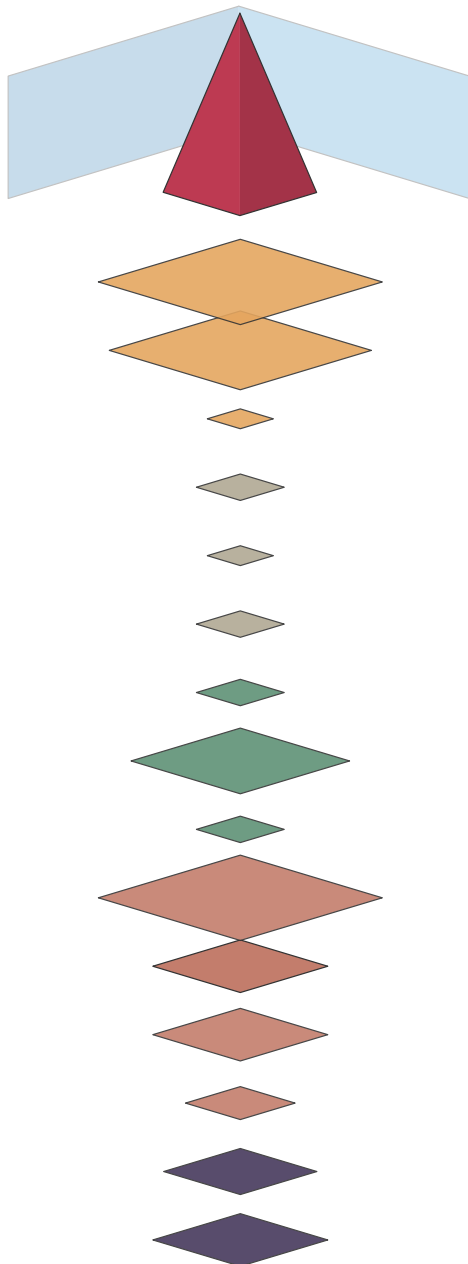


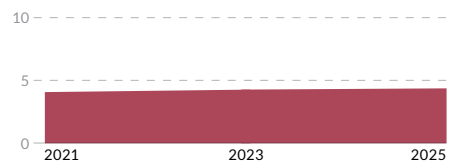


MALDIVES



4.42 $\nearrow 0.15$ CRIMINALITY SCORE

135th of 193 countries $\nearrow 9$
37th of 46 Asian countries $\nearrow 2$
7th of 8 Southern Asian countries -



CRIMINAL MARKETS **3.53** $\nearrow 0.00$

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	6.50	$\searrow 0.50$
HUMAN SMUGGLING	6.00	$\searrow 0.50$
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	1.50	$\searrow 1.00$
ARMS TRAFFICKING	2.00	0.00
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	1.50	$\nearrow 0.50$
ILLCIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	2.00	0.00
FLORA CRIMES	2.00	0.00
FAUNA CRIMES	5.00	0.00
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	2.00	0.00
HEROIN TRADE	6.50	0.00
COCAINE TRADE	4.00	$\nearrow 0.50$
CANNABIS TRADE	4.00	0.00
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	2.50	$\nearrow 0.50$
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	3.50	0.00
FINANCIAL CRIMES	4.00	$\nearrow 0.50$



CRIMINAL ACTORS **5.30** $\nearrow 0.30$

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	6.50	0.00
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	6.00	0.00
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	5.50	$\nearrow 0.50$
FOREIGN ACTORS	4.50	0.00
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	4.00	$\nearrow 1.00$



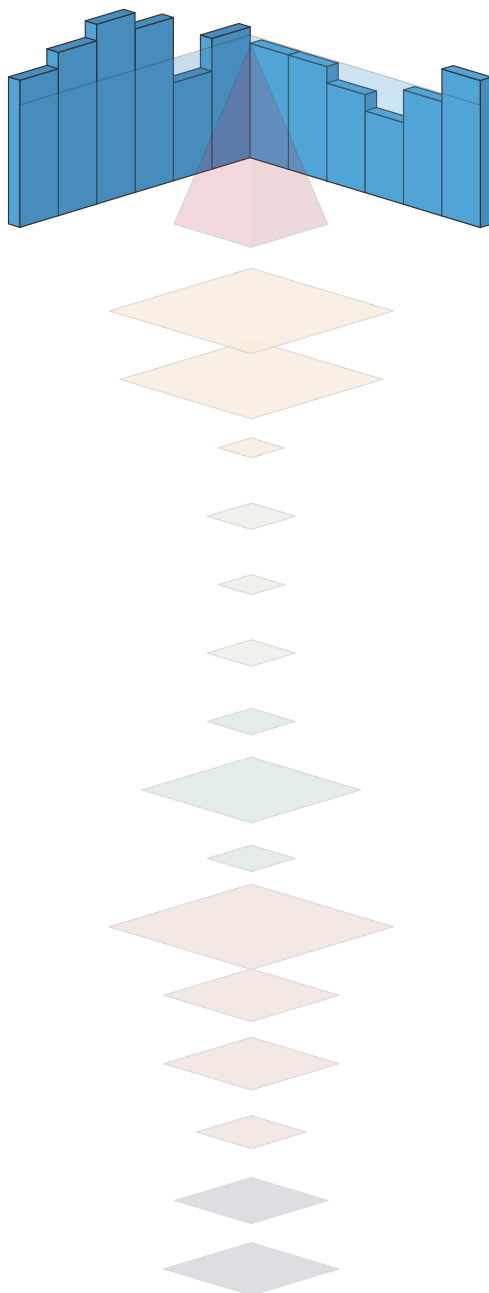
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ENACT is funded by the European Union
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MALDIVES



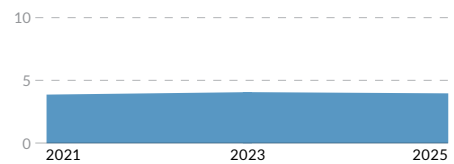
3.96 $\downarrow 0.12$

RESILIENCE SCORE

131st of 193 countries $\downarrow 4$

25th of 46 Asian countries -

4th of 8 Southern Asian countries -



POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	4.50	$\downarrow 1.00$
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	5.00	$\downarrow 1.00$
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	5.50	0.00
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	5.00	$\downarrow 0.50$
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	3.00	0.00
LAW ENFORCEMENT	4.00	0.00
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	3.50	$\uparrow 0.50$
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	3.50	0.00
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	3.00	0.00
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	2.50	$\uparrow 0.50$
PREVENTION	3.50	$\uparrow 0.50$
NON-STATE ACTORS	4.50	$\downarrow 0.50$



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CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

The Maldives is an origin, transit and destination country for human trafficking. The market is fragmented, with small local gangs collaborating with foreign actors from Bangladesh, India, Thailand and other countries to traffic people. Women from South Asia, particularly Bangladesh and Thailand, are trafficked into the Maldives for forced labour or sexual exploitation, often under false promises of employment in the tourism sector or in massage parlours. Child trafficking is also a concern, with Maldivian children moved from remote islands to Malé for domestic labour, where they are vulnerable to abuse.

Human smuggling is persistent and closely tied to the country's dependence on foreign migrant labour. Around one-third of the population consists of foreign workers, many of whom are undocumented and at risk of exploitation. Bangladeshi and Indian men are commonly smuggled in for construction work, where they are subject to fraudulent recruitment, document confiscation and debt bondage. Extortion and protection racketeering also occur, particularly in property transactions, though these cases appear to be isolated and are not strongly linked to transnational criminal networks.

TRADE

The arms trafficking market in the Maldives is poorly documented, though evidence points to a possible link between terrorist groups and the illicit acquisition of weapons. While there are no confirmed cases of sophisticated weaponry being used in attacks, past terrorist activity suggests that criminal actors may be able to access firearms and explosives. The national defence force has faced criticism for its lack of transparency, raising concerns about its potential role in enabling or overlooking illicit arms flows.

The Maldives does not have a sizeable market for counterfeit goods. However, fake luxury items are occasionally found in Malé, where low-cost imitations are more common. Recent reports have also noted sporadic seizures of counterfeit cigarettes. An illicit market for smuggled alcohol has developed in response to strict national laws prohibiting alcohol consumption outside tourist resorts. This trade is often facilitated by foreign actors. However, the market is not well established and is limited in scope. Despite enforcement efforts, smuggling networks continue to meet demand for restricted goods.

ENVIRONMENT

While environmental degradation – such as coral reef destruction and illegal deforestation – remains a serious concern in the Maldives, flora-related crime involving organized groups are neither prevalent nor widely reported. In contrast, fauna-related crime, particularly illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and wildlife trafficking, are significant. Dolphin, turtle and shark are frequently targeted for illegal trade, with poaching on the rise. Maldivian waters are increasingly encroached upon by foreign-flagged vessels engaged in illegal fishing. The resulting economic losses are believed to be substantial, placing additional pressure on the country's already strained regulatory framework.

As for non-renewable resource crime, the market is limited to illegal sand mining, which contributes to coastal erosion and habitat destruction. Recent amendments to government regulations now permit sand mining in marine protected areas, raising concerns among environmentalists. Although the market remains largely fragmented, the relaxed regulatory framework may allow for increased criminal exploitation of natural resources.

DRUGS

The Maldives functions as both a local market and a transit hub for the heroin trade, facilitating its movement from Afghanistan through South Asia and the Arabian Sea. Foreign actors, particularly from Pakistan and Iran, dominate the trade. Despite the country's geography, law enforcement has made significant progress in heroin seizures.

Cocaine trafficking also involves the Maldives as a transit point, with shipments originating from Brazil, Ethiopia, and Nigeria en route to Europe and Asia, though this occurs on a smaller scale. Domestic demand for cocaine is low, but tourism fuels a niche market for high-end drug consumption, supplied by local criminal networks. Recent increases in cocaine seizures suggest a growing number of international traffickers operating in Maldivian territory.

The cannabis trade is well established, with the Maldives serving as both a transit and consumption hub. Seizure patterns have fluctuated in recent years, peaking before declining, although the reasons for this trend remain unclear. Cannabis is primarily sourced from Bangladesh, Iran, India, and Afghanistan. While authorities continue to intercept large shipments, demand remains strong, particularly among local youth.

A local market exists for synthetic drugs, although it remains relatively small. However, the Maldives plays a strategic role in facilitating shipments from Europe to

Oceania. Reports indicate an influx of synthetic substances – particularly ecstasy and methamphetamine – smuggled via both maritime and air routes.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Although the Maldives is still considered a low-risk country for serious cyber offences, cybercrime is an emerging threat, with cases of hacking and malware attacks increasing each year. Both government institutions and private businesses have been targeted, and recent high-profile attacks have been linked to geopolitical tensions.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crime is also on the rise, driven largely by political corruption and fraud. Scams targeting individuals and businesses are common, while weak regulatory oversight enables further abuse. Cyber-enabled offences such as identity theft, phishing and phone scams are becoming more frequent. The country's close ties to politically connected figures in the region who are implicated in financial crimes add to its vulnerability.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

Mafia-style groups operate extensively in the Maldives, with gang violence becoming increasingly prevalent. These groups are particularly active in Malé and Hulhumalé, but their influence has also expanded to Addu, the country's southernmost atoll. According to the Maldives police service, Malé alone is home to 44 gangs, nine of which are classified as highly dangerous. These gangs are involved in drug smuggling and other illicit trade, and many have been linked to a series of homicides attributed to gang-related violence. Smaller-scale operations are also active in Fuvahmulah City, Thinadhoo and other areas, contributing to a broader criminal landscape across the country. Some prominent groups, such as Kuda Henveiru and the Masodi gang, have established ties with political actors, which may help explain periods of reduced violence. Many of these gangs are also connected to extremist organizations, including affiliates of al-Qaeda and ISIS. While gang-related violence remains moderate, the convergence of political influence, religious extremism, and organized crime presents a growing challenge for law enforcement.

Criminal networks in the Maldives are loosely structured and involved in a wide range of illicit activities. They are particularly prominent in drug trafficking, especially the heroin trade, maintaining connections with Pakistani and Iranian suppliers. In addition, these groups are engaged in human trafficking, human smuggling and money laundering, further embedding themselves in the country's criminal economy. Some extremist groups have also been linked

to attacks on public figures advocating for democracy and human rights, reportedly using accusations of blasphemy to justify such violence.

State-embedded actors play a significant role in the criminal landscape, as illustrated by high-profile scandals involving systemic embezzlement and misappropriation by political elites. Recent cases involving alleged corruption – such as the improper allocation of land and the misappropriation of welfare funds – have sparked widespread public outrage. However, the convergence of organized crime and state institutions extends beyond financial misconduct. Reports suggest that senior officials maintain close ties with criminal gangs, contributing to violent incidents, including attacks targeting government representatives.

Foreign actors also play a prominent role in organized crime in the Maldives. Drug trafficking networks rely heavily on suppliers from Pakistan, Iran, Brazil and Ethiopia. While data on transnational organized crime groups operating within the country is limited, many foreign nationals have been arrested for drug distribution. Foreign involvement is also evident in labour-related human trafficking. In addition, foreign businesspeople have reportedly used their financial leverage to influence Maldivian politics through bribery. Although the full extent of foreign criminal involvement remains unclear, available evidence points to a growing entanglement between international actors and local criminal markets. Another concern is the presence of radicalized foreign operatives. Although official data remains scarce, anecdotal reports indicate that individuals are believed to be involved in money laundering and drug trafficking, using illicit financial flows to support extremist activities both domestically and abroad.

The Maldivian private sector has also been implicated in various criminal activities, particularly involving bribery, tax evasion and corruption. Business dealings often overlap with politics, enabling corporate actors to exploit regulatory loopholes for personal gain. The real estate and tourism sectors are especially vulnerable, with reports of illegal land leasing and large-scale fraud surfacing in recent years. Weak regulatory oversight has allowed businesses to operate with limited accountability, facilitating both money laundering and tax evasion.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

The Maldives continues to face persistent challenges in political leadership and governance, marked by fluctuating stability and signs of democratic backsliding in recent years. Despite past efforts to reform laws and strengthen institutions, electoral processes have been undermined by allegations of vote buying, disinformation campaigns and restrictions on civil liberties. The most recent presidential election resulted in a shift in leadership, prompting concerns about the consolidation of power and the weakening of institutional checks and balances.

Although political pluralism exists, it is frequently undercut by corruption scandals and partisan control of governance institutions. Corruption remains systemic, fuelled by entrenched relationships between politicians, business elites and foreign actors. The anti-corruption commission is empowered to investigate government misconduct but lacks authority over the private sector, which limits its impact. Government procurement processes are particularly vulnerable, with senior officials implicated in past scandals. While some oversight mechanisms have been strengthened in response to high-profile corruption cases, enforcement remains inconsistent. Allegations, including those against the current administration, have further eroded public trust in government accountability and transparency.

The Maldives maintains active international cooperation efforts, engaging with regional and global partners to combat organized crime. Collaboration with international law enforcement agencies has focused on transnational crimes such as human trafficking, drug trafficking and financial crime. Participation in regional security initiatives, including agreements with India and Sri Lanka, has facilitated intelligence sharing and joint operations. The Maldives also works with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime to strengthen law enforcement capacity and support criminal justice approaches to preventing violent extremism. In late 2024, the First Amendment to the Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Act was ratified, strengthening the legal framework for international cooperation in criminal cases, particularly those involving cybercrime. The amendment introduces new procedures for accessing electronic evidence, retrieving traffic data in real time and preserving data stored in computer systems. It also establishes a 24/7 network to enhance the exchange of information on cyber-related offences, further supporting cross-border collaboration. However, domestic political instability and governance challenges risk undermining the effectiveness of these partnerships.

The government has taken steps to align national policies and legal frameworks with international standards, particularly in relation to financial crime and counterterrorism. Despite

these efforts, enforcement remains weak, hindered by judicial inefficiencies and political interference, which affect the consistent application of legal provisions.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

The Maldivian judicial system continues to face serious challenges in delivering justice, particularly in cases involving organized crime and corruption. Political interference remains a concern, with past administrations accused of using the courts to target opposition figures. While some reforms have aimed to strengthen the independence of the judiciary, progress has been limited, and improvements in judicial accountability have been slow. Concerns also persist around due process violations, prolonged pretrial detention, and restricted access to legal representation. Prison conditions are problematic, with reports of overcrowding, inadequate facilities and corruption within the system. Although prison management initiatives are underway, systemic weaknesses continue to hamper the effectiveness of the criminal justice system.

Law enforcement institutions struggle with corruption, misconduct and a persistent lack of public trust. Reforms have been introduced to professionalize the police force and address human rights concerns but reports of excessive force, political bias and internal corruption continue to surface. The establishment of specialized units, such as a counterterrorism division, reflect efforts to modernize law enforcement in the Maldives. In 2024, the creation of a new national cybersecurity agency marked another key development, providing a central platform for managing cybersecurity issues, formulating policies and strengthening the cyber defence capabilities of government institutions. Despite these advancements, institutional weaknesses and limited resources continue to hinder overall effectiveness, with public concerns around accountability and transparency persisting. In response, the Maldives Police National Strategic Plan outlines key priorities aimed at addressing these challenges. These include enhancing crime prevention and community policing through stronger community partnerships; expanding outreach initiatives; promoting transparency and accountability; and improving investigative and prosecutorial capacities through investment in modern techniques, forensic capabilities, and specialized training for law enforcement personnel.

The Maldives' geography and its position along major maritime routes increases its exposure to transnational crimes, including drug trafficking and illegal migration. Weak border controls and corruption within customs agencies remain key vulnerabilities. To improve maritime security, the government has engaged in regional cooperation initiatives, including the Colombo Security Conclave, which supports

surveillance and coordinated responses. Despite these initiatives, the ability to effectively monitor the country's vast maritime territory remains a challenge. In terms of cybersecurity infrastructure, a newly established law enforcement agency has been assigned the responsibility of safeguarding the country's cyberspace, marking a significant step towards strengthening national cyber defence capabilities.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Anti-money laundering (AML) efforts in the Maldives remain underdeveloped, with financial institutions and regulatory bodies struggling to detect and prevent illicit financial flows. The financial intelligence unit, tasked with monitoring suspicious transactions, remains understaffed and requires technical assistance and training. The unit has also faced allegations of corruption and inefficiency. Although AML regulations have been implemented in line with international standards, enforcement remains inconsistent. Money laundering risks are amplified by the country's reliance on cash-based transactions and the operation of informal financial networks. The growing use of digital currencies for illicit purposes has added further complexity to an already at-risk regulatory environment.

The Maldivian economic regulatory system faces structural weaknesses, including reliance on tourism and foreign investment. While the economy has shown some resilience, it remains vulnerable to monopolistic market structures and the dominance of a small number of powerful business groups. Volatility in the tourism sector continues to affect government revenues and employment. Meanwhile, the informal economy, including illicit currency trading and unregulated financial activity, operates with minimal oversight. There is evidence of funds being transferred between islands, possibly offshore using informal systems. Political interference and limited institutional capacity continue to obstruct progress towards stronger regulatory frameworks and greater economic transparency.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Victim and witness support mechanisms in the Maldives are inadequate, with limited infrastructure to protect those affected by organized crime and human trafficking. Although legal provisions exist, implementation remains inconsistent. The lack of a dedicated witness protection programme has exposed individuals to intimidation and retribution, undermining judicial proceedings. The government introduced measures to improve victim support services, including the development of handbooks outlining available resources, but these interventions are insufficient. The Maldives is also expanding its drug rehabilitation infrastructure and services through strategic investments, multi-agency collaboration and community engagement. Current efforts

encompass treatment centres, helplines, peer support programmes, vocational reintegration initiatives and capacity-building activities.

Prevention strategies against organized crime in the Maldives have been inconsistent, with limited long-term planning. While legal reforms and policy initiatives have addressed issues such as human trafficking and cybercrime, broader crime prevention measures have been uncoordinated. The anti-human trafficking national action plan marked a step forward but has faced implementation delays. Whistleblower protections and public awareness campaigns have been introduced, yet progress towards building a culture of accountability and transparency has been slow. For instance, the whistleblower protection unit, established to address corruption and human rights violations, has struggled with political interference. The Maldives police service also launched public awareness campaigns during the International Month of Awareness Against Internet Crimes, using social media and information booths across various islands to educate citizens. However, the limited duration of the campaign was seen as insufficient to effectively address the growing and complex threat of cybercrime in the region. The government has also expanded border security operations, resulting in the deportation of thousands of undocumented migrant workers, an approach that has drawn criticism for prioritizing enforcement over addressing root causes.

Non-state actors, including civil society organizations and the media, play a crucial role in promoting transparency and accountability. However, press freedom has deteriorated, with journalists facing legal and physical threats for reporting on sensitive issues. Criminal networks have targeted journalists investigating drug-related offences, issuing direct threats, and in some cases, raiding media offices in retaliation for crime-related reporting. This intimidation, combined with a rise in politically motivated extremism, has created a climate of fear among activists, politicians and human rights defenders. The adoption of the Evidence Act has raised additional concerns about government overreach, particularly provisions that allow courts to compel journalists to disclose their sources. Civil society organizations advocating for human rights and governance reforms have also encountered political resistance, limiting their ability to operate freely. Despite these constraints, independent media and advocacy groups continue to push for improved transparency in public life.

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.