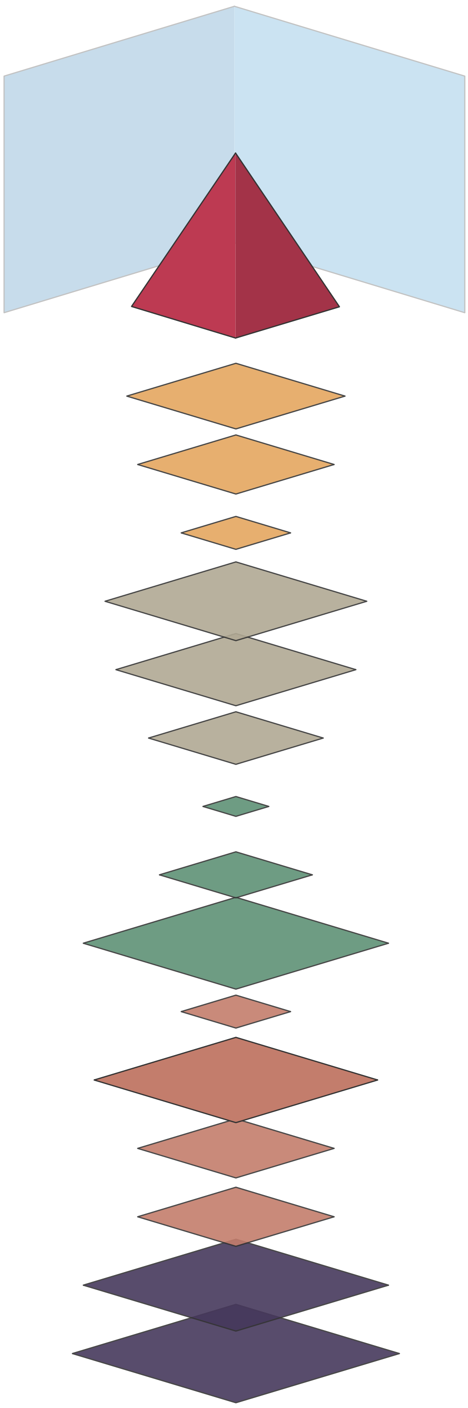
GLOBAL ORGANIZED CRIME INDEX

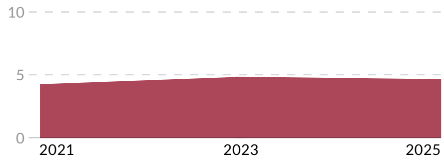
GLOBAL INITIATIVE AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

SWITZERLAND



4.65 ↘0.22
CRIMINALITY SCORE

124th of 193 countries ↘18
27th of 44 European countries ↘5
7th of 11 Western European countries ↘1



CRIMINAL MARKETS 4.80 ↗0.17

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	5.00	0.00
HUMAN SMUGGLING	4.50	↗1.00
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	2.50	0.00
ARMS TRAFFICKING	6.00	↗0.50
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	5.50	↘0.50
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	4.00	0.00
FLORA CRIMES	1.50	0.00
FAUNA CRIMES	3.50	↗0.50
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	7.00	0.00
HEROIN TRADE	2.50	0.00
COCAINE TRADE	6.50	↗0.50
CANNABIS TRADE	4.50	0.00
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	4.50	↗0.50
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	7.00	0.00
FINANCIAL CRIMES	7.50	0.00

CRIMINAL ACTORS 4.50 ↘0.60

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	3.50	↘1.00
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	3.00	↘1.00
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	1.50	↘0.50
FOREIGN ACTORS	7.00	↘0.50
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	7.50	0.00

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

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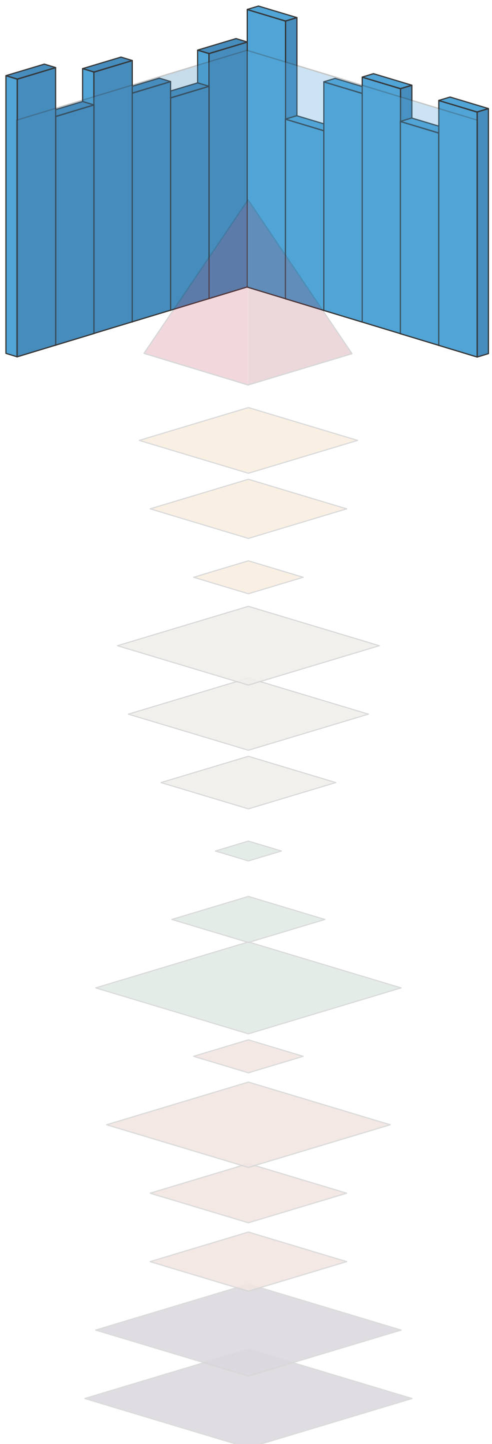
Funded by the European Union

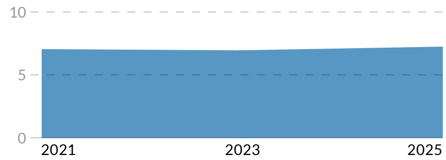
ENACT is funded by the European Union and implemented by the Institute for Security Studies and INTERPOL, in affiliation with the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.

SWITZERLAND



7.25 ↗0.21
RESILIENCE SCORE

24th of 193 countries ↗1
17th of 44 European countries -
9th of 11 Western European countries -



POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	8.50	0.00
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	7.00	↗1.00
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	8.00	0.00
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	7.00	0.00
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	6.50	↘0.50
LAW ENFORCEMENT	7.50	0.00
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	8.50	0.00
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	5.50	↗0.50
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	7.00	↗1.00
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	7.50	↗0.50
PREVENTION	6.50	↗0.50
NON-STATE ACTORS	7.50	↘0.50

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CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

Switzerland functions as both a destination and transit country for human trafficking, with victims exploited mainly in prostitution, domestic work, construction and catering. The steady demand for sex workers is a significant driver of human trafficking for sexual exploitation. Victims originate from a wide range of countries, including Nigeria, Romania, Brazil and Hungary, with African nationals constituting the largest proportion. Nigerian criminal groups, particularly the Black Axe Confraternity, has been identified as active in this market. Trafficking is often under-reported due to the difficulties victims face in obtaining residence permits, which limits their access to protection. Online recruitment methods, such as social media accounts falsely advertising childcare jobs, are increasingly used to lure young women into forced prostitution. There have been reports of Albanian women trafficked under these conditions, as well as cases involving traffickers from Thailand, Nigeria and Spain. While refugees from Ukraine remain at risk, Swiss authorities and NGOs have identified only one suspected case of Ukrainian trafficking to date.

Switzerland also serves as a destination and transit country for human smuggling, particularly through its southern border with Italy and the eastern border with Austria. Migrants use various routes, including train, car and international bus services. Many do not intend to remain in Switzerland but use it as a transit hub en route to other European countries. The smuggling market has been growing, with Switzerland increasingly targeted by organized crime networks, with notable cases involving Iraqi Kurds and Afghan migrants being smuggled into Switzerland. The use of high-quality forged documents has been observed in smuggling operations, particularly those originating from Southeastern Europe. Extortion and protection racketeering have been reported in Switzerland. Motorcycle gangs, particularly the Bandidos and Hells Angels, have been linked to violent extortion cases, including a high-profile 2024 trial involving torture.

TRADE

The arms trafficking market in Switzerland is shaped by the country's high gun ownership rates and relatively liberal firearms regulations. Switzerland has become an arms supply hub for criminal groups, including Italian mafia networks and outlaw motorcycle gangs, who exploit its flexible laws to acquire weapons. Cases of arms-store robberies by criminal groups from France, Belgium and Romania have been documented, with the stolen firearms entering the illicit market. The number of weapons violations has increased in recent years. Also, Switzerland serves as a transit point for arms smuggling networks operating across Europe, supplying criminal groups in neighbouring countries.

The trade in counterfeit goods is expanding, and Swiss companies, especially in the watch and luxury sectors, are suffering significant economic losses. Other counterfeit goods, including pharmaceuticals, electronics and branded clothing, have been found circulating in Swiss markets. The growing prevalence of e-commerce has facilitated the distribution of counterfeit goods, with Swiss postal facilities intercepting small shipments containing fake luxury items daily.

The illicit trade in excisable consumer goods, particularly contraband cigarettes, remains prevalent, with trafficking routes spanning Africa and Europe. Geneva airport has seen a rise in cigarette seizures, often involving traffickers smuggling large quantities in personal luggage. A notable case involved a customs official at Bucharest airport in Romania, who was arrested for facilitating the smuggling of contraband cigarettes into Switzerland by falsifying export invoices. Cigarette smuggling networks have also been reported to be using truck shipments hidden among other legal goods to bypass border controls.

ENVIRONMENT

Switzerland is considered a low-risk country for illegal timber harvesting, although minor cases of unauthorized logging have been reported. The country remains a destination for illicit timber, often arriving with forged documentation. Illegal timber imports, particularly from Southeast Asia, have been flagged in recent customs inspections.

The illegal wildlife trade is largely opportunistic, with cases involving protected parrots, turtles and wild birds smuggled for sale. Illegal caviar trafficking, mainly from Eastern Europe and Russia, is also documented. Switzerland's role as a transit country for exotic animal smuggling has expanded, with reptile markets attracting illicit wildlife traders. Authorities have seized shipments of protected species entering Switzerland via air cargo, often destined for private collectors.

Gold smuggling is a major issue, with Switzerland serving as both a transit and destination hub for illicit gold from Africa and Latin America. Criminal actors, including mafia groups, exploit the opaque gold trading system, using Swiss refineries to launder illicit profits. In a notable operation, authorities dismantled a network smuggling gold from South

America through Switzerland to European markets. Money laundering through gold transactions remains a significant problem due to the difficulty of tracing illicitly mined gold.

DRUGS

Switzerland is a destination for heroin, with ethnic Albanian groups and Italian mafias controlling distribution. Heroin is mainly produced in Afghanistan, and then smuggled to Türkiye and on to Switzerland via the Western Balkans. However, recent data shows that these mafias also collaborate with South American cartels to import huge quantities of heroin into Europe, transiting through Switzerland. The country's heroin-assisted therapy programme has reduced illicit demand, but seizures continue, particularly at airports.

Cocaine trafficking has surged, with Switzerland emerging as a key transit point. The 'Ndrangheta plays a central role, alongside other groups operating from South America. Cocaine purity levels have risen, and prices have dropped, making it more accessible. Crack cocaine use is also increasing, sparking public-health concerns. According to wastewater analysis, some Swiss cities rank among the top European cities in cocaine consumption.

Cannabis remains the most widely used illicit drug, with a vast annual market value flowing to criminal actors. While much of the supply is domestic, imports from Morocco have risen. Large-scale seizures indicate a thriving underground trade, despite ongoing regulatory discussions around legalization.

Synthetic drugs, including MDMA and methamphetamine, are also on the rise. In recent years, synthetic drug seizures at borders increased significantly, with production hubs in the Netherlands, Belgium and Eastern Europe supplying the Swiss market. Law enforcement has dismantled a synthetic drug lab, highlighting local production risks. Wastewater analysis has indicated an increase in amphetamine and Ecstasy consumption in major Swiss cities.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Switzerland experiences a significant level of cyber-dependent crimes, with ransomware attacks and malware infections affecting businesses and individuals. Reports of cybercrime incidents have been frequent in recent years, with hacker groups linked to China, Russia and Iran targeting Swiss institutions. The pro-Russian hacker group NoName has carried out multiple DDoS attacks against Swiss government websites. In January 2024, hackers stole sensitive government data, causing alarm about the state's digital security vulnerabilities. Swiss authorities have also noted an increase in fraudulent schemes using digital currencies, further complicating law enforcement efforts. Fake threats involving acid attacks or bombings have been reported, with demands for ransom payments to be made in cryptocurrency.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Switzerland remains a global hub for financial secrecy, with most risks linked to international corruption cases. Recent scandals, including the Lebanese banking fraud, illustrate systemic vulnerabilities. Swiss banks have been implicated in helping criminals conceal assets. Regulatory actions, including fines and asset seizures, have targeted major financial institutions. Despite efforts to strengthen anti-money laundering (AML) measures, investment fraud and tax evasion remain prevalent. Reports of online financial scams have doubled in recent years, with cyber-enabled fraud playing an expanding role in Switzerland's financial crime landscape. Criminals use phishing scams, voice impersonation and altered images or videos to blackmail victims. AI-driven fraud techniques have grown in sophistication.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

With regards to local mafia-style groups, among the most notorious are the Hells Angels and Bandidos, which have a presence in the country. These motorcycle gangs are involved in drug and arms trafficking, human smuggling and extortion. Rivalries between these groups have occasionally resulted in violent confrontations. However, their broad impact remains limited. The country also hosts only few domestic criminal networks, as the Swiss criminal market is largely controlled by foreign actors.

Switzerland generally has strong institutions and low levels of corruption, but weaknesses have been observed in integrity regulations and lobbying transparency. While there is no substantial evidence of systematic criminal involvement by state-embedded actors, sporadic cases of corruption have sparked concerns.

Switzerland hosts a complex array of international criminal networks, with Italian mafia groups – particularly the 'Ndrangheta – entrenched in local communities through economic activities such as real estate and catering, and involved in money laundering and drug trafficking while avoiding overt violence. The Camorra and Sacra Corona Unita focus on arms, drugs and human trafficking. These groups exploit Switzerland's location and financial systems for illicit logistics and laundering. Alongside them, ethnic Albanian groups and the 'Mocro Mafia' from the Netherlands and Belgium play a major role in the heroin and cocaine trade, collaborating across borders. West African networks, especially Nigerian groups like Black Axe, are implicated in both drug trafficking and forced prostitution, while Romanian gangs have carried out a wave of high-tech ATM robberies. The transnational nature of these groups challenges Swiss law enforcement due to their coordination across European borders and ability to evade prosecution.

Switzerland's private sector remains susceptible to exploitation by organized crime groups, particularly in the financial and real estate industries. Despite regulatory improvements, significant weak points exist in AML enforcement. A recent study showed that one in three Swiss companies admitted to paying bribes abroad, and over half encountered bribery demands. Also, Swiss banks have been implicated in major international money-laundering scandals, such as the Lebanese banking fraud. In response, the Swiss government has introduced stricter due-diligence obligations, requiring enhanced reporting by financial institutions and high-risk businesses. Lawyers, notaries and real estate agents have also been identified as facilitators of financial crime, often enabling criminals to conceal assets. Organized crime groups continue to exploit these weaknesses, using Swiss businesses as conduits for illicit financial flows.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Switzerland has demonstrated a strong stance against organized crime through various government initiatives, including hosting conferences focused on combating human trafficking and participating in international law-enforcement operations against the counterfeiting of pharmaceuticals. The government has also prioritized cybercrime as a major area of intervention, developing specialized units to counter digital threats. However, the coalition-dominated pattern of the political landscape weakens critical debate, as the majority of parliamentarians belong to parties in government, leaving little room for opposition-driven oversight. While Switzerland performs well in governance, there are still flaws in its approach to fighting organized crime. For instance, the country's political rhetoric against organized crime does not always translate into sufficient funding, as evidenced by financial constraints on the Federal Police. International pressure, particularly from Belgium and the Netherlands, has been placed on Switzerland to strengthen its measures against organized crime to prevent further infiltration by mafia-style groups.

Switzerland maintains a high level of government transparency, reinforced by anti-corruption reforms in 2023 and new transparency rules requiring political entities to disclose campaign financing. Although the Council of Europe's Group of States against Corruption has noted limited progress in managing conflicts of interest, regulating lobbying and addressing nepotism – particularly given the risks of undue influence from private sector actors – Switzerland's enhanced party funding transparency has been implemented and has shown some positive results. Switzerland's law on the right of access to information remains weak, with poor appeals mechanisms and insufficient public-disclosure enforcement. Despite these challenges, the country maintains strong budget transparency. Budgetary allocations and government expenditures remain accessible to the public, and civil society groups play an important role in monitoring state spending.

Switzerland actively engages in international cooperation on organized crime matters, adhering to various treaties and agreements. It has extradition agreements with EU member states and has facilitated the return of illicit assets to foreign governments. Swiss authorities have also intensified their participation in Europol and Interpol operations, contributing to the dismantling of transnational criminal organizations. However, Switzerland faces criticism for lagging in international cooperation on AML efforts, prompting the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) to call for improved information-sharing mechanisms. Despite these concerns, Switzerland continues to comply with major international crime-related conventions, including UNTOC and CITES, and has enhanced cross-border police cooperation with European partners.

National policies and laws in Switzerland comprehensively address organized crime, including stringent penalties for human trafficking, drug trafficking and financial crimes. Switzerland has authorized pilot programmes for licensed recreational cannabis production and sales in major cities, though the full impact of these reforms on the illicit market remains unclear. While legislative frameworks exist to combat mafia-style groups, Swiss law does not explicitly criminalize membership in such organizations, a gap that has drawn criticism. Efforts to introduce stricter measures against mafia-linked individuals have been rejected in the past. The government has also bolstered anti-cybercrime legislation, creating specialized units to counter digital threats. Despite advancements, critics argue that legal frameworks remain insufficient to prevent organized crime from infiltrating legitimate economic sectors.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Switzerland's judicial system is structured to handle organized crime cases at both cantonal and federal levels. However, the judiciary's close ties to political parties have cast doubt on its impartiality, as judges must seek re-election every six years and contribute financially to their respective parties. Also, the Federal Office of Police (Fedpol) recently acknowledged that organized crime has demonstrated its ability to infiltrate Switzerland's justice system and current police resources are inadequate to effectively combat it. Prison conditions are generally adequate, but overcrowding remains a persistent issue, particularly in detention centres in Ticino and French-speaking Switzerland. Authorities are exploring alternatives to incarceration to reduce this strain.

Law enforcement in Switzerland is divided between federal and cantonal agencies, with specialized units dedicated to organized crime, financial crimes and cyber threats. Trust in the police remains high, with surveys indicating strong public confidence. However, staffing shortages have strained investigative capacity. Switzerland remains committed to international police cooperation through Europol and Interpol, actively participating in cross-border investigations and intelligence-sharing initiatives.

Switzerland maintains strong territorial integrity, with mostly well-monitored borders. However, the Swiss-Italian border remains a hotspot for drug and human trafficking. In response, additional border personnel have been deployed in Ticino in recent years to enhance security operations. Switzerland benefits from the stability of its neighbouring countries, which eases the pressure on its border controls. Also, Germany has strengthened its checks on its border with Switzerland to curb cross-border criminal activity. The Federal Office for Customs and Border Security oversees border security measures, though officer staffing levels have declined slightly compared to previous years. Cybersecurity has also become a priority, with Switzerland having adopted a new national strategy to combat it.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Switzerland has introduced new AML regulations to tighten oversight on financial transactions and organized crime-linked assets. The framework extends due-diligence requirements to legal professionals, accountants and financial advisers involved in high-risk financial operations. The surge in Suspicious Activity Reports (SARs) has also forced the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) to move from a risk-based approach to one driven by available resources. In response, the FIU has introduced a triage system that prioritizes SARs linked to serious organized crime, while offering only a brief review of other potential offenses. Notwithstanding these improvements, Switzerland remains under scrutiny for weaknesses in AML enforcement. The FATF has urged Swiss authorities to adopt a more systematic approach to combating financial crimes, citing vulnerabilities in customer due-diligence processes. However, Switzerland has improved its standing in FATF evaluations, particularly in the area of international cooperation. Also, the European Union has removed Switzerland from its tax-haven watchlist, recognizing recent regulatory improvements.

Switzerland's economic environment remains one of the most stable in the world, ranking highly for economic freedom and business-friendly regulations. The country continues to attract significant foreign investment. Its robust legal framework protects property rights, enshrined in the Swiss Constitution and enforced through comprehensive laws. Entrepreneurship is flourishing, with a notable rise in new start-ups in 2024, especially in skilled trades, consulting and real estate. Sole proprietorships recorded the fastest growth, while limited liability companies remain the most common legal structure. However, economic crime remains a concern, particularly in relation to financial secrecy and tax evasion. Switzerland has implemented stronger oversight of real estate and trust-related transactions to mitigate money laundering risks. Public-private partnerships, such as the collaboration between financial institutions and the Money Laundering Reporting Office, aim to enhance information sharing and financial crime detection.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Switzerland provides a comprehensive framework for victim and witness support, particularly in cases of human trafficking. Government-funded shelters and legal aid services are available for trafficking victims, though non-state actors continue to play a major role in providing long-term assistance. Swiss law includes provisions for witness protection, coordinated by FedPol. However, the country currently has no comprehensive legal framework in place protecting whistleblowers. Private entities are not required to set up whistleblowing systems, though they may do so voluntarily. In February 2024, Parliament rejected proposed legislation to enhance whistleblower protections, despite backing from business associations. Nevertheless, efforts continue at various levels to strengthen protections, with some cantonal initiatives providing limited safeguards. The Geneva canton adopted the 'Loi sur la protection des lanceurs d'alerte au sein de l'État', which shields whistleblowers from reprisals, professional disadvantages and accusations of breaching confidentiality or official secrecy.

Prevention efforts against organized crime include awareness campaigns on cyber threats and human trafficking. Switzerland launches its anti-trafficking guide for financial institutions, aimed at improving detection of illicit financial flows linked to trafficking networks. The country has a four-pillar drug policy emphasizing health promotion, harm reduction, therapy and law enforcement. The government has also committed to drafting a national strategy to combat organized crime, involving collaboration between federal and cantonal authorities.

Non-state actors, including NGOs and media organizations, play a significant role in combating organized crime in Switzerland. NGOs focus on victim advocacy and awareness campaigns related to human trafficking. The media landscape is generally free, though investigative journalists face legal risks when reporting on financial crime due to strict banking secrecy laws. Switzerland ranks very highly in press-freedom indices, though some constraints to accessing government documents have hindered investigative reporting. Despite these challenges, civil society remains actively engaged in promoting accountability and advocating stronger anti-corruption measures.

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