CAMEROON

Cameroon has high levels of organised crime, ranking 13th in Africa for criminality.

With the exception of the cocaine and heroin markets, all other criminal markets in the country are considered to have a moderate to significant negative influence on society. Human trafficking and smuggling are prevalent throughout the country although the highest scores are in the environmental criminal markets. There are concerns surrounding illicit trafficking and smuggling of timber, gemstones and stolen fuel. Furthermore, Cameroon has become a hotspot for the poaching, smuggling and trafficking of wildlife products, and these markets are often controlled by national criminal networks. Cameroon is considered a highly corrupt state, with criminal state-embedded actors having a negative impact on nearly all parts of society as a result of their involvement in numerous criminal markets, scoring 8.

In terms of resilience, Cameroon’s opaque government means that there are high levels of corruption, which undermines any ability to combat organised crime effectively. While Cameroon scores relatively well on international cooperation and non-state actors, most other resilience indicators are characterised by extreme ineffectiveness. Indeed, Cameroon ranks 32nd in Africa on overall resilience.

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Criminal Markets

Cameroon is a prime example of a country with a wide range of pervasive criminal markets, although none has a severe influence on society and state structures. The country’s high criminal market score, ranking 4th in Africa, is driven by the diversity of the criminal markets that afflict the country. Indeed, seven of the ten criminal markets in Cameroon have scores of 6 or above. However, unlike certain countries with standout markets, there are no criminal markets that score 8 or above.

The most pervasive criminal markets in Cameroon are those for environmental products, with all three in this subcomponent scoring 7.5. There is widespread illegal timber logging in the country, with illegally logged timber smuggled to Europe and Asia predominantly. The Cameroon-based syndicates that operate in the illegal flora market are also involved in other illicit economies, namely the illicit fauna market. The country is both a
Cameroon’s conflict in the north of the country with the Boko Haram insurgency, and in the secessionist conflict in the north-west and south-west increase vulnerability to human trafficking, particularly in the recruitment of child soldiers. These conflicts are, therefore, linked to the prevalence of the arms trafficking market in Cameroon, with the open border with the Central African Republic making the circulation of arms increasingly easy in the eastern region of the country. Cameroon’s borders are notoriously porous and the longest border, with Nigeria, is particularly prone to trafficking of arms, cannabis and synthetic drugs.

Criminal Actors

Cameroon has a fairly high criminal actors score, ranking 18th. State-embedded actors are the predominant criminal actor type in Cameroon, which is reflected in this subcomponent’s score of 8. High levels of corruption exist within state institutions, which provide a safe haven for criminal actors to operate in. The embezzlement of public funds by state officials is a major issue in Cameroon, and both the flora and non-renewable resource sectors are plagued with corruption.

Criminal networks are also widespread in Cameroon, the most prominent of which are kidnapping groups in the Adamawa region, armed robbers and traffickers in the eastern region, and criminal networks exploiting the conflict in the south-west and north-west. These groups are involved in various criminal activities, including drug trafficking, arms trafficking, kidnappings, hijacking, money laundering, the illegal fuel trade, illegal logging and the exploitation of other natural resources. In the south-west and north-west parts of the country, secessionist supporters have turned into criminal networks and mafia-style groups involved in arms trafficking and racketeering of business owners.
As regards resilience, Cameroon fares worse than the continental average, ranking 32nd. The government is very weak and due to its inability to respond to numerous security threats across the country, trust and faith in the regime has been significantly diminished. There is no evidence to suggest that the Cameroonian government is serious about tackling organised crime, and high levels of corruption in the state apparatus do nothing to assuage fears that state officials are increasingly involved in organised-criminal activity.

On the international stage, however, Cameroon appears to be a willing collaborator in tackling organised crime, having ratified eight of the ten international treaties and conventions pertaining to organised crime. Nevertheless, there is a clear lack of capacity on the part of the government to effectively implement these instruments. Similarly, with respect to the country’s national legislative framework, numerous laws pertaining to organised crime are in place, but the implementation of such laws is poor, due in large part to the ineffectiveness of the country’s criminal-justice system. The judiciary is poorly equipped and there is a huge backlog of cases awaiting prosecution. Furthermore, the judiciary is considered to be corrupt and there is perceived impunity for government officials accused or suspected of involvement in organised crime, notably economic crime.

Law enforcement agencies in Cameroon perform slightly better, regularly making crucial interceptions, including seizures of goods being trafficked through, to or from the country. However, reports of chronic corruption in law-enforcement agencies, particularly in customs authorities and the forestry sector, have weakened national efforts to deal effectively with organised crime. Overall, there is a crisis of territorial integrity in Cameroon, to a large extent caused by pervasive corruption among border police and customs officials. The government is, however, cracking down on suspects and has ordered an auditing of corrupt agencies.

On a more positive note, civil-society organisations in Cameroon are active in combating organised crime in certain areas, such as human trafficking and human smuggling, where civil society actors play a more important role than the state, notably with respect to direct support services to victims. With regard to the illicit fauna market, there is significant and effective cooperation between the state and civil-society organisations, a prime example being work carried out between state and the Last Great Ape Organisation (LAGA), which collaborate on wildlife crime interventions. However, the government regularly cracks down on civil-society organisations that oppose or criticise government policies, which makes fighting against corruption and criminal activity perpetrated by state-embedded actors much more of a challenge.