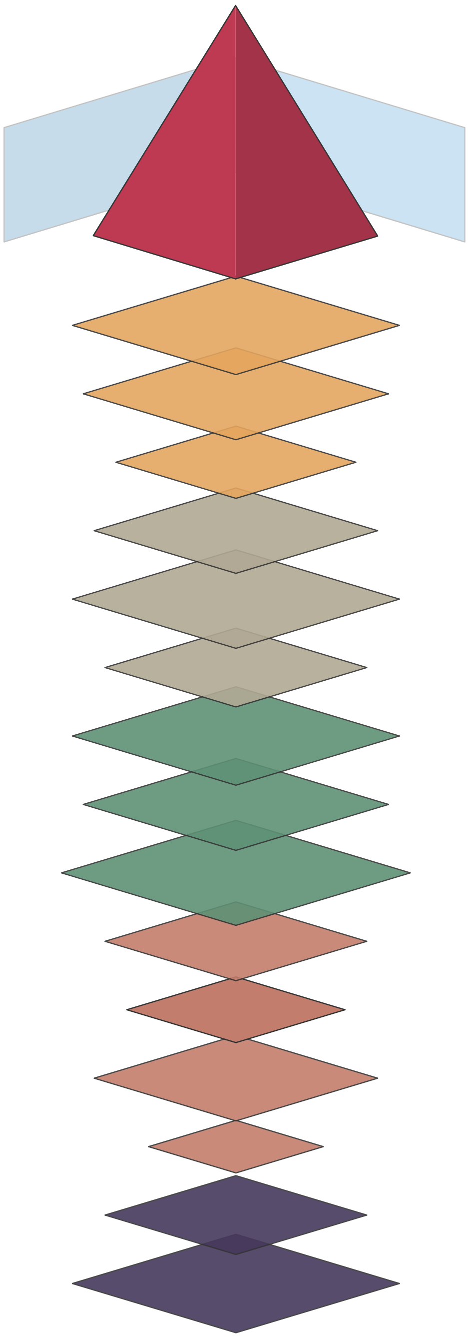
GLOBAL ORGANIZED CRIME INDEX

GLOBAL INITIATIVE AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

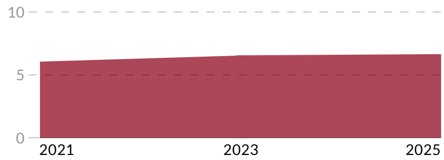
UGANDA



6.65 ↗0.10

CRIMINALITY SCORE

26th of 193 countries ↗3
7th of 54 African countries -
2nd of 9 East African countries -



CRIMINAL MARKETS	6.50	↗0.10
HUMAN TRAFFICKING	7.50	0.00
HUMAN SMUGGLING	7.00	↗0.50
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	5.50	↗0.50
ARMS TRAFFICKING	6.50	↘0.50
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	7.50	0.00
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	6.00	0.00
FLORA CRIMES	7.50	↗0.50
FAUNA CRIMES	7.00	0.00
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	8.00	0.00
HEROIN TRADE	6.00	0.00
COCAINE TRADE	5.00	↗0.50
CANNABIS TRADE	6.50	0.00
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	4.00	0.00
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	6.00	0.00
FINANCIAL CRIMES	7.50	0.00

CRIMINAL ACTORS	6.80	↗0.10
MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	5.50	0.00
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	7.00	↗0.50
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	8.00	0.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	7.00	0.00
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	6.50	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.

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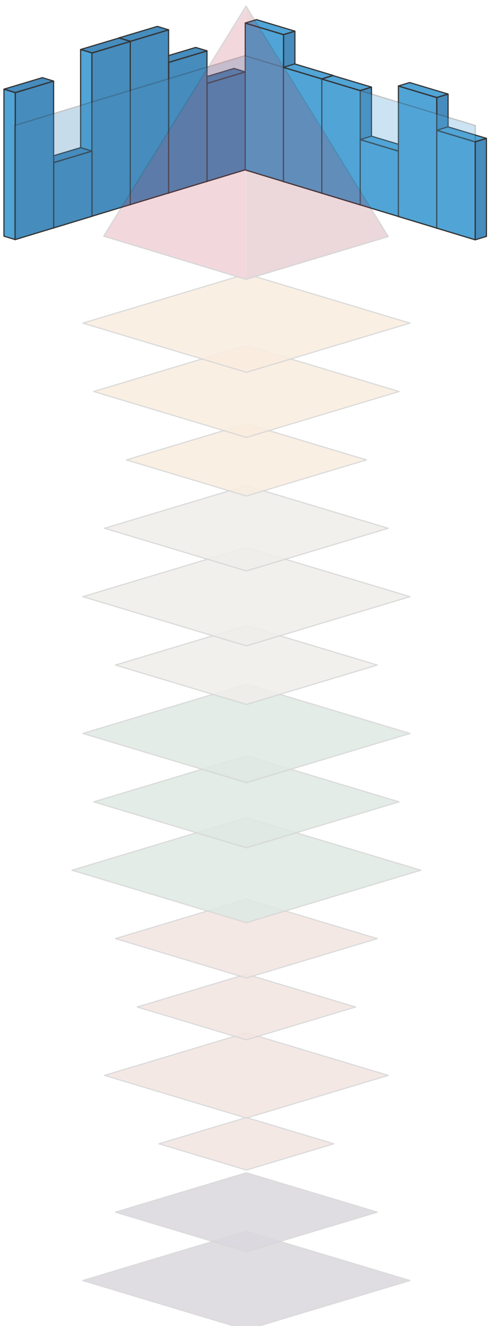
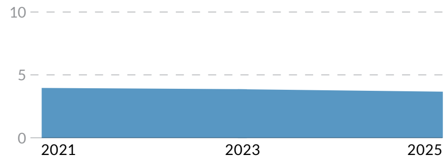
UGANDA



3.67 ↘0.21

RESILIENCE SCORE

146th of 193 countries ↘8
29th of 54 African countries ↘2
5th of 9 East African countries -



POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	4.50	0.00
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	2.00	0.00
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	5.00	0.00
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	5.00	0.00
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	4.00	0.00
LAW ENFORCEMENT	3.00	↘1.00
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	4.50	↘1.00
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	3.50	↗0.50
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	3.50	0.00
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	2.00	0.00
PREVENTION	4.00	0.00
NON-STATE ACTORS	3.00	↘1.00

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CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

Human trafficking is a prominent market in Uganda, with a high incidence of reported cases in recent years. The country is a key source and transit hub, with victims – primarily young women – being exploited for forced labour and sex work, both domestically and abroad. Recruitment agencies, operating locally and internationally, facilitate trafficking, particularly to Kenya, Tanzania and Western Asian countries. Corruption among government officials has exacerbated the problem, and trafficking networks are linked to other illicit markets. Economic hardships and perceptions of trafficking as a financial opportunity sustain the market, with profits fuelling other criminal activities, including money laundering and illegal trade. Uganda also plays a key role in the region as a source and transit point for human smuggling, which is closely linked to illegal migration and human trafficking. Many individuals voluntarily engage smugglers to reach neighbouring countries or Western Asia, and often face exploitation. Corruption among officials facilitates access to forged travel documents and the illicit movement of migrants. Uganda's refugee status further fuels the market, with unregistered immigrants concentrated in urban centres. Profits largely benefit local actors near borders, while regional and international demand sustains the trade. Security risks and document fraud complicate border enforcement efforts.

Extortion and protection racketeering in Uganda, although less prominent than other organized crimes, significantly impact businesses and community safety. Criminal networks, often independent, engage in extortion of businesses, street vendors and transport operators, sometimes with the backing of municipal officials. Cases of kidnapping for ransom and business extortion highlight the market's reach, with both local and foreign investors reporting financial losses. The market has transnational links within East Africa, where the extortion market is widespread. Despite its impact, extortion remains a lower-value sector compared with other illicit markets in Uganda.

TRADE

Uganda is both a transit point and a destination for arms trafficking, with activity concentrated in the Karamoja region, where firearms fuel cattle raids and violent conflicts. The trade is sustained by criminal networks, private-sector actors and state-embedded individuals, with weapons sourced from deserters, conflict zones and illicit cross-border sales. Motorcyclists and truck drivers facilitate smuggling through the borders with Kenya, South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The market contributes to insecurity, with firearms linked to cattle rustling, organized crime and regional instability, particularly in semi-arid areas where economic hardship drives demand.

The counterfeit goods market in Uganda significantly impacts the economy, particularly through tax evasion and harm to the manufacturing sector. The agricultural industry is vulnerable, with fraudulent seed labelling discouraging investment in certified products. Criminal networks blend counterfeit and genuine goods to evade detection, smuggling items in buses and across borders. Kampala serves as a key hub owing to its commercial activity. Counterfeit imports include food, construction materials, electronics and pharmaceuticals, with foreign suppliers playing a role. Corruption within regulatory agencies exacerbates the issue. Economic hardship fuels demand for low-cost counterfeit goods, while enforcement efforts are hampered by resource shortages, allowing illicit networks to profit.

Similarly, the illicit trade in excisable goods is a challenge, undermining legitimate businesses and reducing tax revenues for the state. Smugglers primarily traffic mobile phones, cosmetics, alcohol and textiles, often using false compartments and relying on unmanned border points to evade detection. The market relies on collusion among transporters, clearing agents and importers who falsify documentation. Smuggling of excisable goods is closely linked to the counterfeit trade, with seized shipments of substandard goods destined for South Sudan being resold in Uganda. Illicit alcohol and cigarettes represent a substantial portion of national consumption, contributing to major tax losses. Corruption among border and customs officials facilitates the trade.

ENVIRONMENT

Illegal logging and deforestation are widespread in Uganda, with evidence that these activities are increasing, driven by corruption involving government officials, military personnel and private actors. Reports indicate weak border controls enable illicit timber from the DRC to enter Uganda's furniture market, while trucks transporting logs and charcoal from South Sudan often receive military escorts. The trade is closely linked to the charcoal business, with high demand in Kenya sustaining cross-border smuggling. The shea butter tree is particularly threatened and illegal logging has detrimental effects on the environment. The market generates significant profits both domestically and internationally, ranking as a medium-value criminal economy in Uganda. Similarly, illegal wildlife and fishing crimes are consistently high in Uganda, driven by demand for fish maw, ivory and endangered species' parts. Illegal fishing in Lake Victoria, particularly for immature Nile perch, has led to large-scale seizures of prohibited nets. Poaching of hippos, rhinos and pangolins is prevalent, with wildlife products trafficked both locally and internationally. Uganda serves as both a source and transit hub for illicit fauna products, with routes extending to global markets. Corruption undermines enforcement efforts, allowing criminal networks to evade detection. Disputes over Lake Edward have fuelled tensions with the DRC, as each side accuses the other of illegal fishing and violating territorial boundaries. The market ranks among Uganda's most lucrative criminal economies, depleting fish stocks and threatening biodiversity.

Non-renewable resource crimes are a significant concern in Uganda. Gold smuggling is driven by networks that exploit corruption and weak border controls. The country primarily serves as a transit point, with gold illicitly sourced from the DRC and South Sudan. Criminal actors, including state-embedded figures, use smuggling profits for tax evasion and to finance militant groups. Arua and Kampala are key hubs for the trade, while high local demand for gold sustains the market. Uganda is also a transit point for smuggled scrap metal from Kenya. Both local and foreign actors benefit financially from these illicit operations.

DRUGS

Uganda is a notable transit hub for heroin trafficked from Afghanistan, Pakistan and India to Europe, North America and the rest of Africa. Two major routes facilitate the trade: one moving heroin northwards to Europe, and another southwards to the rest of the East Africa region, South Africa and Latin America. Local heroin use is on the rise, particularly in Kampala and border towns, although transit remains the primary activity. Trafficking is facilitated by organized groups, sometimes with assistance from airport officials. Violence, including gang clashes and drug-related crimes, is associated with the trade, which benefits both domestic and foreign actors.

In recent years, Uganda has seen a steady rise in cocaine trafficking, marked by significant seizures and growing involvement of foreign actors, private-sector individuals and organized criminal networks. Most trafficking activity is concentrated in airports, with aviation services playing a central role in the trade. Airport staff have been implicated in smuggling operations, highlighting the role of corruption in facilitating the movement of cocaine across borders. Although Uganda has introduced stricter drug laws to improve its response to this growing concern, enforcement is undermined by corruption, allowing suspects to evade justice with minimal penalties. While the country primarily serves as a transit hub for cocaine destined for external markets, a growing domestic demand – especially among young men and sex workers – has begun to impact local communities. Despite its expanding presence, the cocaine market in Uganda remains relatively small compared with other criminal economies in the region.

Uganda's cannabis trade is relatively well established, driven by both legal medicinal cultivation and illicit activities. The government's approval for medicinal cannabis has created opportunities for criminal groups to engage in illegal cultivation. In recent years, authorities seized significant amounts of cannabis, often trafficked to neighbouring countries such as Kenya. The cannabis market is of medium size compared with other illicit markets in Uganda, with profits primarily benefiting domestic actors. Despite legal cultivation, the illicit trade remains active, supported by both local and regional demand. Lastly, Uganda's synthetic drug trade has remained stable in the reporting period, with criminal networks trafficking substances such as methamphetamine, often alongside heroin and cocaine. Uganda serves mainly as a transit point for drugs from South America and Southeast Asia. Although synthetic drug use is not as extensive as other illicit markets, violence and conflict related to the trade persist.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

The cybercrime market in Uganda is notable, mainly attributed to increased internet usage, with a rise in data breaches, hacking and ransomware attacks. The financial sector, telecommunications, e-commerce and government institutions are frequent targets. Despite efforts to strengthen cybersecurity, many incidents go unreported or are poorly investigated, partly because of a lack of trust in law enforcement. Although the cybercrime market is smaller than other criminal sectors, its rapid growth, especially in connection with financial crimes, poses broader economic concerns.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crime in Uganda is driven by systemic issues such as mismanagement of public funds, nepotism and corruption, with both state-embedded and private actors contributing to its perpetuation. Economic scams targeting businesses and individuals are on the rise, often facilitated through digital platforms like mobile money and social media. A significant increase in digital finance fraud has also been noted as a concern in Uganda. Transnational collaborations in digital finance fraud, particularly with Nigerian actors, are also common. These crimes have a substantial impact on the economy, undermining tax collection, public procurement and investor trust. Corruption hampers progress in investigations and mitigation efforts.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

The Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), an armed group linked to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), has a moderate influence in Uganda's organized crime landscape, particularly in human trafficking and gold smuggling. The group has grown significantly, using radicalization and violent extremism to recruit fighters, often from border regions. With access to weapons possibly supplied by ISIL, the ADF operates along Uganda's border with the DRC, where it uses terror and abduction to strengthen its ranks. The group's leadership structure is organized, with roles in military command, finance and logistics. Despite Ugandan government efforts, including operating border checkpoints, the ADF persists. Recent military operations have targeted the group in the DRC, resulting in significant losses, but the group still engages in criminal activity to sustain some of its operations.

At the same time, criminal networks are deeply involved in human trafficking and illegal trade in the country, including flora and fauna crimes. These groups employ strategies such as monopolizing markets, controlling supply and fixing prices to eliminate competition. Uganda's proximity to conflict zones, such as Eastern Congo, facilitates transnational criminal collaborations, especially in non-renewable resource crimes. Corrupt ties with high-level public officials, including those in the judiciary, security and government, enable these networks to operate with relative impunity, evading legal consequences and securing necessary support.

In Uganda, state-embedded actors are increasingly involved in illicit activities, including money laundering, land fraud, extortion and procurement fraud. High-ranking government officials often facilitate criminal markets such as human trafficking and wildlife crimes through bribery and corruption. These officials protect illicit activities like smuggling of gold, timber and fish, sometimes exerting control over criminal networks. They also target anti-establishment individuals and suppress political opposition, enabling widespread impunity and a lack of transparency in matters of procurement and government contracts. Extortion is rampant across various sectors, including transport and fish trading, where both criminals and law enforcement officials exploit citizens. Despite occasional arrests, many cases remain unresolved, underscoring the lack of accountability and the persistence of corruption within government structures.

Foreign criminal actors, notably from China, have also established operations in Uganda, often disguised as investors in extractive industries. They exploit weaknesses in Uganda's financial system to launder money through shell companies, and their activities extend to cybercrimes, human trafficking and the drug trade. Foreign actors are linked to increasing cases of labour trafficking, with Western Asian traffickers involved in human trafficking and migrant smuggling. These foreign networks often collaborate with local criminal groups, enhancing the scope and complexity of organized crime. Based primarily in Kampala, these actors focus on exploiting Uganda's natural resources and take advantage of the country's economic situation to lure victims of human trafficking. In addition, private-sector actors in Uganda have been pivotal in facilitating organized crime, with involvement in money laundering, tax evasion, human trafficking, smuggling and the trade in counterfeit goods. Labour recruitment companies in particular have been implicated in human trafficking, contributing significantly to these illicit activities.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Uganda's government has demonstrated political will in addressing organized crime, although sustained efforts fall short owing to competing priorities in other sectors. The country faces significant governance challenges, marked by corruption and a weakened rule of law. Despite some efforts to combat organized crime, enforcement remains weak owing to patronage systems within state institutions. International scrutiny highlights concerns over wildlife and mineral trafficking, which often fund terrorism and cross-border arms trafficking. The country faces internal instability, with groups like the ADF exploiting cross-border tensions for illicit trade. The political climate is also strained, with opposition leaders facing harassment, including violent confrontations with security forces. Despite efforts, inconsistent policy implementation hampers Uganda's ability to address these issues effectively.

Corruption is pervasive in Uganda, impacting all levels of government, with high levels of bribery and illicit payments, particularly within the police, judiciary and public procurement sectors. Despite anti-corruption frameworks, including institutions such as the Office of the Auditor General and the Inspector General of Government, their effectiveness is undermined by inadequate resources, political interference and a lack of political will. Public contracts often favour well-connected individuals. Government repression and restrictions on media and civil society further hinder transparency and accountability. Although legislative bodies and anti-corruption structures exist, their actions are frequently ineffective, fostering a climate where corruption continues to thrive. Access to government information is limited despite being constitutionally protected.

Uganda has taken steps towards international cooperation in combating organized crime, signing several relevant treaties and holding extradition agreements with all Commonwealth members. The country collaborates regionally through organizations such as INTERPOL, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and the Eastern Africa Police Chiefs Cooperation Organization to address human, drug and arms trafficking and environmental crimes. Although Uganda has bilateral labour agreements with countries such as Saudi Arabia and Jordan, enforcement challenges persist. A gap in its cooperation framework to combat firearms trafficking is due to the failure to sign the Arms Trade Treaty.

Internally, Uganda's legal framework addressing transnational organized crime is extensive, shaped by its history of internal conflicts and abductions. Key legislation includes laws targeting human trafficking, terrorism financing, money laundering, wildlife crime and cybercrime. Despite these laws, enforcement is hindered by corruption, limited funding and inadequate law enforcement training. Gaps in implementation are visible, such as inconsistent enforcement of wildlife laws and trafficking laws. Laws such as the Anti-Counterfeiting Bill and Mining and Minerals Bill aim to strengthen enforcement, but challenges remain in effective application and political accountability.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Uganda's judicial system struggles with corruption, political interference and limited resources, which undermine enforcing the rule of law. The judicial system shows limited success in prosecuting organized crime, as cases often dwindle through the court system and few convictions result in the end. Corruption is prevalent, particularly in lower courts, where judges may be influenced by bribery and political ties. Despite these challenges, civil society and the Financial Intelligence Authority have initiated capacity-building efforts to improve crime prosecution. Specialized courts (e.g. the Standards, Utilities and Wildlife Court) have been established to address specific crimes, although effectiveness remains limited. The country's prisons are severely overcrowded and underfunded and lack basic hygiene.

Uganda's law enforcement also struggles with corruption, underfunding and political interference, which hinder the effective enforcement of laws against organized crime. The police force, often regarded as the most corrupt institution, faces public distrust and many cases remain unresolved. Military officers in leadership roles have further militarized law enforcement. Specialized desks and task forces are aimed at tackling specific issues and criminal markets. Despite training programmes and transparency initiatives, such efforts are often undermined by corruption.

Uganda's territorial integrity is compromised by border vulnerabilities, inadequate surveillance and organized crime. The country shares borders with several nations, but only a small number of entry points are regularly monitored, facilitating smuggling of goods such as timber, gold and ivory. Rebel groups, including the ADF, exploit these borders for trafficking and destabilization. Tensions with neighbouring countries, such as Rwanda and Sudan, have involved allegations of espionage and support for insurgencies. Despite efforts such as bilateral agreements and peace accords to address border issues and reduce illicit activities, enforcement remains weak. Collaborative efforts with civil society and international organizations aim to bolster border control and community resilience.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Uganda faces ongoing challenges with money laundering owing to its cash-based informal economy, porous borders and limited financial monitoring. Despite strengthened legal frameworks, enforcement remains weak, with low administrative sanctions and stalled high-profile cases. Domestic sources of laundered funds include corruption, tax evasion and real estate transactions. Uganda's porous borders exacerbate cross-border money laundering risks. However, the country has made some progress, including working to be removed from the Financial Action Task Force grey list in 2024, after improving compliance with anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing measures. The Financial Intelligence Authority oversees compliance, and recent training for prosecutors and judges aims to strengthen legal responses. Still, Uganda's economic regulatory capacity remains constrained by corruption, weak regulatory frameworks and an inefficient judiciary, resulting in challenges for business operations. Land administration corruption leads to disputes and opacity, while procurement officers demand bribes, undermining fair competition. Despite the country's natural wealth, economic growth is limited by corruption and inefficiencies. Although GDP grew moderately in recent years, challenges such as a heavy tax burden, widespread tax evasion and international sanctions persist.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Uganda faces significant challenges in victim and witness protection, exacerbated by its militarized environment and repressive leadership, leading to arbitrary arrests and fears that hinder participation in the judicial process. Some progress in combating human trafficking is evident, such as improved victim support services and collaboration with civil society organizations, but rural areas still face inadequate services. The lack of government-run shelters for trafficking victims means that victims rely heavily on NGOs. Uganda also lacks specific legislation for witness protection, leaving witnesses vulnerable. A proposed bill for a national witness protection programme remains stalled in Parliament, although guidelines from the Director of Public Prosecutions offer some (but limited) protection. The Whistle-blower Protection Act remains the primary framework for reporting wrongdoing, promoting the disclosure of corruption and offering protection and rewards. Awareness campaigns also help protect trafficking victims.

Over time, Uganda has introduced various strategies to combat organized crime, although challenges remain owing to corruption and implementation gaps. The Crime Preventers programme, aimed at mobilizing civilians to prevent crime, has had mixed results, with evidence suggesting it may have inadvertently contributed to crime. The Labour Externalization Programme aims to reduce human trafficking by offering regulated employment abroad. The National Task Force, led by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, coordinates anti-trafficking efforts, while the Uganda Wildlife Authority has made notable progress in curbing illegal wildlife trade.

Civil society and non-state actors play a key role in combating organized crime and supporting victim rehabilitation in Uganda, but their efforts face significant obstacles. Government suppression, corruption and systemic violence have limited the ability of organizations to operate freely, particularly those critical of the government. Laws governing NGOs allow their formation, but impose stringent requirements that discourage advocacy for government accountability. Some civil society organizations collaborate with authorities on human trafficking and rehabilitation, but many face shutdowns or harassment, particularly those linked to the opposition. The media and journalists also experience frequent intimidation and violence, with press freedom continuing to decline under state control.

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.