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ORGANISED CRIME CONTINUES TO GROW IN AFRICA, ACCORDING TO NEW INDEX

The 2025 Africa Organised Crime Index, published on 17 November by the ENACT project, provides an overview and analysis of the past, present and future of organised crime across the continent. In its fourth and final iteration, the 2025 Index draws on the knowledge of over 160 experts. It combines eight years of qualitative and quantitative data to provide an assessment of how organized crime and resilience have evolved in Africa. It also examines ongoing challenges, including the impact of technology and geopolitical dynamics on organized crime. The ENACT project is implemented by a consortium of the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), INTERPOL and the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.

"Eight years of data and four issues of the Africa Organised Crime Index provide a rich pool of information that gives us an unprecedented overview of illicit economies across the continent", says **Mark Shaw**, Executive Director of GI-TOC. "Thanks to the ENACT research programme and our cooperation with the ISS, we have pioneered a methodology for measuring organized crime first in Africa, which has now been scaled up to a Global Organized Crime Index produced every two years".

"This has been an innovative flagship project," says **Eric Pelser**, ENACT Programme Head at the ISS. "Our partnership with GI-TOC has produced in-depth analysis that goes beyond research – we've taken the recommendations emanating from the Africa Index to the highest levels of policy-making, ensuring that evidence drives action across the continent."

KEY FINDINGS:

- There has been a steady growth in criminal markets and criminal actors in Africa since 2019.
- In 2025, the most pervasive criminal markets in Africa are financial crimes, human trafficking, non-renewable resource crimes, the trade in counterfeit goods and arms trafficking. Since 2023, the two fastest-growing markets have been financial crimes and the trade in counterfeit goods, reflecting broader global patterns.
- Criminal markets in Africa today show considerable diversity across the continent. East Africa stands out for its high human trafficking, arms trafficking, and human smuggling scores, which drive the continental averages. In North Africa, financial crimes and cannabis trade are the most pervasive criminal markets, placing the region



ENACT is implemented by the Institute for Security Studies (www.issafrica.org) and INTERPOL (www.interpol.int),
in association with the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (www.globalinitiative.net)

second and first (respectively) in the world for these illicit economies. Non-renewable resource crimes were found to exert significant influence in Central Africa, while the cocaine trade dominates West Africa's illicit economy. In Southern Africa, wildlife trade was found to be among the most prevalent criminal markets.

- State-embedded actors are the most prevalent type of criminal actor across the continent, with their influence in nearly half of African countries (48%) classified as "severe".
- Foreign criminal groups pose an increasingly significant threat to the continent. Their influence in West Africa was found to be "significant to severe" in all but one country in the region. This reflects the impact of transnational cocaine trafficking as well as private military companies engaged in illicit activities.
- Africa's digital boom has provided new opportunities for criminal actors, both to expand and diversify traditionally non-digital markets and to grow new criminal markets, such as online financial fraud and ransomware. As in other regions of the world, cyber-dependent crime is increasing in many parts of Africa – particularly Kenya, South Africa and Nigeria, with four out of the five subregions witnessing a rise in this crime type.
- Criminality thrives in volatile environments. States and regions where conflicts, insurgency and violent extremism persist are magnets for organized crime. Many countries in Africa that have the highest criminality scores are wracked by conflict and instability: there is a relatively high (0.59) correlation between the Fragile States Index and criminality. This phenomenon needs to be factored into peacemaking and peacebuilding.
- Governance was found to have a strong impact on resilience to organized crime, with the data showing a strong (0.81) correlation between Africa's resilience and the Democracy Index. While democratic countries are vulnerable to organized crime, they are also more resilient in their response to it. In contrast, authoritarian states tend to either embrace organized crime or suppress it with violent crackdowns.
- Geopolitics has a negative impact on illicit economies, drawing on the continent's resources and role in the global landscape. For example, the withdrawal or expulsion of some foreign powers has created a vacuum for both licit and illicit actors to fill, generating instability and the growth of illicit activity in some cases.
- There has been a steady decline in resilience to organized crime in most African countries since 2019. Almost all countries in Africa (92.5%) are characterized as having low resilience to organized crime. Of these, 23 countries are affected by high criminality, creating a particularly vulnerable combination of high criminality and low resilience.
- Africa's resilience ranks among the lowest in the world, indicating insufficient capacity to respond to the criminal threats the continent faces. One key resilience measure is that 'non-state actors' play a vital role by supporting vulnerable communities and holding authorities to account. Civil society organizations are often at the forefront of leading social protection efforts. However, since the 2021 Index, the 'nonstate actors' resilience indicator has declined the most.

"While these findings are concerning, they provide the evidence base needed for effective responses," said Shaw. "The data, analysis and recommendations in this report can guide policymakers, researchers and civil society in developing targeted interventions to combat organized crime and strengthen resilience across the continent."

For further information and interviews, please contact:

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The full 2025 *Africa Organised Crime Index*, including comprehensive rankings and policy recommendations, is available at africa.ocindex.net

