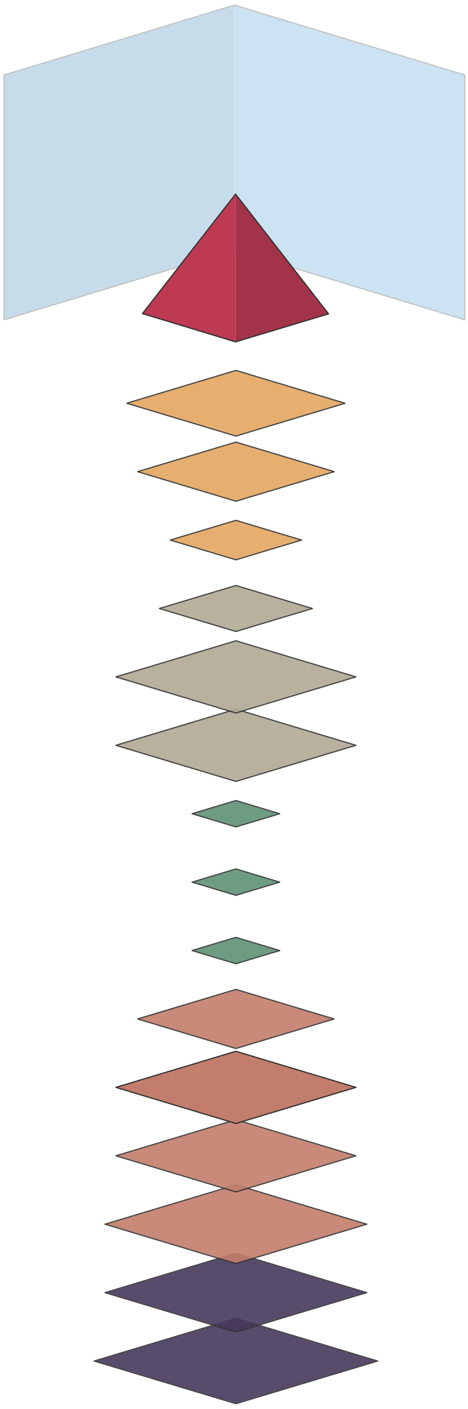
GLOBAL ORGANIZED CRIME INDEX

GLOBAL INITIATIVE AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

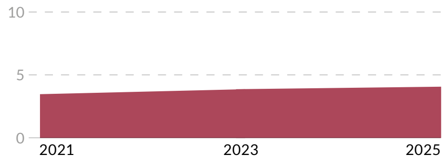
LATVIA



4.08 ↗0.18

CRIMINALITY SCORE

149th of 193 countries ↗7
34th of 44 European countries ↗1
3rd of 8 Northern European countries ↗1



CRIMINAL MARKETS	4.47	↘0.03
HUMAN TRAFFICKING	5.00	0.00
HUMAN SMUGGLING	4.50	0.00
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	3.00	↘0.50
ARMS TRAFFICKING	3.50	0.00
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	5.50	↘0.50
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	5.50	↘0.50
FLORA CRIMES	2.00	↗0.50
FAUNA CRIMES	2.00	0.00
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	2.00	0.00
HEROIN TRADE	4.50	0.00
COCAINE TRADE	5.50	0.00
CANNABIS TRADE	5.50	0.00
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	6.00	↗0.50
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	6.00	0.00
FINANCIAL CRIMES	6.50	0.00

CRIMINAL ACTORS	3.70	↗0.40
MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	4.00	0.00
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	4.00	↗0.50
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	2.50	↗0.50
FOREIGN ACTORS	5.00	↗0.50
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	3.00	↗0.50

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

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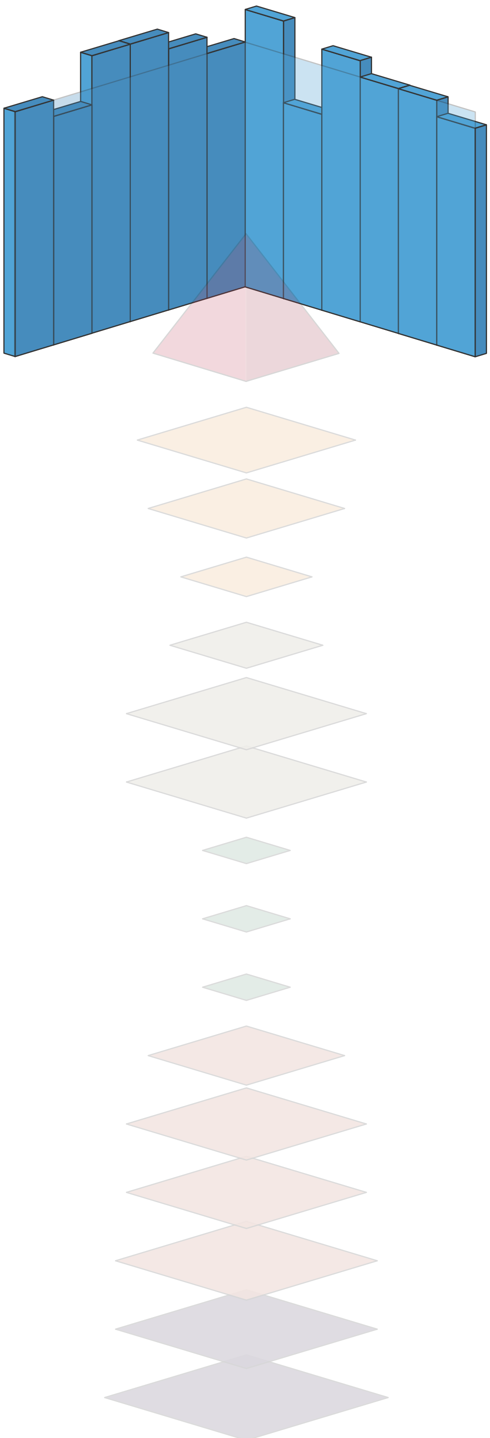
Funded by the European Union

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.

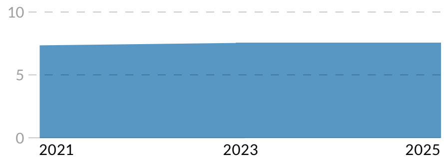
LATVIA



7.63 ↗0.04

RESILIENCE SCORE

11th of 193 countries -
8th of 44 European countries -
6th of 8 Northern European countries -



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

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CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

Human trafficking in Latvia primarily involves forced labour and sexual exploitation. The country serves as both a source and transit point, with traffickers targeting vulnerable populations, including non-citizens. Latvian nationals, particularly women, are often trafficked to Western Europe and Scandinavia, while non-citizens face exploitation within Latvia. Recruitment typically occurs through online job postings and social media, with traffickers luring victims under false pretences. These operations are coordinated by criminal networks, often linked to foreign actors, that facilitate cross-border movement and exploitation.

Human smuggling networks exploit Latvia's geographical location as gateway to the European Union, facilitating irregular migration through Belarus and Russia. Criminal groups use forged documents, clandestine transport routes and corrupt officials to move people across borders. These smuggling operations often overlap with trafficking networks, with some people smuggled later subjected to labour or sexual exploitation.

There is no substantial evidence of an organized extortion or protection racketeering market in Latvia. While isolated incidents involving coercion and intimidation have been reported in sectors such as construction, retail and nightlife, these appear opportunistic and lack signs of systematic or coordinated criminal activity. Historically associated with structured criminal organizations, extortion practices have shifted in recent years from physical threats to cyber-based tactics. Criminals are increasingly relying on digital tools to target victims, blurring the boundaries between extortion and other forms of cybercrime.

TRADE

Arms trafficking in Latvia is shaped by regional geopolitical dynamics, with illicit weapons sourced from post-Soviet states entering both domestic and international markets. Organized crime groups facilitate firearms smuggling, sometimes leveraging ties to security forces or exploiting legal loopholes in gun ownership regulations. The conflict in Ukraine has heightened concerns about the diversion of weapons, with reports indicating that traffickers are attempting to move arms into Europe through the Baltic states. Although law enforcement has intercepted illegal shipments, tracking the full scale of trafficking operations remains difficult, particularly given the growth of small-arms transactions via encrypted online marketplaces.

The counterfeit goods market in Latvia includes pharmaceuticals, electronics, branded apparel and luxury accessories. Criminal networks import counterfeit items from external markets, primarily China and Türkiye, before distributing them via online platforms and physical marketplaces. Some operations are connected to larger transnational groups that use Latvia as a transit hub for goods headed to Russia and Western Europe. Enforcement actions have periodically disrupted supply chains through the seizure of fake products. Nonetheless, consumer demand for inexpensive counterfeit items continues to sustain the market, and digital commerce platforms pose ongoing enforcement challenges.

The illicit trade in excise consumer goods, especially tobacco and alcohol, is a persistent problem. Smuggling operations take advantage of Latvia's borders with non-EU states to avoid excise duties, supplying both domestic and regional markets. Authorities have conducted large-scale seizures of contraband cigarettes and untaxed alcohol, yet smuggling networks continue to adapt. These groups use sophisticated concealment techniques, such as hidden compartments in shipments and underground storage facilities. The illicit cigarette trade is particularly profitable, with organized crime maintaining routes between Belarus, Russia and the European Union. However, the societal impact of this illicit trade remains moderate.

ENVIRONMENT

Flora crimes in Latvia primarily involve illegal logging and the unauthorized trade of protected plant species. Although the forestry sector is well-regulated, some criminal actors exploit loopholes to exceed legal timber quotas. Cases of timber fraud have emerged, where illegally sourced wood is misrepresented as being legally harvested through falsified documentation. Authorities have intercepted illicit timber exports, often bound for Western European markets. While regulatory enforcement has improved, monitoring smaller-scale illegal logging operations remains challenging.

Fauna crimes include poaching and wildlife trafficking. Latvia functions as both a source and transit country for the illicit wildlife trade, with smuggling routes linked to broader European and Asian markets. Protected species, such as birds of prey and endangered fish, have been targeted. Demand for wildlife products, particularly traditional medicine ingredients and exotic pets, drives this market. Despite existing wildlife protection laws, enforcement is undermined because of the clandestine nature of trafficking and difficulties in monitoring remote areas.

Non-renewable resource crimes involve illegal extraction and trade in minerals, particularly amber. Unauthorized mining operations have supplied demand in Asian markets. Although regulatory bodies monitor extraction sites, enforcement capacity is limited. Fuel smuggling also occurs, especially along Latvia's borders, where operations aim to evade taxation and bypass environmental regulations.

DRUGS

The heroin trade in Latvia is linked to broader regional trafficking routes, with shipments passing through the country en route to Western Europe. Domestic consumption is relatively low compared to synthetic opioids, though seizures confirm ongoing trafficking activity. Heroin is typically concealed in cargo shipments or private vehicles. Law enforcement has identified connections between local criminal networks and larger transnational groups based in Central Asia and the Balkans.

Cocaine trafficking in Latvia is prevalent, facilitated by international networks. Both maritime and overland routes are used to move shipments, with Latvian ports serving as key entry points for cocaine originating from South America. Organized crime groups employ a range of smuggling techniques, including commercial shipping containers and private courier networks. Although multiple shipments have been intercepted, demand for cocaine remains steady, particularly in urban areas.

The cannabis trade in Latvia includes both imported and locally cultivated product. Domestic cultivation ranges from small-scale operations to organized production sites using specialized equipment. Law enforcement has targeted both indoor and outdoor grow operations, yet cannabis remains one of the most used illicit substances. Smuggling routes from Morocco and the Netherlands supplement the domestic market, while some locally produced cannabis is exported to neighbouring countries.

The synthetic drug trade is a major concern, especially involving amphetamines and new psychoactive substances. Latvia has become a regional hub for synthetic drug production, with clandestine laboratories manufacturing substances for both domestic distribution and export. Authorities have dismantled several production sites, but trafficking continues due to high demand, low production costs and the ability of criminal groups to quickly adapt to regulatory changes.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Cyber-dependent crime is relatively common in Latvia, with ransomware attacks the most frequently observed. Criminal networks exploit digital infrastructure to carry out illicit activities, targeting both individuals and corporate entities. International cybercrime groups collaborate with local actors to execute these attacks. While law enforcement agencies have strengthened cybersecurity measures, cybercrime continues to evolve in complexity, with new tactics emerging to circumvent existing defences. The anonymity of digital transactions and the use of cryptocurrency to launder illicit proceeds further complicate enforcement.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crime in Latvia includes tax evasion, identity theft and other forms of fraud. The country has historically been a hub for illicit financial activity due to weaknesses in its banking sector. Although regulatory reforms have aimed to reduce these risks, enforcement is challenged by sophisticated cross-border schemes.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

Mafia-style groups in Latvia operate across multiple criminal markets, including drug and arms trafficking, fraud and money laundering. Influenced by Russian and Eastern European criminal traditions, these groups are structured and hierarchical, with some maintaining ties to international networks. Outlaw motorcycle gangs are particularly notable, having expanded their presence to control strategic trafficking routes for drugs, weapons and human smuggling. These groups also channel illicit financial flows through front companies and offshore accounts to launder proceeds. Although several operations have been dismantled by law enforcement, they have adapted quickly, shifting tactics to avoid detection. Using intimidation and violence, these groups maintain control over certain criminal enterprises, although regulatory measures and increased cross-border cooperation have put pressure on their operations.

Criminal networks in Latvia are flexible and opportunistic, engaging in activities such as cybercrime, human smuggling, arms trafficking and the trade in counterfeit goods. These groups are typically less structured than mafia-style organizations and adapt quickly to changing market conditions. Drug trafficking is a primary source of revenue, with Latvia serving as both a transit route and destination for illicit substances. Digital extortion and fraud have also become more prominent, with criminals using online platforms for scams, identity theft and ransomware attacks. Although Latvian authorities have intensified efforts to disrupt these networks, their decentralized operations and use of both physical and digital environments continue to pose significant enforcement challenges.

Officials have been implicated in fraud schemes, the embezzlement of EU funds, and facilitating money laundering. Public procurement remains a high-risk area, with organized crime groups infiltrating contracts to secure deals through illicit means. Some people linked to government have engaged in bribery and mismanagement of public resources, though legal action has resulted in high-profile convictions. Additionally, the influence of political figures linked to illicit financial flows, continues to undermine public trust in institutions.

Latvia's criminal landscape is also influenced by foreign actors, particularly Russian and Belarusian organizations, which continue to have notable control over key illicit markets. Russian syndicates maintain connections with local groups, collaborating in money laundering, drug trafficking and cybercrime. Geopolitical tensions with Russia have heightened concerns about the intersection of organized crime and state-sponsored activity, with allegations that intelligence agencies have leveraged criminal networks for strategic purposes. Belarus has also been accused of facilitating human smuggling, allegedly using migratory flows as a form of hybrid warfare against Latvia and other EU states. Other Eastern European groups, including those from Lithuania and Poland, are active in the regional drug trade and have contributed to the growing availability of synthetic drugs in Latvia. While international cooperation has disrupted some foreign-led activity, these networks remain influential within Latvia's criminal economy.

Private-sector actors in Latvia have played a role in facilitating organized crime, particularly in financial offences and the trade of counterfeit goods. Certain businesses and financial institutions have been used to launder illicit proceeds, exploiting regulatory loopholes to move money for criminal organizations. The real estate sector has also been implicated in laundering schemes, with high-value properties used to integrate illegal funds into the legitimate economy. Additionally, logistics and transportation companies have been co-opted by smuggling networks to move contraband across borders. The rise of e-commerce and digital payment platforms has further complicated enforcement, as illicit transactions increasingly occur online. While Latvia has introduced stricter compliance measures, complicit and negligent private-sector entities sustain the country's vulnerability to financial crime and illicit trade.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Latvia operates as a multiparty democracy with regular, free and fair elections. While political stability is generally upheld and government reforms have been introduced, challenges persist, particularly with public procurement and the influence of politically connected business figures. High-profile corruption cases involving former politicians and officials have revealed vulnerabilities in oversight and enforcement. Despite reform efforts, public trust in government has declined, driven by perceptions of ineffective governance and delays in judicial processes.

The corruption prevention and combating bureau has worked to strengthen integrity in public administration, but concerns remain over the effectiveness of anti-corruption initiatives. Recent legislative reforms and national strategies targeting organized crime have reinforced accountability measures, yet enforcement and regulatory gaps persist. Initiatives to expand independent audits and strengthen whistleblower protections are under way, though their application across government agencies remains uneven.

Latvia actively participates in international cooperation frameworks to combat organized crime, working with Europol, INTERPOL and the Financial Action Task Force. The country has also strengthened its engagement with the European Public Prosecutor's Office, which investigates financial crimes affecting the EU budget. These partnerships have improved Latvia's investigative capacity, though aligning national enforcement with broader regional and global strategies remains a challenge.

National laws and policies addressing organized crime are regularly updated to reflect EU directives and international standards. Recent legislation has targeted human trafficking, money laundering and cybercrime with amendments expanding prosecutorial powers and increasing penalties for serious offences. However, enforcement agencies continue to face operational limitations, and legal loopholes persist, which allow offenders to avoid prosecution.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

The judicial system in Latvia is generally independent and courts uphold the rule of law. However, delays in case resolution and a lack of financial and human resources undermine judicial efficiency. The establishment of specialized courts for financial and economic crimes has improved the handling of complex cases, though there are still concerns about politicization and undue influence in judicial appointments. Recent reforms have sought to streamline procedural efficiency and reduce case backlogs, but public confidence in the judiciary remains moderate.

Law enforcement agencies, including the state police and border guard, are central to efforts against organized crime. While several networks have been dismantled, operational capacity is limited by personnel shortages and budgetary constraints. The adoption of digital forensic tools and stronger inter-agency coordination has boosted investigative capacity, particularly in tackling cybercrime and financial fraud. However, the increasing sophistication of cyber-enabled crimes poses ongoing challenges. Training is also hindered by limited funding. While enforcement against human trafficking has increased, underreporting continues to hinder detection and prosecution.

Latvia has reinforced its border security in response to geopolitical tensions with Belarus and Russia. Investments in border infrastructure, surveillance technologies and intelligence-sharing mechanisms have strengthened efforts to combat smuggling and illicit cross-border crime. Latvia's strategic position makes it vulnerable to human smuggling and the trafficking of illicit goods, necessitating sustained vigilance. Despite improvements – particularly through increased cooperation with security authorities within the region – border control agencies remain understaffed, limiting rapid response capacity.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Latvia's financial sector has undergone substantial reforms to combat money laundering and financial crime. The country has improved compliance with international anti-money laundering standards, resulting in greater scrutiny of financial transactions and banking practices. The Financial Intelligence Unit has increased efforts to identify suspicious activity, leading to more investigations and asset seizures. Nonetheless, concerns remain about the effectiveness of oversight mechanisms, especially in regulating cryptocurrency transactions and around virtual asset service providers. Despite these improvements, financial crime risks persist, particularly in the real estate and digital finance sectors. The shadow economy contributes to tax evasion and unregulated transactions. Authorities have introduced stricter regulations for financial service providers and improved corporate ownership transparency, yet enforcement agencies still face difficulties detecting complex financial schemes involving offshore entities and shell companies. The economic regulatory environment is generally stable, with policies designed to attract foreign investment and foster economic growth. However, structural challenges, including labour shortages, dependence on external markets and exposure to geopolitical instability continue to affect resilience. The government has implemented reforms to boost business transparency and reduce bureaucratic obstacles, though gaps remain in tax collection efficiency and compliance monitoring.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Victim and witness support services in Latvia have expanded, with state-funded programmes offering legal aid, shelter and psychological support to victims of human trafficking and other forms of exploitation. However, NGOs report that identification and referral systems are inadequate, particularly for labour trafficking victims, and that gaps persist in long-term support services. While efforts to improve inter-agency coordination and streamline victim assistance are ongoing, limitations in resources and specialized training hinder effectiveness. The scarcity of tailored rehabilitation services for trafficking survivors further complicates recovery and reintegration.

Preventive measures addressing organized crime have been integrated into national policy frameworks, including initiatives targeting human trafficking, drug-related offences and financial fraud. Public awareness campaigns and community outreach have supported crime prevention efforts, though effectiveness varies across regions. Educational programmes aimed at youth and vulnerable populations seek to reduce risk factors associated with criminal exploitation but reach and impact are inconsistent.

Non-state actors, including civil society organizations and the media, play a vital role in promoting transparency and accountability. However, press freedom has come under pressure due to concentrated media ownership and occasional political interference. Investigative journalists have been instrumental in uncovering corruption and financial misconduct, though some face legal intimidation or threats. Despite these constraints, Latvia retains an active civil society sector that contributes meaningfully to policy debates and social reform. Legal protections for freedom of expression are robust, though self-censorship has been noted in politically sensitive cases.

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.