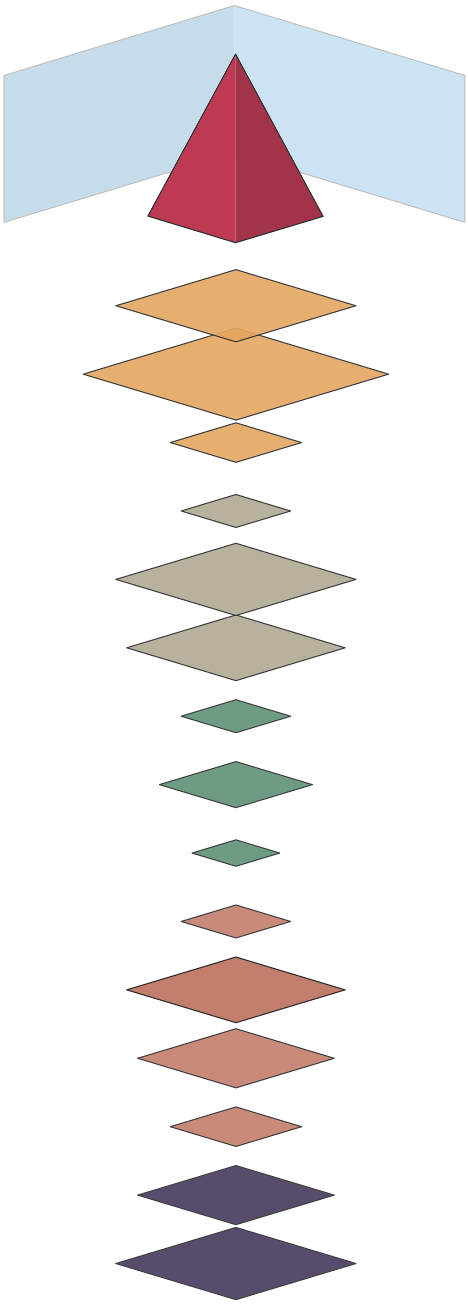
GLOBAL ORGANIZED CRIME INDEX

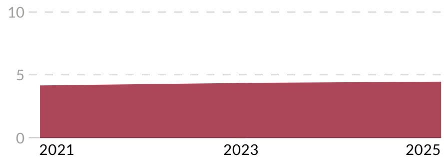
GLOBAL INITIATIVE AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

CYPRUS



4.50 ↗0.07 CRIMINALITY SCORE

129th of 193 countries -
30th of 44 European countries ↘1
6th of 8 Southern European countries -



CRIMINAL MARKETS	**4.10**	↗0.13
HUMAN TRAFFICKING	5.50	0.00
HUMAN SMUGGLING	7.00	↗0.50
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	3.00	0.00
ARMS TRAFFICKING	2.50	0.00
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	5.50	0.00
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	5.00	0.00
FLORA CRIMES	2.50	0.00
FAUNA CRIMES	3.50	↗0.50
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	2.00	0.00
HEROIN TRADE	2.50	0.00
COCAINE TRADE	5.00	0.00
CANNABIS TRADE	4.50	0.00
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	3.00	0.00
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	4.50	↗0.50
FINANCIAL CRIMES	5.50	↗0.50

CRIMINAL ACTORS	**4.90**	0.00
MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	3.50	0.00
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	5.00	0.00
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	4.00	0.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	7.00	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.

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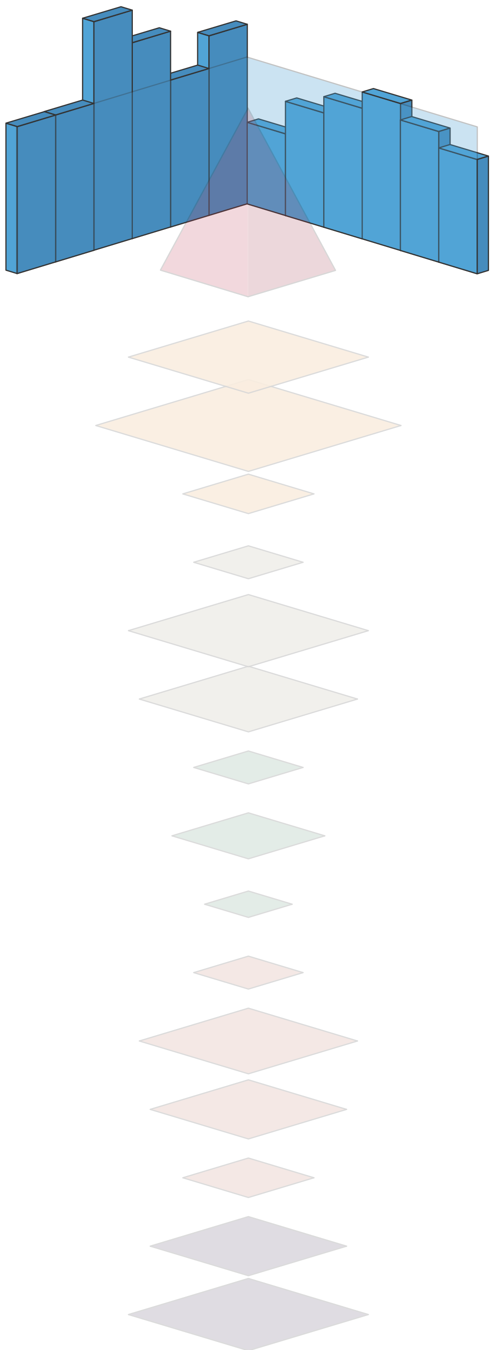
Funded by the European Union

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.

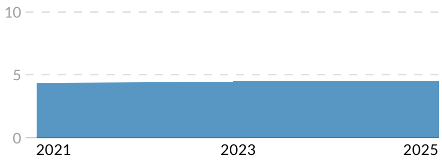
CYPRUS



4.50 ↗0.04

RESILIENCE SCORE

111th of 193 countries ↗6
40th of 44 European countries -
8th of 8 Southern European countries -



POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	4.50	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	4.50	0.00
LAW ENFORCEMENT	5.50	0.00
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	2.50	0.00
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	3.50	0.00
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	4.00	↗0.50
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	4.50	0.00
PREVENTION	4.00	0.00
NON-STATE ACTORS	3.50	0.00

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CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

Cyprus remains primarily a destination for human trafficking, with victims subjected to sexual exploitation, forced labour and other forms of criminal coercion. The country's geographical position at the crossroads of Europe, Western Asia and Africa makes it particularly vulnerable to organized criminal networks involved in human trafficking. Sexual exploitation remains the most prevalent form of trafficking, with victims primarily originating from Eastern Europe, sub-Saharan Africa, Central Asia, and South and South East Asia. The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) serves as a major hub for sex trafficking, particularly in nightclubs that exploit women under coercive conditions. Forced labour also affects various sectors, including construction, domestic work, agriculture and retail, with traffickers employing debt-based coercion and threats of deportation to maintain control over victims.

Cyprus has faced mounting pressure from irregular migration, particularly along the eastern Mediterranean route. Boat landings in government-controlled areas have doubled, with Syrian and Lebanese nationals forming most arrivals. Syrian criminal syndicates, often facilitated by members of the diaspora in Cyprus, play a key role in smuggling operations, coordinating the recruitment and payment processes while using social media and encrypted platforms to validate transactions. Migrants frequently enter Türkiye legally before proceeding to the TRNC, exploiting student visas issued by unregulated institutions. Many then cross the UN Buffer Zone into government-controlled areas to claim asylum. Authorities have attempted to curb the influx by intercepting boats and tightening asylum policies, but smuggling networks remain resilient.

Although extortion and protection racketeering are not widely reported, isolated incidents linked to organized crime groups suggest a more covert presence. Extortion in Cyprus is often associated with arson and destruction of property as retaliatory measures when victims resist. The nightlife sector has been particularly vulnerable to mafia-style violence, with high-profile assassinations indicating a turf war among criminal groups. Extortion cases frequently involve connections to drug and arms trafficking, underscoring the interdependence of various illicit markets.

TRADE

Arms trafficking remains a relatively small market in Cyprus, with few notable cases reported. Illicit arms mainly originate from areas within the TRNC, where they are smuggled into government-controlled zones through unofficial crossings. Although Cyprus primarily serves as a transit country, there are indications that it may also function as a minor source. Incidents of firearm theft from army outposts and reservists' homes, likely intended to support local smuggling routes, have been reported, though these largely remain isolated occurrences. Authorities continue to monitor arms flows, but illicit weapons are often discovered during broader criminal investigations rather than dedicated arms trafficking probes.

Counterfeit goods remain widely available in Cyprus, with the TRNC serving as a key entry point for fake products smuggled from Türkiye. Criminal networks are heavily involved in this trade, which primarily includes cosmetics, personal care products, clothing, accessories, electronics and toys. Despite regulatory enforcement efforts and cross-border cooperation, the market remains persistent due to consumer demand and porous borders.

The illicit trade in excise goods, particularly tobacco, has surged due to economic disparities between the TRNC and areas under the effective control of the Republic of Cyprus. The low exchange rate of the Turkish lira has incentivized the smuggling of tobacco products across the UN Buffer Zone, with the majority of illicit tobacco in government-controlled areas reportedly originating from the north. Seizures of contraband tobacco products have continued, with authorities regularly intercepting smuggling attempts at crossing points and unregulated routes.

ENVIRONMENT

Illegal logging occurs in protected areas, though it remains underreported. The demand for illegal timber is fuelled by local traditions and the need for firewood. Although Cyprus serves as a minor source of illegal timber, the market remains small compared to other forms of environmental crime. Recently, an increase in processed timber imports from Türkiye has raised concerns over non-compliance with European environmental standards.

Fauna crimes, particularly bird trapping, continue to be a significant issue in Cyprus. Illegal bird trapping, primarily involving migratory songbirds, generates millions of euros annually for organized criminal networks. Despite past enforcement efforts, trapping rates have surged, fuelled by the lucrative restaurant trade for illegal delicacies. Recent cases also indicate smuggling attempts involving exotic wildlife, including West African bush rats.

Fuel smuggling is the most prominent form of non-renewable resource crime, driven by price disparities between the TRNC and areas under the effective control of the Republic of Cyprus. Smugglers exploit weak border controls and economic inequalities to transport fuel across the UN Buffer Zone, causing significant tax revenue losses for the government. Authorities have intensified enforcement efforts, but the practice remains prevalent due to high consumer demand.

DRUGS

Heroin trafficking in Cyprus remains relatively low and stable. Seizures are limited and have generally involved authorities intercepting shipments intended for transit to other EU nations.

The cocaine market in Cyprus is substantial but not a major player in the transnational supply chain. Though total seizures have overall declined in recent years, criminal groups such as Turkish–Cypriot syndicates remain active in distribution. The tourism sector plays a role in sustaining demand, with Limassol emerging as a hotspot for cocaine consumption. The TRNC has become a key hub for laundering cocaine profits through casinos and gambling establishments.

Cannabis remains widely consumed in Cyprus. Despite the limited domestic production, demand continues to rise, particularly among tourists. Seizures of imported cannabis are frequently reported, with Syrian coastal areas serving as a major trafficking route. Although cannabis is only legal for medical purposes, illegal THC-infused products remain available, highlighting the overlap between licit and illicit markets.

Cyprus remains a secondary market for synthetic drugs, but increasing seizures indicate a potential growth in local demand. Synthetic drug consumption, particularly amphetamines and ecstasy, is growing in line with European trends. The largest seizure of synthetic narcotics in Cyprus in recent years involved authorities intercepting 500 kilograms of mephedrone.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Cybercrime is a growing threat in Cyprus, with ransomware attacks surging. Supply chain attacks, unauthorized software usage and man-in-the-middle attacks have also increased. The private sector remains a primary target, with half of Cypriot businesses reporting cyberattacks in the past year. Despite preventive measures, state institutions have also been targeted.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crimes in Cyprus remain systemic, with significant cases of tax fraud, VAT fraud and investment fraud frequently reported. Investigations have uncovered multimillion-euro fraud networks exploiting cross-border tax exemptions. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has intensified scrutiny, revealing how Cyprus-based entities facilitated illicit financial transactions. Despite increased enforcement efforts, the country remains an attractive jurisdiction for financial crime due to regulatory loopholes and corporate opacity.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

Mafia-style groups in Cyprus remain entrenched in various criminal markets, with a strong presence in drug trafficking, extortion, tobacco smuggling, racketeering and illegal gambling. These groups operate across major cities, including Nicosia, Limassol, Paphos and Famagusta. Although various mafia-style groups are embedded in some cities, their influence is typically fragmented due to inter-group rivalries and loose affiliations. These groups often establish long-standing structures bound by familial ties, maintaining hierarchical operations and engaging in violent power struggles. Drug trafficking remains a primary illicit activity, with mafia-style groups controlling significant portions of the cocaine and synthetic drug markets. These organizations are also linked to illegal betting and match-fixing operations. Offshore financial structures and investments in legitimate sectors such as real estate and hospitality serve as avenues for laundering illicit profits, further entrenching their economic influence. The TRNC plays a crucial role in facilitating mafia-style operations, particularly as a transit point for drug trafficking. Recent developments indicate increasing connections between Cypriot mafia-style groups and international crime syndicates, including those from Russia and Poland.

Criminal networks in Cyprus maintain a flexible and opportunistic approach, engaging in a wide range of illicit activities, including drug trafficking, human trafficking, economic crimes and cybercrime. These groups operate with less organizational rigidity than mafia-style groups, but wield substantial influence over local and transnational crime markets. Recent assessments suggest that Cypriot criminal networks collaborate closely with foreign counterparts, particularly British, Eastern European and Asian groups. Their adaptability allows them to exploit regulatory gaps and engage in illicit financial flows, including online fraud and tax evasion schemes. These networks also play a significant role in facilitating human trafficking and irregular migration, often working in tandem with international smuggling operations.

The role of state-embedded actors in organized crime has drawn increasing scrutiny, particularly regarding allegations of corruption within law enforcement and political institutions. Reports have surfaced implicating police officers in facilitating criminal activities, with accusations ranging from abuse of authority to direct involvement in organized crime. Broader concerns regarding institutional corruption were amplified by the Cyprus Confidential scandal, which exposed weaknesses in state oversight mechanisms. The parliamentary Standing Committee on Legal Affairs, Justice and Public Order highlighted systemic failures that facilitated illicit financial activities, reinforcing perceptions of entrenched corruption within state institutions. The administration in the TRNC has historically served as a refuge for fugitives, tax evaders and other criminals evading prosecution in their home countries.

Foreign actors play a substantial role in Cyprus's organized crime landscape, with individuals from Eastern Europe, Türkiye and the rest of Western Asia deeply involved in various illicit markets. Russian criminal organizations remain influential in financial crimes, often linked to high-profile money laundering cases and offshore financial structures. Turkish criminal actors exert considerable control over migrant smuggling, trade in counterfeit goods, excise consumer goods smuggling, fuel smuggling and cocaine trafficking. The TRNC areas function as a major hub for these operations, with limited regulatory oversight allowing for the expansion of transnational criminal activities. Syrian and Lebanese organized crime groups have a strong presence in the cannabis trade, leveraging Cyprus's geographic position to facilitate smuggling routes. The influx of asylum seekers, refugees and irregular migrants has contributed to the formation of new, non-Cypriot criminal networks, particularly among Syrian, Nigerian and Somali groups. Some of these networks are increasingly described as emerging mafias, particularly those involved in human smuggling and related illicit activities.

The involvement of private-sector actors in organized crime in Cyprus is primarily linked to financial crimes, corruption and money laundering. Although confirmed cases remain limited, corruption within the private sector is pervasive, particularly in relation to government procurement and bribery of officials. The Cyprus Confidential and Magnitsky scandals underscore the extent to which financial institutions and corporate entities have facilitated illicit financial flows. Law firms, real estate companies and financial service providers have been implicated in enabling money laundering activities, often exploiting regulatory loopholes. In the TRNC, casinos and hotels serve as primary vehicles for laundering proceeds from drug trafficking and other criminal enterprises. There have been reports of these activities spilling over into areas under the effective control of the Republic of Cyprus, yet regulatory measures remain insufficient to curb financial crime effectively.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Cyprus has proven capable of maintaining stability in leadership and governance. The government has declared a commitment to combating organized crime, with political leaders emphasizing law enforcement measures against criminal networks. However, concerns persist regarding the extent of organized crime's influence within the country. The leadership within the TRNC has publicly committed to a 'zero tolerance' stance on organized crime, yet evidence suggests a high level of criminal activity within the administration.

Transparency and accountability remain significant concerns. Public perception surveys indicate that corruption is widely regarded as a major issue, with a substantial proportion of Cypriots expressing distrust in government institutions. The establishment of an Anti-Corruption Authority and laws aimed at whistleblower protection represent efforts to address these concerns. However, criticisms remain over the effectiveness of anti-corruption initiatives, particularly regarding enforcement mechanisms and oversight. In the TRNC, corruption and bribery are perceived as major obstacles to effective governance, with reports of favouritism and nepotism in public sector appointments.

Cyprus maintains a robust legislative framework aligned with international commitments, including ratification of key treaties such as the UNTOC and various bilateral agreements targeting organized crime. Despite these frameworks, enforcement challenges persist, particularly in extradition cases where delays have enabled suspects to evade prosecution. The country has expanded cooperation with international agencies, notably partnering with the United States to enhance financial crime investigations. Although Cyprus actively participates in Europol and INTERPOL collaborations, challenges remain in ensuring timely and effective responses to transnational crime.

National policies addressing organized crime cover a range of issues, including drug trafficking, human trafficking and financial crimes. Recent policy developments include the implementation of an action plan against organized crime, strategies to combat illicit tobacco trade and strengthened measures against fuel smuggling. Specialized initiatives to prevent human trafficking have been introduced, including a dedicated unit for victim support. However, the effectiveness of these policies is yet to be fully assessed.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

The judicial system in Cyprus faces significant challenges in handling organized crime cases. The absence of specialized courts for organized crime means that such cases are processed within the general judiciary, contributing to delays. A shortage of judges and increasing caseloads have further strained the system, resulting in low levels of judicial efficiency. Prison overcrowding remains a major issue, with detention facilities exceeding their capacity, leading to substandard conditions. Corruption allegations within the prison system persist, raising concerns over the ability of correctional institutions to prevent organized crime operations from being conducted internally.

Law enforcement agencies in Cyprus have established specialized units to combat organized crime, including divisions focused on financial crimes, cybercrime and poaching. However, there have been criticisms regarding their effectiveness, leading to the adoption of a national action plan to enhance enforcement capabilities. The police have deepened cooperation with Frontex, particularly in managing migrant smuggling operations, and have established a new intelligence unit focused on irregular migration. However, public confidence in law enforcement remains relatively low, with surveys indicating concerns over corruption within the police force.

Border security presents ongoing challenges, particularly along the UN Buffer Zone and the maritime border. The division between the areas under the effective control of the Republic of Cyprus and the TRNC complicates territorial integrity, with the UN Buffer Zone serving as a corridor for smuggling and other illicit activities. Although technological surveillance measures have been implemented to enhance border security, the effectiveness of these measures is limited by geopolitical constraints. The deployment of additional police personnel to patrol the Green Line represents an effort to strengthen territorial control, but smuggling activities remain persistent.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Cyprus has long been a jurisdiction associated with financial secrecy, contributing to its vulnerability to money laundering. The country has adopted anti-money laundering regulations in line with EU directives, with financial oversight bodies regularly monitoring compliance. However, international assessments have highlighted ongoing deficiencies, particularly in implementing recommendations from the Financial Action Task Force. Though enforcement measures have improved, concerns remain over the effectiveness of asset recovery and the prosecution of financial crimes.

The economic regulatory environment in Cyprus is characterized by a competitive tax framework, which has attracted foreign businesses but also created risks for illicit financial flows. The implementation of anti-tax avoidance directives aligns Cyprus with EU standards, but regulatory gaps persist in sectors such as real estate and investment-based crowdfunding. The private sector plays a role in mitigating organized crime risks, with financial institutions and industry bodies implementing due diligence measures. However, sectors such as public procurement, pharmaceuticals and tobacco remain particularly vulnerable to illicit activities.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Victim support services in Cyprus are provided through government and NGO collaborations, which offer assistance such as medical care, legal aid and counselling. A specialized unit in Nicosia is dedicated to supporting human trafficking victims, extending services across the island. However, there have been criticisms regarding the implementation of victim protection laws, particularly concerning residency permit extensions for foreign victims. The adoption of whistleblower protection laws has strengthened legal safeguards, but practical enforcement remains a challenge.

Preventive measures against organized crime include national strategies targeting human trafficking, cybercrime and illicit trade. A notable initiative includes the limitation of high-value cash transactions to curb money laundering risks. Law enforcement agencies have increased efforts to tackle financial crimes through international cooperation agreements. Community policing models, such as the EU-funded KOBAN initiative, have been introduced to enhance engagement between police and local communities. However, the effectiveness of these measures remains subject to long-term evaluation.

The role of non-state actors in Cyprus remains constrained, particularly concerning press freedom and civil society participation. Media organizations face political pressure, with allegations of state surveillance and editorial interference limiting journalistic independence. A high concentration of media ownership further restricts pluralism, contributing to self-censorship. Civil society participation is relatively low, with limited engagement in policymaking. Although NGOs are active in victim support and drug rehabilitation, their overall influence is restricted by government oversight. The National Referral Mechanism has facilitated cooperation between government agencies and NGOs to address human trafficking cases. However, broader civil society engagement in organized crime prevention remains limited. The government has expressed commitments to strengthening civil society's role, but structural barriers impede more active participation. Additionally, the long-standing dispute between Greek and Turkish Cypriots continues to have a significant impact on how the media and civil society organizations operate.

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.