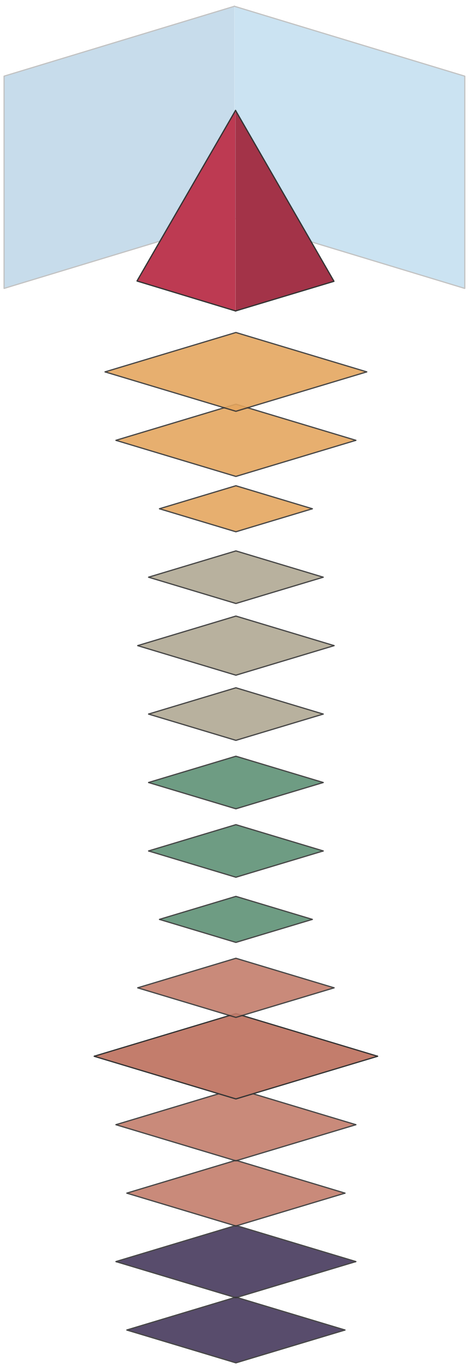
GLOBAL ORGANIZED CRIME INDEX

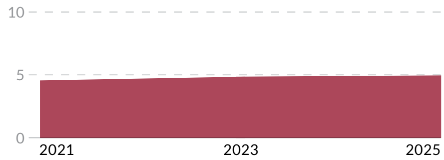
GLOBAL INITIATIVE AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

PORTUGAL



4.97 ↗0.08
CRIMINALITY SCORE

103rd of 193 countries ↗1
19th of 44 European countries ↗2
4th of 8 Southern European countries ↗1



CRIMINAL MARKETS	**4.73**	↗0.07
HUMAN TRAFFICKING	6.00	↗0.50
HUMAN SMUGGLING	5.50	↗0.50
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	3.50	0.00
ARMS TRAFFICKING	4.00	0.00
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	4.50	0.00
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	4.00	0.00
FLORA CRIMES	4.00	0.00
FAUNA CRIMES	4.00	0.00
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	3.50	0.00
HEROIN TRADE	4.50	↘0.50
COCAINE TRADE	6.50	↗0.50
CANNABIS TRADE	5.50	0.00
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	5.00	0.00
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	5.50	0.00
FINANCIAL CRIMES	5.00	0.00

CRIMINAL ACTORS	**5.20**	↗0.10
MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	4.50	↘0.50
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	6.00	0.00
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	4.50	0.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	6.00	↗0.50
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	5.00	↗0.50

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

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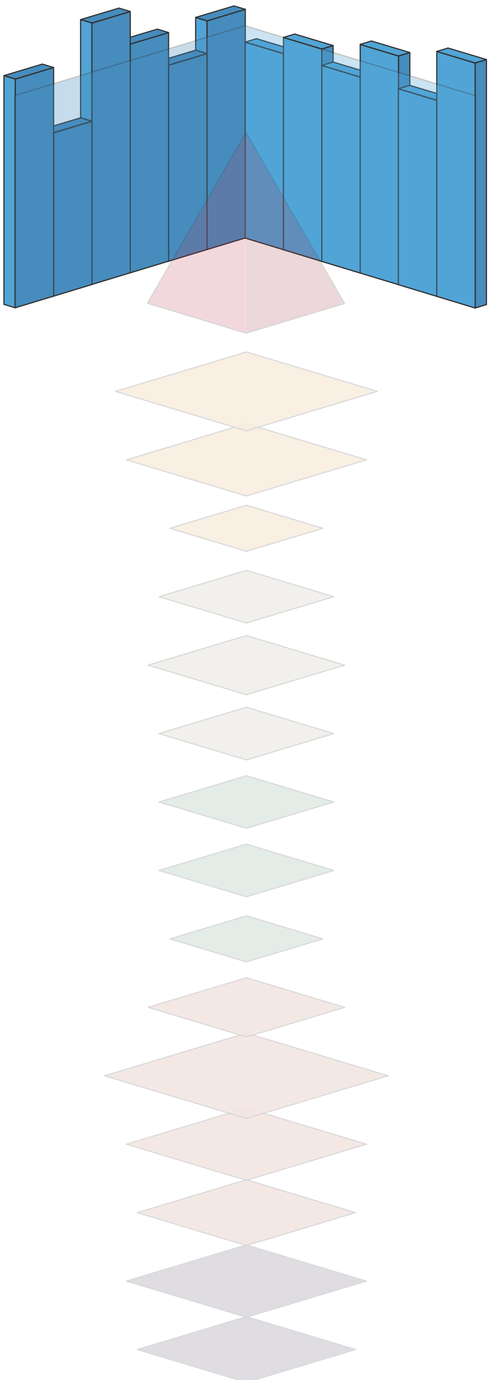
Funded by the European Union

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.

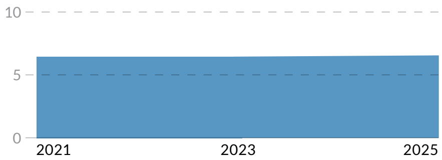
PORTUGAL



6.58 ↗0.08

RESILIENCE SCORE

29th of 193 countries ↗1
21st of 44 European countries -
2nd of 8 Southern European countries -



POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	7.00	0.00
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	5.00	0.00
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	8.00	↗0.50
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	7.00	0.00
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	6.00	0.00
LAW ENFORCEMENT	7.00	0.00
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	6.00	0.00
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	6.50	0.00
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	6.00	↗0.50
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	7.00	0.00
PREVENTION	6.00	0.00
NON-STATE ACTORS	7.50	0.00

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CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

Portugal is predominantly a destination country for human trafficking, with victims largely comprising third-country nationals. However, Portuguese citizens are also subjected to trafficking, primarily for labour exploitation. The agricultural sector, particularly in certain rural regions, relies heavily on undocumented migrant labour, creating an environment conducive to exploitation. Transnational criminal networks have used Portugal as a gateway into the Schengen Area, often subjecting trafficked individuals to forced labour and sexual exploitation. Reports indicate a significant rise in judicial inquiries into human trafficking in the reporting period. Large-scale police operations have exposed the extent of criminal structures dedicated to labour exploitation. Other forms of trafficking have also emerged, including the trafficking of aspiring footballers under false promises of professional careers. Victims from diverse backgrounds are typically lured with deceptive offers based on false premises. Their vulnerability to trafficking is amplified by weaknesses in labour regulations and border control measures. Investigations have revealed that individuals smuggled into Portugal are often forced into exploitative working conditions in industries such as construction, agriculture and domestic services. Portugal serves as both a transit and destination country for human smuggling, with increasing links to human trafficking. Criminal networks exploit vulnerabilities in the country's administrative processes, leveraging delays in the newly established Agency for Integration, Migration and Asylum to facilitate fraudulent applications for residency. A notable case involved a network exploiting Portugal's automatic pre-scheduling system to create fraudulent residence applications. Portuguese authorities actively collaborate with international counterparts, conducting joint operations with Spain and other European nations. Investigations have revealed transnational organizations facilitating illegal migration from Asia and Latin America. Smuggling networks also operate within the country, engaging in document forgery and illegal marriage schemes. The growing involvement of Brazilian organized crime groups has further complicated the landscape, with evidence of these groups leveraging Portuguese legal structures to facilitate document fraud.

Although not a dominant criminal market in Portugal, extortion is often linked to other illicit activities such as drug trafficking and arms possession. High-profile cases in the last few years involved organized groups coercing victims into illicit payments, sometimes under the guise of legal businesses. Despite an increase in extortion cases, Portugal has not seen a large-scale protection racket akin to those in other European countries.

TRADE

Portugal is a known transit point for arms trafficking, particularly for illicit weapons destined for African markets. Domestic arms seizures have increased, with major operations dismantling trafficking networks in recent years. Criminal groups exploit commercial trade flows to camouflage weapon shipments, often integrating them with legitimate dual-use goods. Online platforms, including the dark web, serve as an additional avenue for arms circulation.

The trade in counterfeit goods is a well-established criminal market in Portugal, particularly in apparel and footwear, as well as counterfeit nicotine products. Large-scale law enforcement operations have uncovered networks generating significant illicit revenue. Authorities have dismantled counterfeit production sites and seized large quantities of counterfeit goods. Although law enforcement has had some success, counterfeit goods remain socially accepted among certain segments of the population.

Portugal is involved in both the production and distribution of contraband tobacco, with criminal networks smuggling cigarettes across the Iberian Peninsula. Authorities seized substantial amounts of contraband tobacco in 2024. International cooperation, particularly with Spain, has led to significant crackdowns, yet the market remains lucrative due to high tax differentials on excisable goods.

ENVIRONMENT

Portugal is a destination and transit country for illegal timber, mainly sourced from Brazil. Investigations have linked corporate entities to the trade, with Portugal serving as a conduit for illegal timber shipments into the European market. Europol-led operations have exposed the scale of timber smuggling networks, although enforcement remains insufficient to disrupt the market. Portugal is also a hub for the illegal wildlife trade, particularly in marine species such as Japanese clams and European eels. Criminal groups involved in wildlife crimes frequently overlap with those engaged in illegal migration and labour exploitation. Large-scale operations have dismantled networks trafficking elvers to Asian markets, while illegal harvesting of shellfish remains prevalent along coastal regions. Portugal has been linked to the illicit trade of African diamonds, including smuggling cases connected to conflict zones. Some individuals as well as private sector actors have been implicated in trafficking schemes, underscoring vulnerabilities to corruption, although such reports remain sporadic. Despite these incidents, the non-renewable resources criminal market in Portugal is generally limited and stable.

DRUGS

Portugal remains a transit and destination country for heroin, with established routes from Spain and other European hubs. Although opioid use is reportedly declining, high-profile seizures in 2024 indicate that large-scale trafficking persists. Criminal networks linked to Türkiye and the Western Balkans control much of the trade.

Portugal plays a central role in Europe's cocaine trade, serving as a key entry point for shipments from Latin America. Organized criminal groups from Spain, Brazil and the Western Balkans operate within the country, leveraging maritime and air transport routes. Cocaine processing labs have been dismantled in northern Portugal, signalling a shift toward domestic refinement. Rising cocaine consumption, particularly in urban centres, further fuels market expansion.

Cannabis remains the most widely trafficked drug in Portugal, primarily arriving from North Africa. Maritime smuggling dominates, with criminal organizations utilizing high-speed boats to transport large shipments. Domestic production also exists, often linked to organized crime.

Synthetic drugs, particularly new psychoactive substances, have become a growing concern. Portugal has identified several novel substances, particularly in the Azores and Madeira. The use of postal and parcel services for distribution is increasing, complicating enforcement efforts.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Cybercrime is a consolidated threat in Portugal, with ransomware attacks targeting both public and private institutions. Criminal networks exploit security gaps in digital infrastructure, often demanding ransom payments in cryptocurrency. International cybercriminal groups, including those with links to foreign intelligence entities, have been implicated in cyberespionage campaigns against Portuguese institutions.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crime is deeply entrenched in Portugal, with tax fraud and VAT fraud among the most prevalent offenses. High-profile investigations have exposed complex fraudulent schemes involving public funds, real estate and corporate tax evasion. Although authorities have intensified efforts against financial crime, gaps remain in regulatory oversight.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

Portugal has a limited but well-established presence of mafia-style groups, with the most prominent being outlaw motorcycle clubs. Notably, the Hells Angels have been present in the country since the early 2000s, and Los Bandidos have been attempting to expand their operations in recent years. These groups engage in various criminal activities, including extortion, drug trafficking and arms smuggling. Their internal structures follow a hierarchical model, with membership being exclusive and controlled through strict initiation processes. Tensions between these groups have led to violent clashes, with law enforcement intervening on multiple occasions to prevent escalating conflicts. While the Hells Angels have multiple branches across Lisbon, Porto and the Algarve, Los Bandidos remain largely confined to Lisbon. Despite law enforcement crackdowns, both groups continue to operate, utilizing their transnational networks to facilitate illicit activities. Their ability to embed themselves in local criminal markets, particularly in drug distribution and protection rackets, presents an ongoing challenge for Portuguese authorities. The surge in gang violence reported in previous years has subsided, indicating a downward trend in such incidents.

Portugal hosts a range of criminal networks that operate both independently and in collaboration with foreign actors. These networks are heavily involved in drug trafficking, human trafficking and illicit trade, particularly through Portugal's ports and airports. Domestic criminal groups are key players in the retail drug market, fauna crimes and counterfeit goods distribution. These groups tend to be opportunistic and adaptable, forming temporary alliances with larger transnational organizations to access illicit supply chains. Recent reports highlight Portugal's role in transnational criminal networks engaging in VAT fraud, wildlife trafficking and illicit drug distribution. The presence of transnational criminal organizations is especially evident in the narcotics trade, where Portuguese groups facilitate the import and distribution of cocaine, cannabis and synthetic drugs. Urban centres such as Lisbon and Porto, as well as the southern regions along the Tejo River, have become focal points for organized drug-related activities.

Portugal has witnessed repeated instances of corruption and abuse of power among state-embedded actors. Notably, recent scandals have implicated government officials in corruption, leading to political resignations and a reassessment of regulatory measures. One of the key issues is the continued operation of residency-for-investment programmes, such as the 'Golden Visa' and 'Green Visa' schemes, which have been criticized for enabling money laundering and facilitating organized crime. These programmes have drawn scrutiny from international organizations and have been identified as potential loopholes that criminal entities exploit to gain entry into the European financial system. Additionally, a lack of transparency in lobbying and financial disclosures for political figures further exacerbates concerns over governance integrity. Beyond financial crimes, state-embedded actors have also been linked to cases of illicit resource exploitation. Though not a widespread phenomenon, there have been instances of public officials being accused of trafficking illicit goods, such as diamonds and gold, during overseas peacekeeping missions. Despite ongoing efforts to strengthen anti-corruption frameworks, Portugal continues to face significant challenges in fully addressing state-linked criminal facilitation.

Portugal is a strategic location for foreign criminal actors, with networks from Spain, Brazil, Italy, the Western Balkans and West Africa actively operating within its borders. The country's geographical position makes it a key transit hub for narcotics, arms and human trafficking. Foreign actors frequently collaborate with domestic networks, leveraging local infrastructure and legal loopholes to conduct operations. Brazilian criminal organizations, notably Primeiro Comando da Capital and Comando Vermelho, have consolidated their presence in Portugal, using the country as a base for drug trafficking and money laundering operations. Reports indicate that these groups have infiltrated visa acquisition processes, using fraudulent means to legalize their presence in Portugal. The growing presence of these actors has been linked to rising violence and drug-related crime, particularly in Lisbon and the southern coastal areas. Italian criminal syndicates, such as the Camorra and 'Ndrangheta, have also been active in Portugal, with recent arrests highlighting their role in laundering proceeds from international drug trafficking. Additionally, international drug traffickers from the Western Balkans have been detained in Portugal, further demonstrating the country's role as a safe haven for foreign criminal elements. West African networks have primarily been associated with financial fraud and human trafficking, utilizing Portugal as both an operational base and transit point for illicit activities.

The involvement of private-sector actors in organized crime in Portugal is most evident in financial crimes, drug trafficking and human trafficking. Some businesses serve as intermediaries for illicit trade, facilitating money laundering and tax evasion through seemingly legitimate operations. A growing concern is the role of Portuguese import companies in drug smuggling, with reports indicating that certain business owners collaborate with criminal organizations to conceal narcotics within legal shipments. The football industry has also been implicated in organized crime activities, with fraudulent player recruitment schemes leading to human trafficking cases. Investigations have uncovered cases in which aspiring footballers, particularly minors from South America and Africa, were lured into the country under false promises of professional contracts, only to be subjected to exploitative conditions. The use of football clubs as fronts for money laundering has also been flagged as a key issue, with some criminal groups leveraging the sport's financial opacity to move illicit funds. Additionally, concerns have been raised regarding the involvement of private corporations in large-scale tax fraud and corruption. The lack of robust oversight in financial transactions has allowed criminal entities to exploit gaps in regulatory enforcement. Investigations have linked certain business figures to fraudulent schemes involving international financial transfers and corporate bribery, demonstrating the intersection between white-collar crime and organized criminal activities.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Portugal maintains a stable parliamentary democracy characterized by a multiparty political system and regular transitions of power. Although civil liberties are broadly protected, concerns persist regarding corruption, constraints on journalism and the treatment of marginalized communities. Corruption remains a major issue, with public perception ranking it among the highest in the EU. Despite this, international governance indicators rate Portugal highly in government effectiveness, reflecting the country's capacity to implement policy and uphold legal frameworks. Organized crime, although not a primary concern for the international community, remains a national priority. The Criminal Policy Law for 2023–2025 explicitly highlights the prevention of organized crime, including human trafficking and financial fraud, as key areas of focus. The state budget for 2024 has allocated additional resources to combat human trafficking, with measures aimed at strengthening victim identification, improving recruitment oversight and enhancing enforcement efforts. The government has also taken steps to increase transparency by ending the controversial 'Golden Visa' programme, which was previously linked to illicit financial activities.

Portugal's national anti-corruption strategy (2020–2024) outlines measures to enhance transparency, ethics and enforcement. However, high-profile corruption cases, including the resignation of the prime minister in 2023 due to an influence-peddling investigation, underscore persistent governance challenges. Although Portugal has strong institutional frameworks, implementation gaps remain, particularly in the oversight of political and financial activities. Reports from international watchdogs call for enhanced regulatory mechanisms, including stricter conflict-of-interest policies and improved integrity vetting for government officials. Furthermore, transparency remains limited regarding politicians' asset declarations and lobbying activities.

Portugal has ratified all major international legal instruments related to organized crime and actively participates in international initiatives. The country collaborates with Europol, Eurojust and regional programmes targeting cybercrime and maritime trafficking. Bilateral agreements with countries such as Angola and Brazil focus on countering money laundering and transnational organized crime. Despite strong international engagement, corruption in public institutions remains a concern, with external reports highlighting deficiencies in political integrity measures.

National policies address a wide range of organized crime issues, with legal provisions criminalizing human trafficking, drug trafficking and illicit resource crimes. Portugal's decriminalization of drug use has shaped its response to narcotics-related offenses, emphasizing rehabilitation over punitive measures. Though the country's cybercrime and financial crime laws have evolved, regulatory gaps persist, particularly regarding cryptocurrency transactions and digital fraud. Additionally, human smuggling laws require profit motives to establish criminal liability, which may hinder enforcement efforts.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Portugal's judiciary is independent, but inefficiencies in the legal system, such as lack of resources and delays in high-profile cases, have been flagged by international organizations. Although some recent cases have underscored the need for stronger anti-corruption measures in the justice system, ongoing efforts have focused on prioritizing financial crime investigations and expanding judicial oversight.

Law enforcement agencies, particularly the judicial police, play a central role in tackling organized crime. However, the restructuring of border control functions following the dissolution of the Foreigners and Borders Service has been met with criticism, particularly concerning human trafficking investigations. Portugal has faced recruitment challenges in law enforcement, with issues related to resource allocation and workforce aging. Cases of misconduct, including officers engaged in hate speech and corruption, have also affected public trust. Despite these challenges, specialized cybercrime and financial crime units have been established, enhancing the country's investigative capabilities.

Portugal's geographical position and extensive coastline present challenges in securing territorial integrity, particularly against drug trafficking networks. Corruption among port and airport employees has been reported, with several arrests linked to organized crime operations. Authorities have noted an increase in aerial drug trafficking, particularly from Brazil. Law enforcement has intensified maritime surveillance, but significant challenges remain in preventing illicit goods from entering the country.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Portugal has robust anti-money laundering laws, but enforcement gaps persist. The financial intelligence unit plays a central role in monitoring suspicious transactions, yet international assessments highlight deficiencies in the country's adherence to EU anti-money laundering directives. Reports indicate that money laundering risks remain high, particularly within real estate and financial sectors. Portuguese authorities have shown increased commitment to prosecuting money laundering cases, but further action is needed to strengthen regulatory compliance.

The country's economic regulatory framework aligns with international standards, but labour exploitation remains an issue. Criminal organizations have infiltrated certain sectors, including private security and agriculture, where cases of labour trafficking have been identified. Portugal has historically been seen as a favourable jurisdiction for cryptocurrency transactions due to lenient tax policies, though recent legislative changes have introduced capital gains taxes on short-term holdings. Regulatory authorities have also increased monitoring of fraud schemes exploiting artificial intelligence technologies.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Portugal provides government-funded support for victims of human trafficking and drug addiction, with services operated through integrated response centres and shelters. Civil society organizations play a leading role in victim assistance, particularly for trafficked individuals. However, limited shelter capacity remains a challenge, particularly for male victims. A national strategy for victim protection was introduced in 2024 to enhance multidisciplinary support structures. Although human rights conditions remain stable, reports indicate that professionals working in victim services lack sufficient resources and training.

Prevention efforts in Portugal focus largely on human trafficking and drug-related crimes. National action plans addressing human trafficking have been implemented, though updates to these frameworks have been delayed. Public awareness campaigns are conducted annually, particularly on the European Day Against Trafficking in Human Beings. Recent government efforts have prioritized cybersecurity threats, with Portugal participating in international cybercrime prevention networks. The country has also intensified efforts to combat foreign bribery, though challenges persist in prosecuting such incidents.

Portugal's civil society operates freely, with press freedom rankings placing it among the world's top countries. However, journalists face economic insecurity, threats and legal constraints that may affect investigative reporting. The country's right-to-information law is considered outdated, and watchdog organizations have called for stronger enforcement of transparency measures. Civil society organizations actively engage in anti-trafficking initiatives, running shelters and advocacy programmes. Although non-state actors contribute significantly to crime prevention, organizations supporting minority groups have faced political opposition and funding challenges.

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.