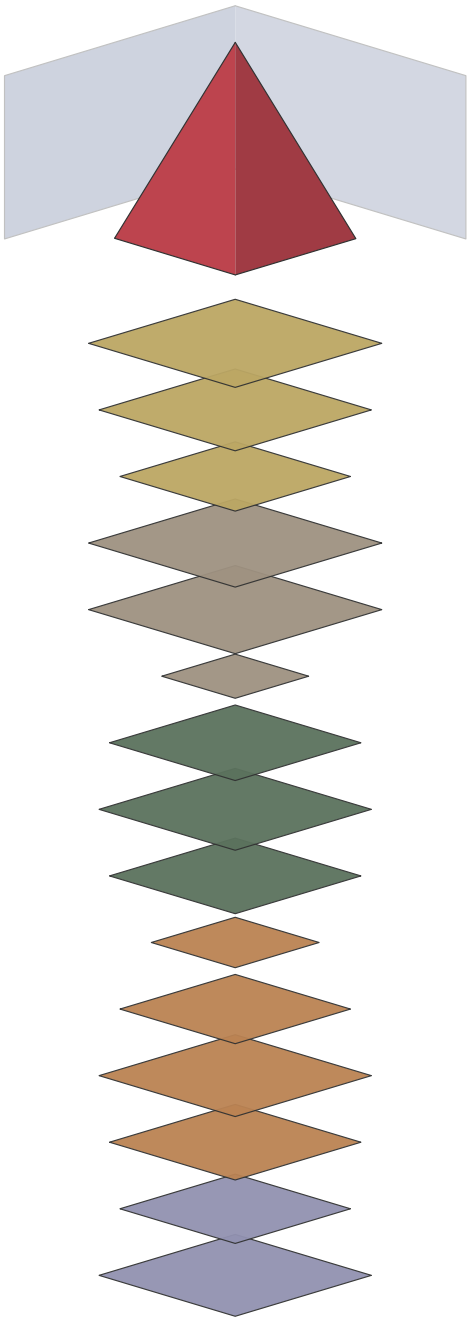
Africa
ORGANISED CRIME
INDEX 2023

enact
Enhancing Africa's response to transnational organised crime

This project is funded by the European Union

CÔTE D'IVOIRE



6.02
CRIMINALITY SCORE

14th of 54 African countries
2nd of 15 West African countries

CRIMINAL MARKETS	5.93
HUMAN TRAFFICKING	7
HUMAN SMUGGLING	6.5
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	5.5
ARMS TRAFFICKING	7
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	7
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	3.5
FLORA CRIMES	6
FAUNA CRIMES	6.5
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	6
HEROIN TRADE	4
COCAINE TRADE	5.5
CANNABIS TRADE	6.5
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	6
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	5.5
FINANCIAL CRIMES	6.5

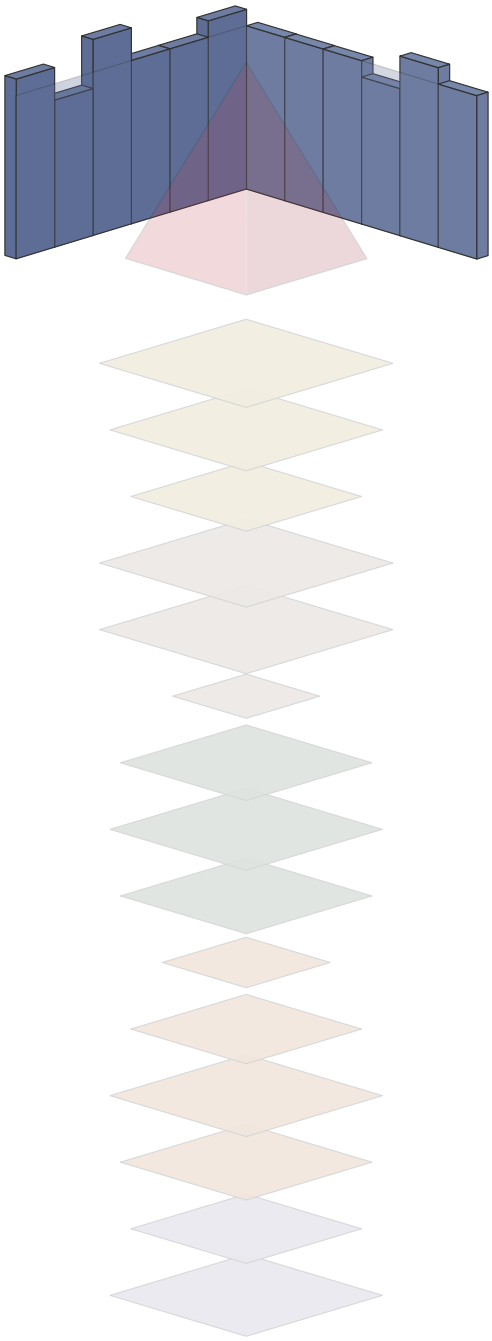
CRIMINAL ACTORS	6.1
MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	3.5
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	7
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	7.5
FOREIGN ACTORS	7.5
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	7.5

5.13
RESILIENCE SCORE

enact
Enhancing Africa's response to transnational organised crime

This project is funded by the European Union

CÔTE D'IVOIRE



5.13
RESILIENCE SCORE

12th of 54 African countries
6th of 15 West African countries

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	5.5
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	4.5
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	6
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	5
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	5
LAW ENFORCEMENT	5.5
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	5
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	5
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	5
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	4.5
PREVENTION	5.5
NON-STATE ACTORS	5

6.02
CRIMINALITY SCORE

CRIMINAL MARKETS	5.93
CRIMINAL ACTORS	6.1

CRIMINALITY

Criminal Markets

PEOPLE

Human trafficking continues to be a significant issue in Côte d'Ivoire, with the country serving as a source, transit point and destination for forced labour and commercial sexual exploitation. Both domestic and foreign victims are exploited within the country as well as abroad. In the economic capital, Abidjan, Nigerian nationals play a significant role in trafficking dynamics. Internal trafficking is more prevalent, with victims primarily transported from the northern regions to the economically prosperous south. While child trafficking, especially in the cocoa industry, is widely reported, adult trafficking may be under-reported because of a stronger focus on crimes against children. Côte d'Ivoire also faces challenges in addressing trafficking from other West African countries. Boys, particularly from Burkina Faso, are forcibly engaged in labour intensive industries such as agriculture, mining, construction, carpentry and begging within Côte d'Ivoire.

Côte d'Ivoire is considered a country of origin for individuals moving from Africa to Europe, using predominantly the Central Mediterranean route, and the maritime route to the Canary Islands from departure points in Senegal and Morocco. While many migrants and refugees travel independently within the ECOWAS region, most then hire the services of smugglers to embark on maritime journeys, or cross into Algeria or Libya by land, depending on the route.

Extortion and protection racketeering are major issues, resulting in significant economic losses and contributing to insecurity. The increase in armed robberies, highway robberies and kidnappings in the Bounkani region is attributed by elements of law enforcement to the increasing presence of violent extremists, although the extent of the involvement of extremist actors in driving criminal markets in the area remains unclear. Protection racketeering is also prevalent in cities, involving the private security sector and occasionally the participation of traditional hunters (Dozo).

TRADE

Côte d'Ivoire ranks among the countries in West Africa with the highest number of circulating arms. The tri-border area shared with Burkina Faso and Mali serves as a crucial hub for commerce and transit, linking the Gulf of Guinea, the Sahara, the Sahel and the Mediterranean. While improved stability in the tri-border area with Guinea and Liberia has reduced the amount of arms trafficking, the overall trade remains active. Government forces have also been implicated in arms trafficking, with security officials known to rent their weapons to unauthorized users and facilitate cross-border movements of arms.

The counterfeit goods market in Côte d'Ivoire is a significant problem that spans various sectors such as food, electronics and pharmaceuticals. Some counterfeit goods are smuggled into the country along hidden routes, while others are produced locally. It is estimated that more than three-quarters of imported and circulating goods are counterfeit. The production of counterfeit goods is particularly prominent in areas like Adjamé and Treichville in Abidjan, where counterfeit medicines are prevalent. Well-organized networks, primarily composed of Guinean and Ivorian nationals, facilitate the trade, with the city of Man serving as a transit point. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated this issue, with Benin, Côte d'Ivoire and Togo becoming key entry points for large volumes of counterfeit goods destined for the West African markets of Ghana and Nigeria.

The illicit trade in excise goods, including tobacco, alcohol and stolen cars, is a growing concern. While there is a lack of hard data, it is estimated that illicit and counterfeit tobacco products account for approximately one-tenth of total cigarette sales. Improper packaging and tracking of the tobacco supply chain in West Africa have contributed to the sale of cigarettes without the appropriate excise taxes and in illegal markets. Although Côte d'Ivoire is not considered a source country for illicit tobacco, it probably receives most of these products from Mali, where the illegal tobacco trade is operated by jihadist networks, posing a threat to regional security. Stolen cars are also smuggled into Côte d'Ivoire through the port of Abidjan, primarily from European countries.

ENVIRONMENT

Flora crimes in Côte d'Ivoire have had a significant impact on the country's forests, which are shared with neighbouring nations in West Africa. In the past six decades illegal logging has depleted almost all the country's forest resources. The alarming deforestation rate is primarily driven by agricultural activities, particularly cocoa production. These illegal logging operations are well

organized and involve shadowy financiers, coordinators and criminal networks, sometimes protected by corrupt officials to facilitate the exploitation, transport and sale of illegal timber.

Côte d'Ivoire serves as both a source and a transit point for pangolin scales, the sale of which is identified as the most prevalent wildlife trade in the country. While pangolin scales enter from various countries in the region, such as Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, Nigeria, Liberia and Ghana, there is evidence of recent shifts in trafficking routes.

The illegal trade in apes, ivory and birds also contributes to Côte d'Ivoire's emerging role as a prominent transit state for fauna trafficking, involving Guinean families with pan-African networks and middlemen from Burkina Faso and Mali. The local market in the country is of significant value, with pangolin scales being sold to local middlemen and Vietnamese and Chinese buyers, while baby chimpanzees from Liberia are sent to Abidjan for local sale or export. Wildlife trafficking in the country is also reported to be facilitated by corrupt public officials. Limited amounts of ivory are smuggled across the Liberian border. Resident species like giraffes, elephants, Roan antelopes and buffaloes also face significant threats.

Côte d'Ivoire is one of the largest gold producers in Africa. As in much of West Africa, obtaining a license for artisanal gold mining is a complex process. Consequently, tens of thousands of unlicensed artisanal miners operate in the country. The environmental damage caused by illegal mining is compounded by issues such as the use of banned chemicals like cyanide and mercury. The economic impact is also substantial, with West African countries losing a significant amount of money to informal artisanal and small-scale gold production. There are growing concerns that violent extremist groups based in southern Burkina Faso may be involved in pre-financing gold mining operations in the north of the country, particularly within the Comoé National Park.

DRUGS

Côte d'Ivoire is a significant transit country for the cocaine trade between Latin America and Europe. Cocaine is smuggled into Abidjan across the country's extensive coastline and then exported to European markets. Smugglers use various methods, including offloading drugs from fishing boats operating in international waters, and trafficking cocaine into the country in containers, via the main maritime ports. Côte d'Ivoire is believed to be an important stronghold for the 'Ndrangheta, the Italian mafia organization which influences a significant proportion of cocaine flows into Europe, within West Africa.

Côte d'Ivoire, along with Senegal and Ghana, is a major producer of cannabis in West Africa. Cannabis plants are often hidden in rice fields, as its cultivation provides significant benefits for many farmers in the country. The use, sale, storage, transportation and export of the drug have expanded and include the export of cannabis resin to neighbouring countries. Cannabis, alongside crack cocaine and heroin, is widely available in informal smokehouses called 'fumoirs' across Abidjan. Côte d'Ivoire is currently not a significant trans-shipment point for heroin. Heroin is trafficked by air or sea from distant countries such as Pakistan, Lebanon and Latin American nations, with the intention of re-exporting it to the United States or Europe.

Detecting and seizing synthetic drugs pose significant challenges to law enforcement leading to significantly likely under-reporting. Consumption of Tramadol, some imported from Nigeria, is relatively widespread and reportedly growing. There are regular, small volume, seizures of amphetamines, particularly methamphetamines, at Abidjan airport destined predominantly towards Australia and New Zealand.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Increased access to information and communication technologies has resulted in Côte d'Ivoire experiencing a rise in cybercrime. While technological advances have benefited the population, lagging regulatory frameworks have created a favourable environment for cybercriminals. Complaints about cybercrimes have reached record highs in the region and the country is considered to be friendly to these criminals. In Abidjan cybercriminals, known as 'grazers' in Ivoirian slang, operate from internet cafés located in municipalities such as Port-Bouët, Marcory, Koumassi, Treichville and Yopougon, often with the complicity of certain café managers. The COVID-19 pandemic and its economic impact on Africa have led to a rise in cybercriminal activities in the country, particularly cyberattacks on online banking platforms.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crimes, including tax fraud and embezzlement of public funds, are widespread. Various forms of financial crime, such as cheque and credit card fraud, mortgage fraud and corporate fraud, contribute to the illicit acquisition of property and wealth. The digital transformation of Africa has opened up new opportunities for cybercriminals, leading to significant threats from online scams and banking fraud. In recent years several individuals,

including prominent political and military figures, have been convicted of embezzlement and corruption. However, the underlying political motives behind these convictions remain unclear, raising concerns about the politicization of embezzlement cases. Private companies are also involved in financial misconduct, such as misappropriation of state assets and tax evasion. Some have been pursued in court, and received significant fines for such actions.

Criminal Actors

Foreign actors play a significant role in Côte d'Ivoire's criminal markets, particularly in facilitating cross-border activities and trafficking commodities such as cocoa, gold and timber in the Sahel region, specifically to Mali and Burkina Faso. The Italian Mafia (especially the 'Ndrangheta), Lebanese, Ghanaian, and Nigerian groups are prevalent in the country. Their involvement extends to money transfers, goods trafficking and creating networks that enable Ivoirian actors to access other markets for their illicit activities. The artisanal mining sector, fishing and the exploitation of fishing licences and the cocaine trade are crucial areas in which their influence is evident.

State-embedded actors are identified as the primary catalysts of corruption and financial crimes, perpetuating illicit practices throughout various sectors. Corruption poses a significant obstacle to investment, with a particular impact on judicial proceedings, contract allocations, customs and taxation. Businesses encounter instances of corruption across levels of the civil service and reports indicate that bribes in some instances influence judicial decisions. Côte d'Ivoire also faces the persistent issue of extortion and protection racketeering by security forces at checkpoints, which engender significant grievances between communities and the state.

Ivoirian criminal networks operate across West African states, reaching as far as Tunisia, engaging in various illicit activities. These activities include human trafficking, artisanal mining, drug trafficking, wildlife crimes such as the trafficking of elephant tusks, arms smuggling, money laundering and the illegal trade in cigarettes and fuel. Local gangs, including teenage groups, operate in small clusters and are involved in armed robberies. There are allegations that politicians use these groups to disrupt opposing rallies or intimidate opposition figures during elections.

Syndicates that run public/mass transport businesses resemble mafia-style groups. Despite their apparent legitimacy, some of their leaders lead large criminal organizations that are heavily involved in illicit markets, including drug trafficking. The organizations often have a significant number of members, who are referred to as 'gnambros' and 'microbes'.

Although the extent of the impact of crime on the private sector in Cote d'Ivoire is unknown, it is likely to be affecting the development of business activities. In addition, private sector actors are also known to be involved in certain criminal activities in the country, especially financial crimes in the form of tax evasion and embezzlement.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Côte d'Ivoire's most recent elections, in 2020, were marred by widespread electoral violence, triggered in part by current President Alassane Ouattara's controversial and successful third-term bid. Since then, while there have been improvements in governance, challenges persist in areas such as political consensus building, reconciliation and security. Lagging socio-economic development in the north of the country has fuelled feelings of marginalization in the area, and fed into intra-regional tensions.

Widespread perceptions of corruption at distinct levels of state continue to fuel grievances. Efforts to combat corruption have been ongoing for nearly a decade, with the establishment of high-level institutions and specialized units. However, the public is still skeptical about the government's commitment to tackling the problem effectively. Concerns persist about corruption within key public institutions such as the police and the judiciary. While the government has digitalized its systems to enhance transparency and accountability, the implementation and effectiveness of this initiative is yet to be fully determined.

Côte d'Ivoire has actively pursued and nurtured a range of international partnerships. The country has ratified many international instruments, including the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. It has engaged in joint operations with other countries and international organizations to address transnational crimes, such as human trafficking and smuggling.

Côte d'Ivoire maintains positive relations with many Western donor organizations. The country has also formed significant trade and investment partnerships with a wide range of countries, among them China, and is among West Africa's fastest growing economies. The country has a broad and well-defined legal framework. However, its implementation is sometimes problematic, particularly in the civil court system. A large backlog of cases and a poor prosecutorial record, have somewhat hindered progress. The political will and effective enforcement of some elements of the existing legal framework remain a challenge.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

There are significant challenges hampering the effective functioning of the judicial system in Côte d'Ivoire. There have been some limited improvements such as the introduction of three-judge panels for certain cases and efforts to expedite legal decisions. International organizations and foreign governments have supported the establishment of legal and institutional structures to combat organized crime, but the enforcement of existing laws and the enhancement of judicial integrity continue to be areas of concern. While the judiciary is institutionally separate, it is susceptible to executive interference, lacks resources and suffers from corruption. Corrupt officials in the prison system engage in bribery or intimidation to facilitate the release of prisoners, including those connected to organized crime. The correctional system in Côte d'Ivoire is severely overcrowded.

The national police are responsible for law enforcement, maintaining public safety, protecting freedoms, securing the state and coordinating policing activities. The General Directorate of Judicial Police is tasked with combating serious crimes, including economic and financial crimes and child and drug trafficking. The Transnational Crime Unit also has a mandate to investigate serious organized crime. Limited funding and resources for law enforcement create gaps in addressing criminal activities. Corruption within police ranks is also a hindrance, with reports of high levels of extortion in rural areas and widespread bribery during the recruitment process. The public has little confidence in the effectiveness of law enforcement in the country.

Despite the civil war having ended nearly a decade ago, the country still experiences pockets of instability and the potential for violence. The government has increased military surveillance at the northern border in response to attacks by violent extremist groups from the Sahel. This has brought a temporary halt to the attacks, but the threat persists as these groups may use the Burkina Faso- and Mali-Côte d'Ivoire borders as a fallback area. The instability and breakdown of security and politics in Burkina Faso could further strain the Ivoirian security system. The situation on the Liberian border, which was unsafe for years, seems to have stabilized.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

While Côte d'Ivoire has established a legal framework and institutional structures to address money laundering, practical enforcement remains a significant challenge. Deficiencies in its legal framework and measures result in high risks of money laundering and terrorist financing. Although there are legal measures in place, such as the referral of alleged perpetrators for trial and investigation, the fight against corruption and money laundering is often intertwined with political issues. The real estate, construction and agricultural sectors are identified as major contributors to these crimes. The presence of illegal and unsupervised casinos also poses risks, as they can easily evade authorities and lack proper controls over the origin of funds exchanged within their establishments.

Côte d'Ivoire has experienced robust economic growth driven by pro-business reforms, strong private investment and sectors such as agriculture, agribusiness, mining, manufacturing, housing and services. However, certain challenges persist in the regulatory framework. Property rights and contracts are enforced, but difficulties relating to the complex laws that govern rural land tenure mean there is a limited number of clear land titles. There is also inadequate protection of intellectual property rights. In the face of pressure from international organizations to enact reforms government has made efforts to promote transparency and competition.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Although law enforcement and judicial officials have received training, there are areas in which the government's performance remains inadequate. Specifically, law enforcement officers lack the necessary training and resources to investigate trafficking cases and identify victims effectively. There are insufficient shelters and services for adult victims, leaving many vulnerable to re-victimization and prompting the government to

refer adult victims to NGO-operated shelters, while child victims are referred to both government-run and NGO-operated shelters. While the government also provides limited medical care and psycho-socio support to trafficking victims, legal and judicial assistance is typically insufficient.

Efforts to prevent organized crime in the country are underway, including training law enforcement personnel and improving border management. The government modestly increased its anti-trafficking prevention efforts, including the recent implementation of a four-year national action plan, with the assistance of foreign donors. Other forms of prevention supported by international partners include child trafficking, narcotics and fisheries. The government has abolished school fees and increased the number of labour inspectors, specifically to target child trafficking.

Past civil conflict and political repression have weakened the civil society sector. Civil society actors advocating for change have historically faced strong repression from political forces, creating a polarized environment in which engaging in debates is viewed as a form of protest. Under the current administration civil society is often co-opted or repressed if it is perceived as a threat to political power. While the situation of journalists has improved in recent years, with no convictions and increased freedom of expression, challenges persist. Self-censorship is common and certain political discussions, particularly those questioning the legitimacy of the president's third term, may still result in harassment. Journalists face verbal and physical attacks by unknown assailants, political party activists and law enforcement personnel. Investigative journalists are targeted with intimidation and arbitrary arrest and newsrooms are subjected to attacks.