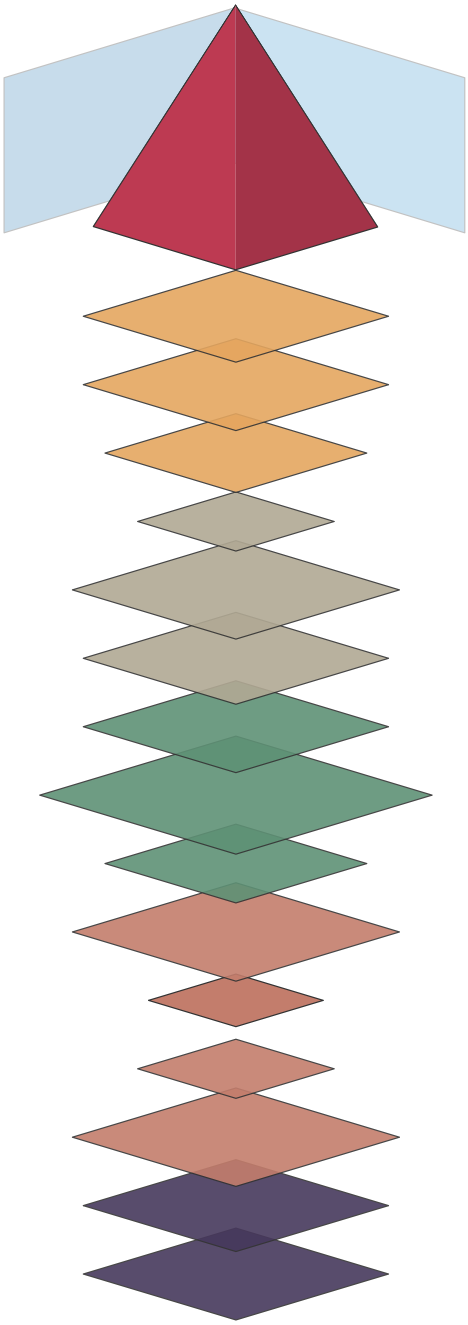
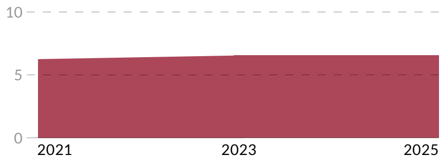
VIETNAM



6.58 ↗0.03 CRIMINALITY SCORE

32nd of 193 countries ↘2
12th of 46 Asian countries ↗1
4th of 11 South-Eastern Asian countries ↗1



CRIMINAL MARKETS	6.57	↗0.07
HUMAN TRAFFICKING	7.00	0.00
HUMAN SMUGGLING	7.00	0.00
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	6.00	0.00
ARMS TRAFFICKING	4.50	0.00
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	7.50	0.00
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	7.00	0.00
FLORA CRIMES	7.00	0.00
FAUNA CRIMES	9.00	0.00
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	6.00	0.00
HEROIN TRADE	7.50	0.00
COCAINE TRADE	4.00	0.00
CANNABIS TRADE	4.50	0.00
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	7.50	↗0.50
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	7.00	↗0.50
FINANCIAL CRIMES	7.00	0.00

CRIMINAL ACTORS	6.60	0.00
MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	6.00	0.00
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	7.00	0.00
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	7.00	0.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	6.50	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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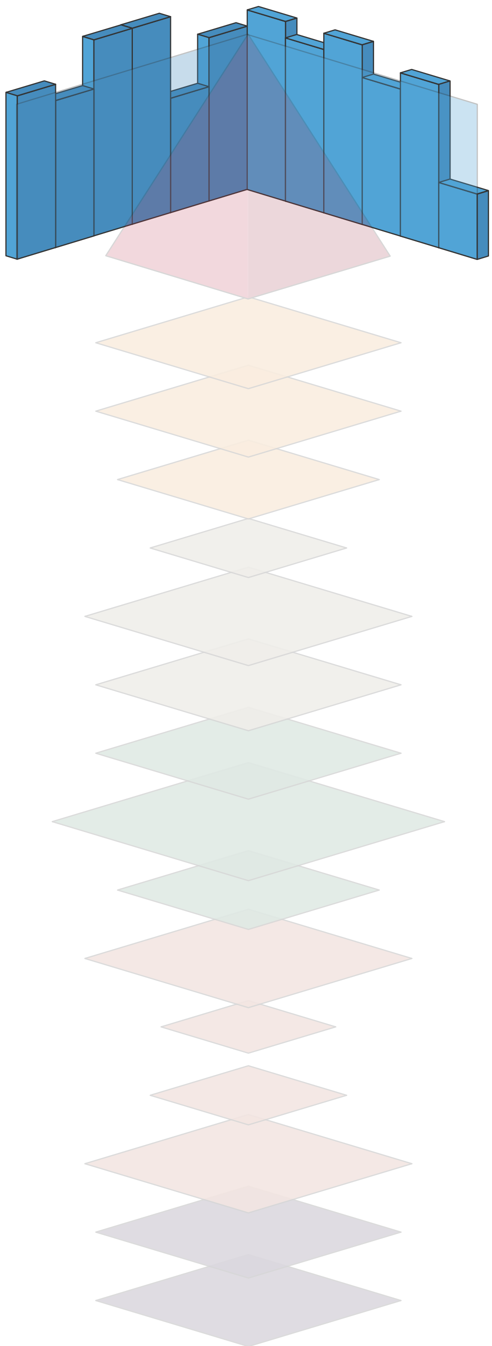
Funded by the European Union

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.

GLOBAL ORGANIZED CRIME INDEX

GLOBAL INITIATIVE AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

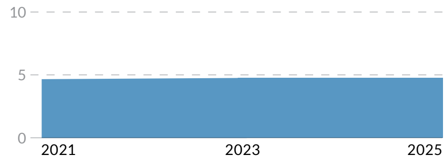
VIETNAM



4.79 ↘0.00

RESILIENCE SCORE

97th of 193 countries ↗2
18th of 46 Asian countries ↘1
4th of 11 South-Eastern Asian countries ↘1



POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	**5.00**	0.00
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	**4.50**	0.00
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	**6.00**	0.00
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	**6.00**	0.00
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	**3.50**	↘0.50
LAW ENFORCEMENT	**5.00**	↗0.50
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	**5.50**	0.00
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	**5.00**	↘0.50
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	**5.50**	0.00
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	**4.50**	0.00
PREVENTION	**5.00**	0.00
NON-STATE ACTORS	**2.00**	↗0.50

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CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

Human trafficking remains a significant and complex issue, with Vietnam functioning as a source, transit and destination country. Regional trafficking routes and Vietnam's long, porous borders facilitate cross-border exploitation. Victims are trafficked for both forced labour and sex work, domestically and abroad – often through fraudulent recruitment schemes. Traffickers kidnap Vietnamese women and girls, primarily from the Hmong ethnic minority, and transport them to China for forced marriages and exploitation. Overseas sex trafficking is also prevalent, with Vietnamese nationals deceived by false job offers and then transferred to commercial sex facilities. Hundreds of Vietnamese nationals have been lured to Cambodia under false pretences and forced to work at cyber scam compounds. State-embedded actors and corruption contribute to impunity. Meanwhile, limitations in victim identification and support services hinder enforcement and protection efforts, resulting in high levels of undetected exploitation.

Human smuggling is a well-established transnational enterprise, driven by economic inequality. It is concentrated in provinces such as Nghe An and Hà Tĩnh, with Vietnam functioning primarily as a source country. Smuggling routes extend to Europe and across South East Asia. Vietnam has also become a transit country for non-Vietnamese migrants, notably individuals from India seeking passage to the Americas. Smuggling networks, often disguised as recruitment agencies, use informal channels and social media. They have strong links to diaspora communities. High smuggling fees create debt burdens that increase migrants' vulnerability to exploitation. While some awareness efforts exist, limited data obscures the scale and effectiveness of government responses.

Extortion and protection racketeering remain widespread in Vietnam, involving both local and foreign actors. These activities are concentrated in major cities and wholesale markets, where coercive debt collection, property appropriation and intimidation occur. Criminal networks have infiltrated legitimate sectors, forming opaque ties with private companies, banks and financial institutions to enforce illegal lending practices. Gangs profit from black-market credit operations and online lending scams, sometimes charging exorbitant interest rates and resorting to threats or violence to receive repayment. These practices extend into rural areas, fuelling conflict and public fear. Although some prosecutions have occurred, persistent under-reporting and recurring gang formation continue to undermine enforcement efforts and enable market expansion.

TRADE

Arms trafficking in Vietnam remains moderate in scale, with the country functioning as a destination point for weapons and explosives sourced primarily from neighbouring countries. These arms are then distributed by loosely organized networks and foreign actors. Some smugglers travel to Cambodia, Thailand and China to test products before bringing them back to Vietnam, either intact or disassembled for easier transport. Criminals exploit social media, e-commerce platforms and informal courier services to traffic and sell firearms, including converted non-lethal weapons and homemade guns. Despite Vietnam's strict regulations, local demand – particularly among gangs and drug traffickers – remains high. Urban hubs and the Mekong Delta are hotspots for the illicit arms trade. The growing use of digital platforms complicate enforcement efforts and enable cross-border market expansion.

Vietnam has a large and growing counterfeit goods market, driven by consumer demand for low-cost alternatives. Common items include clothing, accessories, cosmetics, food products and medications. The trade is both transnational and domestic: counterfeit goods are produced within Vietnam – often in industrial parks or craft villages – as well as illegally imported from abroad. Cross-border smuggling occurs, mainly through border provinces, and involves cargo, mail or undeclared imports that are often mixed with legitimate goods. The border areas that Vietnam shares with China and Laos are particularly vulnerable due to rugged terrain and the use of unofficial routes by locals. Distribution is facilitated through both online platforms and physical markets, such as Saigon Square and Tan Thanh Market. Despite enforcement efforts, the growth of e-commerce continues to enable the trade.

Vietnam's illicit market for excisable goods – particularly in tobacco and alcohol – remains consolidated and driven by high domestic demand, especially during holiday periods. Smuggling routes span northern, central and southern border provinces, with goods entering through roads, waterways or through misdeclared cargo. Criminal networks exploit e-commerce and social media to distribute smuggled goods, often through anonymous deliveries. While Vietnam is primarily a destination country, there is evidence of it serving as a source for exports to markets such as Malaysia. Smuggling involves both organized criminal groups and local actors, with local participation often driven by economic hardship. Corruption and Vietnam's long, porous borders complicate enforcement efforts, despite recent increases in seizures.

ENVIRONMENT

Vietnam's illicit flora market is highly consolidated, with timber trafficking its core activity. The country functions as a source, transit and destination for illegal timber – importing from Laos and Cambodia and re-exporting to markets such as China. Despite a logging ban, domestic exploitation continues, including trafficking of rare species and the discovery of illegal stockpiles. Timber smuggling often involves collusion with corrupt officials and uses concealed transportation methods such as trucks, waterways and secret compartments. Rising demand for fuelwood has driven land disputes over acacia plantations. Criminal actors include networks, private-sector participants and complicit authorities. Although enforcement efforts have increased, weak import controls and corruption hinder effective suppression.

Wildlife trafficking remains pervasive, with Vietnam serving as a source, transit and destination country for illicit fauna such as ivory, pangolin scales and rhino horn. Other trafficked species and products include black coral, big-headed turtles, snakes, tigers, pygmy slow loris, wild cats, bears, tiger bones and clam shells. Smuggled shipments from Africa transit through Vietnam en route to other markets such as China, the US and Singapore. Traffickers use maritime cargo and border routes from Africa, as well as Vietnam's neighbouring countries, aided by corrupt officials. Online platforms and coded language help traffickers evade detection, while domestic demand – though lower than international demand – persists for wildlife products used in food, medicine and decoration. Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing remains a concern. Illegal fishing within Vietnamese waters has depleted fish stocks. While the criminal justice system performed better in 2024, with increased prosecutions and convictions, Vietnamese criminals continue to play significant roles in global illicit supply chains for wild fauna across Asia and Africa.

Vietnam's illicit market for non-renewable resources is consolidated and includes oil, gold, sand and coal. Oil is smuggled through maritime routes near Thailand and Cambodia, using disguised fishing vessels and night-time transfers. Gold is trafficked overland from Laos and Cambodia, driven by domestic demand and regional price disparities. Sand mining is linked to ecological damage and potential resource depletion, while coal smuggling occurs by river routes from China. These trades are facilitated by criminal networks, private-sector actors and state-embedded officials, often through corruption and sophisticated evasion tactics.

DRUGS

Although difficult to quantify precisely, Vietnam's heroin market remains consolidated. While authorities have disrupted major trafficking networks, domestic demand persists, especially among young males. Heroin continues to enter the country through provinces bordering Laos and Cambodia before being trafficked to Ho Chi Minh City, where it is divided into smaller packages and stored in warehouses and factories. It is often concealed within other goods during transport. Both foreign and state-embedded actors are implicated in the trade, though weak enforcement capacity and legal loopholes continue to undermine drug control efforts.

Cocaine use in Vietnam remains limited, but recent cases suggest the country's emerging role as a transit hub for shipments from South America to Asia-Pacific markets. In 2023, Vietnam recorded its first cocaine seizures since 2019; several high-volume interdictions occurred, including a shipment disguised as rice from Argentina and cocaine packets washing ashore along the central coast. These operations are managed by criminal networks involving business fronts, foreign nationals and state-embedded actors. Trafficking is facilitated using shipping containers, aircraft and couriers. Despite strict drug laws, enforcement is weakened by limited expertise at air and sea entry points. Domestic demand remains low, with users preferring heroin and synthetic drugs.

Despite decreased seizures, Vietnam maintains a consolidated cannabis market, driven by local cultivation, domestic consumption and its role as a transit point. Cannabis is distributed both in person and online, often disguised as medicinal or cosmetic goods. Cannabis seizures are modest compared to synthetic drugs, and demand is relatively low. Criminal networks – including local, foreign and private-sector actors – operate trafficking routes, with reports of involvement by state-embedded actors. Environmental effects such as deforestation have been linked to illegal cultivation. Enforcement is hindered by limited investigative capacity at key entry points and insufficient resources.

Vietnam has a large and consolidated synthetic drug market, with crystal methamphetamine and ketamine as the most commonly seized substances. While the use of methamphetamine tablets has slightly declined, seizures have reached record levels. Vietnam functions as a source, transit and destination country for synthetic drugs and precursor chemicals, with smuggling routes linked to Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Taiwan and beyond. Traffickers often conceal drugs in commercial products, and state-embedded actors are reportedly involved. Domestic consumption, particularly among youth, continues to rise. Despite strict drug laws, including the death penalty, enforcement remains hampered by limited oversight.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Cyber-dependent crime is a growing concern in Vietnam, with increasing incidents of advanced persistent threat (APT) attacks, ransomware and account-stealing malware. In recent years, reported attacks have surged, affecting hundreds of thousands of systems, including government agencies, financial institutions and educational websites. Damages from cyberattacks include embedded ads and data breaches. Both domestic and foreign groups are active in Vietnam's cybercrime landscape, with Chinese hacker groups reportedly behind many APT attacks. As cybercrime becomes increasingly sophisticated and lucrative, its full scale remains difficult to assess.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crime in Vietnam remain widespread and complex, driven by a rise in embezzlement, online fraud and Ponzi schemes. Cyber-enabled scams, particularly those involving deepfake technology and social media, have surged. Romance scams and impersonation frauds disproportionately affect women. Financial losses from online scams are considerable. Social media sites are popular avenues for Ponzi schemes, while the expansion of e-commerce has further complicated enforcement. Weak regulation has allowed illegal multi-level marketing schemes to flourish, often targeting the elderly. Criminal actors include domestic networks, foreign groups and corrupt officials.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

Mafia-style groups in Vietnam are active across various illicit markets, including extortion and protection racketeering, sand mining, financial crimes, cybercrime and illegal gambling. Many operate in multiple sectors and exert varying levels of territorial control, particularly over lucrative areas such as sand mines and wholesale markets. These groups often use coercion, threats and violence to enforce compliance, including against rival actors. Recent law enforcement actions have targeted criminal groups involved in fraudulent land deals, homicide, illicit lending and extortion in sectors like real estate and fishing. Some possess significant access to weapons, and territorial incursions by rivals can lead to violent confrontations, highlighting their persistent influence and localized control.

Criminal networks in Vietnam are heavily involved in illicit markets, including human, wildlife, drug and arms trafficking, as well as timber smuggling. These networks often operate transnationally and have strong ties to foreign actors, particularly in the trafficking of people, flora, fauna and narcotics. Vietnamese authorities have reported the use of fishing and logistics vessels to smuggle drugs from Cambodia and China, highlighting the operational sophistication of these groups. In drug trafficking, many frequently conceal their activities behind legitimate businesses, allowing them to manage the full supply chain covertly. These networks typically comprise both Vietnamese and foreign nationals, reflecting their cross-border nature and coordination.

State-embedded actors facilitate multiple criminal markets, including wildlife and human trafficking, non-renewable resource crimes and financial crimes. Their level of involvement often correlates with their rank and political protection. Low-level officials have reportedly enabled wildlife and drug trafficking, while higher-ranking officials are more commonly implicated in human trafficking and financial crimes. Corruption extends from local commune authorities – who have allegedly extorted trafficking victims and enabled forced marriages – to diplomats and police accused of concealing trafficking operations or exploiting stranded citizens. These actors use bribery to exert influence and facilitate illicit activity, with recent cases exposing senior officials who accepted payments to authorize illegal sand mining beyond regulatory limits.

Foreign criminal actors are active across multiple markets in Vietnam, particularly in drug trafficking, cybercrime and cyber-enabled financial fraud. Foreign groups from China, Myanmar and Cambodia are key players in online gambling, ransomware and scam operations linked to human trafficking, using Vietnam as a recruitment hub. These activities are often managed from regional scam compounds, where Vietnamese victims are trafficked into forced criminality. Cooperation between foreign and local actors is common, particularly in human smuggling, where diaspora networks in Europe enable migration flows. Geographic patterns vary: South East Asian actors dominant in drug and human trafficking, while African and European groups are more involved in wildlife trafficking and smuggling.

Private-sector actors in Vietnam play a facilitative role in organized crime, notably through money laundering, illicit finance and the concealment of illegal goods within legitimate supply chains. Financial institutions and the real estate sector are commonly used to launder proceeds from wildlife trafficking and other illicit markets. Criminal networks operate under the guise of businesses that offer predatory loans or engage in fraud through law firms and debt recovery services. Employees in logistics and transport companies have been implicated in drug and wildlife trafficking. High-profile corporate embezzlement cases and the laundering of illegal timber through Vietnam's import-dependent supply chain underscore the vulnerabilities of private-sector channels to criminal exploitation, both domestically and transnationally.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Vietnam remains a one-party state under the Communist Party, with limited political competition and no independent oversight of organized crime policy. Although governance is centralized and stable, the lack of electoral accountability limits public influence over anti-crime strategies. During the reporting period, the government maintained a strong public stance against organized crime, implementing a national crime prevention strategy and launching a review of anti-trafficking measures. However, international observers remain concerned over Vietnam's limited effectiveness in addressing organized crime involving politically connected or state-embedded actors.

Corruption is a widespread issue across all levels of government and within state-owned enterprises, fuelled by opaque regulations, slow bureaucracy and systemic cronyism. In the reporting period, the government carried out a high-profile anti-corruption campaign targeting senior officials, which resulted in leadership reshuffles. Efforts to improve transparency included the use of e-governance tools, procurement disclosures and a fiscal transparency portal. Despite these efforts, enforcement remains uneven, with allegations of politically selective investigations and low asset recovery rates. Following a decline in corruption cases during the COVID-19 pandemic, 2023 saw a marked increase in both the number of investigations and defendants, suggesting a renewed focus on anti-corruption efforts.

Vietnam is party to several major international conventions on organized crime, corruption and drug trafficking. However, it has not ratified key protocols related to firearms trafficking, migrant smuggling and the arms trade. Implementation of wildlife protection frameworks remains hindered by inter-agency overlap and weak coordination. During the reporting period, Vietnam expanded its legal cooperation infrastructure, signing extradition and mutual legal assistance agreements and processing numerous international requests. It also increased its engagement in regional and multilateral initiatives targeting trafficking, financial crime and cybercrime. Vietnam bolstered cross-border collaboration through liaison offices and training programmes, while deepening security cooperation under newly upgraded strategic partnerships with the US and Australia.

Vietnam's legal framework addresses organized criminal activities such as drug, human and wildlife trafficking, as well as counterfeiting, with penalties ranging from lengthy prison sentences to the death penalty. The 2015 Penal Code and its amendments form the foundation of this legal framework, though enforcement gaps persist. In 2021, the prime minister approved the National Strategy for Crime Prevention and Control for 2016–2025. In 2023, further progress was made with the approval of a plan to review a decade of implementation of the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. Vietnam's drug laws impose severe penalties, including capital punishment, for trafficking and possession of large quantities of narcotics. Wildlife crime laws penalize high-volume trafficking but permit small-scale smuggling due to threshold limitations. Recent reforms include updates to human trafficking legislation to align with the Penal Code and improve victim protection. Vietnam also launched a plan to combat counterfeiting in e-commerce and strengthen consumer protection.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Vietnam's judiciary remains heavily influenced by the ruling Communist Party, and lacks both independence and sufficient expertise in adjudicating organized crime legislation. While courts have increased the number of resolved cases and appear to dismiss fewer due to interference, systemic issues persist. The justice system retains a particularly punitive approach to drug-related offences, which carry high prosecution rates and frequent death sentences. Training and implementation of enforcement laws remain limited, and detention facilities often fall short of meeting national and international standards. Reported issues include overcrowding, poor sanitation and abuse. Independent monitoring of prisons is not permitted, hindering transparency and making accountability for prison conditions nearly impossible.

Vietnam's law enforcement system is multi-agency, with the Ministry of Public Security playing a central role in combating organized crime. Specialized units focus on cybercrime, drug trafficking, corruption and smuggling. Despite resource constraints, Vietnam has expanded international cooperation, participating in joint operations such as Operation Mekong Dragon and working with partners like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Chiefs of Police, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the Australian Federal Police. Border Liaison Offices have been established to support cross-border enforcement. While legislative amendments have increased penalties for wildlife crimes, enforcement remains weak due to corruption and limited capacity. Additional concerns include due process violations, excessive use of force by police and mistreatment of trafficking victims.

Vietnam's borders remain highly susceptible to organized criminal activity due to porous land crossings, river systems and major seaports. These vulnerabilities are exacerbated by limited capacity in neighbouring countries, insufficient domestic resources and corruption, with reports of customs officials colluding with traffickers. Despite increased border control staffing, challenges persist in curbing drug and human trafficking, wildlife smuggling and petroleum-related crimes. Vietnam continues to enhance international cooperation through Border Liaison Offices and training support from partners such as UNODC and INTERPOL. Growing cybersecurity threats have also prompted Vietnam to invest in digital infrastructure, training and specialized agencies to prevent cyber-infiltration and strengthen cyber defences.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Vietnam's vulnerability to money laundering is driven by rapid economic growth, widespread use of cash, limited regulatory oversight and the country's proximity to other high-risk jurisdictions. In mid-2023, Vietnam was added to the Financial Action Task Force's Grey List. In response, the government enacted a new anti-money laundering law, updated its legal frameworks, launched a national risk assessment and strengthened international cooperation. Regulatory requirements were extended to the banking, gambling, insurance and securities sectors. However, online gambling and betting remain difficult to control. The State Bank of Vietnam has issued directives on risk identification and reporting, and prosecutions for money laundering have increased. Still, high-risk sectors such as real estate and digital finance remain poorly monitored.

Vietnam has made progress in improving its business environment by streamlining administrative procedures, reducing informal costs and strengthening legal mechanisms that support legitimate business operations. These efforts have been recognized as having a positive effect on innovation and sustainable development. However, foreign businesses report persistent challenges, including high start-up costs, inefficient regulations, corruption in state-owned enterprises and bureaucratic delays. The informal economy remains large, characterized by a substantial underpaid workforce. Organized crime is present in the black credit sector, where criminal networks – sometimes involving foreign actors – operate shadow enterprises that offer loans at exorbitant interest rates.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Vietnam provides trafficking victims with a range of support services, including medical care, legal aid, vocational training and financial assistance under its national action plan. While the government has made progress, including operating a 24-hour victim support hotline and partnering with international donors and civil society, service delivery remains inconsistent. Victim identification is particularly limited in forced labour and cyber scam cases, with reluctance observed at the provincial level. A 2024 amendment to the anti-trafficking law introduced clearer victim definitions and enhanced financial support mechanisms. Although whistle-blower protections are codified in law, the absence of a formal programme leaves people vulnerable to retaliation or job reassignment.

Vietnam continues to implement long-term national strategies to combat transnational organized crime, including action plans addressing trafficking, drug control, biodiversity crimes and corruption. Funding has been allocated to support prevention efforts, although slightly reduced from previous years. Law enforcement continues to participate in awareness campaigns on drug and human trafficking, and the government promotes anti-counterfeit education through public showrooms. The Ministry of Education has also launched awareness campaigns in schools and universities targeting 'social evils' to encourage prosocial behaviour and prevent criminal activity. However, these initiatives are undermined by weak enforcement, fragmented oversight and limited resources.

Vietnam's media environment remains tightly controlled by the state, with censorship enforced under the 2018 cybersecurity law and the penal code. Journalists, bloggers and civil society actors face arrest for charges such as 'anti-state propaganda' or 'abuse of democratic freedoms'. The country continues to perform poorly in press freedom rankings, with journalists facing threats of imprisonment. Civil society operates under significant restrictions, with reports of surveillance, intimidation and violence against activists. Despite these limitations, some NGOs continue to support victims of organized crime and drug abuse by offering legal aid, harm reduction services and training for law enforcement in financial investigations and open-source intelligence on transnational crime.

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.