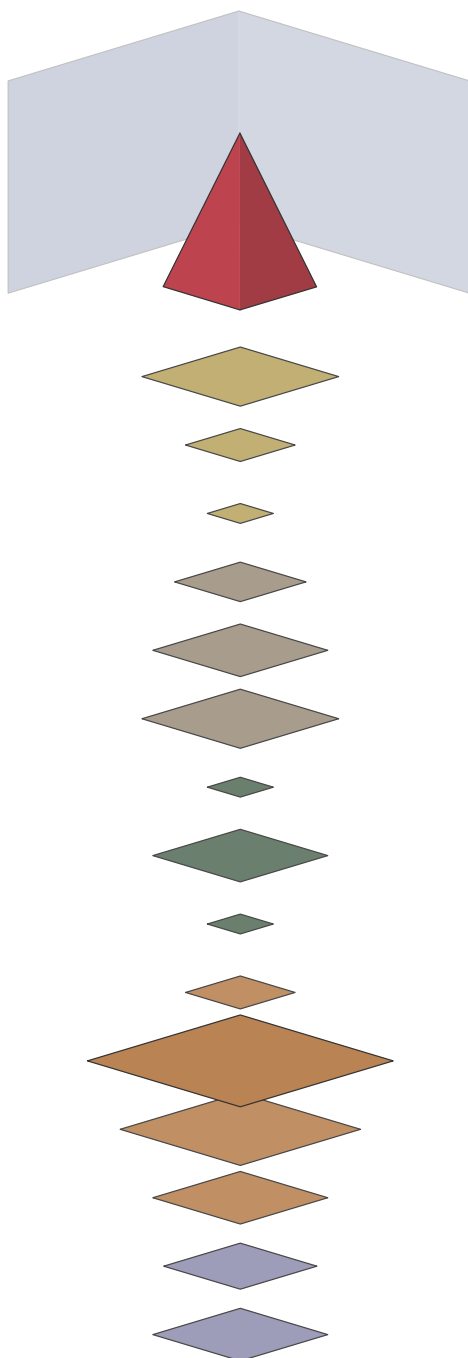


# CABO VERDE

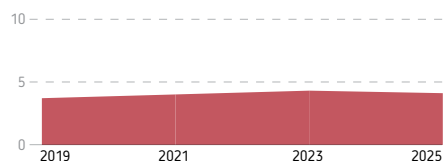


4.08  $\nearrow 0.20$

## CRIMINALITY SCORE

49<sup>th</sup> of 54 African countries  $\nearrow 1$

15<sup>th</sup> of 15 West African countries -



## CRIMINAL MARKETS

3.57  $\nearrow 0.40$

HUMAN TRAFFICKING 4.50 0.00

HUMAN SMUGGLING 2.50  $\nearrow 0.50$

EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING 1.50  $\nearrow 3.50$

ARMS TRAFFICKING 3.00 0.00

TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS 4.00 0.00

ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS 4.50 0.00

FLORA CRIMES 1.50  $\nearrow 0.50$

FAUNA CRIMES 4.00 0.00

NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES 1.50  $\nearrow 0.50$

HEROIN TRADE 2.50  $\nearrow 1.50$

COCAINE TRADE 7.00  $\nearrow 0.50$

CANNABIS TRADE 5.50 0.00

SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE 4.00 0.00

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES 3.50  $\nearrow 1.00$

FINANCIAL CRIMES 4.00 0.00



## CRIMINAL ACTORS

4.60 0.00

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS 3.00 0.00

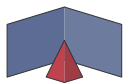
CRIMINAL NETWORKS 5.00  $\nearrow 0.50$

STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS 4.00 0.00

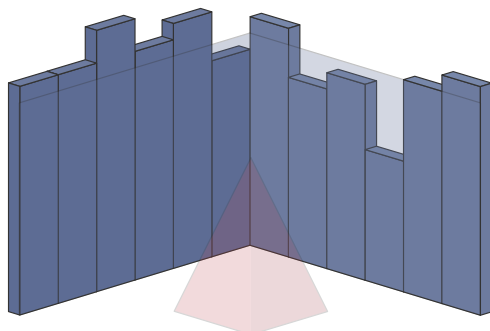
FOREIGN ACTORS 6.50  $\nearrow 0.50$

PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS 4.50 0.00





# CABO VERDE

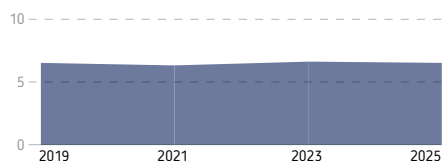


6.54  $\downarrow 0.04$

## RESILIENCE SCORE

1<sup>st</sup> of 54 African countries -

1<sup>st</sup> of 15 West African countries -



POLITICAL LEADERSHIP  
AND GOVERNANCE **7.00** 0.00

GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY  
AND ACCOUNTABILITY **7.00** 0.00

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION **8.00**  $\downarrow 0.50$

NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS **7.00** 0.00

JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION **7.50** 0.00

LAW ENFORCEMENT **6.00** 0.00

TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY **7.00**  $\downarrow 0.50$

ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING **5.50**  $\uparrow 0.50$

ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY **6.00** 0.00

VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT **4.00** 0.00

PREVENTION **6.50** 0.00

NON-STATE ACTORS **7.00** 0.00



# CRIMINALITY

## Criminal markets

### PEOPLE

Human trafficking in Cabo Verde is a moderately large market due to its location, with the archipelago serving as a source, transit hub and destination for smuggled people. Cabo Verde is a source country for child sex trafficking and a destination for women trafficked for prostitution from West Africa (especially Nigeria and Senegal). Labour trafficking, particularly of West African migrants, is also widespread in hospitality, construction, agriculture, domestic work and private security. Shops operated by Chinese expats have been reported to exploit other Chinese nationals for labour. Sex tourism involving minors is a particular problem, with the Sal and Boa Vista islands reporting the highest rates of child sexual exploitation. Socio-economic deprivation is a major driver, with some families reportedly encouraging young girls to engage in relationships for financial or marital gain.

There is also some migrant smuggling through Cabo Verde towards Europe, predominantly involving Senegalese and Nigerian nationals. Despite having high levels of emigration historically as an island nation, Cabo Verde has recently become a destination for West African migrants, many of whom live in the country without legal status. Allegations of corrupt practices further complicate the issue, with reports of officials accepting bribes to facilitate irregular migration or expedite residency documents.

Extortion and protection racketeering are limited in Cabo Verde, with sporadic incidents reported in recent years.

### TRADE

Arms trafficking is still relatively limited but a growing concern. Artisanal firearms manufactured within the archipelago known as boca-bedjo are being used by urban youth gangs involved in the drug trade, concentrated in the capital Praia. Organized crime groups, by contrast, typically use commercial weapons, as revealed in seizures during arrests linked to the drugs trade. The confiscation of Makarovs, Brownings and Walthers suggests that weapons are being lost or stolen from military or police sources. Seizures of both artisanal and commercially produced firearms have increased at ports such as Praia with thousands of rounds of ammunition having been impounded in recent years. The scale of intercepted ammunition shipments, in some cases hidden in containers from European ports like Lisbon,

have prompted authorities to adopt stricter penalties and initiate voluntary weapon collection campaigns. These measures reflect the state's recognition of the growing risk from the arms trade, even if the market remains comparatively underdeveloped.

The counterfeit goods market is a major concern in the country, undermining legitimate businesses, eroding consumer trust and reducing government tax revenues. The Sucupira Market in Praia is a known hotspot for the informal and illicit goods trade, with counterfeit pharmaceuticals smuggled mainly from Dakar and Bissau posing the greatest harm to the public.

While the scope and scale of the market is unclear, the illicit trade in excise goods, particularly tobacco and alcohol, also poses a serious challenge. High excise duties on legal tobacco products creates a powerful incentive for smuggling, while porous borders and under resourced enforcement agencies hamper effective regulation.

### ENVIRONMENT

Flora crimes are limited in Cabo Verde. While there have been isolated reports of illegal deforestation, these have not been linked to organized criminal actors. Tourism and real estate development pose a potential risk, but current enforcement appears to be effective at mitigating widespread flora crime.

Fauna crimes, however, are more prevalent. Cabo Verde's rich marine resources have made it a hotspot for illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, which poses a significant threat to biodiversity and fish stocks. The government has denied evidence of illegal fishing within its exclusive economic zone, but the maritime police, environmental groups and journalists have flagged ongoing violations. Local communities, driven by economic hardship, have also been implicated in the illegal hunting and sale of sea turtles.

Non-renewable resource crimes in Cabo Verde are limited but becoming more significant due to the growth in illegal sand mining on the island of Santiago. Although not clearly linked to organized crime, the extraction of sand for construction has become a common practice in coastal communities such as Charco, Ribeira da Barca and Canelo. Economic necessity, especially among former fishing communities, drives participation in this physically demanding and environmentally damaging activity. Policing remains uneven and sand mining continues to exacerbate coastal erosion and the impacts of climate change.



## DRUGS

Heroin trafficking in Cabo Verde appears to be limited, with only a small degree of domestic consumption. However, there is insufficient data to confirm the scale or structure of the trade.

Cocaine trafficking, on the other hand, is an entrenched and evolving criminal market in Cabo Verde with domestic consumption reportedly on the rise. The archipelago's strategic geographic location has long made it a key logistics and trans-shipment hub for South American cocaine – particularly originating in Colombia, Peru and Bolivia – destined for Europe. Maritime routes are critical to the trade, with seizures commonly occurring on fishing vessels and other non-container ships in waters off the islands. Vessels often embark from Brazil, although routes from Suriname and Guyana are increasingly being tracked. Recent years have seen multi-tonne seizures coordinated by international law enforcement, often in collaboration with Cabo Verdean authorities. Foreign criminal actors in the trade, including Brazilian, Italian, Serbian, Spanish, Albanian and Guyanese networks, often work in partnership with local groups. Proceeds from the trade are laundered locally, particularly in Praia, through the real estate and hospitality sectors, construction companies and complicit banks. Transport infrastructure improvements have allowed cocaine trafficking to spread across more islands.

Cannabis is widely consumed in Cabo Verde and is both locally produced and trafficked. Although illegal, personal use is tolerated in small quantities. Santiago Island, particularly its municipalities of Ribeira Grande and Santa Catarina, has emerged as a focal point for cultivation and trade. Moroccan nationals have been linked to cannabis resin shipments through Cabo Verde toward Europe. Authorities have also intercepted shipments of hashish oil, indicating diversification within the cannabis market.

Synthetic drug trafficking in Cabo Verde is widespread in urban areas, and reported to be increasing. MDMA is commonly available, especially on the tourist islands of Sal and Boa Vista. While synthetic drug consumption is still limited, trends suggest it has potential for expansion.

## CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Cyber-dependent crimes in Cabo Verde are not pervasive. Recent cyberattacks have targeted public institutions and disrupted key services. These incidents illustrate the country's growing vulnerability in the digital space, particularly as technology use expands. Although systemic responses are still nascent, the rise in cybercrime in Cabo Verde follows the global pattern.

## FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crimes are a persistent concern in Cabo Verde, particularly in tourist areas where fraud is common. Various scams are used to target people and small businesses including credit card fraud and fraudulent online advertisements. Ponzi schemes have become a notable issue, often disguised as investment opportunities in cryptocurrency, foreign exchange and sports trading. These schemes exploit economic vulnerabilities and are promoted through fabricated success stories to attract new investors.

## Criminal actors

Mafia-style groups in Cabo Verde are a peripheral threat. These groups compete for local control over trafficking routes and their overall influence on the country's criminal markets is limited.

Criminal networks in Cabo Verde are particularly involved in the drugs and arms trades. Domestic drug distribution is done through local criminal groups, who are increasingly armed. The capital Praia is heavily affected by urban gang violence, including robbery, theft, homicide and drug and arms trafficking. The structure of some gangs is becoming increasingly complex, with former street youth gang structures that were not necessarily built around organized crime, becoming fused with international criminal networks. These networks often have strong links with diaspora communities in Europe and the US, using transnational ties to facilitate the import and export of illicit goods.

Cabo Verde is generally recognized for low levels of corruption compared to other states in West Africa. At the municipal level, bribery and nepotism persist, and there have been cases of state actors being involved in illicit markets. Reports indicate that border police have solicited bribes to facilitate irregular migration or provide residency documentation unlawfully. Observers have noted cases of complicity from officials in hampering human trafficking investigations and prosecutions. Furthermore, interaction between state authorities and criminal organizations has been reported in the context of drug law enforcement.

Foreign actors are deeply embedded in Cabo Verde's criminal landscape, playing a significant role in multiple illicit markets. Foreign criminal actors are particularly prominent in cocaine trafficking, including groups from South America – especially the Brazilian group Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC) – West Africa and the Western Balkans. Russian, Nigerian and Galician actors – along with mafia-style groups from Serbia, Albania and Montenegro – have also been linked to the cocaine trade, using elements based temporarily or permanently on the archipelago to support their international operations. Moroccan nationals have been identified as key players in the transit of cannabis resin. Chinese criminal actors continue to exert influence



in the domain of counterfeit goods. Collectively, these groups reflect Cabo Verde's strategic vulnerability to foreign criminal exploitation.

Private-sector actors in Cabo Verde are regularly used as conduits for money laundering and other forms of illicit economic activity. Some illegally obtained funds are funnelled through real estate, fisheries, tourism, financial

services and high-end retail. The construction sector is a particular area of concern due to its reliance on illegally sourced sand from the coastlines. This private sector activity, while not always coordinated by formal criminal networks, nonetheless supports the informal economy and generates criminal profits.

# RESILIENCE

## LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

The political leadership in Cabo Verde is relatively stable, with robust democratic institutions and regular elections. The country is often viewed as a model of democracy in Africa. During the reporting period, the government launched its second action plan against human trafficking and created the National Observatory on Human Trafficking, highlighting its commitment to combating organized crime. However, opposition parties have criticized the government's response to crime, citing increasing insecurity and a rise in criminality. Government transparency and accountability has improved, supported by legal reforms, public participation mechanisms and technical tools such as e-payment systems, among other things. Nonetheless, there are ongoing issues such as nepotism, bribery and lack of compliance with asset-declaration rules. Anti-corruption legislation exists but lacks rigorous enforcement, and the right to information framework is weakened by excessive exclusions and lack of independent oversight.

Cabo Verde has demonstrated strong international cooperation in tackling organized crime, having ratified major international conventions and worked extensively with foreign partners. The country engages in joint initiatives with organizations such as the UN Office on Drugs and Crime and the EU, particularly in drug and crime prevention. It contributes to regional efforts such as the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries and the Atlantic Centre. Its active participation in initiatives like CRIMJUST and the seaport cooperation project (SEACOP V) demonstrates the country's dedication to building institutional capacity, especially in maritime security. Cabo Verde's outreach efforts include participating in training, intelligence-sharing, and security collaboration with bodies such as INTERPOL and the US Coast Guard.

The national legal framework dealing with organized crime is comprehensive, covering money laundering, firearms, excise goods and human trafficking. Cabo Verde has adopted updated gun control laws, measures against

tax evasion and national action plans targeting human trafficking. Additionally, legislative changes have improved regulation of the forestry sector and whale watching, and the country is preparing frameworks to address illegal fishing. However, weaknesses remain in the implementation of laws, particularly for protections against sexual exploitation and the prosecution of trafficking-related offenses. International bodies have called for stronger enforcement and transparent reporting mechanisms.

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Cabo Verde's judiciary is largely independent, and safeguards against arbitrary detention are generally respected. However, the system is burdened by delays and understaffing. Many detainees face slow judicial processing, with criminal cases comprising half of all pending lawsuits. Although the government has initiated reforms by investing in facilities, digitization and judicial training, systemic inefficiencies persist. Judicial authorities have acknowledged concerns over the incarceration of people linked to transnational criminal organizations within an understaffed and overburdened correctional system.

Law enforcement bodies include several specialized agencies under the interior and justice ministries – the national police, the judicial police, the maritime police and the coast guard. While the state has invested in recruitment and training, overall capacity is constrained by limited staffing and poor infrastructure. Technical support and training from international partners have bolstered law enforcement capabilities, particularly in the fields of maritime interdiction and forensic investigations.

Cabo Verde is a small insular country, made up of 10 islands (nine of which are inhabited) and a large exclusive economic zone, which are under the effective control of the state. Nevertheless, this geography poses challenges for its territorial integrity, particularly when it comes to maritime security. Cabo Verde's remote location and developed port infrastructure make it a strategic node in transnational

trafficking, especially for cocaine. Capacity issues prevent the coast guard and other law enforcement bodies from comprehensively monitoring and intercepting illicit flows. Recent partnerships with regional and international actors aim to address these gaps, focusing on vessel monitoring, coordinated enforcement and increased technical capacity.

## ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Cabo Verde faces substantial risks from money laundering, largely driven by its exposure to transnational criminal activity. Notable cases, such as the shutdown of an offshore bank which was implicated in a corruption scandal, have drawn attention to the vulnerabilities of the banking sector. In response, the government has launched several initiatives, including a national strategy to prevent and combat money laundering, enhanced supervisory powers for the central bank and provisions to lift banking secrecy for tax investigations. Despite these reforms, according to the financial intelligence unit, Cabo Verde continues to be a high-risk country for money laundering due to vulnerabilities in certain sectors.

The economic regulatory environment is relatively strong, with laws ensuring equal treatment for foreign and domestic investors and a general openness to market competition. Nonetheless, the regulation of virtual assets only began in recent years, and entities involved in virtual banking were previously unsupervised. The central bank now oversees these areas. While the economy has rebounded from the COVID-19 pandemic, the country continues to struggle with its dependence on tourism, widespread poverty and vulnerability to climate change. The private sector plays a proactive role in mitigating financial crimes, particularly through regulatory compliance and collaboration with law enforcement. The country implemented regulatory reforms to address certain financial crimes, particularly tax evasion and fraud, but enforcement remains weak due to technical shortcomings.

## CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Victim and witness support mechanisms exist in Cabo Verde but face limitations. Vulnerable groups, such as children, women and migrants, are connected with dedicated public bodies responsible for their care. These entities run shelters and social service centres across multiple islands. Government and NGO-run facilities provide emergency support, including psycho-social care, and access to services is not conditional on cooperating with the authorities. However, procedures for identifying victims of crime remain inconsistent, compounded by a lack of training among law enforcement and child protection officials. The state's ability to track victim data is limited and most anti-trafficking enforcement is concentrated in major transit hubs, such as airports and tourist zones. When it comes to support for drug users, non-state actors work closely with the government to offer care and assistance, including helping incarcerated users reintegrate into society.

'Prevention' as an indicator has improved in recent years. The national strategies prioritize prevention, awareness and institutional efficiency. Other initiatives include community workshops on migrant rights, hotlines for children and public-private partnerships targeting financial crimes. National measures against money laundering, cyber threats and trafficking have been supported by international cooperation. Notably, a cybersecurity simulation in the energy sector tested national readiness, and the establishment of a national observatory provides a platform for data collection and policy coordination.

Non-state actors, including civil society organizations and independent media, operate freely in Cabo Verde. NGOs monitor human rights conditions, prison standards and social issues without government interference. However, their influence over policymaking remains limited, and some journalists report self-censorship due to political sensitivities. Financial instability has led to the closure of several private media outlets, but there have been no reports of journalists' detention or physical harassment. The right to peaceful assembly is upheld, and the broader civic space remains active and engaged.

