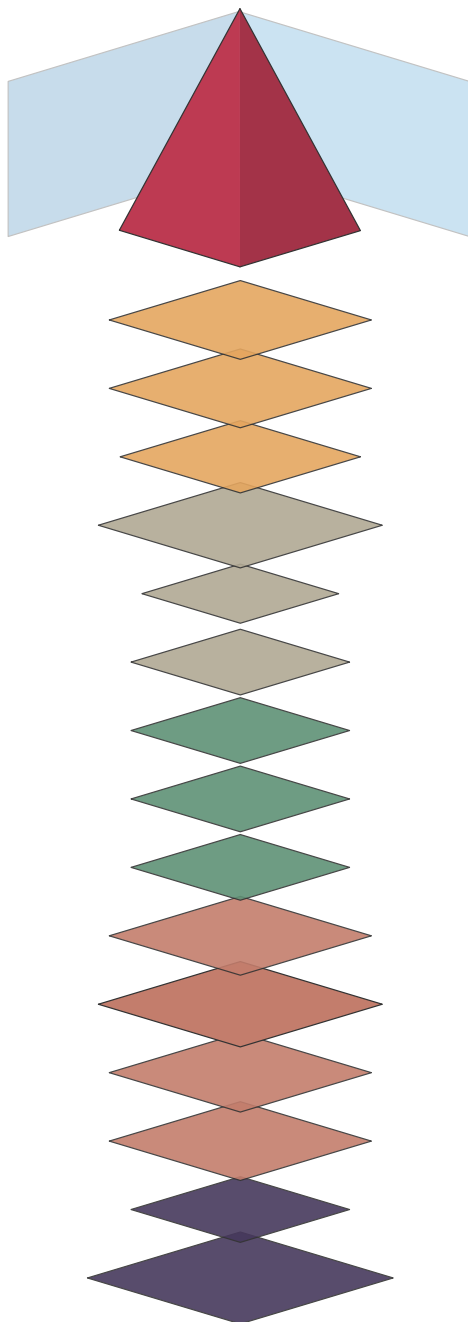


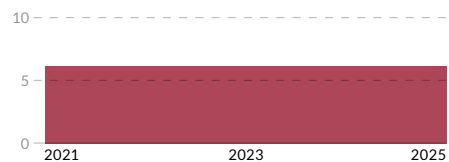


SERBIA



6.18 $\nearrow 0.03$
CRIMINALITY SCORE

47th of 193 countries $\nearrow 7$
4th of 44 European countries $\nearrow 1$
3rd of 17 Central and Eastern European countries -



CRIMINAL MARKETS 5.67 $\nearrow 0.07$

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	6.00	0.00
HUMAN SMUGGLING	6.00	$\nearrow 0.50$
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	5.50	0.00
ARMS TRAFFICKING	6.50	0.00
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	4.50	0.00
ILLCIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	5.00	0.00
FLORA CRIMES	5.00	0.00
FAUNA CRIMES	5.00	0.00
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	5.00	0.00
HEROIN TRADE	6.00	$\nearrow 1.00$
COCAINE TRADE	6.50	$\nearrow 0.50$
CANNABIS TRADE	6.00	0.00
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	6.00	0.00
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	5.00	0.00
FINANCIAL CRIMES	7.00	0.00



CRIMINAL ACTORS 6.70 0.00

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	6.00	0.00
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	7.00	0.00
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	8.00	0.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	6.50	0.00
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	6.00	0.00



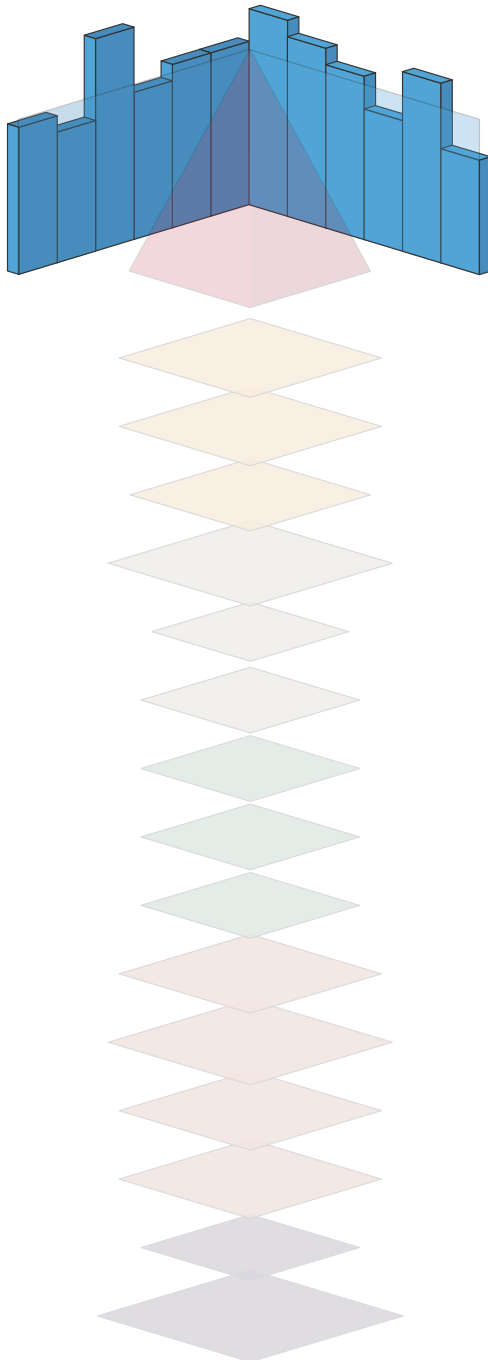
This project was funded in part
by a grant from the United
States Department of State.



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.



SERBIA



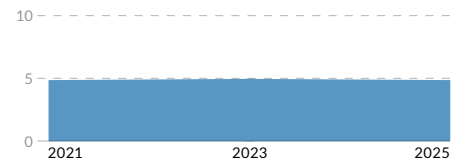
4.92 $\nearrow 0.04$

RESILIENCE SCORE

91st of 193 countries $\nearrow 2$

35th of 44 European countries $\nearrow 1$

9th of 17 Central and Eastern European countries $\nearrow 1$



POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	4.50	0.00
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	4.00	0.00
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	6.50	0.00
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	4.50	$\nearrow 0.50$
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	5.00	0.00
LAW ENFORCEMENT	5.00	0.00
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	6.00	0.00
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	5.50	0.00
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	5.00	0.00
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	4.00	0.00
PREVENTION	5.50	0.00
NON-STATE ACTORS	3.50	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.

CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

Human trafficking in Serbia remains a significant issue, with the country serving as an origin, transit and destination point for victims. Criminal networks, state-embedded actors and individuals in the private sector are involved in various forms of exploitation, including forced labour, sexual exploitation and coerced criminal activities. Vulnerable populations, such as migrants, refugees and the Roma community, are at heightened risk. Sexual exploitation is the most common form of human trafficking in the country, facilitated by various online platforms and the 'lover boy' recruitment method. The increasing incidence of forced labour, characterized by practices such as wage withholding, passport confiscation, debt bondage and hazardous working conditions, particularly affects foreign workers from India and Vietnam, highlighting ongoing concerns.

The human smuggling market, although disrupted by law enforcement operations in 2023, remains active. Serbian police have dismantled several smuggling networks, resulting in a shift in smuggling routes from Hungary to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Smugglers utilize social media for recruitment and rely on the 'hawala' system for secure transactions. Afghan, Moroccan and Syrian smuggling gangs continue to exploit Serbia's strategic location along the Balkan migration route. Despite a significant reduction in clandestine border crossings, Serbia remains one of the leading smuggling hubs in the Western Balkans.

Extortion and protection racketeering are prevalent in Serbia. Businesses, particularly in the hospitality sector, are pressured to tolerate or facilitate illegal activities in exchange for protection. Private security firms are often implicated in coercive practices that blur the distinction between legitimate security services and extortion.

TRADE

Serbia is a transit country for arms trafficking, with weapons originating from the Yugoslav wars, as well as weapons originating from Türkiye, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo, North Macedonia and potentially Ukraine, passing through Serbia toward Western Europe. Criminal networks from Kosovo, Albania and Serbia facilitate this trade, while corrupt state officials have allegedly been involved in illegal arms shipments. In recent years, there has been an increase in the smuggling of weapons from Serbia to Kosovo, including military-grade arms. Furthermore, there were also reports of weapons from Serbia being trafficked, via Argentina, into the hands of

Brazilian groups such as Primeiro Comando da Capital and Comando Vermelho. Recent cases have highlighted the country's role as a destination country for the smuggling of firearms from Austria, the Czech Republic and Germany into Serbia, where they are used by organized crime groups. Despite ongoing efforts to curb arms trafficking, Serbia continues to face challenges in controlling the illicit trade.

The counterfeit goods market in Serbia is extensive, with unregistered traders distributing fake branded products, particularly through online platforms. Counterfeit clothing, electronics and household goods are widely available, driven by both domestic and foreign actors. The illicit tobacco market has also gained traction, with authorities utilizing satellite technology to monitor illegal tobacco cultivation and production. While law enforcement efforts have led to an increase in seizures and targeted inspections, the counterfeit trade remains highly profitable and challenging to dismantle due to the evolution of distribution networks and high consumer demand.

The illicit trade of excise goods in Serbia primarily involves the smuggling of tobacco and alcohol. Legal tobacco companies operating in Serbia have been negatively impacted by the black market, despite authorities confiscating substantial quantities of illicit tobacco. While the consumption of illegal tobacco in Serbia is relatively low, the black market remains a persistent challenge.

ENVIRONMENT

Flora-related crimes in Serbia involve illegal logging operations, particularly in the southern and eastern regions. Criminal networks from Kosovo collaborate with local actors to exploit Serbian forests, often using heavy machinery to facilitate large-scale deforestation. The high demand for firewood, combined with inefficient reforestation efforts, has led to a reduction in forest cover, leaving Serbia behind its neighbours in conservation efforts.

Fauna crimes in Serbia involve both domestic and transnational actors engaged in the illicit trade of exotic birds and reptiles. The trafficking of songbirds from Guinea through Serbia to European pet markets highlights the role of Serbian smuggling networks in exploiting regulatory loopholes. Private-sector actors, including airlines, have been implicated in facilitating this trade. Additionally, illegal poaching along the Kosovo border remains a concern, with local species such as goldfinches being targeted for illicit sale.

Non-renewable resource crimes in Serbia primarily involve fuel smuggling along the Danube River. Criminal networks and state-embedded actors conduct highly organized smuggling operations, moving fuel from Moldova and Ukraine through Romania and Hungary before distributing

it within Serbia. The demand for smuggled fuel remains high due to price disparities with neighbouring countries. Furthermore, controversies surrounding lithium mining projects, particularly the reintroduction of the Jadar Valley project, have ignited public opposition and raised concerns about regulatory transparency.

DRUGS

Serbia remains an integral part of the heroin trafficking route into Western Europe, although seizures have decreased as smugglers increasingly rely on maritime transport. The Balkan route, which channels heroin from Türkiye and Iran, still traverses Serbia; however, overland smuggling has diminished. Despite the country no longer being a primary trafficking route, Serbian criminal actors continue to participate in international heroin operations.

The cocaine trade in Serbia is well established, with Serbian criminal networks playing a prominent role in global trafficking. Some groups maintain deep connections with Colombian and European traffickers, smuggling large quantities of cocaine from South America to European markets. Port employees are particularly vulnerable to coercion by these groups, with reports of Serbian and Albanian traffickers intimidating dock workers. Additionally, these networks often corrupt state officials in the regions where they operate. Cocaine is typically smuggled into Serbia from Western Europe, Türkiye and Montenegro, with large seizures usually being extremely pure and uncut. In contrast, smaller seizures are mixed with paracetamol, creatine and caffeine.

Cannabis trafficking in Serbia is consolidated, involving both domestic criminal networks and foreign actors. The notorious 'Jovanjica' case highlighted state involvement in cannabis cultivation. Albania remains the main supplier of cannabis, passing through Serbia on its way to Western Europe. Nevertheless, Serbian authorities have uncovered several indoor cannabis farms, indicating a shift towards domestic production. Cross-border smuggling persists, with Kosovo acting as a key transit point. The synthetic drug market in Serbia is becoming increasingly sophisticated, with MDMA, amphetamines and fentanyl being the most commonly trafficked substances. Serbian criminal actors have been linked to darknet markets, facilitating international sales. Law enforcement efforts have resulted in notable arrests, including those of operators involved in synthetic drug distribution networks. Despite these interventions, the market continues to expand, with Serbia serving as both a producer and a transit country.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Cybercrime in Serbia is on the rise, with ransomware attacks and cryptocurrency-related fraud becoming increasingly frequent. Criminal groups exploit vulnerabilities in both public and private sector institutions, with major breaches

targeting Serbian infrastructure, including the national power company. The rising frequency of cyberattacks on the public and private sectors is a growing concern, particularly due to Serbia's inadequate response to the issue.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crimes in Serbia are deeply entrenched, involving a network of criminal organizations, state-embedded actors and transnational syndicates. While authorities have intensified financial investigations and asset seizures, large-scale tax evasion, embezzlement and fraudulent schemes persist, often implicating high-ranking officials. Cyber-enabled financial crimes, including business email compromise, phishing, credit card fraud, skimming and an increasing number of cryptocurrency investment scams, have become a growing concern. Law enforcement has made efforts to combat these threats, but regulatory oversight remains weak, allowing fraudulent financial activities to flourish. The Serbian government has faced criticism for its inability to curb political corruption and financial misconduct. A 2024 investment fraud case exposed systemic corruption, with individuals linked to the ruling party accused of orchestrating large-scale tax avoidance schemes. Despite sporadic crackdowns, the enforcement of anti-corruption measures remains inconsistent, allowing financial crimes to thrive within Serbia's political and economic landscape.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

Serbia's mafia-style groups have undergone significant evolution since the fall of communism and the Yugoslav wars, consolidating into powerful entities with an extensive international reach. While the number of these groups has decreased in recent years, their influence remains substantial. Serbia hosts several mafia-style groups, many of which have merged into powerful entities engaged in drug trafficking, arms smuggling, money laundering and document forgery. These groups are highly structured, exhibiting clear hierarchies, defined roles and strict internal enforcement mechanisms. Many operate under the umbrella of larger regional syndicates, particularly the Montenegrin Kavađ and Škaljari clans, which maintain a strong presence in Serbia as well as in neighbouring Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Slovenia. Despite the arrests of key members of these groups, Serbian mafia-style groups continue to dominate various aspects of the European drug trade, investing heavily in legitimate businesses to launder their proceeds and shield their operations from law enforcement scrutiny. Football hooligan groups have also become active in criminal activities, providing logistical support for smuggling operations and engaging in paramilitary activities. Their connections to organized crime extend beyond Serbia, with affiliations to Montenegrin and South American criminal groups involved in narcotics and arms trafficking. Serbia's criminal networks are highly adaptable and play a pivotal

role in organized crime, particularly in drug trafficking. Unlike hierarchical mafia-style groups, these networks lack a clear leadership structure but function cohesively due to shared cultural and linguistic ties. Notable Serbian criminal networks include factions led by individuals sanctioned by the US Department of the Treasury for their involvement in corruption and organized crime. These groups play a significant role in smuggling narcotics, arms and illicit financial flows, often employing high levels of violence to maintain control over their operations.

State-embedded actors play a critical role in Serbia's organized crime landscape, with political elites allegedly exerting influence over key criminal markets. Reports indicate that segments of the government and law enforcement are complicit in forced labour, sex trafficking and large-scale arms smuggling, with minimal accountability for implicated officials. Corruption within state institutions facilitates illicit financial transactions and shields criminal enterprises. High-ranking officials have been linked to notorious figures in organized crime. Cases involving the illegal logging of trees by state enterprises, the Ministry of Environment's involvement in the illicit wildlife trade, and financial crimes linked to government infrastructure projects highlight the deep intertwining of political and criminal interests. Documented collaboration between human-smuggling gangs and Serbian border police has also been reported, with organized crime networks allegedly used to intimidate political opponents and manipulate electoral processes. State-backed extortion schemes targeting private businesses have emerged, with government-linked intermediaries reportedly controlling access to public contracts, licences and essential utilities in exchange for political allegiance or financial kickbacks. Foreign criminal actors do not directly control Serbia's criminal markets but

exert significant influence through transnational networks. Montenegrin groups, particularly the Kavač and Škaljari clans, are the most prominent, while Afghan, Moroccan and Syrian smuggling gangs operate along the northern borders. Albanian networks from Kosovo also play a role in cross-border arms trafficking. Serbian groups maintain ties with organizations in South and North America and Western Europe, facilitating global narcotics and arms trade. Russian and Turkish actors are linked to illicit financial flows and smuggling via opaque economic and political channels. Additionally, Serbia's growing ties with Russia, China and Gulf states have raised concerns over transparency in foreign investments and infrastructure projects, which often lack competitive bidding and clear oversight, fuelling suspicions of corruption. The Serbian private sector is deeply intertwined with organized crime, as major businesses frequently operate under the influence of high-ranking political figures. Companies owned or connected to government officials receive preferential treatment in tenders and investments, often serving as intermediaries for illicit financial flows. Businesses outside of political circles repeatedly face coercion, with inspections and audits used as tools of control. Private firms often engage in rigged tenders, securing lucrative contracts despite lacking the necessary experience or legitimacy. Corruption within state agencies enables businesses to acquire state-owned property at below-market value, while informal cash payments to politicians secure access to essential services and regulatory approvals. Industries such as construction, cryptocurrency trading and gambling serve as primary vehicles for money laundering, with criminal networks exploiting these sectors to integrate illicit profits into the legitimate economy.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Serbia's governance structure is characterized by political centralization and limited transparency, with ongoing concerns about electoral integrity and government accountability. The ruling party exerts significant influence over public institutions, the media and the electoral process, which contributes to worries about democratic governance. Although constitutional reforms have been implemented to enhance judicial independence, concerns persist over political influence in key appointments. Corruption continues to undermine governance, with reports indicating the existence of links between certain political figures and organized crime networks. Furthermore, the political elite wields almost unchecked power, and democracy is declining due to a centralized, non-inclusive and non-transparent

decision-making process that hampers legislative scrutiny. Public confidence in democratic institutions remains low, as widespread protests reflect dissatisfaction with governance and policy decisions. Additionally, Serbia's political landscape is shaped by its ambitions for EU accession; however, limited progress in meeting transparency and accountability standards has slowed integration efforts.

Government transparency remains a significant challenge, marked by persistent electoral irregularities, media restrictions and concerns regarding the misuse of public resources. While Serbia has established anti-corruption agencies and introduced measures to improve accountability, their effectiveness is undermined by weak enforcement, insufficient resources and a lack of institutional independence.

Public procurement processes and financial disclosures often lack transparency, creating opportunities for favouritism and cronyism. Despite the existence of a Freedom of Information law, its implementation is inconsistent, with government agencies frequently restricting access to critical public data, thereby limiting oversight and accountability.

Internationally, Serbia has ratified key treaties and participates in various regional security initiatives, including the Southeast European Law Enforcement Center and has established cooperation with INTERPOL and Europol. However, Serbia's relations with Kosovo continue to pose challenges, impacting broader regional stability and cooperation. The country has made strides in preventing cross-border crime but remains cautious about fully aligning with EU standards. Recent agreements with Frontex aim to enhance border security, particularly in combating human smuggling and illicit trade.

Serbia's legislative framework for combating organized crime is comprehensive, but it faces implementation challenges. While efforts have been made to enhance legal instruments, enforcement mechanisms remain weak, particularly in addressing financial crime, political corruption and cyber-dependent offences. Efforts to improve oversight of political financing and anti-money laundering regulations have been initiated; however, loopholes persist, allowing illicit financial flows to continue. Serbia's proposed law to combat organized crime has sparked concern. Amendments to the Criminal Procedure Code, introduced in September 2024, would expand the Security Intelligence Agency's access to electronic communication metadata for all ex officio prosecutions, extending its mandate beyond organized crime and terrorism. Critics warn this conflicts with EU data protection obligations and risks undermining legal safeguards, highlighting the need to balance surveillance powers with privacy rights.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Serbia's judicial system includes specialized units dedicated to prosecuting organized crime, but concerns about judicial independence persist. Political interference in judicial appointments and prosecutorial decisions continues to undermine the system's credibility. High-profile corruption and organized crime cases often fail to result in convictions, and inconsistencies in sentencing further weaken trust in the judiciary. Despite constitutional reforms aimed at strengthening judicial independence, scepticism remains due to persistent political pressure on legal professionals. Delays in judicial proceedings, resource shortages and understaffing further hinder efficiency. Nevertheless, Serbia has taken steps to reduce case backlogs and streamline court practices. Detention conditions remain problematic, with reports of police misconduct and ill treatment of detainees. Corruption within the prison system compromises security, allowing convicted criminals to maintain external communications and exert influence.

Law enforcement agencies operate under considerable political influence, which restricts their autonomy in tackling organized crime. While the police force has conducted operations against criminal networks, the failure to appoint a permanent Director of Police since 2021 has undermined institutional stability. The utilization of security services for political purposes, along with reported links between law enforcement officials and organized crime groups, has further diminished public trust. Despite these challenges, Serbia has demonstrated some success in combating human smuggling and drug trafficking through coordinated police actions and regional collaborations.

Serbia's border security remains vulnerable due to corruption and organized criminal activity, with smuggling networks exploiting enforcement gaps along migration routes and key border crossings. Despite increased cooperation with the EU, including participation in Frontex-led operations, these networks continue to exploit enforcement deficiencies. Large-scale operations targeting human smuggling have been conducted, resulting in a temporary decrease in irregular migration. However, persistent corruption within the border police undermines these efforts, facilitating the continued movement of illicit goods and individuals. Furthermore, tensions surrounding the Kosovo territorial dispute highlight challenges in effective border management.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Serbia has taken steps to enhance its anti-money laundering framework, with a focus on increased oversight of virtual assets and improved transparency in beneficial ownership. However, enforcement remains weak, with financial crime investigations yielding limited results and few convictions. The involvement of politically connected individuals in financial offences further complicates the issue, which is worsened by ineffective reporting mechanisms. Moreover, Serbia still needs to align its legislation with that of the EU. Nevertheless, while proactive financial investigations and systematic tracking of illicit money flows remain underdeveloped, law enforcement agencies, prosecutors and criminal judges have increasingly acknowledged the importance of financial investigations in uncovering criminal activities.

Serbia's economic landscape continues to attract foreign direct investment, particularly from the EU, China and the UK. While the government promotes investment-friendly policies, concerns persist regarding regulatory transparency and preferential treatment in state-backed projects, which limit fair competition and hinder economic expansion. The private sector also grapples with deficiencies in the rule of law, the prevalence of informal economic activities and inadequate antitrust enforcement. Additionally, regulatory unpredictability and insufficient transparency create barriers to sustained growth, despite the country's openness to foreign investment across various sectors.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Victim and witness support mechanisms in Serbia are underdeveloped, with civil society organizations playing a crucial role in providing assistance. Government-run support services lack sufficient resources, particularly for victims of human trafficking. Legal protections for witnesses and whistle-blowers exist but are inconsistently enforced, putting individuals at considerable risk. The absence of effective restitution mechanisms and the frequent penalization of trafficking victims further limit the effectiveness of support frameworks. Despite these challenges, Serbia has recently adopted measures to improve victim identification and support, including the launch of a national trafficking prevention programme.

Crime prevention efforts remain fragmented, characterized by outdated national strategies and limited institutional coordination. The absence of a comprehensive framework for combating organized crime has hindered proactive interventions. Despite these shortcomings, Serbia has implemented thematic strategies that address border security, financial crime and corruption. Community policing initiatives exist, but they are not systematically applied, resulting in disconnects between law enforcement and local populations. Additionally, while Serbia has conducted public awareness campaigns on human trafficking and cybercrime, their impact is limited due to inconsistent implementation and insufficient funding.

Serbia's civil society sector plays a vital role in holding the government accountable, particularly in areas related to corruption, organized crime and human rights. However, civic space is increasingly restricted, with non-governmental organizations facing harassment and stringent regulations. While these organizations are essential for victim support and crime prevention, their participation in policy development remains minimal. Media freedom has deteriorated, with journalists frequently targeted for investigating corruption and state involvement in illicit activities. The heightened threats, harassment and legal pressure faced by journalists have led to increased self-censorship and a decline in investigative reporting on corruption and organized crime. Government-aligned media outlets dominate the landscape, limiting public access to independent reporting. Despite these challenges, investigative organizations continue to expose corruption and organized crime, albeit at considerable personal risk.

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.