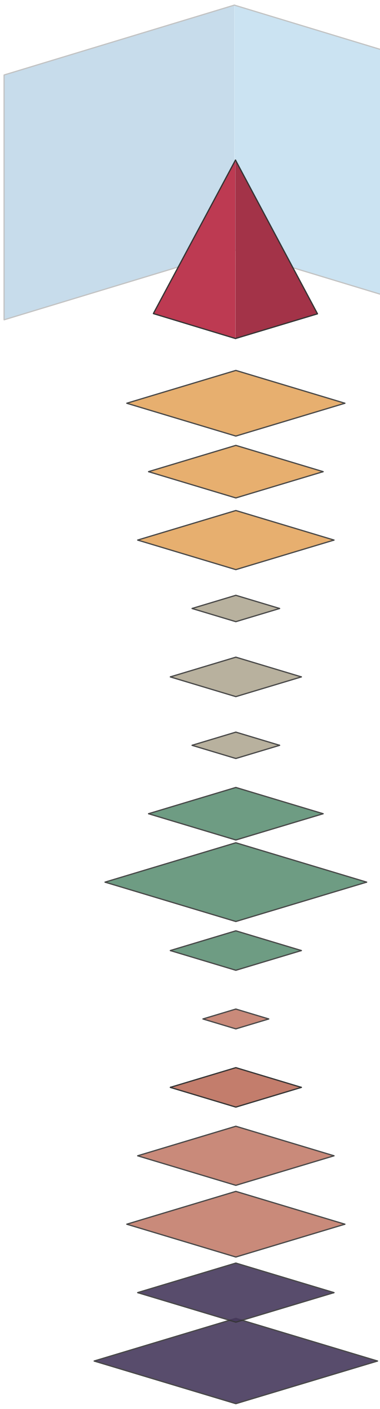
GLOBAL ORGANIZED CRIME INDEX

GLOBAL INITIATIVE AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

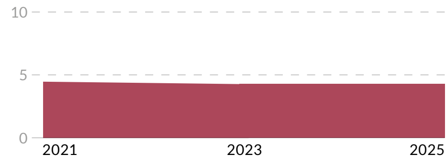
JAPAN



4.25 ↘0.03

CRIMINALITY SCORE

141st of 193 countries ↗1
39th of 46 Asian countries ↘1
4th of 5 Eastern Asian countries -



CRIMINAL MARKETS 3.90 ↗0.03

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	5.00	0.00
HUMAN SMUGGLING	4.00	↘1.00
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	4.50	↘0.50
ARMS TRAFFICKING	2.00	↘0.50
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	3.00	↗1.00
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	2.00	0.00
FLORA CRIMES	4.00	0.00
FAUNA CRIMES	6.00	0.00
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	3.00	0.00
HEROIN TRADE	1.50	0.00
COCAINE TRADE	3.00	0.00
CANNABIS TRADE	4.50	0.00
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	5.00	0.00
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	4.50	↗1.00
FINANCIAL CRIMES	6.50	↗0.50

CRIMINAL ACTORS 4.60 ↘0.10

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	5.50	↘0.50
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	6.00	↗0.50
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	2.00	↘1.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	4.50	0.00
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	5.00	↗0.50

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

enact

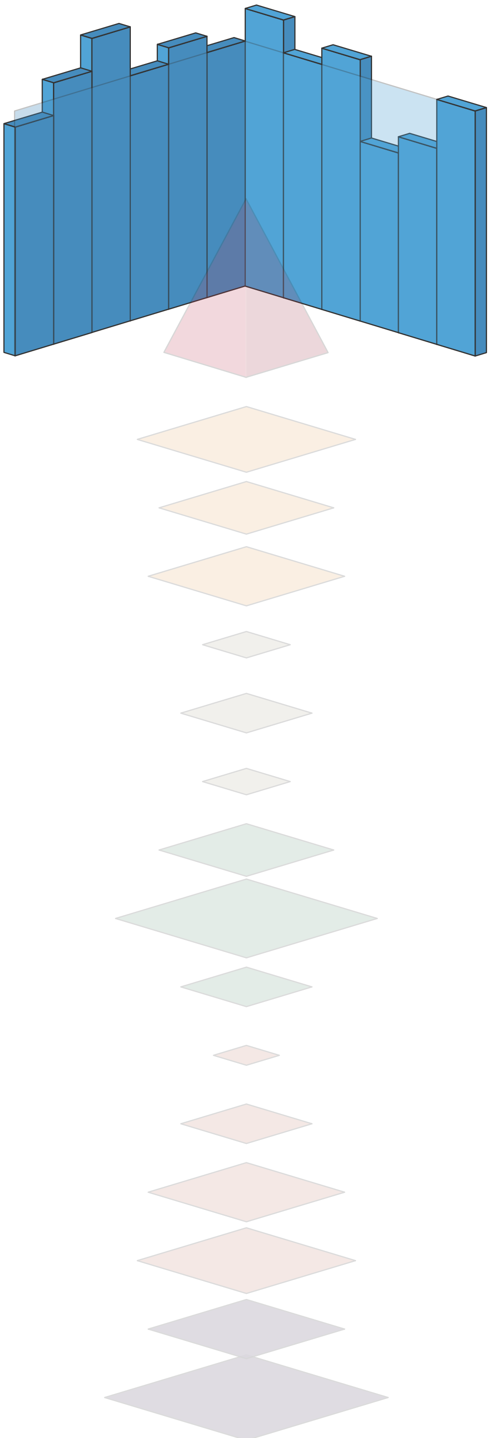
Funded by the European Union

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

GLOBAL ORGANIZED CRIME INDEX

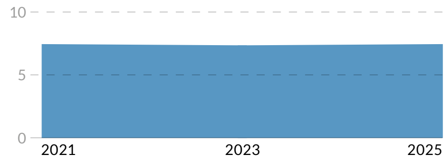
GLOBAL INITIATIVE AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

JAPAN



7.50 ↗0.13
RESILIENCE SCORE

15th of 193 countries ↗4
3rd of 46 Asian countries -
2nd of 5 Eastern Asian countries -



POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	**7.00**	↗1.00
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	**8.00**	↗0.50
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	**9.00**	0.00
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	**7.50**	0.00
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	**8.00**	0.00
LAW ENFORCEMENT	**7.50**	0.00
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	**8.50**	0.00
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	**7.50**	0.00
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	**8.00**	0.00
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	**5.50**	0.00
PREVENTION	**6.00**	↗0.50
NON-STATE ACTORS	**7.50**	↘0.50

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

enact

Funded by the European Union

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

CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

Human trafficking remains a notable issue in Japan, marked by both transnational and domestic dimensions. The country serves as a destination and transit point for victims trafficked from East and South East Asia, Latin America and Africa. These victims, who include men, women, children and LGBTQ+ individuals, are subjected to forced labour, fraudulent marriages and sexual exploitation. Vulnerable Japanese nationals, particularly women and girls living in poverty or with cognitive impairments, are also at risk of being targeted by highly organized criminal networks operating in commercial sex facilities. Runaway youth are among the underage individuals exploited in these venues, with some victims reportedly trafficked from or within countries such as China, South Korea, Laos, the Philippines, Singapore and Vietnam. Although the practice of compensated dating (known as joshi kōsei or papakatsu) persists in areas like Kabukicho in Tokyo, links to organized crime are not always clearly established. However, criminal organizations often act as immigration brokers to lure victims into exploitative work under the guise of legitimate employment, particularly in sectors such as fisheries, food processing and film. Debt bondage, blackmail, threats of deportation and other forms of coercion are employed to maintain control over victims. Moreover, a growing trend involving tokuryū criminal groups, which are less hierarchical than the traditional Yakuza, suggests the use of coercion and recruitment of minors for criminal acts, raising concerns about forced criminality and inadequate victim identification under trafficking statutes.

Human smuggling in Japan remains moderate in scope, due largely to the country's geographic isolation and strict immigration enforcement. Nonetheless, Japan continues to attract irregular migrants, primarily from South and South East Asia, including Nepal, India, Sri Lanka and China. Many of these individuals are believed to find employment within the informal economy. Japan's restrictive asylum policy may inadvertently influence the operations of migrant smuggling networks. The Yakuza and Chinese triads have historically been linked to such operations, although their current levels of involvement remain difficult to quantify. While overall smuggling flows remain relatively low compared to other countries in the region, there has been a noticeable uptick in visa overstays. These infractions have not been attributed to organized criminal networks or smuggling operations.

Extortion and protection racketeering persist in Japan, predominantly facilitated by domestic organized crime groups. The Yakuza, alongside emerging groups such as hangure gangs, continue to extract protection money (mikajimeryo) from businesses including restaurants, clubs and informal vendors. Despite government crackdowns to diminish Yakuza influence, their presence in certain sectors remains entrenched. In businesses where legal protections are perceived as weak, such as hostess bars and gambling parlours, criminal groups continue to offer informal protection services in exchange for payment. Extortion schemes often involve coercive methods such as blackmail and threats of violence.

TRADE

Arms trafficking is not a major criminal market in Japan. While the country is a destination for illicit firearms, the prevalence of gun-related crimes remains extremely low, due in part to stringent legal regulations and low civilian gun ownership. The number of seized firearms in recent years suggests limited domestic demand. Most of the illicit weapons intercepted are improvised or craft-manufactured firearms.

Japan's counterfeit goods market has shown signs of growth, with increasing volumes of counterfeit items, most commonly luxury goods, clothing and medicine, sold on consumer-to-consumer platforms, flea markets and auction sites. China remains the leading source of these products, followed by Vietnam, South Korea and Taiwan. Domestic actors, including small businesses and wholesalers, play an active role in the distribution and sale of counterfeit goods. Although consumer awareness is increasing and major online retailers are implementing product verification protocols, enforcement remains difficult given the volume of digital transactions.

Illicit trade in excise goods, particularly alcohol and tobacco, is minimal in Japan. The government maintains strict regulatory control over these commodities, contributing to Japan having one of the lowest levels of unrecorded alcohol consumption in the Asia–Pacific region. Although some diversion of legally produced products into informal markets occurs, such activity appears to be irregular and does not indicate the presence of a widespread illicit market.

ENVIRONMENT

Japan is a low-risk country for domestic flora crimes but remains a significant destination for illegally sourced timber and plant products. Imports from regions such as South East Asia and Russia have drawn attention, particularly as Japan plans to expand imports from Vietnam – a country with a high risk of illegal logging. Increased demand from the construction and energy sectors contributes to these pressures. Although imports from Europe have been reduced by government regulations mandating supply chain due diligence, significant challenges remain in ensuring the legality of timber sourced from other regions. Additionally, Japan's niche collector market for ornamental plants, including rare cacti, succulents and orchids, has raised conservation concerns due to the demand for illegally sourced specimens.

Fauna crimes in Japan are most prominently reflected in its role as both a destination and transit hub for illegal ivory trade. With the world's largest remaining domestic legal ivory market, it has become a source for international smuggling, particularly to China. Owing to limited oversight, the sale of ivory products, especially smaller items like personal seals (hanko), often occurs without proper origin verification. The broader supply chain involves a range of actors, including poachers, middlemen, exporters and re-exporters, as well as logistics and finance entities. Japan also remains vulnerable to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, particularly in relation to high-value marine species such as abalone and sea cucumbers. Although violations by licensed fishers have decreased, poaching by non-fishers continues. Consumer awareness of sustainable fishing remains low and recent actions, such as the resumption of fin whale hunting, have attracted international criticism.

Non-renewable resource crimes in Japan are linked primarily to gold smuggling and illicit mineral trade. The country remains a destination for smuggled gold bullion, with seizures of concealed shipments – such as gold disguised as golf club heads – highlighting ongoing evasion tactics. The rise in consumption tax on gold imports has incentivized smuggling. The Yakuza remains active in this sector, despite a general decline in its influence. Recent investigations into Yakuza involvement in uranium and plutonium trafficking underscore the group's access to high-risk mineral markets. Additionally, illicit coal shipments from North Korea reportedly pass through Japanese waterways with trans-shipment operations facilitated by weak regulatory oversight.

DRUGS

Heroin trafficking in Japan is limited, with the country playing neither a major destination nor transit role. Although there has been some smuggling on passenger flights, arrest figures and seizure volumes for heroin remain consistently low, signalling its marginal status in the Japanese market. The domestic market is small.

Japan's cocaine market, also relatively small, has shown signs of expansion. Arrests related to cocaine have generally increased over the past five years, and more sophisticated concealment methods are being used, such as embedding the drug in clothing or disguising it in documents. Cocaine traffickers include individuals of Brazilian, Mexican, US, Spanish and Thai origin. Shipments enter Japan primarily by mail from European countries and by air from the Americas. There have also been isolated cases of domestic production, including one involving Peruvian nationals. Nevertheless, local demand remains low overall.

Cannabis is among the most widely used illicit substances in Japan, with consumption and related arrests rising steadily in recent years. Smuggling routes include air and sea shipments, with the United States, Vietnam, Canada and Thailand identified as the main source countries. The evolving legal framework, including provisions for limited medical cannabis use, has introduced ambiguity, complicating enforcement efforts. The popularity of cannabis among young people and the emergence of online distribution channels suggest a growing and increasingly resilient illicit market.

Synthetic drug trafficking in Japan remains robust and well organized. Methamphetamine is the most prevalent synthetic drug, although other substances such as MDMA, synthetic cannabinoids, cathinones and ketamine are also widely used. While seizures of methamphetamine have declined in recent years, arrest rates remain high. South East Asia, particularly the Golden Triangle, remains the principal source region for the country, with air transport accounting for most small shipments and sea routes used for larger volumes. Vietnamese and Malaysian trafficking groups maintain ties with local networks. The market for synthetic cannabinoids continues to grow, alongside rising concerns over the misuse of over-the-counter medications.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Cyber-dependent crimes in Japan have increased significantly, particularly those linked to ransomware, other malware attacks and data breaches. Authorities have recorded a rise in cases involving links to international groups, particularly from North Korea, China, Russia and the United States. Attacks frequently target businesses, government agencies and vulnerable individuals. Japan has experienced one of the highest regional increases in data breaches, indicating that the country is a target for criminals engaged in cyber-dependent crimes and has persistent cybersecurity vulnerabilities.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Japan faces a diverse array of financial crimes, driven in part by demographic changes and technological advancement. Phishing scams, internet banking fraud and deepfake-enabled fraud have all increased in recent years. Criminal groups, including the b▯ryokudan, and transnational networks recruit vulnerable individuals for financial scams, often using social media platforms. Youth participation in fraudulent activity is rising, with many acting as intermediaries in money collection schemes. There is also a documented increase in account trading by Vietnamese nationals, with such accounts later used in wider fraud operations. Additionally, corruption cases involving high-ranking political officials in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party have emerged in the financial landscape, although they are not always clearly linked to organized crime. Despite Japan's reputation for regulatory rigour, the scale and sophistication of financial crime are becoming an issue, with record losses registered in the reporting period.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

Mafia-style groups in Japan, primarily represented by the Yakuza, continue to exhibit a hierarchical structure and recognizable membership, with tattoos symbolizing affiliation and discipline being a defining characteristic. Although their numbers have steadily declined, the Yakuza remain involved in organized crime activities such as drug trafficking, arms smuggling, gambling and extortion. The Yakuza maintain territorial influence, notably through extortion of informal businesses, although this influence is diminishing due to increased law enforcement efforts and shifting public tolerance. Historic collusion between organized crime and political or civil sectors has also reportedly declined following more stringent crackdowns. Notably, inter-group disputes and realignments have occurred, though these rarely escalate into violence, reflecting the relatively low levels of gun violence in Japan. Despite membership withdrawals, many individuals retain informal ties to Yakuza figures, complicating efforts to fully dismantle the syndicates' influence.

Criminal networks in Japan are increasingly fluid and decentralized, with groups such as hangure and tokury□ emerging as prominent actors. Unlike the Yakuza, these lack formal hierarchies, often forming and dissolving rapidly while maintaining significant connections to established organized crime. They are heavily involved in cybercrime, fraud, robbery and various illicit business ventures. Recruitment through social media, especially targeting financially vulnerable youth, has allowed these networks to expand their reach. A notable rise in violent incidents, including coordinated home invasions and robberies, has been linked to these groups, which often operate using encrypted communication tools and base coordinators abroad to avoid detection. While some networks maintain financial links to traditional syndicates, others operate in parallel, contributing to a diversification of Japan's organized crime landscape. Former motorcycle gang members are also active in urban areas, leading law enforcement to intensify monitoring under the 'jun-b□ryokudan' classification. The sharp increase in fraud cases – particularly online investment and romance scams – highlights the growing sophistication and impact of these loosely structured yet highly adaptive criminal networks. Japanese fraud groups have also been identified as operating from Cambodia and Vietnam, demonstrating their expanding transnational reach.

State-embedded actors are not a central feature of Japan's organized crime ecosystem, and recent reporting provides limited evidence of direct involvement in illicit markets. Nonetheless, historical links between political entities and organized crime persist in public discourse. Past associations between political figures and Yakuza leaders, including financial donations, have raised questions about legacy connections. Additionally, the long-standing practice of amakudari, where retired government officials take up senior roles in industries such as finance and construction, has prompted concerns about potential corruption and bid-rigging. However, no direct evidence ties these practices to organized criminal networks in the current context.

Foreign actors in Japan are active across a range of criminal markets, particularly in cybercrime, drug trafficking and illicit trade in flora and fauna. Although they do not control the domestic criminal landscape, they are increasingly integrated into transnational networks operating in collaboration with local actors. Chinese nationals, for instance, play a notable role in the ivory trade, sourcing products within Japan for export to China. Other diaspora groups contribute to human trafficking and drug smuggling operations, forming composite networks that span international borders. While overall participation remains lower than that of local groups, the strategic role played by foreign actors in enabling and facilitating complex criminal schemes continues to warrant close scrutiny.

Private sector actors in Japan are implicated in several organized crime markets, most prominently in connection with human trafficking and extortion. Numerous businesses – particularly bars, clubs, brothels and 'compensated dating' establishments – have documented links to organized crime, including both Yakuza and hangure groups. These establishments often serve as venues for labour exploitation and trafficking, with victims including Japanese nationals as well as individuals smuggled from other parts of Asia. The complicity or negligence of business operators contributes to the persistence of exploitation in the commercial sex industry.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Japan's political leadership has demonstrated a firm public stance against organized crime, particularly targeting traditional mafia-style groups such as the Yakuza. The implementation of Yakuza exclusion ordinances by prefectures, along with amendments to existing laws, reflect the state's commitment to curbing organized criminal influence. The decline in open cases involving Yakuza members indicates some success in these efforts. However, the vacuum left by diminishing Yakuza power has enabled the growth of less structured groups, such as the hangure, presenting new challenges. Furthermore, Japan has been criticized for its limited enforcement of regulations in specific organized crime markets, particularly concerning the domestic ivory trade. In October 2024, after the ruling Liberal Democratic Party lost the parliamentary majority it had enjoyed since 2009, newly elected officials committed to placing organized crime and corruption high on the political agenda. The prime minister has pledged to remain in office and implement reforms targeting corruption and broader economic challenges.

Government transparency and accountability in Japan benefit from a regulatory framework that includes provisions against both domestic and foreign bribery. Public access to financial documents – such as budget overviews and procurement information – is generally ensured. Nonetheless, persistent questions about transparency stem from the continued influence of state secrecy laws and the absence of comprehensive disclosures related to conflicts of interest or commercial registries. Shortfalls in the implementation of international anti-bribery conventions and the state's reluctance to adopt all recommended reforms have drawn scrutiny. Arrests related to bribery of public officials have increased, and recent scandals, including within the ruling political party, have fuelled public dissatisfaction, indicating ongoing vulnerabilities despite Japan's relatively low perceived level of corruption.

Japan plays an active role in international cooperation on organized crime, participating in multilateral forums and treaties, including those facilitated by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and INTERPOL. The country ratified the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its protocols, and remains a signatory to key conventions on narcotics and wildlife trade. Japan has taken part in regional funding initiatives to combat the drug trade and has signed extradition agreements with multiple countries, using these mechanisms to facilitate high-profile international arrests. However, the country has received criticism for weak enforcement of regulations concerning wildlife trafficking and forced labour. Although supportive of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, Japan has struggled to enforce adequate oversight mechanisms in the domestic ivory market and has not adopted stringent penalties for those involved in the illicit trade. Similarly, its approach to human trafficking and forced labour remains limited in implementation, despite formal commitments.

Japan has enacted national policies addressing a range of organized crime markets, including trafficking in persons, narcotics, arms, environmental crimes and counterfeit goods. However, the legal framework remains fragmented in some areas. A comprehensive anti-trafficking statute aligned with international norms is lacking, despite recent amendments, and existing laws continue to result in the criminalization of trafficking victims. Legal oversight of wildlife crimes remains insufficient, with lax registration requirements for ivory sellers and insubstantial penalties. Recent updates to laws addressing foreign bribery and sustainable timber sourcing reflect incremental progress in enhancing corporate accountability and environmental stewardship.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Japan's judiciary is generally independent and well resourced, with due process protections enshrined in the constitution. Nonetheless, systemic shortcomings have been noted, with some critics highlighting a tendency for judges to favour the prosecution. Additionally, allegations of mistreatment in detention and pre-trial procedures, such as denial of bail, lack of legal representation and coercive interrogation tactics, undermine confidence in judicial processes. Reports from human rights organizations point to deficiencies in mental health services, physical infrastructure and detainee treatment. Cases of abuse in immigration detention centres, including fatalities, have further highlighted systemic weaknesses in custodial oversight.

Japan's law enforcement agencies are well resourced and include specialized units focused on countering organized crime. The government operates a national-level inter-agency coordination body for anti-trafficking efforts, complemented by a subordinate law enforcement coordination group. The formation of cybercrime-focused units and the public sharing of attack data indicate a proactive stance on cyber threats. International cooperation is facilitated through the national central bureau, which connects Japan to global criminal investigations. However, allegations of racial profiling and rights violations by law enforcement persist. Victims of trafficking and individuals with links to organized crime are reportedly subjected to restrictive measures, including increased surveillance. Despite these issues, law enforcement authorities are generally well equipped and maintain the institutional capacity to respond to organized crime threats.

Japan's geographic location, economic prominence and trade infrastructure make it a target for transnational criminal activity, including the smuggling of narcotics, non-renewable resources and fauna. While improvements have been made in monitoring port and maritime traffic, some vulnerabilities remain. Seizures of cocaine and gold shipments suggest that organized crime groups continue to exploit logistical gaps. Despite recent investments in cyber defence, cyber-infiltration remains an issue.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Japan's anti-money laundering framework is supported by several national institutions, including its financial intelligence centre, which is embedded within the organized crime department of the national police agency. Japan has updated several key legislative measures to align more closely with Financial Action Task Force recommendations. Proposed revisions aim to increase oversight of law firms, certified public accountants and tax professionals, and to enhance client verification processes. While enforcement has improved in some areas, concerns remain regarding the effectiveness of information sharing and preventive action against illicit financial flows. In April 2024, Japan adopted a national AML/CFT/CPF action plan led by a newly established inter-ministerial council chaired by the national police agency and the ministry of finance. However, significant challenges persist in regulating cryptocurrencies and overseeing non-traditional sectors.

Japan's economic regulatory capacity is generally strong, with well-established protections for property rights, anti-corruption statutes and regulations against bid-rigging. A robust judicial system supports the resolution of economic disputes, and enforcement mechanisms are in place to punish corporate bribery. Nevertheless, structural issues continue to hinder full economic transparency. The public-to-private revolving door of amakudari persists in sectors such as finance, construction and pharmaceuticals, raising concerns about conflicts of interest. Though bid manipulation appears to have declined over the last decade, the close interconnection between political institutions and corporate entities fosters an insular business environment. Additionally, prefectures have implemented ordinances to prevent businesses from engaging with organized crime groups, but the enforcement and monitoring of these measures vary.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Victim and witness support systems in Japan face multiple challenges, particularly for survivors of trafficking. The government's identification mechanisms for victims have been criticized as outdated and insufficient, resulting in the continued criminalization of trafficking victims, especially minors and male victims. Government shelters reportedly lack adequate psychosocial and legal services and some non-governmental organizations have drawn attention to poor conditions and restrictive practices in state-run facilities. Drug-related stigma further complicates access to support, with individuals suspected of drug use often placed in isolation or denied contact with family and support networks.

Japan's prevention efforts against organized crime include public education campaigns, severe legal penalties and participation in international initiatives. The country contributes financially to regional drug prevention programmes and has imposed harsh penalties on the possession and sale of banned substances. Intelligence-sharing mechanisms are used to investigate online and telecommunications-based fraud, with targeted outreach to youth and elderly populations. Efforts to dismantle the political and social networks of organized criminal groups have included education campaigns and the exclusion ordinances. Social reintegration programmes exist for former Yakuza members, but with limited effect. Barriers such as stigma, restricted access to housing, communication and banking services hinder re-entry into society. As a result, only a small fraction of those leaving criminal groups have successfully reintegrated.

Civil society in Japan operates within a legal environment that generally respects freedom of association and expression. NGOs are permitted to operate without significant government interference and authorities recognize the value of civil society engagement. However, civil society's involvement in domestic organized crime issues is relatively restrained. While Japan is home to a vibrant NGO community, most organizations focus on international issues rather than domestic crime prevention. Media freedom is constitutionally protected, but journalists face pressures from political and corporate interests. The kisha kurabu (press club) system can contribute to self-censorship and restricted access, curbing the media's ability to investigate and report on organized crime independently. Despite these limitations, Japan maintains a pluralistic and active civil society landscape, contributing to overall resilience against organized crime.

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.