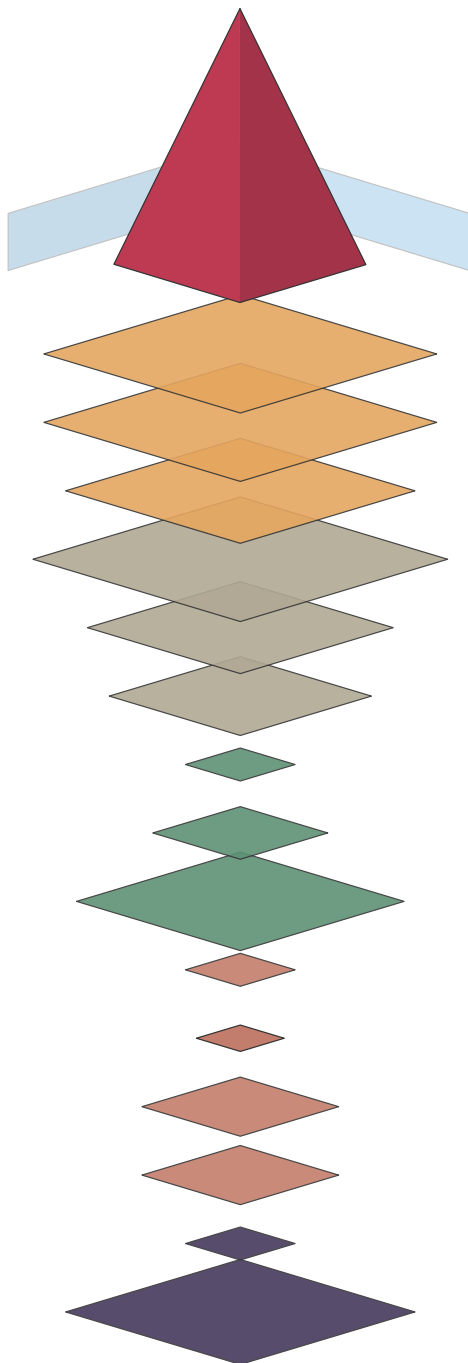
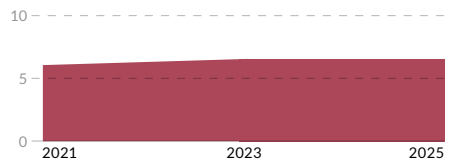


**YEMEN**



**6.63**  $\nearrow 0.06$   
**CRIMINALITY SCORE**

27<sup>th</sup> of 193 countries -  
10<sup>th</sup> of 46 Asian countries  $\nearrow 1$   
6<sup>th</sup> of 14 Western Asian countries -



**CRIMINAL MARKETS** **5.77**  $\nearrow 0.14$

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	9.00	0.00
HUMAN SMUGGLING	9.00	0.00
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	8.00	0.00
ARMS TRAFFICKING	9.50	0.00
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	7.00	$\nearrow 0.50$
ILLCIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	6.00	0.00
FLORA CRIMES	2.50	0.00
FAUNA CRIMES	4.00	0.00
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	7.50	0.00
HEROIN TRADE	2.50	0.00
COCAINE TRADE	2.00	0.00
CANNABIS TRADE	4.50	$\nearrow 0.50$
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	4.50	0.00
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	2.50	$\nearrow 1.00$
FINANCIAL CRIMES	8.00	0.00



**CRIMINAL ACTORS** **7.50** 0.00

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	7.50	$\nearrow 0.50$
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	7.50	$\nearrow 0.50$
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	8.00	0.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	8.50	0.00
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	6.00	0.00



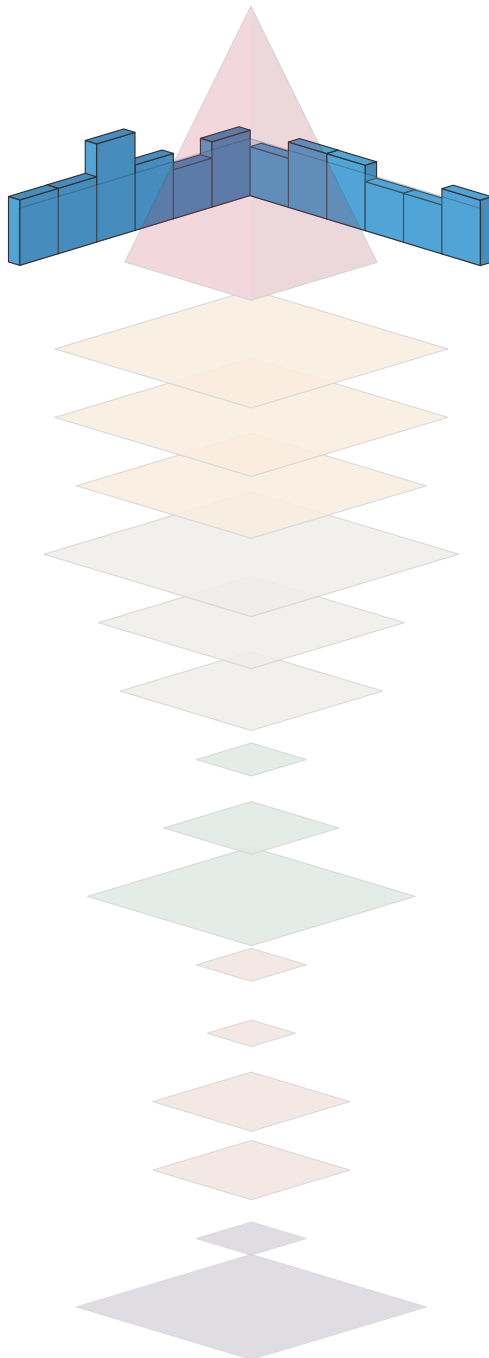
This project was funded in part by a grant from the United States Department of State.



Funded by the European Union

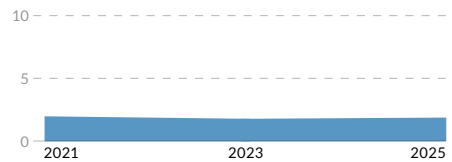
ENACT is funded by the European Union and implemented by the Institute for Security Studies and INTERPOL, in affiliation with the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.

**YEMEN**



**1.92**  $\nearrow 0.17$   
**RESILIENCE SCORE**

**187<sup>th</sup>** of 193 countries  $\nearrow 3$   
**43<sup>rd</sup>** of 46 Asian countries  $\nearrow 1$   
**14<sup>th</sup>** of 14 Western Asian countries -



POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	<b>2.00</b>	$\nearrow 0.50$
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	<b>2.00</b>	$\nearrow 0.50$
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	<b>3.00</b>	0.00
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	<b>2.00</b>	0.00
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	<b>1.50</b>	0.00
LAW ENFORCEMENT	<b>2.00</b>	0.00
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	<b>1.50</b>	0.00
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	<b>2.00</b>	0.00
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	<b>2.00</b>	0.00
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	<b>1.50</b>	$\nearrow 0.50$
PREVENTION	<b>1.50</b>	$\nearrow 0.50$
NON-STATE ACTORS	<b>2.00</b>	0.00



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# CRIMINALITY

## CRIMINAL MARKETS

### PEOPLE

Human trafficking in Yemen remains pervasive, driven by protracted conflict, economic instability and the absence of cohesive governance. The country functions as both a source and major transit hub for trafficking, particularly affecting migrants from the Horn of Africa. Rising migrant flows and recent seizures underscore the scale and complexity of operations, which include forced labour, sexual exploitation and child soldier recruitment. Criminal groups exploit weak enforcement and operate with cross-border coordination. Vulnerable groups – especially displaced people, women, children and marginalized communities – are disproportionately impacted. Certain initiatives have improved reporting, but systemic corruption, insecurity and insufficient resources continue to impede meaningful mitigation of trafficking and related abuses.

Human smuggling in Yemen has evolved into a multimillion-dollar transnational enterprise exacerbated by prolonged conflict and weak governance. Migrant arrivals have surged in recent years, with most people entering the country primarily en route to the Gulf states. Despite crackdowns and adverse weather conditions, smuggling remains entrenched, with operations marked by forced transfers, detention in remote camps and exploitative labour. Fees collected from migrants fund highly organized networks that use encrypted communication and drones. Fatal shipwrecks and increased violence, including extortion and arbitrary detention, underscore the severe risks.

The extortion and protection racketeering market in Yemen is also entrenched in the country's war economy, particularly at checkpoints controlled by armed groups. Non-state actors exploit weak governance to impose levies, notably under the guise of religious obligations. Since 2019, coercive Zakat collection has intensified in areas like Sanaa, with threats and blacklists used to enforce compliance. These groups also collect customs duties and taxes, generating significant revenues. In some regions, extortion is viewed as informal governance, with policies, such as travel restrictions for women, serving as mechanisms for further control and revenue extraction.

### TRADE

Yemen's arms trafficking market is extensive and transnational, sustained by maritime and overland smuggling routes and shaped by the country's prolonged conflict. Weapons are trafficked frequently, with increasing sophistication and scale, particularly through the Arabian

Sea and Gulf of Aden. Yemen acts both as a source and destination, with arms flowing to the Horn of Africa and sold domestically through private dealers, including on social media. External actors, notably Iran, have repeatedly been implicated, while Western nations have faced criticism for supplying arms to regional actors. The trade undermines Yemen's legal economy, exacerbates violence and is increasingly linked to other criminal markets, including narcotics and human trafficking.

Yemen's counterfeit goods market is widespread and deeply embedded in the war economy, particularly affecting the pharmaceutical sector. Trade is fuelled by economic hardship, weak regulation and high demand for affordable products, with counterfeit medicines posing serious health risks. Yemen serves primarily as a destination and transit hub, with most counterfeit imports originating from Egypt, China, Türkiye and the UAE. Armed groups and local smugglers are key players, often exploiting the lack of oversight and extorting healthcare providers. The market is interconnected with broader smuggling networks, further undermining the legal economy.

Similarly, the illicit trade in excisable goods, particularly tobacco and alcohol, is also entrenched in Yemen's conflict-affected economy. Local demand, especially for tobacco, remains high, while enforcement is weak and inconsistent. Smuggled cigarettes, primarily originating from the UAE, enter through Djibouti and are distributed through various Yemeni ports. State and non-state actors, including armed groups, are heavily involved, exploiting governance gaps to profit from trafficking and distribution. The legal tobacco sector has declined sharply, reducing tax revenues. This trade overlaps with other criminal activities, such as arms and human trafficking, and is sustained by systemic corruption.

### ENVIRONMENT

Illegal logging in Yemen, particularly of Sidr trees, has significantly increased because of widespread fuel shortages and rising energy costs, forcing many communities to rely on firewood for survival. Deforestation is especially severe in urban and coastal regions, where displaced populations cut down trees for shelter and charcoal production. While this market appears to be largely locally driven, the extent of organized criminal involvement remains unclear. Nonetheless, there are indications of cross-border trafficking, particularly involving timber from Socotra.

Fauna-related crimes are notable, with Yemen serving as both a transit and destination point for the poaching and trafficking of species such as cheetahs, Arabian oryx, leopards and sea turtles. These crimes are facilitated by

ongoing conflict, poverty and weak law enforcement. Similarly, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing – especially by foreign vessels – continues to pose a serious threat to marine biodiversity and the livelihoods of coastal communities. Local tribes, armed groups and international networks exploit legal grey areas and rely on corruption to sustain these illicit activities. Social media platforms also play a role in promoting the wildlife trade and normalizing hunting practices.

Oil smuggling in Yemen is widespread and deeply interconnected with regional conflict and organized crime. Armed factions, including the Houthis, exploit oil resources as a major revenue stream, attacking transport convoys, levying unauthorized taxes and maintaining control over smuggling routes that stretch across the Arabian Peninsula and into the Horn of Africa. Yemen's substantial oil reserves and strategic geographic location make it a key source of illicit petroleum flows, further complicated by fragmented governance and legal ambiguities. While some legal trade persists, it is often disrupted by theft and redirection. This parallel economy reinforces the financial power of armed groups, weakens state revenues, and contributes to environmental harm through oil spills and damaged infrastructure.

## DRUGS

The country functions primarily as a transit hub for heroin trafficking, facilitated by ongoing conflict, weak governance and strategic geography. Criminal groups, particularly the Houthis, are implicated in the trade, allegedly using it to fund military operations. Trafficking routes span maritime corridors and border regions, often involving actors with ties to external groups. Though local heroin consumption is low, the trade is linked to broader illicit economies, including arms and human trafficking, and is marked by advanced smuggling and laundering operations.

Cocaine trafficking in Yemen is limited but present, with the country primarily serving as a transit hub for regional markets, particularly Saudi Arabia. Smugglers – including local tribes, militant groups and foreign actors – exploit Yemen's porous borders and instability, operating with relative impunity. Although local demand is low, the trade contributes to conflict financing, recruitment and territorial competition among armed factions.

The cannabis trade is especially prominent in Houthi-controlled areas, where it reportedly funds military operations. Smuggling networks operate transnationally, with routes from Afghanistan via Pakistan and through Yemen's porous borders and coastal zones. Naval seizures underscore high trafficking volumes, with cannabis and hashish detected together with other substances such as amphetamines and heroin. Local production supports insurgent financing while replacing food crops, worsening food insecurity.

Yemen's synthetic drug trade, particularly involving Captagon, is embedded within complex criminal and regional networks, with operations exhibiting advanced logistical and manufacturing capabilities. The Houthis play a central role, reportedly producing Captagon domestically to finance military activities. Yemen's location and instability make it a key transit hub for drugs bound for Gulf states, especially Saudi Arabia, with trafficking routes extending from the Levant region, such as from Jordan. Although some local consumption exists, profits are largely driven by external demand. State fragmentation, porous borders and armed group involvement enable large-scale trafficking, intensifying violence and undermining control efforts.

## CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Cyber-dependent crime has risen notably in Yemen in recent years, driven largely by politically motivated actors – most prominently the Houthis. Groups such as OilAlpha have carried out sophisticated cyberattacks targeting humanitarian organizations, media outlets and civil society actors, often through the use of spyware and malicious applications. The absence of dedicated cybercrime legislation has created a permissive environment whereby such activities can flourish. These crimes extend beyond Yemen's borders, impacting regional networks, undermining press freedom and disrupting civic engagement. Common offences include digital espionage, surveillance and blackmail, with some groups demonstrating the technical capability to develop and deploy malware independently. These operations often blur the line between politically motivated activity and organized criminal behaviour, making it difficult to assess the scope and scale of this market.

## FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crimes in Yemen are widespread, driven by political and military factions. Embezzlement, aid diversion and unauthorized taxation are common, often blurring the lines between state revenue and extortion. These activities have created a parallel economy, particularly in Houthi-controlled areas, where illicit transactions merge with legitimate commerce. The resulting financial misconduct fuels armed groups, deepens corruption and worsens Yemen's economic instability. International aid is frequently diverted, while public funds are misused or laundered domestically and abroad. With limited taxpayer registration and billions lost in uncollected taxes, Yemen's fiscal structure remains severely weakened, exacerbating the humanitarian and economic crisis.

## CRIMINAL ACTORS

Yemen's landscape features mafia-style groups operating in unconventional but deeply entrenched ways, notably among some tribal structures and armed factions. The Houthis represent the most prominent example, exhibiting

defined leadership, identifiable membership and a wide scope of criminal activities. Their control over northern territories, including Sana'a, is maintained through military strength, tribal alliances and widespread coercion. The group exerts systemic control using a network of checkpoints known for human rights violations including extortion, arbitrary detention and torture. The Houthis finance their operations through illicit taxation, business extortion and control over humanitarian aid, arms and oil markets – effectively operating a parallel economy and state. Their judicial structures undermine state institutions and enable repression. Other tribal groups also show mafia-style characteristics, especially through hierarchical leadership and occasional alignment with armed actors like the Houthis. Their allegiances shift based on evolving political and economic incentives.

Criminal networks in Yemen operate with fluid structures, adapting opportunistically to the conditions of ongoing conflict. These loosely organized actors are heavily involved in smuggling, drug trafficking, money laundering and human trafficking. Some networks are reportedly linked to larger factions, including the Houthis, who enable or directly benefit from drug distribution. The violence associated with these networks is moderate to high, often manifesting in abuse and exploitation, especially of vulnerable populations like migrants. Their reach extends across the country and into transnational markets, particularly in the Gulf and East Africa, through smuggling routes and illicit trade. While their internal composition remains vague, their operational impact is significant, aided by Yemen's fragmented governance and widespread insecurity.

Yemen's institutional fragility has created fertile ground for state-embedded criminal actors across multiple governance levels. Evidence of corruption and financial mismanagement

is widespread, with high-level officials implicated in major scandals across sectors such as energy, telecommunications and finance. These actors exploit their positions for personal and political gain, often engaging in illegal taxation, extortion and forced levies. Those aligned with the internationally recognized government manipulate bureaucratic functions to entrench control and suppress dissent. This dual role – as state representatives and criminal beneficiaries – underscores the deep entanglement between governance and organized crime in Yemen, where formal authority often serves as a cover for illicit enterprise.

Foreign actors also exert a substantial and multifaceted influence on Yemen's criminal ecosystem. Regional powers such as Iran, the UAE and Saudi Arabia support domestic armed factions, namely the Houthis and various anti-Houthi factions, reshaping power dynamics and further complicating internal sovereignty. These actors contribute to the militarization of local groups and enable control over illicit economies, including human trafficking and resource exploitation. Foreign-backed networks facilitate the movement of weapons, people and illicit goods across Yemen's porous borders.

The private sector in Yemen presents notable vulnerabilities to organized crime, especially within banking, real estate and import-export sectors. The predominance of cash transactions and an informal economy create weak points for money laundering and illicit financial flows. Organized crime groups have exploited the war economy to gain influence over key sectors, including extractives such as oil. Despite the clear presence of enabling conditions, comprehensive data on private-sector complicity remains scarce, reflecting the opacity of Yemen's financial environment and regulatory breakdown.

# RESILIENCE

## LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Yemen's political leadership and governance capacity remain profoundly constrained due to a fragmented authority landscape, sustained conflict and systemic institutional weaknesses. Since the onset of the civil war in 2014, the country has been divided among competing power centres. The internationally recognized government, restructured under a Presidential Leadership Council, exercises limited control with the backing of a Saudi-led coalition. The Houthis, supported by Iran, continue to dominate Sana'a and northern Yemen, while the UAE-backed Southern Transitional Council asserts authority in the south, particularly in Aden. These divisions reflect a de facto partition of governance, with varying laws and

policies implemented across territories. Elections have not occurred in over a decade, and civil institutions have eroded, with political repression and widespread human rights abuses, including enforced disappearances, gender-based violence and arbitrary detentions. Despite some attempts to re-establish alliances and promote unity among factions, such as the April 2024 alliance formed in Aden, fragmentation and mutual distrust persist.

The internationally recognized government has taken steps to address corruption, including adopting a national anti-corruption strategy and forming institutions to improve oversight. However, these efforts face major obstacles due to weak implementation, financial constraints and

political fragmentation. The Supreme National Authority for Combatting Corruption suffers from limited capacity and independence. The conflict has deepened corruption by enabling armed actors and elites to exploit state assets, aid and illicit markets. Oversight remains weak, with limited enforcement and few meaningful transparency improvements.

Yemen has ratified several international treaties addressing organized crime, corruption and illicit trafficking, indicating formal alignment with global standards. However, enforcement remains uneven, hindered by limited extradition agreements, weak institutions and non-state actor influence. The country joined the UNIDROIT Convention in 2024, enhancing legal protection of cultural property. Informal cooperation exists on extradition, though implementation is hampered in conflict zones. Yemen participates with INTERPOL, including some engagement in transnational crime prevention, though public data on asset seizures is scarce. Despite the country's acute humanitarian needs, aid delivery faces significant challenges, especially due to Houthi-imposed restrictions and the politicization of relief efforts amid ongoing conflict.

Yemen's legal framework to counter organized crime is hindered by fragmentation, limited scope and poor enforcement, worsened by the civil war. Multiple factions enforce competing laws, creating inconsistencies and undermining governance. Existing anti-trafficking laws narrowly focus on slavery and child sex trafficking, neglecting labour exploitation. Legislative processes remain opaque, with limited activity since the conflict began. Unilateral legal changes, such as Houthi-imposed banking regulations in recent years, have destabilized the economy. Despite international pressure, Yemen has not modernized key laws or ratified the UN Arms Trade Treaty, a significant gap given the country's role in arms smuggling and the ongoing impact of conflict-related violence on civilians.

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Yemen lacks specialized judicial units for organized crime, and its judiciary is fragmented, heavily influenced by armed groups and political factions. Formal judicial processes are weak or non-existent in many areas, leading citizens to rely on customary or tribal justice. Houthi-controlled courts operate as political tools, while the internationally recognized government struggles with judicial oversight due to conflict-related infrastructure damage, financial constraints and personnel shortages. Citizens often turn to customary or tribal justice systems, especially in rural areas, because of the inefficiency of formal courts. Conditions in detention facilities remain dire, characterized by overcrowding, poor sanitation and allegations of torture. Unauthorized detention centres operated by tribes or militias exist in some areas, indicating a complete absence of state oversight.

Law enforcement in Yemen is fragmented and underfunded and faces deep-seated mistrust. Units dedicated to organized crime are under-resourced, and coordination with prosecutorial bodies is weak or non-existent. The law enforcement apparatus is plagued by corruption and a lack of accountability. Incidents such as extrajudicial killings by police forces and Houthi security personnel further undermine public confidence. Efforts to reform the security sector have been made, such as the announcement of a unified Central Agency for State Security, which aims to bring together various intelligence services and militias under the leadership of the Presidential Leadership Council. However, its implementation and effectiveness remain uncertain. Yemen's maritime law enforcement continues to rely on international actors such as INTERPOL, which assist with maritime operations against smuggling.

Yemen's border security is severely weakened by complex terrain, porous borders and ongoing conflict, enabling traffickers and organized crime to exploit unmonitored regions. Its strategic location between Africa and the Gulf makes it a key transit point for arms, narcotics and human trafficking. Border control efforts are undermined by insufficient infrastructure, untrained personnel and widespread corruption, enabling illicit networks to operate freely. Critical infrastructure, including ports and airports, is often controlled by militias and criminal groups who facilitate smuggling. Yemen also lacks cyber defences, ranking last globally in cybersecurity capacity, further highlighting systemic vulnerabilities in national security and governance.

## ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Yemen's financial sector has increasingly shifted to informal systems like hawala due to conflict-driven disruptions in formal banking, complicating efforts to monitor transactions and combat money laundering. While anti-money laundering laws exist and a Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) is in place, enforcement is hindered by institutional fragmentation. The central bank has been divided since 2016, with branches in Aden and Sanaa aligned to opposing authorities, reducing transparency and disrupting fiscal governance. Despite limited progress, including FIU cooperation agreements and capacity-building support from international donors, Yemen remains on the Financial Action Task Force's grey list, reflecting persistent vulnerabilities in its financial oversight framework.

Yemen's economic regulatory environment is severely weakened by ongoing conflict, economic fragmentation and the dominance of armed groups over key sectors. Corruption, unclear regulatory frameworks and the existence of dual systems of governance hinder economic stability. Armed actors exert control over resources such as oil, water and the import-export trade, often engaging in illicit activities including smuggling and taxation of humanitarian aid. A dual economy has emerged between the Houthi-controlled north and the internationally recognized

government-governed south, marked by different currencies and customs regimes. This has led to price distortions and increased incentives for smuggling. The central bank's split has undermined trust in the financial system, and international sanctions imposed have further restricted legal trade. Businesses operate under threats from criminal actors, and the formal private sector has limited capacity to counteract organized crime.

## CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Victim and witness support systems in Yemen are extremely weak. The government relies heavily on international and local NGOs to provide services, often without adequate funding or institutional support. The government's capacity to deliver protection is severely undermined by political fragmentation and conflict. Victims of trafficking, particularly women and migrants, face inadequate protection due to poor identification procedures, limited shelters and discriminatory practices. Migrants are often penalized rather than supported and the government struggles to distinguish trafficking from smuggling, leading to frequent victim criminalization. Cultural stigmas pertaining to drug use and certain crimes such as sexual exploitation further isolate victims.

Yemen has engaged in crime prevention efforts with international and regional support, focusing on maritime crime, financial crimes and human trafficking. A national anti-trafficking strategy was developed with international assistance to improve victim identification, regional cooperation and public awareness. However, implementation has been weak, with no training for diplomatic personnel

or efforts to reduce demand for commercial sex. While some progress has been made in curbing child recruitment, ongoing conflict and weak governance undermine overall effectiveness. Community-based approaches supported by international actors have shown some potential, but overall effectiveness remains limited by the humanitarian crisis and ongoing instability. There are no known whistleblower protection mechanisms or awareness programmes, indicating a critical gap in systemic crime prevention efforts.

Non-state actors, including civil society organizations (CSOs), continue to play a critical role in Yemen's response to organized crime, despite considerable risk. CSOs and international NGOs provide humanitarian assistance, monitor violations and offer limited support to victims. However, their operations are hindered by harassment, arbitrary arrests and media suppression. Press freedom is among the lowest globally, with journalists facing harassment, censorship and arbitrary detention. Houthi authorities have blocked news websites and messaging platforms, further stifling independent reporting. Women activists and journalists are particularly vulnerable to targeted attacks. These restrictions weaken the role of civil society in promoting accountability and combating organized crime. Despite these challenges, the resilience of civil society actors remains evident. NGOs continue to provide critical services and engage in advocacy under difficult circumstances.

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