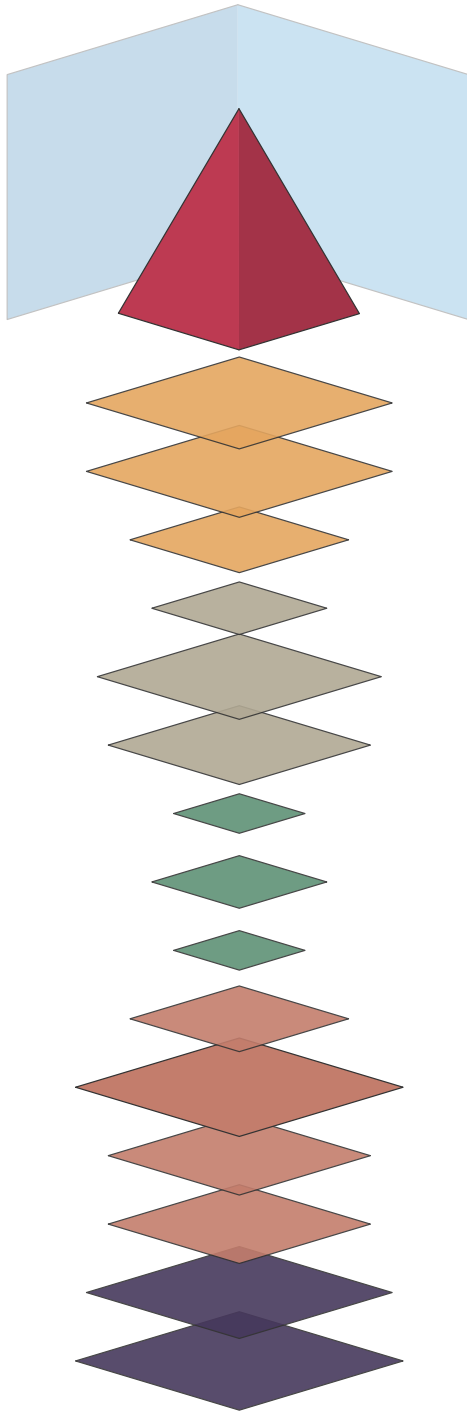
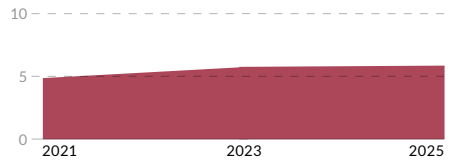


UNITED KINGDOM



5.87 $\nearrow 0.12$ CRIMINALITY SCORE

60th of 193 countries $\nearrow 1$
8th of 44 European countries $\nearrow 2$
2nd of 11 Western European countries -



CRIMINAL MARKETS **5.63** $\nearrow 0.13$

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	7.00	0.00
HUMAN SMUGGLING	7.00	$\nearrow 1.00$
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	5.00	$\searrow 1.00$
ARMS TRAFFICKING	4.00	$\searrow 0.50$
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	6.50	0.00
ILLCIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	6.00	0.00
FLORA CRIMES	3.00	0.00
FAUNA CRIMES	4.00	0.00
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	3.00	$\nearrow 0.50$
HEROIN TRADE	5.00	$\nearrow 0.50$
COCAINE TRADE	7.50	$\nearrow 0.50$
CANNABIS TRADE	6.00	$\nearrow 0.50$
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	6.00	0.00
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	7.00	$\nearrow 0.50$
FINANCIAL CRIMES	7.50	0.00



CRIMINAL ACTORS **6.10** $\nearrow 0.10$

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	5.50	$\nearrow 1.00$
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	7.00	0.00
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	3.00	$\searrow 0.50$
FOREIGN ACTORS	7.50	0.00
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	7.50	0.00



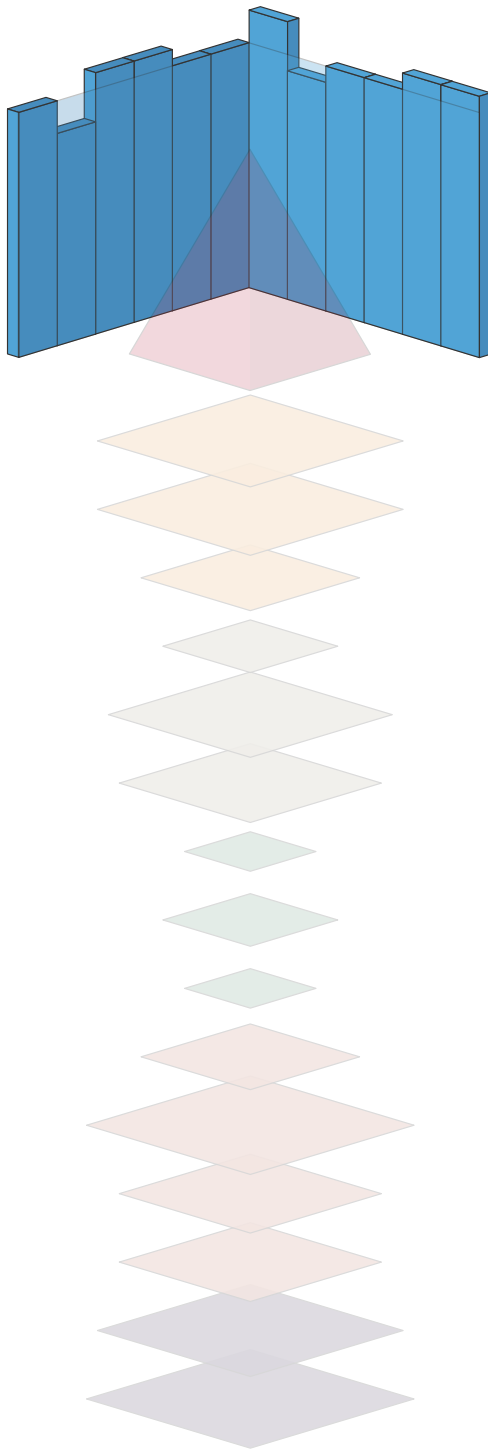
This project was funded in part by a grant from the United States Department of State.



Funded by the European Union

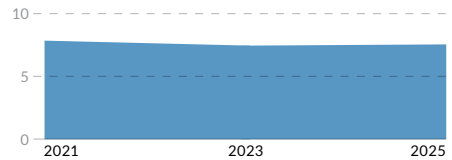
ENACT is funded by the European Union and implemented by the Institute for Security Studies and INTERPOL, in affiliation with the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.

UNITED KINGDOM



7.63 $\nearrow 0.09$
RESILIENCE SCORE

11th of 193 countries $\nearrow 1$
8th of 44 European countries $\nearrow 1$
3rd of 11 Western European countries -



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



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

The United Kingdom remains a significant destination country for human trafficking, with modern slavery affecting various industries, including construction, agriculture, domestic service and the care sector. The country's evolving immigration policies have contributed to increased vulnerability to labour trafficking, with reports indicating that the relaxation of immigration rules to address worker shortages in care homes led to a surge in trafficking cases in this sector. Child victims are disproportionately affected, with many being forced into criminal activities through county lines drug networks, where organized crime groups exploit children and vulnerable adults to transport and sell drugs. The use of technology to facilitate trafficking has expanded, particularly in cyber-enabled child sexual exploitation.

Human smuggling remains a lucrative criminal enterprise in the UK, particularly through small boat crossings in the English Channel. Despite government efforts to curb these operations, the number of irregular entries via small boats remains high, with organized crime groups playing a central role in coordinating smuggling logistics. Albanian-speaking criminal networks have been heavily involved in this market, often acting as intermediaries for Kurdish smuggling networks that control launching points on the French coast. These groups use sophisticated logistics, including the coordinated purchase and transportation of boats. Some of these networks are also linked to drug and firearms trafficking, deepening security concerns.

Organized crime groups in the UK remain active in protection rackets and extortion, primarily targeting small businesses and immigrant communities. In Northern Ireland, extortion linked to paramilitary territorial control continues to generate significant revenue each year. These activities are often under-reported, making the true scale of the market difficult to gauge. Extortion has also evolved, with many schemes shifting online and blackmail-related crimes becoming increasingly common. Criminal groups now exploit digital platforms, including social media and encrypted messaging services, to target victims. Online extortion has grown more sophisticated, with many offences now taking the form of cyber-dependent crimes, particularly ransomware.

TRADE

Arms trafficking in the UK remains relatively low compared to other forms of organized crime, but recent trends indicate an increase in firearm possession offences. Also, most of the smuggling revolves around reactivated or converted weapons. While fully automatic weapons are rarely seized, criminal networks continue to access illicit firearms through various channels, including imports from Eastern Europe, often via Belgium and the Netherlands, and purchases through the dark web. Despite being still relatively limited, online trafficking remains a way to import weapons, which enter the UK via parcel post. The Irish border also remains a potential route for illicit arms flows, with criminal groups in Ireland sourcing weapons from Europe and South America alongside drug shipments.

The counterfeit goods market in the UK is extensive, with the entire counterfeit industry recently estimated to be worth in the billions. Counterfeit products circulating in the UK mainly originate from China, Hong Kong, Türkiye and Vietnam. Manchester's Cheetham Hill area remains a significant hub for counterfeit distribution, with multiple organized crime groups involved in this trade. The rise of social-media influencers promoting counterfeit goods has further normalized the purchase of fake luxury items, contributing to sustained demand. Despite increased enforcement, the scale of the counterfeit market remains a challenge for law enforcement.

Illicit trade in excise goods continues to present challenges, particularly in tobacco and alcohol smuggling. While the UK has strong regulatory measures for tobacco control, the excise duty gap remains substantial, with large sums lost in tax revenues in recent years due to smuggling. Organized crime groups have adapted to evolving enforcement measures, diversifying their smuggling methods and using networks that also engage in drug and arms trafficking. Seizures of illicit cigarettes and alcohol remain high, with major operations uncovering large-scale illegal production facilities in recent years that evade millions in excise duties annually.

ENVIRONMENT

Flora crimes in the UK are not highly organized but are a concern, particularly the illegal importation of timber. Reports indicate that conflict timber continues to enter the UK market disguised as timber from legal sources in Southeast Asia. While the overall impact remains limited, environmental groups have raised concerns about deforestation-linked imports, particularly in food supply chains.

Fauna crimes are more prevalent, with wildlife trafficking increasingly linked to other forms of organized crime. Reports indicate that connections have been identified in the UK between wildlife crime and firearms offences, as well as with drug trafficking. Operation Thunder, a global enforcement effort, resulted in multiple UK seizures, including CITES-protected species and products such as ivory, crocodile blood and exotic bird eggs. The market remains attractive to organized crime groups due to its low-risk, high-profit nature.

Non-renewable resource crimes have been linked to geopolitical conflicts, particularly the Russia-Ukraine war. Loopholes in sanctions enforcement have allowed Russian crude oil, refined in third-party countries such as India and China, to be imported into the UK. Also, hydrocarbon oil smuggling persists, leading to major losses of tax revenue.

DRUGS

The heroin market in the UK is large, despite a significant decrease in the quantity of heroin seized in 2024 compared to the previous year. Criminal networks in the country have recently sought new routes for heroin trafficking via Romania and Azerbaijan, following market disruptions caused by the Taliban's ban on poppy cultivation.

The cocaine market continues to be one of the UK's most lucrative illicit economies, with imports mainly routed through Antwerp and Rotterdam before reaching UK ports. Albanian-speaking criminal organizations dominate the market, particularly in major cities, though Merseyside remains an exception, where local gangs continue to compete. Increased enforcement measures have led to record cocaine seizures, indicating a growing trend in the cocaine market in the UK.

Cannabis remains the most widely used illicit drug in the UK, with growing demand for the drug due to its medical effects. While domestic cultivation accounts for much of the supply, imports have increased significantly, with Border Force seizures doubling in recent years. Vietnamese, Albanian-speaking and British gangs dominate the trade, with cultivation linked to human trafficking and forced labour. Law enforcement operations in early 2024 uncovered multi-million-pound cannabis farms, highlighting the scale of domestic production.

Synthetic drugs, including MDMA and amphetamines, continue to be trafficked into the UK from mainland Europe, particularly from the Netherlands and Belgium. The emergence of nitazenes – synthetic opioids significantly more potent than heroin – poses new public health risks, with a considerable number of deaths linked to the substance. Synthetic opioids, including nitazenes, have emerged as potential substitutes for heroin. UK law enforcement has dismantled a large nitazene production facility in 2023.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Cyber-dependent crime in the UK is on the rise, specifically ransomware attacks, data breaches and cryptocurrency-related fraud. Russian-language cybercriminal groups remain the most significant external threat, with major ransomware operations targeting UK businesses and government entities. AI-driven cybercrime is expected to increase, with criminals deploying machine learning to enhance data exploitation.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Fraud is the most prevalent form of financial crime in the UK. The banking sector has reported a surge in authorized push payment scams, with social media playing a key role in facilitating fraud. Online investment scams have grown more frequent, with fraudulent schemes advertised on social media and instant messaging platforms. A surge has also been identified in the use of deepfake technology in fraudulent schemes. It is worth noting that fraud does not inherently require the involvement of organized crime groups as it can be perpetrated by opportunistic individuals with some level of technical skill. Nevertheless, the unmatched impact and rising prevalence of these incidents indicate the involvement of organized crime groups, especially in large-scale and cyber-enabled incidents. These complex criminal operations illustrate the establishment of networks crossing both national and regional borders that conduct mass targeting schemes, making these activities both transnational and organized in nature.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

Although the traditional mafia model in the UK has largely been replaced by a more decentralized structure, several well-known criminal gangs continue to operate across major cities. In Birmingham, the 247365 is a key player in heroin and cocaine distribution, while remnants of the once-powerful Burger Bar Gang are still evident, especially across the Midlands. Liverpool hosts groups like the Croxteth Crew and Naga; Manchester sees ongoing activity from the Cheetham Hill Gang, Cooch Gang and Pepper Hill Mob. In Glasgow, the Lions-Daniels family feud continues to shape organized crime. Gang violence, including tit-for-tat killings, remains common. While traditional family-based syndicates have declined, remnants of former Provisional IRA factions remain active under different guises. These groups are generally small, but, despite their reduced numbers, they maintain connections with international criminal actors, particularly in Dublin and South America, under a loose affiliation known as 'The Firm'. This entity plays a key role in drug distribution in Northern Ireland, working with Albanian-speaking criminal groups in Manchester and Spain to supply narcotics. Although paramilitary-linked criminality persists, UK authorities have cracked down on these networks, contributing to MI5 downgrading the Northern Ireland-related terror threat to 'substantial' in 2024.

Domestic loosely organized criminal networks in the UK are diverse and engage in a variety of crimes. These actors usually infiltrate legitimate industries, using businesses as fronts for money laundering and other illicit activities. They are increasingly sophisticated, often concealed, and make full use of modern technology. Criminals operating in these loose networks are highly adaptable, exploiting geopolitical instability and technological advancement, as well as using insiders to facilitate and enable crime through bribery and corruption. Local criminal networks continue to dominate the 'county lines' drug distribution model. In recent years, youth recruitment into criminal networks in the UK has become a critical concern, as criminal networks increasingly exploit socio-economic vulnerabilities and digital platforms to bring in new members, often minors and in some cases even below the age of 12.

Evidence of state-embedded actors in the UK is limited, though isolated cases of collusion between state officials and criminal organizations have been reported. Corruption within the judicial system and law enforcement is a concern, though authorities have taken decisive action against it. While corruption cases have led to legal consequences, vulnerabilities remain in the oversight of law enforcement and border-security personnel.

Foreign criminal groups are deeply embedded in the UK, controlling drug imports while local gangs manage their distribution. The Irish Kinahan Cartel works with Colombia's Clan del Golfo and UK-based groups like the Lyons gang to facilitate wholesale shipments and launder illicit proceeds across Europe. Albanian-speaking networks dominate the cocaine and cannabis trade, collaborate with Latin American cartels and exploit the Modern Slavery Act to avoid deportation. Turkish and Albanian gangs have divided drug market control, while Vietnamese networks run illegal cannabis farms using trafficked labor. Russian groups focus on money laundering and cybercrime, including politically motivated attacks.

The UK's lax corporate oversight and easy business registration have made it a hub for money laundering, with shell companies and legal structures like LLPs often used to hide illicit funds. Banks have faced criticism for failing to prevent suspicious transactions. The British Virgin Islands and other UK overseas territories play a key role in global financial crime, often appearing in corruption and tax evasion cases. Calls for greater ownership transparency persist. Additionally, organized crime has exploited illegal labor practices, including through food delivery platforms, revealing broader regulatory weaknesses.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

The United Kingdom maintains a robust governance framework with well-established political institutions that prioritize combating organized crime. The government has taken significant steps in strengthening policies related to financial crime, law enforcement and cybercrime. However, political divisions and ongoing debates about policing priorities have occasionally led to inconsistencies in the implementation of organized crime policies. Law enforcement agencies have raised concerns about budget constraints, which have affected the ability to expand specialized organized crime units.

Levels of transparency and accountability in governance are uneven, with some progress in prosecuting corrupt actors, but broader systemic weaknesses in preventing infiltration by organized crime groups. The UK has a strong history of anti-corruption measures, but oversight mechanisms have been described as lacking enforcement power in political finance and lobbying regulations. While the country has made efforts to introduce greater transparency in political funding, the influence of financial backers on policy decisions is still concerning. Reports have revealed the use of opaque corporate structures to facilitate financial

crime, with regulatory agencies struggling to keep pace with the evolving tactics of organized crime groups that exploit such vulnerabilities.

International cooperation is a critical component of the UK's response to organized crime. The country has strong collaborative ties with European and international law enforcement agencies, including Europol and Interpol, and plays a key role in intelligence-sharing initiatives. However, post-Brexit adjustments have weakened information exchange mechanisms, leading to some operational inefficiencies. The UK remains committed to upholding international anti-money laundering (AML) and counter-terrorism financing agreements, though it has faced criticism for being slow to adopt new regulatory frameworks required by global oversight bodies. In 2024, the EU and UK signed an agreement to strengthen intelligence sharing on criminal gangs involved in human trafficking, as part of post-Brexit cooperation with Frontex. This builds on the UK's 2023 deal with Albania, which contributed to a sharp drop in Albanian small-boat arrivals. In parallel, the UK expanded its international efforts against serious and organized crime, increasing resources for Home Office International Operations and the National Crime Agency's network of

liaison officers, who now work with partners in over 130 countries to counter shared threats through enhanced intelligence and operational capacity.

The UK has a comprehensive legal framework to address organized crime, covering financial crimes, drug trafficking, human trafficking and cyber-related offences. But enforcement of these laws has been inconsistent, particularly in areas related to corporate transparency and money laundering. The introduction of new economic crime legislation has sought to close loopholes exploited by criminal actors, but enforcement agencies lack sufficient resources to pursue large-scale financial crime cases effectively.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

The UK judicial system is well-established, with independent courts handling cases related to organized crime. However, the justice system has faced delays in processing cases, particularly those related to complex financial crimes and cyber offences. Prisons in the UK have seen a rise in organized crime activity, with gangs operating within correctional facilities to coordinate drug distribution networks and money-laundering schemes. Prison overcrowding remains a persistent problem, with authorities struggling to separate high-risk organized crime figures from the general prison population, and this permits criminal networking inside detention facilities.

Law enforcement agencies in the UK have developed specialized units to combat organized crime, including financial crime task forces, cybercrime divisions and anti-trafficking teams. However, a decline in police staffing levels has lengthened response times and curbed investigative capacity, particularly outside major urban centres. There are difficulties in recruiting and retaining law enforcement personnel with specialized expertise in financial crime, leading to an over-reliance on private sector partnerships to address regulatory weaknesses. Despite these issues, the UK continues to conduct successful operations targeting major crime syndicates, with law enforcement agencies collaborating closely with international partners to dismantle trafficking and money laundering networks.

Border security in the UK is a central priority, particularly given the rise in human smuggling operations across the English Channel. The UK has invested in technological upgrades to border control systems, increasing surveillance and monitoring capabilities to detect irregular migration and illicit trafficking. However, organized crime groups have continued to adapt, exploiting weaknesses in maritime patrol coverage and using sophisticated methods to evade detection. The UK's withdrawal from the EU has also presented border security problems, requiring the implementation of new agreements to facilitate information sharing and cross-border investigations.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

AML measures in the UK have undergone significant reforms, with authorities introducing stricter regulations on company ownership transparency and financial reporting requirements. The Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act 2023 is a key legislative initiative, which strengthens oversight of company registrations, prevents misuse of limited partnerships, and improves information sharing. By addressing vulnerabilities in the UK's corporate structures, the legislation seeks to close loopholes exploited by illicit actors. Despite these efforts, enforcement of AML provisions remains inconsistent. The UK's financial sector remains exposed to large-scale money laundering operations, particularly through real-estate investments and complex offshore structures. The country continues to serve as both a target and facilitator of global money-laundering schemes. The size and complexity of its financial and real-estate markets make it particularly vulnerable, with more than £100 billion laundered through or within the UK, or via UK-registered corporate structures, each year using high-end methods. Financial regulatory bodies have imposed fines on banks and financial institutions that fail to meet compliance standards, but critics argue that penalties have been insufficient to deter repeat offenders.

The UK's economic regulatory environment is considered one of the world's strongest, with well-developed policies governing financial transactions and corporate governance. However, the rise of decentralized finance and cryptocurrency-related financial crime has outflanked regulatory agencies, which have struggled to keep pace with evolving criminal tactics. The country has sought to introduce new frameworks to regulate cryptocurrency exchanges and online financial platforms, but gaps persist in enforcement and oversight. The private sector plays a key role in financial resilience, with banks and financial institutions collaborating with law enforcement to detect and prevent economic crimes, though some institutions have been criticized for lax due-diligence measures.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Victim and witness support services in the UK are well-established, with government-funded programmes providing shelter, legal assistance and psychological care for survivors of human trafficking and organized crime-related exploitation. But access to these services has been inconsistent, with funding shortages affecting the availability of long-term support programmes. Reports indicate that trafficking survivors often struggle to secure stable housing and employment after exiting protection programmes, making them vulnerable to re-exploitation. The UK's 10-year drug strategy aims to expand access to treatment, including for offenders, while promoting prevention and supporting recovery. Since its launch, significant funding has been invested, with a substantial portion allocated in 2024. Witness protection initiatives have been strengthened in

recent years, but doubts remain about the capacity of these programmes to safeguard high-risk individuals involved in organized crime cases.

Prevention efforts against organized crime in the UK include public awareness campaigns, school education programmes and targeted intervention initiatives for at-risk youth. In 2024, the UK government announced increased funding for the National Crime Agency and Border Security Command to combat organized crime and immigration smuggling, while highlighting the importance of local and rural efforts. Government agencies have prioritized the disruption of 'county lines' drug trafficking, working with community organizations to identify and support vulnerable individuals before they are recruited into criminal networks. Despite these initiatives, organized crime groups continue to exploit systemic vulnerabilities, particularly in economically disadvantaged areas where limited social mobility increases the appeal of illicit activities. Law enforcement agencies have partnered with tech companies to address cyber-enabled crimes, including online fraud and digital exploitation, but the rapid evolution of cybercriminal tactics has hampered preventive efforts. A new fraud strategy has also been recently developed to prevent and combat tech-enabled fraud, including leveraging AI, enhancing data sharing and pursuing global partnerships to tackle fraud more effectively.

Non-state actors, including media organizations, advocacy groups and NGOs, play a crucial role in monitoring organized crime trends and holding institutions accountable.

Investigative journalists have uncovered major financial crime scandals, though legal restrictions have occasionally hindered reporting on high-profile cases linked to corporate entities. Civil society organizations have actively lobbied for stronger regulatory measures to combat money laundering and financial secrecy, but progress has been slow in implementing large-scale reforms. Despite these challenges, the UK has a dynamic civil society landscape that contributes to resilience against organized crime through research, advocacy and policy engagement. Press freedom is broadly protected, supported by a competitive and diverse media environment. Journalists generally operate with a high degree of freedom and face few cultural constraints. However, recent years have seen growing challenges. Paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland have issued threats and journalists who are committed to defend the rights of minority groups are particularly vulnerable to mistreatment. Rising political polarization has fueled criticism and intimidation, especially online. Meanwhile, the detention and questioning of several journalists under counter-terrorism legislation marked a concerning shift in a country traditionally known for a free press.

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.