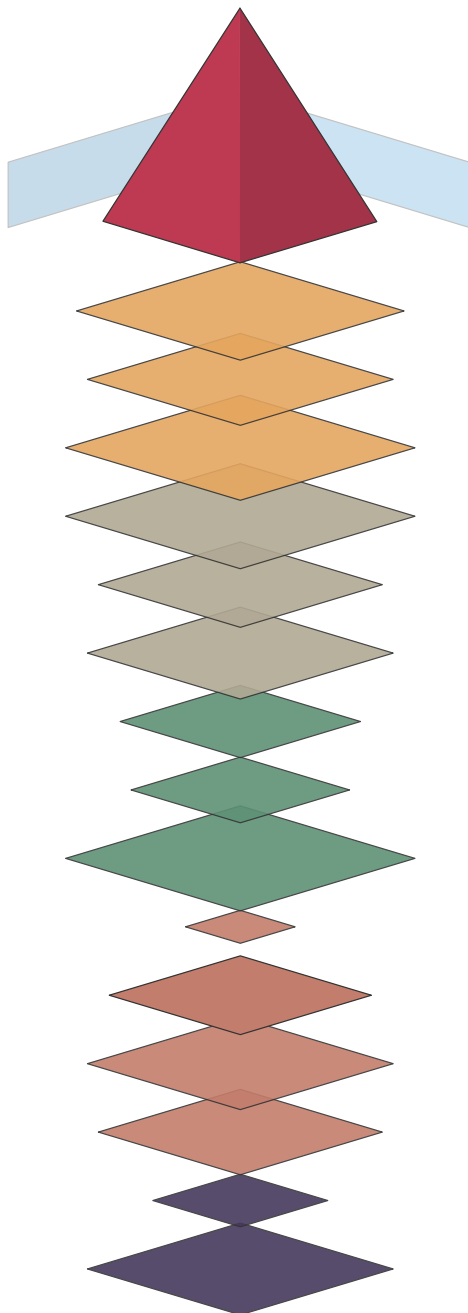
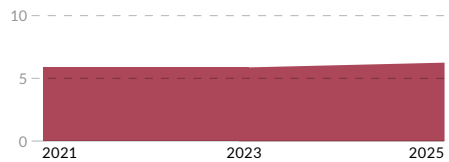


 **MALI**



**6.33**  $\nearrow 0.40$   
**CRIMINALITY SCORE**

43<sup>rd</sup> of 193 countries  $\nearrow 7$   
12<sup>th</sup> of 54 African countries  $\nearrow 3$   
2<sup>nd</sup> of 15 West African countries  $\nearrow 1$



**CRIMINAL MARKETS** **6.37**  $\searrow 0.10$

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	<b>7.50</b>	0.00
HUMAN SMUGGLING	<b>7.00</b>	0.00
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	<b>8.00</b>	0.00
ARMS TRAFFICKING	<b>8.00</b>	0.00
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	<b>6.50</b>	0.00
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	<b>7.00</b>	0.00
FLORA CRIMES	<b>5.50</b>	$\nearrow 0.50$
FAUNA CRIMES	<b>5.00</b>	0.00
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	<b>8.00</b>	0.00
HEROIN TRADE	<b>2.50</b>	$\searrow 0.50$
COCAINE TRADE	<b>6.00</b>	0.00
CANNABIS TRADE	<b>7.00</b>	0.00
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	<b>6.50</b>	$\searrow 0.50$
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	<b>4.00</b>	$\searrow 1.00$
FINANCIAL CRIMES	<b>7.00</b>	0.00



**CRIMINAL ACTORS** **6.30**  $\nearrow 0.90$

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	<b>7.00</b>	$\nearrow 3.00$
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	<b>6.50</b>	$\searrow 0.50$
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	<b>8.00</b>	0.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	<b>6.00</b>	$\nearrow 2.00$
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	<b>4.00</b>	0.00



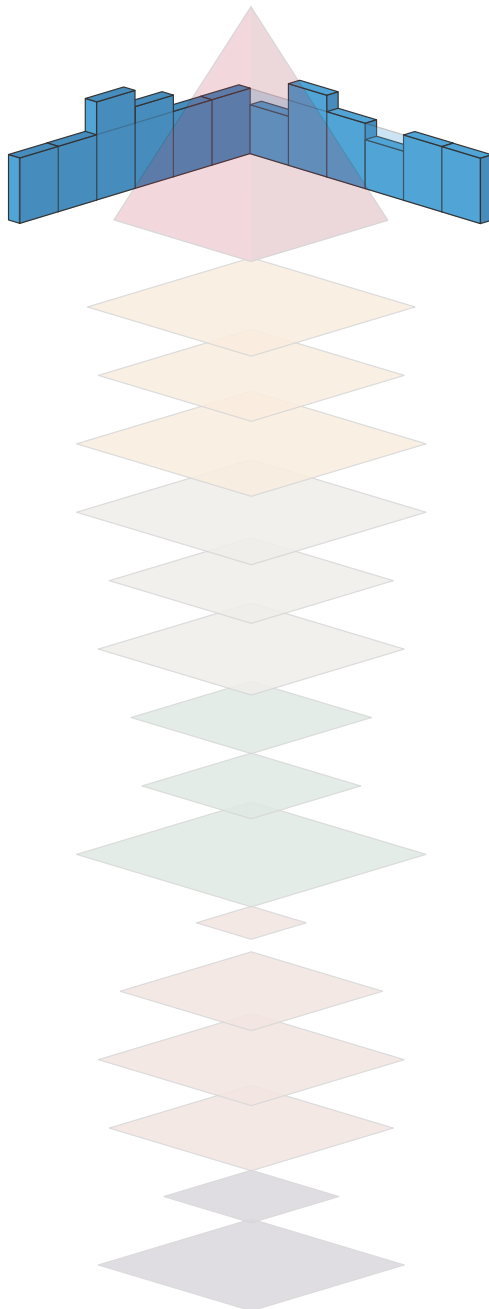
This project was funded in part by a grant from the United States Department of State.



Funded by the European Union

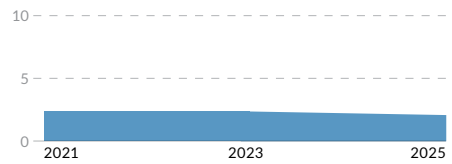
ENACT is funded by the European Union and implemented by the Institute for Security Studies and INTERPOL, in affiliation with the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.

 **MALI**



 **2.08**  $\downarrow 0.30$   
**RESILIENCE SCORE**

**181<sup>st</sup>** of 193 countries  $\downarrow 5$   
**49<sup>th</sup>** of 54 African countries  $\downarrow 4$   
**15<sup>th</sup>** of 15 West African countries -



POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	<b>2.00</b> $\downarrow 0.50$
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	<b>2.00</b> $\downarrow 0.50$
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	<b>3.00</b> $\downarrow 1.00$
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	<b>2.50</b> 0.00
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	<b>2.00</b> $\downarrow 0.50$
LAW ENFORCEMENT	<b>2.00</b> 0.00
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	<b>1.50</b> 0.00
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	<b>2.50</b> 0.00
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	<b>2.00</b> 0.00
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	<b>1.50</b> 0.00
PREVENTION	<b>2.00</b> 0.00
NON-STATE ACTORS	<b>2.00</b> $\downarrow 1.00$



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# CRIMINALITY

## CRIMINAL MARKETS

### PEOPLE

Mali remains a source, transit and destination country for human trafficking, with a deeply entrenched market due to the ongoing insecurity and political instability in the country. Victims include men, women and children, Malian nationals and citizens from neighbouring West African countries, who are subjected to forced labour and sexual exploitation. Men and boys are primarily exploited in artisanal gold mining, agriculture, domestic work, transportation and forced begging. Women, especially from Nigeria, are mainly subjected to sex trafficking, particularly in mining communities where demand is high. Children are also heavily targeted, with reports of their recruitment by violent extremist organizations (VEOs), armed groups, and even the Malian armed forces (FAMa). Hereditary slavery is another concern, particularly around the Taoudeni salt mines. Although the government has taken steps to identify and refer victims to care programmes, large swathes of the country remain beyond state control, leaving vast numbers unprotected. Human trafficking in Mali retains a strong transnational dimension. Malian children are forced to beg in neighbouring countries and work on cotton and cocoa farms in Côte d'Ivoire. Nigerian women and girls are frequently deceived with false promises of employment and then exploited in sex trafficking. Irregular migrants travelling through Mali toward Algeria, Libya, Mauritania or Europe are also highly vulnerable to trafficking. Criminal actors operating in this market include loose domestic networks, corrupt public officials and state-embedded actors, including elements within the FAMa.

The human smuggling market in Mali is well established, driven by the country's strategic location and porous borders, and has continued to adapt by shifting routes in response to insecurity. It plays a pivotal role in West African migration routes to North Africa and Europe, although instability in northern Mali since mid-2023 has disrupted movement into Algeria. In response, smuggling activity has intensified in south-western Mali, along the route to Mauritania, and to a lesser extent Senegal, with a sharp increase in arrivals there of both Malian nationals and other migrants and refugees who had been displaced from trans-Saharan routes to the Canary Islands. Smuggling networks are disjointed and operate through ad hoc partnerships involving local residents and former migrants with intimate knowledge of the terrain and contacts with local authorities. Collaboration between smugglers and public officials is pervasive, with bribery at border crossings common. Smugglers also collaborate with armed groups to facilitate passage through informal checkpoints in the

northern regions. While some migrants possess travel documents, many still prefer smugglers to avoid bribery and bureaucratic delays.

Extortion and protection racketeering are widespread in Mali and closely tied to conflict dynamics. Over the past ten years, kidnappings have become a tool of territorial expansion and governance by VEOs, rather than simply a funding source. Groups like Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) continue to engage in ransom kidnappings, particularly targeting wealthy Sahelians. JNIM also imposes zakat, a religious tax, which is a coercive tool but also creates a form of reciprocal obligation between JNIM and local populations.

### TRADE

Arms trafficking in Mali remains a significant market, sustained by conflicts within the country and in neighbouring states. The vast majority of the weapons used by armed groups come from military sources – either looted from army stockpiles during attacks, entering the country through illicit routes from neighbours such as Libya (though this has declined in recent years) and Guinea, or diverted by state security forces. Artisanal production also contributes to local supply. The operations of foreign mercenaries, including the Wagner Group, mean that there is an ongoing risk of arms proliferation in the future. Arms markets in northern Mali have been disrupted by instability since mid-2023, and some key hubs (such as Ber) have completely shut down, meaning that trafficking is more dispersed than it used to be. Ethnic affiliations play a significant role in cross-border arms transfers, as criminal groups often trade weapons along tribal lines. The demand for arms is sustained by persistent intercommunal violence, violent extremism as well as hostilities between rebel groups and the armed forces. Criminal networks are the primary operators in the market, supported by state-embedded actors and non-state armed groups, including VEOs.

The trade in counterfeit goods, particularly medical products, is well established in Mali and is driven by limited access to affordable and regulated pharmaceuticals, a weak healthcare system and widespread insecurity. Counterfeit medicines dominate the illicit market, with the capital, Bamako, functioning as a key storage and redistribution hub. Products originate mainly from India and China and are routed through West African ports before reaching Mali by land. Criminal actors involved include opportunistic private sector actors – from importers, logistics companies, wholesalers, street vendors and pharmacy employees – as well as corrupt law enforcement officials. Armed groups often extract levies on products passing through their territory. Beyond pharmaceuticals, the market includes counterfeit cigarettes, agro-food products and printing

materials. Goods enter both through the northern border with Algeria and southern crossings, especially with Guinea, where friendly ties between the military governments facilitates trade. Despite occasional seizures by authorities, enforcement efforts have had little effect, with both smuggling routes and demand remaining robust.

The illicit trade in excisable goods, particularly cigarettes, is also entrenched, with Mali functioning as a key transit hub for goods destined for North and West Africa. Cigarettes enter Mali having been landed at ports in Guinea, Benin and Togo, and are moved northward through cities such as Gao, Timbuktu, Kidal and Mopti. Reports suggest that oversupply by tobacco companies facilitates this trade. Armed groups reportedly profit from taxing these goods.

## ENVIRONMENT

Flora crimes in Mali are primarily driven by the illicit logging of rosewood (kosso), particularly in the Kayes, Koulikoro and Sikasso regions. Chinese demand continues to fuel large-scale exploitation, with timber routed through Mauritania and Senegal. Armed groups play an indirect role by regulating access to forests and charging loggers for protection. Corrupt forestry officials also enable the trade by accepting bribes. The environmental consequences are considerable, including deforestation, loss of biodiversity and soil erosion. Additionally, rosewood shipments are sometimes used to smuggle ivory, linking the trade to other environmental crimes.

Fauna crimes are less documented but include the poaching and trafficking of endangered sea turtles and desert elephants. The Gourma region, home to Mali's desert elephants, was once severely affected by poaching, which prompted the establishment of an anti-poaching brigade that helped stabilize the population. Wildlife trafficking routes also exist between Senegal's Niokolo-Koba National Park and Mali, with crocodile and kob skins traded across the border.

Non-renewable resource crimes, particularly the illicit gold trade, are among the most significant criminal markets in Mali. Artisanal and small-scale gold mining accounts for a major proportion of national production, especially in the Kayes and Sikasso regions, and is closely linked to politics and organized crime. In the north, some mines in the Kidal and Gao regions are controlled by rebel groups and VEOs, which impose taxes and provide protection in return. In Kidal region, the resurgence of conflict in the north in mid-2023 has led to rebel groups losing control of the mines, and has resulted in a decrease in artisanal mining activity altogether. The capital, Bamako, functions as a regional hub for the trade, with gold exported by air to destinations including the UAE, Switzerland and Türkiye. In addition to miners and organized criminal actors, those involved in illicit mining and the trafficking of non-renewable resources include traders, landowners and other enablers such as traditional leaders, village chiefs and politicians. The trade also serves as a means

for laundering illicit proceeds, as gold can be manufactured into a legally tradable commodity which can be moved across borders, or invested directly into other criminal activities. Environmental degradation from the use of mercury and cyanide for gold extraction is widespread, and competition for control over mines has led to increased tensions among miners, law enforcement and armed groups.

## DRUGS

The heroin market in Mali exists on a relatively small scale, primarily functioning as a transit route for drugs destined for Europe. Local consumption is limited but documented, particularly in gold mining areas and urban centres like Bamako. Overall, the market remains fairly underdeveloped compared to other drug trades.

The cocaine trade, by contrast, is highly consolidated, with Mali serving as a key transit country for shipments originating in South America and passing through West Africa towards Europe and Western Asia. Although most trafficking bypasses Mali, since it follows maritime routes, seizures within the southern part of the country (on the border with Guinea and Senegal) indicate increased volumes moving overland through southern Mali between distinct coastal import and export points. Northbound trans-Saharan routes have continued to function, simply rerouting to adapt to the resurgence of conflict in northern Mali since 2023. Criminal networks and separatist armed groups dominate the trade, while VEOs impose taxes on drug flows through their territories.

Cannabis remains the most widely used drug in Mali. Cannabis resin (mainly from Morocco) transits through Mauritania into Mali's Kayes region, while cannabis plants are also locally cultivated, particularly in Sikasso. Trafficking and consumption are concentrated in the major cities and gold mining areas. Seizures indicate its widespread availability, with notable volumes having been found in recent years. Elements linked to separatist non-state armed groups are prominent in the cannabis resin market, imposing taxes on shipments.

The synthetic drug trade, particularly Tramadol and diazepam, is pervasive. Mali serves as both a destination and transit country for these substances, which are largely imported to ports in Benin and Togo and routed through Niger. Consumption is prevalent among gold miners and armed actors who use the drugs to cope with physical stress or violence. The increasing overlap between synthetic drug use and other illicit markets, such as mining and arms trafficking, underscores the growing complexity of this sector.

## CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Mali experiences some degree of cyber-dependent crimes, including ransomware attacks and data breaches. The expansion of digital services in the country has increased vulnerabilities, particularly among banks and financial institutions. This was showcased in a recent ransomware attack targeting a Malian financial institution. These incidents underscore the growing threat posed by cybercriminal gangs in the country.

## FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crimes remain a persistent issue in Mali, with public officials frequently accused of embezzlement, misappropriation of public funds, illicit enrichment and other forms of corruption. Efforts by the government to tackle corruption have led to high-profile arrests, though concerns persist over politically motivated charges. Moreover, financial crimes perpetrated by extremist groups in conflict zones are financing the insurgency and contribute significantly to grassroots instability. Overall financial crime levels remain high, fuelled by governance gaps, the immunity from prosecution granted to members of the military junta and conflict dynamics.

## CRIMINAL ACTORS

Mali has a significant presence of non-state armed groups whose organizational structures and territorial influence increasingly resemble mafia-style groups. These entities, particularly VEOs such as JNIM and the Islamic State Sahel Province (IS Sahel), display many of the hallmarks: defined leadership hierarchies, identifiable membership and effective territorial control. There are, however, a myriad of other armed groups in Mali, including separatist groups, mainly the Front National de Libération de l'Azawad (FLA) in northern Mali as well as self-defence militias, often working with the authorities, mostly in central Mali. Armed groups' activities include protection rackets; extortion; kidnappings; cattle rustling; trafficking in arms, fuel and motorbikes; and the taxation of both licit and illicit markets, including gold mining, logging and goods smuggled along routes. JNIM, in particular, has operational control across most regions of Mali. It imposes levies on loggers, gold miners and traffickers in exchange for protection and access to resources, effectively functioning as a parallel authority. The group also partakes directly in criminal activities such as cattle rustling, arms trafficking, kidnapping and child recruitment. IS Sahel has extended its territorial hold in the Ménaka region and the wider Liptako-Gourma area, while JNIM has expanded into southern regions of Mali, including Kayes and Sikasso. Although their presence was noted in previous assessments, their control and influence has continued to grow, consolidating their mafia-style structures.

As for other criminal groups active in the country, their level of organization varies according to the illicit economy in which they are involved. While some, such as drugs or

arms trafficking networks are structured and stable, many others (gold mining, fuel trafficking, contraband) involve loosely organized, profit-driven networks that collaborate opportunistically. These loose networks lack the rigid hierarchies seen in mafia-style groups and often shift between markets depending on profitability and changing security dynamics. Individuals involved frequently engage in multiple illicit economies and may form temporary partnerships with the armed groups that control strategic routes or territories. Such cooperation is especially evident near national parks, where individual poachers and hunters, familiar with terrain and security layouts, are approached by VEOs for recruitment or tactical collaboration. These actors often operate outside formal criminal syndicates and pursue illicit activities to supplement their livelihoods. Despite limited new data since the last reporting period, these entrenched networks clearly remain a core component of Mali's criminal landscape.

State-embedded actors play a substantial role in enabling organized crime in Mali. Corruption among border officials, forestry agents and airport security facilitates human trafficking, human smuggling, drug and gold trafficking and illicit logging. These actors frequently accept bribes or payments in exchange for allowing illicit activity to proceed unchecked, undermining enforcement efforts across multiple sectors. In some cases, state involvement goes beyond passive facilitation. Members of the armed forces have reportedly diverted weapons from military stockpiles for sale to armed groups. High-profile political and administrative figures have also been implicated in financial crimes, especially in the form of false contracting, embezzlement and illicit enrichment.

Foreign actors are also influential across a number of criminal markets in Mali. Nigerian nationals are prominently involved in trafficking women for sexual exploitation, while Burkinabè actors engage in gold smuggling and the trafficking of mercury and cyanide for use in gold mines. Chinese nationals have been linked to large-scale logging operations in regions like Kayes, with rosewood (kosso) exports channelled through ports in Senegal for shipment to China. Foreign corporate entities have also been linked to illicit activity in Mali, particularly informal mining operations and the smuggling of excisable consumer goods. The Wagner Group – rebranded Africa Corps – has established a significant presence under the guise of providing security assistance to the transitional government, but has also been implicated in illicit activities such as looting, extortion, motorbike trafficking and cattle rustling.

Mali's private sector plays a dual role in the country's organized crime landscape. While the mining industry includes firms operating legally with proper licences, it also intersects with illicit economies. Gold mining in particular is entangled with smuggling, environmental crimes and tax evasion.

# RESILIENCE

## LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Mali's leadership and governance environment is critically fragile, plagued by entrenched instability on one side and a democratic backslide on the other. The transitional military government has repeatedly delayed the return to civilian rule, long surpassing its initial 24-month self-imposed transition period. In response, a coalition of political parties and civil society organizations have demanded the scheduling of presidential elections. Instead, in April 2024, the authorities suspended all political parties and political activities, intensifying repression. The authoritarian drift has included the banning of media outlets and the arrests of journalists and civil society activists, further narrowing the space for dissent and weakening the foundations of democratic governance. Public dissatisfaction is mounting amid growing insecurity, economic hardship and frequent electricity shortages. In the absence of consistent governance, other actors – including armed groups – have stepped into the void, positioning themselves as providers of security and livelihoods, especially in gold-rich areas or forest zones. In contrast, where state representatives are present, they are often perceived as predatory, engaging in extortion at checkpoints and border crossings for example, which further erodes public trust in state institutions.

Government transparency and accountability remains a key vulnerability. Although the country has special institutions tasked with combating corruption, their efforts have yielded limited results. Bribery and embezzlement persist at all levels of government, particularly in public procurement, and prosecutions are rare. State-embedded actors play a prominent role in enabling organized crime, with some directly implicated in financial misconduct. While arrests of high-profile figures for embezzlement have been made, including senior government officials, the selective nature of these crackdowns – often targeting those associated with previous regimes – suggest that anti-corruption efforts may be being used for political consolidation rather than systemic reform. Freedom of information has declined markedly since the military assumed power. Access to government documents is highly restricted, and journalists reporting on governance or security matters face harassment, threats or exile. Only mining concessions and official gazettes are made publicly available, and current government expenditure remains undisclosed.

Despite officially ratifying key international treaties related to organized crime, Mali's international cooperation has significantly weakened. The expulsion of French forces in August 2022 and the departure of the United Nations peacekeeping mission (MINUSMA) in December 2023, reflected a shift away from its traditional international partners. The government has instead embraced new alliances with Russia and Türkiye, which has led to

cooperation with the Wagner Group (Africa Corps) and the acquisition of Turkish military technology. Mali's 2024 withdrawal from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), alongside Burkina Faso and Niger, has further isolated the country regionally. Although these three countries have established the Alliance des Etats du Sahel, aimed at mutual defence and cooperation, Mali's disengagement from more established regional frameworks may hinder collective responses to organized crime.

Mali's legal framework criminalizes a wide range of organized crime-related activities, including those under the UN Convention against Corruption, although enforcement remains inconsistent. While the country has adopted various laws to address trafficking and illicit enrichment, gaps remain – such as the lack of a clear legal definition of hereditary slavery as a form of human trafficking. Additionally, although Mali has passed legislation punishing participation in armed groups, there is no legal provision that formally recognizes organized crime as a distinct offence. In 2024, a cybersecurity strategy was introduced to address rising cybercrime, aiming to fill legal and institutional gaps in that sector.

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

The judicial system in Mali suffers from significant structural weaknesses. Despite constitutional guarantees of independence, the judiciary is subordinate to the executive. Military courts continue to exercise jurisdiction over offences committed by military personnel against civilians. Arbitrary arrests, extended pretrial detentions and violations of due process are widespread and have been increasing since the military takeover, through the Agence Nationale de la Sécurité d'Etat. Many detainees are held without formal charges, and access to justice remains prohibitively expensive and bureaucratic. Conditions in detention facilities are dire. Overcrowding with resulting unsanitary and unsafe conditions are pervasive, with pretrial detainees constituting the majority of the prison population. This environment fosters the spread of disease and violence among inmates.

Law enforcement capacity is similarly constrained. While specialized units dedicated to countering terrorism and transnational organized crime exist, their operational effectiveness is significantly hampered by insufficient resources, limited technical capacity and inadequate training. Enforcement is hampered by frequent staff rotations, poor knowledge of the relevant laws and collusion between officials and traffickers. Cases of bribery, victim re-trafficking and tip-offs to criminals were documented, reflecting the fragility of institutional safeguards.

The country's territorial integrity is deeply compromised. The government does not control large swathes of the country, especially in northern and central regions, where violent extremist organizations such as JNIM and IS Sahel operate. Even in the southern regions – including Kayes, Sikasso and Koulikoro – JNIM has established a foothold. Although since 2023 Malian armed forces and their foreign partners have regained control of the urban centres in northern Mali (such as Kidal), their presence remains limited to the cities themselves and does not extend into surrounding areas. Mali's role as a trafficking hub is exacerbated by porous borders, corruption among customs officials and insufficient border control capacity. Border agents have reportedly formed illicit partnerships with smugglers and frequently accept bribes to overlook contraband. This complicity enables the continued flow of illicit goods and undermines national security. However, the extreme levels of insecurity in many areas make them less attractive to criminal networks.

## ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

In 2023, the government adopted a draft decree to amend the law on freezing assets related to terrorism and weapons proliferation. The measure seeks to align Mali's framework with international standards set by the Financial Action Task Force and strengthen the powers of designated authorities. Mali's continued membership of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) offers a level of continuity in its financial framework in spite of the country's withdrawal from ECOWAS. WAEMU's unified legal and financial intelligence systems provide essential infrastructure for countering financial crime. Nonetheless, the prospect of further isolation due to political developments poses a risk to the country's economic and regulatory stability.

The economic regulatory environment faces acute challenges. The rise of trafficking in goods such as counterfeit medicines, foodstuffs and tobacco has disrupted licit economic activity, as has the extreme level of instability. Artisanal gold mining – predominantly informal and largely outside state control – accounts for a substantial untaxed economic output. The sector continues to enable tax evasion, environmental degradation and money laundering. Mali's fragile economy remains dependent on informal sectors as well as external aid, and is highly vulnerable to external shocks, including global commodity prices and shifting geopolitical alliances. The departure from ECOWAS may further strain economic activity, especially in regional trade. All of these challenges combined will hold back the creation of a competitive economic environment in Mali.

## CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

During the reporting period, Mali's transition government decreased its efforts to identify and assist trafficking victims, reporting significantly fewer identified victims compared to previous years. While some victims (including child soldiers and foreign nationals) were referred to care services, NGOs and international organizations continued to provide the majority of victim support, often with limited government assistance. Shelters and specialized services are inadequate, particularly outside Bamako. Shelters are inadequate and rising insecurity further constrains service delivery in the northern and central regions. Victims of hereditary slavery remain largely unidentified and underserved, and male victims continue to face barriers to accessing care. While conferences and regional programmes have been organized, drug treatment services are sparse, particularly in conflict-affected areas.

The government has made modest prevention efforts. In the anti-trafficking domain, awareness-raising campaigns and a new national action plan have been implemented. However, many preventive measures remain underdeveloped. Authorities have not regulated Quranic schools or combated forced child begging, and minimal resources have been allocated to addressing exploitative recruitment or the informal labour market. There is no national strategy related to drug prevention, but the country set up a demand reduction programme in late 2024 where the link between terrorism and drug trafficking and consumption was highlighted. Non-state actors, including NGOs and civil society organizations, face increasing restrictions. Following the 2020 coup, groups focusing on human rights and governance have experienced threats, surveillance and violence. The government banned NGOs receiving French funding, significantly curtailing humanitarian operations. All external funding for NGOs is now subject to state review, complicating operations and reducing effectiveness. Mali's media environment has also deteriorated sharply. Journalists critical of the junta face intimidation, censorship or imprisonment, while foreign reporters are routinely denied accreditation or expelled. Major international broadcasters are banned from operating in the country. Reporting from conflict zones is particularly dangerous, with abductions and killings of community radio workers reported in recent years. These conditions have stifled independent journalism and limited the flow of credible information.

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