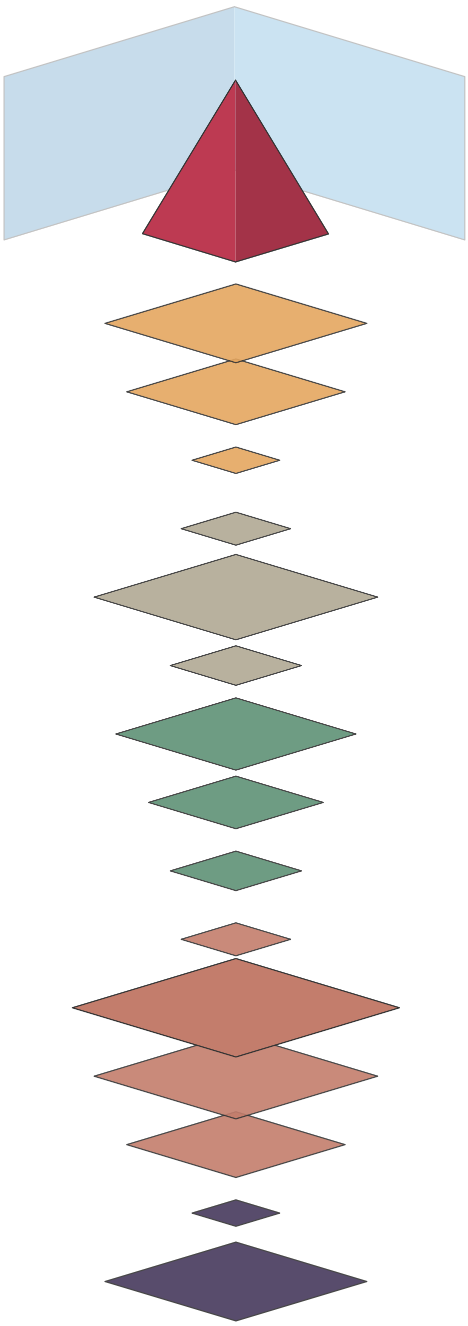
GLOBAL ORGANIZED CRIME INDEX

GLOBAL INITIATIVE AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

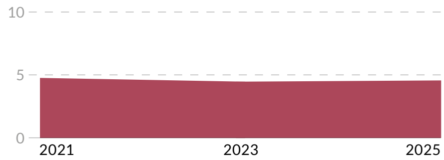
GAMBIA



4.58 ↗0.05

CRIMINALITY SCORE

126th of 193 countries ↘2
40th of 54 African countries ↘1
14th of 15 West African countries -



CRIMINAL MARKETS	4.47	↘0.20
HUMAN TRAFFICKING	6.00	0.00
HUMAN SMUGGLING	5.00	0.00
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	2.00	↗1.00
ARMS TRAFFICKING	2.50	0.00
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	6.50	0.00
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	3.00	↗0.50
FLORA CRIMES	5.50	↘1.50
FAUNA CRIMES	4.00	0.00
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	3.00	↘1.50
HEROIN TRADE	2.50	↘2.00
COCAINE TRADE	7.50	↗0.50
CANNABIS TRADE	6.50	↘0.50
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	5.00	↗1.00
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	2.00	↘1.00
FINANCIAL CRIMES	6.00	↗0.50

CRIMINAL ACTORS	4.70	↗0.30
MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	1.00	0.00
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	6.50	0.00
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	7.00	↗0.50
FOREIGN ACTORS	5.00	↗1.00
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	4.00	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.

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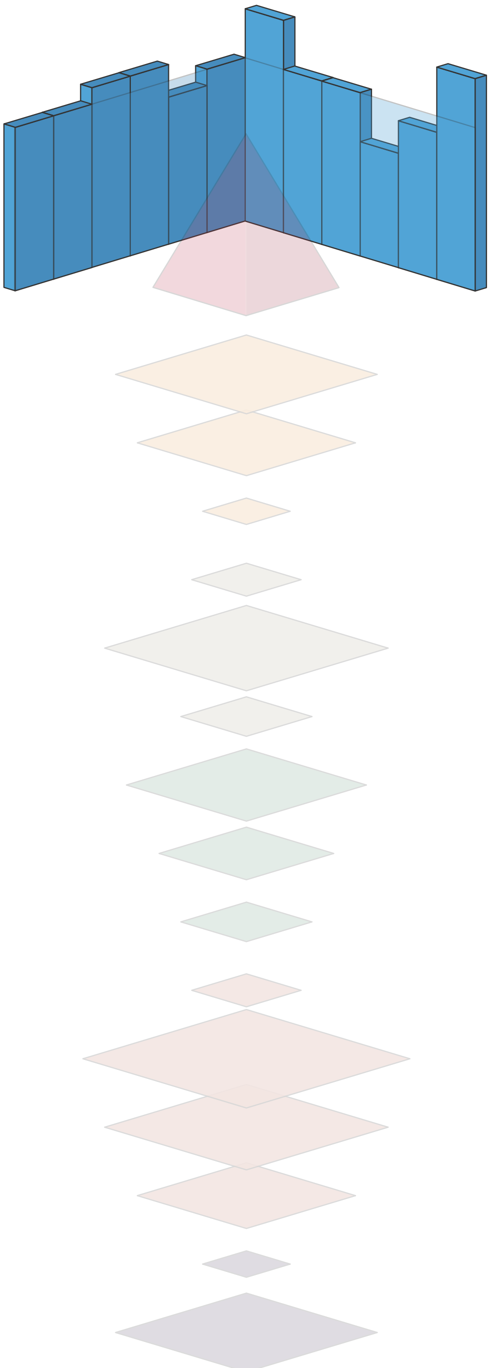
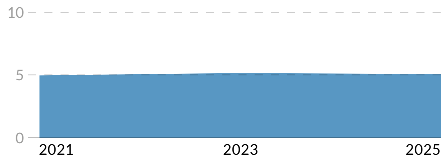
GAMBIA



5.13 ↘0.04

RESILIENCE SCORE

79th of 193 countries ↗2
10th of 54 African countries ↗1
5th of 15 West African countries -



POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	5.00	↘0.50
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	5.00	0.00
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	5.50	0.00
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	5.50	↗0.50
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	4.50	0.00
LAW ENFORCEMENT	5.00	0.00
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	6.50	0.00
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	5.00	↘0.50
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	5.00	↘0.50
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	3.50	0.00
PREVENTION	4.50	↗0.50
NON-STATE ACTORS	6.50	0.00

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CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

Human trafficking in The Gambia is multifaceted, with the country acting as a source, transit hub and destination for women and children. Sexual exploitation and forced labour are prevalent in the tourist industry, with victims including both Gambian and foreign nationals – primarily women, girls and boys. Informal networks and organized criminal syndicates exploit undocumented migrants and locals alike, using fake job offers to lure vulnerable people from countries such as Nigeria and Sierra Leone. Victims are then coerced into sexual exploitation or forced labour, including domestic servitude and street vending. Trafficking also affects Gambian migrants abroad, including young men lured out of the country by fake football contracts, who are then taken to Europe and Western Asia and forced into hospitality, mining and domestic work under exploitative conditions. Children from rural areas without proper identity documents are particularly vulnerable to trafficking, as their inability to prove their age hampers access to legal protection. Quranic school teachers have been implicated in trafficking Gambian boys into labour across Guinea-Bissau and Senegal, while law enforcement officers, including border officials, have been reported to solicit bribes and ignore anti-trafficking procedures. Traffickers increasingly use social media to recruit victims, exploiting digital anonymity to extend their reach.

Human smuggling in The Gambia is primarily driven by economic hardship, high unemployment and limited domestic opportunities. The country is predominantly a source country, with its young people seeking a better life in Europe or neighbouring African nations. Although the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) facilitates visa-free travel for its citizens, individuals often employ smugglers in order to bypass bribes and harassment at border posts to enter countries outside of ECOWAS. Smuggling networks are loosely organized and involve both local and foreign actors who use social media and online job platforms to recruit migrants and arrange logistics. Migrants travel towards Europe by land through Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger en route to Libya where they attempt a sea crossing to Italy. Alternatively, some depart directly from The Gambia's coast on fishing boats bound for the Canary Islands, on a route which is rapidly expanding. Coastal areas such as Jambur, Gunjur, Tanji and Kartong have been identified as smuggling hotspots and departure points.

Extortion and protection racketeering is not an issue nationwide, but field research indicates that it takes place in specific urban and economic contexts. Local businesses in areas like Banjul and Serekunda have, although uncommonly, experienced criminals demanding payments in exchange for safety. Small and medium-sized enterprises, who lack the resources for legal recourse, are particularly at risk. The fishing industry has also been affected, with workers and processing facilities being compelled to pay to operate safely.

TRADE

The scale of arms trafficking market in The Gambia is unclear but authorities have linked a rise in gun crime to an increase in the availability weapons. Firearms seizures, particularly during drug raids, have underscored this connection. Weapons are smuggled through seaports in containers arriving from Europe and North America, as well as other West African countries such as Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire and Mali.

There is a sizeable market for counterfeit goods, largely driven by economic vulnerability and insufficient regulatory enforcement. Counterfeit pharmaceuticals represent the most harmful segment of this market. Medications such as antibiotics, anti-inflammatories and analgesics – primarily manufactured in Nigeria, India, China and Brazil – are distributed widely in The Gambia. These products enter the country through ports and porous borders, sometimes having been routed through Senegal, before being sold at informal points of sale such as ferry terminals – often by unlicensed personnel in the Greater Banjul Area. Online sales have further expanded the market, as e-commerce platforms enable anonymous transactions. The public health consequences of counterfeit medicines are severe, with both adults and children experiencing complications and fatalities due to substandard products.

The illicit trade in excise goods, including tobacco and alcohol, has expanded during the reporting period, due to weak border controls and low enforcement capacity. These goods are commonly smuggled from Senegal and are consumed locally, especially by young people, who link smoking to stress relief and weight control. Vendors operating in Banjul, the West Coast Region and Kanifing Municipality dominate the trade, selling products from street stalls, online platforms and retail outlets.

ENVIRONMENT

Flora crimes, while still prevalent, have reduced significantly since 2022. The country has historically acted as a key transit hub for rosewood illegally harvested in Senegal, particularly from the conflict-affected Casamance region. Smuggled rosewood is exported through the Banjul port to markets in China. Although it has reduced considerably in recent years, some degree of illicit timber trade is ongoing. Local traffickers play an important role, using their knowledge of forest terrain and contacts within port authorities to expedite shipments. Bribes are allegedly paid to obtain permits and facilitate container movement. Other forms of illegal logging, particularly for charcoal and firewood, are also prevalent.

Fauna crimes in The Gambia are closely dominated by illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. This market is enabled by weak regulation, poor enforcement and opaque fishing agreements. The country's waters are exploited by foreign industrial trawlers, particularly from China, and local artisanal fishers. Illegal activities include the use of banned fishing equipment, underreporting catches and environmentally destructive practices such as fish dumping and improper waste disposal. Key hubs for IUU fishing include coastal towns like Sanyang and Gunjur. The problem is compounded by alleged corruption. Environmentalists, for example, have reported being offered payments to cease their advocacy campaigns. Government officials have also been implicated in taking bribes to facilitate illegal fishing.

While non-renewable resource crimes, are less prevalent, illegal sand mining has escalated in coastal towns and regions like Kartong and Denton Bridge. Sand extraction to supply the domestic construction and export markets has resulted in land degradation, soil erosion and reduced agricultural productivity. Disused quarries and degraded coastal land, particularly around the towns of Sanyang and Batokunku, underscore the long-term consequences of unregulated extraction.

DRUGS

Heroin trafficking is not a major market in The Gambia, although a small quantity passes through on the way to Europe and there is a limited degree of domestic consumption.

The cocaine trade, by contrast, is well established and, in line with regional trends, has been sharply expanding since 2019. The Gambia's extensive coastline and limited maritime oversight make it an attractive midpoint for South American cocaine traffickers targeting Europe. The largest volumes are smuggled by sea, but there are also overland routes passing through Senegal and Banjul airport is another significant transit point on the route to Europe. Domestic demand, particularly in tourist areas, sustains internal distribution networks. Foreign and local actors collaborate on trafficking operations, often using fishing enterprises as cover.

Cannabis is still the most commonly consumed and trafficked drug in The Gambia. The country is a source, destination, and transit and storage location for cannabis flows, with domestic cultivation centred in Brikama and imports coming primarily from Casamance, Senegal. The latter region has, until recently, been dominated by the secessionist Mouvement des forces démocratiques de Casamance (MFDC), which funded itself largely through cannabis trafficking. However, the disarmament of many MFDC rebels has largely decoupled the Casamance cannabis trade from the conflict. Despite this, data shows consistent levels of seizures, with cannabis often concealed in everyday items.

Synthetic drug use is rapidly on the rise, especially among Gambian youths, with MDMA, Tramadol and methamphetamines becoming increasingly available. Synthetic drugs arrive from regional and European sources, including Nigeria, Sierra Leone, the Netherlands and Germany, concealed in clothing, luggage and medical supplies to avoid detection. Brikama, Banjul and Senegambia are notable hotspots for the inflow. Kush, a drug consisting of synthetic cannabinoids or nitazenes (potent synthetic opioids), has spread across communities across The Gambia, particularly in the greater Banjul area, to devastating effect. Kush is believed to be largely trafficked from Sierra Leone, the regional epicentre of the drug.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Cyber-dependent crime is an emerging but poorly documented market in The Gambia. While there is limited data on the scale of the threat, recent isolated incidents suggest that that cybercrime has the potential to expand in the absence of robust preventive infrastructure.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crimes are pervasive and stem partly from the legacy of state capture under the former regime. Corruption such as embezzlement and misappropriation of public funds is common across all levels of government, undermining institutional integrity. Criminals in this market include state-embedded actors, such as civil servants and political appointees, as well as loose criminal networks running Ponzi schemes and other forms of fraud. Reports have also indicated a surge in cyber-enabled fraud schemes, particularly investment scams.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

There is no substantial evidence of the presence or influence of mafia-style groups in The Gambia. But other criminal networks pose a serious challenge to the rule of law, stability and development. Unlike structured mafia-style groups, these networks typically function through flexible and loose connections built on familial and community ties. They are active across a wide range of illicit markets, including drug trafficking, human trafficking, human smuggling and flora and fauna crimes. Coastal areas and regions along the border with Senegal are particularly affected. These networks maintain transnational links, often cooperating with criminal groups in neighbouring countries. Border areas are particularly vulnerable due to historical smuggling routes from the Casamance region amid a long-standing, but diminishing, separatist conflict. Criminal networks in these zones take advantage of weak oversight to traffic goods and exploit civilians, further contributing to regional instability.

State-embedded actors are deeply involved in various forms of organized crime. Corruption and financial crime are endemic in public institutions, with numerous examples of embezzlement and diversion of public funds by government officials. Cases have involved personnel at multiple levels of government, including permanent secretaries, revenue collectors and agency directors. State-embedded actors are also complicit in other illicit markets. In some cases, law enforcement agents have accepted bribes from criminal groups, while authorities have been known to turn a blind eye to human trafficking and environmental offences, including flora crimes.

Foreign actors play an influential role in several of The Gambia's criminal markets. Nationals from Sierra Leone, Senegal, Guinea-Bissau and Nigeria are involved in drug trafficking, particularly cannabis, cocaine and synthetic drugs. Recent seizures and arrests have uncovered transnational operations linked to Latin American cartels, Italian nationals and an Albanian drug trafficking network based in Spain. In addition to drugs, foreign commercial entities are active in environmental crimes. Chinese fish processing companies have been linked to IUU fishing. These firms reportedly purchase illegally sourced fish from local fishers, significantly depleting marine resources and undermining regulatory efforts. Separatist groups in the Casamance region of Senegal have historically engaged in the illicit felling of rosewood, which was then trafficked through southern Gambian border communities to Banjul port for export to China. After the significant weakening of the MFDC, this activity has declined considerably. Nevertheless, some Senegalese nationals (as well as Gambians) still carry out illicit logging in the region for smuggling into The Gambia.

Private-sector actors in The Gambia are complicit in facilitating organized crime both through direct involvement and aiding regulatory evasion. Numerous private companies have been found to have collaborated with state officials to disguise illegal activities as legitimate business operations. For example, illegal timber has continued to be transported through Banjul port by shipping companies despite government bans and formal warnings, indicating either complicity or negligence within corporate practices. The travel and tourism industries are also implicated, particularly in sex tourism involving children. Some travel agencies have been identified as facilitators, using their commercial infrastructure to assist abuse and exploitation. A national risk assessment conducted by the financial intelligence unit during the review period also identified real estate and tourism as high-risk sectors for money laundering. These industries are characterized by large, opaque, often cash-based transactions involving anonymous buyers and complex ownership structures, making them highly susceptible to criminal infiltration.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

The Gambia's political leadership has taken steps to address organized crime through initiatives aimed at strengthening law enforcement and working with international bodies. However, commitment to tackling organized crime has varied between administrations, and corruption remains a dominant political issue. While there has been democratic progress, including peaceful presidential and parliamentary elections, there are still concerns over weak civil society participation, inefficient political transitions and discord within party coalitions. Although elections have generally been orderly, international observers have identified weaknesses in campaign financing regulations and inappropriate use of state resources. Corruption and institutional weaknesses have drawn also public frustration and criticism from opposition parties and civil society actors. Overall, Gambian governance is characterized by fragile institutions and limited state capacity.

On the transparency and accountability front, corruption continues to affect all levels of the state, with instances of bribery, embezzlement and abuse of power. Although asset declarations by public officials are required by law, they are not publicly accessible and enforcement is weak. High-profile decisions –such as the presidential pardon of individuals convicted of corruption – have been heavily criticized. Civil society plays a role in promoting accountability and advocating against corruption. While legal frameworks have improved, public trust in government institutions has declined and the perception of corruption is worsening. However, a more vocal presidential stance against corruption in recent years received support from civil society and international actors.

In terms of international cooperation, The Gambia has ratified major organized crime treaties but has struggled with implementing them effectively. Outdated laws and porous borders have left the country vulnerable. Despite these challenges, international collaboration is robust. Partnerships with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, ECOWAS and international NGOs support initiatives on human trafficking, irregular migration and cybersecurity. The country has signed new bilateral agreements, including accords with Spain to promote legal migration routes and combat human smuggling. Participation in multilateral initiatives, such as the Seaport Cooperation Project (SEACOP) and the African Union's pharmaceutical harmonization efforts, further illustrates a commitment to regional integration. Nonetheless, outdated systems and weak enforcement continue to undermine the effectiveness of these partnerships.

Regarding national policies and laws, The Gambia has made significant legislative progress on anti-corruption, financial crimes and cybercrime. The Constitution, Criminal Code and Economic Crimes Act collectively form the backbone of the country's regulatory framework. However, enforcement is hindered by poor inter-agency cooperation and limited law enforcement capacity. Although The Gambia acceded to the international Arms Trade Treaty in 2024, relevant national laws are outdated which has created gaps in arms control. The country has introduced digital excise tax stamps to curb counterfeiting, and environmental laws been strengthened, with new protected areas and plans to revise licensing and fishing regulations.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

The judiciary continues to face structural and operational weaknesses. There are no specialized judicial units for organized crime and the sector is burdened by inefficient case management, inadequate training and resource shortages. Heavy caseloads, infrastructure limitations and concerns about the independence of the prosecution service place further strains on the system. Although some reforms – such as ending contract judges, increasing court autonomy and restructuring the judicial service commission – have begun, executive influence remains a concern. Prison conditions are harsh, characterized by overcrowding, poor sanitation, food insecurity and limited access to healthcare.

Improvements to law enforcement capacity in recent years have been driven by institutional reforms, international cooperation and the development of specialized units. The Gambia Police Force and Drug Law Enforcement Agency have conducted successful operations and community outreach initiatives, including joint training and intelligence-sharing on human and drug trafficking. Reports of illegitimate use of force have decreased, and the government has taken action against abusive security personnel. However, resource constraints and institutional fragmentation continue to limit the scope and efficiency of law enforcement.

The country's territorial integrity remains largely intact, which lends some structural advantages, such as manageable borders and coordinated patrols. Nevertheless, The Gambia continues to serve as a major transit point for drugs, with weak seaport oversight and insufficient border controls. The smuggling of goods and people across borders remains a persistent issue, and border personnel have been implicated in bribery and failing to comply with anti-trafficking protocols.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Anti-money laundering (AML) measures in The Gambia have been boosted by positive legal reforms, financial intelligence collaboration and alignment with international reporting standards. Nevertheless, there are gaps in mechanisms that limit the state's capacity to counter money laundering – including the ineffective enforcement of legislation already in place, a lack of cooperation over forfeiting asset proceeds or sharing seized assets with other countries, even when bilateral agreements exist. The establishment of the financial intelligence unit, for example, and initiatives to reduce cash transactions are positive developments; however, data shows that the unit is still unable to investigate effectively or be transparent about its work. The unit reportedly has limited capacity to analyze suspicious transactions, and cooperation on asset recovery with other countries is inconsistent. National assessments have shown that the real estate sector is particularly vulnerable to money laundering. The growing number of commercial banks, the dominance of cash and weak supervisory mechanisms compound its existing vulnerability to money laundering.

The broader economic regulatory environment presents a mixed picture. On one hand, the government has tried to attract foreign investment through tax exemptions, while the introduction of a digital excise tax stamp system and other digital payment reforms reflect its attempts to modernize the economy. On the other hand, there are persistent structural challenges. Regulatory inconsistencies, red tape and a stagnant labour market impede economic freedom. Judicial inefficiencies weaken property rights enforcement, and corruption continues to erode public confidence. Despite some improvements, the country's economic transformation is being held back by weak institutions and external shocks.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Victim and witness support mechanisms in The Gambia are underdeveloped, although some improvements have been observed, such as better identification of trafficking victims and provision of basic services such as counselling and shelter, with civil society organizations contributing significantly. However, coordination between government agencies remains weak, and support for foreign victims is limited. Temporary residence options are rarely used, and services in rural areas are lacking. Funding has increased, yet the assistance fund remains non-functional. Conditions in shelters have raised concerns, including unnecessary restrictions on the freedom of adult victims and insufficient access to essential services. Legal support and protections for victims involved in prosecutions are minimal, and social stigma further deters cooperation with the authorities. Drug treatment services are severely limited due to the absence of a dedicated rehabilitation facility. However, plans are in place for the Drug Law Enforcement Agency to build a modern drug rehabilitation and treatment centre.

Prevention efforts focusing on the counterfeit pharmaceutical market and digital crime have expanded through public awareness campaigns, educational initiatives and community engagement with hotlines, billboards and youth programmes. The National Agency Against Trafficking in Persons and the Ministry of Communications have spearheaded campaigns on human trafficking, child protection and cybersecurity. But regulatory gaps persist, especially when it comes to fraudulent labour recruitment and forced child begging. Some outreach programmes have been discontinued, and law enforcement and judicial actors still lack specialized training and resources.

Non-state actors play a critical role in the resilience landscape of The Gambia. Civil society organizations are deeply involved in supporting anti-corruption legislation, operating daytime support centres and running awareness campaigns on trafficking and domestic violence. Community-based training and watchdog activities also help to foster public accountability and engagement. The media, while relatively free, faces economic and political pressures. Concerns have been raised over the possible chilling effect of the Cybercrime Bill 2024, while cases of harassment, arrests and intimidation of journalists have threatened press freedoms and independent reporting.

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.