



COCAINE MARKETS IN WEST AFRICA

Mapping impacts, routes,
trends and actors

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CONTENTS

Acronyms and abbreviations	iv
Glossary	iv
Executive summary	1
Methodology	2
Key points	4
Why is West Africa a trans-shipment node in international cocaine trafficking?	5
Structural aspects of the cocaine market	7
Supply chains: land, air and sea	7
Impacts	18
Public health: escalating consumption, particularly of crack	18
Corruption and governance	19
Conflict and violence	23
Resourcing armed conflict	23
Illicit financial flows linked to the cocaine trade	25
The actors	27
State-embedded actors	27
Regional networks	27
Foreign criminal actors	29
Data gaps undermining the response	34
Emerging trends	35
Conclusion and recommendations	36
Recommendations	36
Annex: Status of legal cases	40
Notes	49

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CSP-DPA	Strategic Framework for the Defence of the People of Azawad
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ELN	National Liberation Army, Colombia
EUDA	European Union Drugs Agency
FAMa	Malian Armed Forces
FATF	Financial Action Task Force
FLA	Azawad Liberation Front
GIABA	Inter-Governmental Action Group against Money Laundering in West Africa
IS Sahel	Islamic State Sahel Province
JNIM	Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims)
OCRTIS	Central Office for the Repression of Illicit Drug Trafficking
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PCC	Primeiro Comando da Capital
PWUD	People who use drugs
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
WACD	West Africa Commission on Drugs
WENDU	West African Epidemiology Network on Drug Use

GLOSSARY

Daughter vessel: Vessel that picks up cocaine consignments either directly from larger vessels, or locates and collects consignments thrown overboard using GPS tracking technology. These are typically smaller vessels than the larger 'mother' vessel.

Non-containerized trafficking: Cocaine trafficking by sea where consignments are not stored in containers. Instead, they are carried on vessels such as fishing boats, tugboats, cargo ships, bulk carriers, sailing ships and speedboats. This is a high-volume modality.

Western Hub: The following coastal states in West Africa: Senegal, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cabo Verde.

Central Hub: The following coastal countries in West Africa: Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Benin, Togo, Nigeria.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

West Africa is a major and growing logistics, redistribution and strategic operating base in the global cocaine trade. The region's cocaine market is bigger than ever, with multi-tonne consignments warehoused across countries, consumption expanding in many urban hubs, and involvement by several of the world's most powerful organized crime groups.

In 2014, the West Africa Commission on Drugs (WACD) cautioned that 'West Africa must not become a new front line in the failed "war on drugs", which has neither reduced drug consumption nor put traffickers out of business.'¹ This was triggered by escalating concerns of West Africa's role as a cocaine trans-shipment point in the early 2000s, triggering international and regional action. Following this period of intense scrutiny, there was a seizure drought broadly between 2013 and 2018. However, this proved temporary, and flows – albeit perhaps diminished – are likely to have continued through this period. A decade on from the WACD's warning, the scale and effects of the cocaine trade in West Africa are more extensive than ever. It poses a substantial obstacle to development; consumption of crack and cocaine has become widespread in a context of strained public health responses; and cocaine is a significant driver of corruption across state structures.

While West Africa's drug trade is shaped by global supply and demand, the regional impacts of the market are under-estimated. The year 2019 was a key milestone in the sharp expansion of the region's cocaine trade, driven by trends in Latin America and Europe. Cocaine production in Latin America has grown steadily since 2017, reaching record highs in 2020 and exceeding them in subsequent years.² This has pumped more cocaine into global markets.

A parallel significant consumption increase in western Europe particularly supercharged trafficking routes to this lucrative market.³ Escalating harms in Europe to public health, governance and security drove heightened law enforcement focus, concentrated on direct routes from Latin America. From the early 2020s, seizures on direct routes surged, encouraging traffickers to explore alternative routings. These included via West Africa, where logistics, warehousing and redistribution surged.⁴

Reflecting this, since 2019, retail prices in many urban hubs in the region have dropped, people who use drugs (PWUD) in many countries report improved availability, and there is evidence that organized criminal networks are increasingly entrenched. According to the Global Organized Crime Index 2025 – an expert-led assessment of the scope and scale of criminality, and state resilience to it – cocaine trafficking was the fastest-growing criminal market in West Africa between 2019 and 2025.⁵ Surging numbers of seizures since 2019 (even though seizures are unreliable indicators of drug market activity and tend to be more linked to disruption and enforcement interventions⁶) support this analysis of a growing market (as highlighted in Figure 1).

While a small but growing share of cocaine trafficked to West Africa remains in the region, feeding a growing market for cocaine powder and its crack cocaine variation, most is trafficked onwards, largely to Europe, either directly or through North Africa or Türkiye. Although difficult to estimate, some international analysts posit that in 2025 roughly 30% of Europe's cocaine was routed through West Africa.⁷ Cocaine does not transit the region with no trace: its effects on governance, public health and security are significant and escalating.

This report draws on widespread consultation with regional and international stakeholders to consolidate the evidence base on cocaine markets in West Africa and map their structure, key networks and players, and main effects. By doing so, the report also highlights persistent data gaps that leave an incomplete picture of this criminal market, undermining the response. Finally, the research highlights emerging trends that are likely to shape the short- and medium-term dynamics of West Africa's cocaine market. Analysis of the growing number of drug policy, public health, harm reduction and law enforcement responses in the region falls beyond the scope of this report.

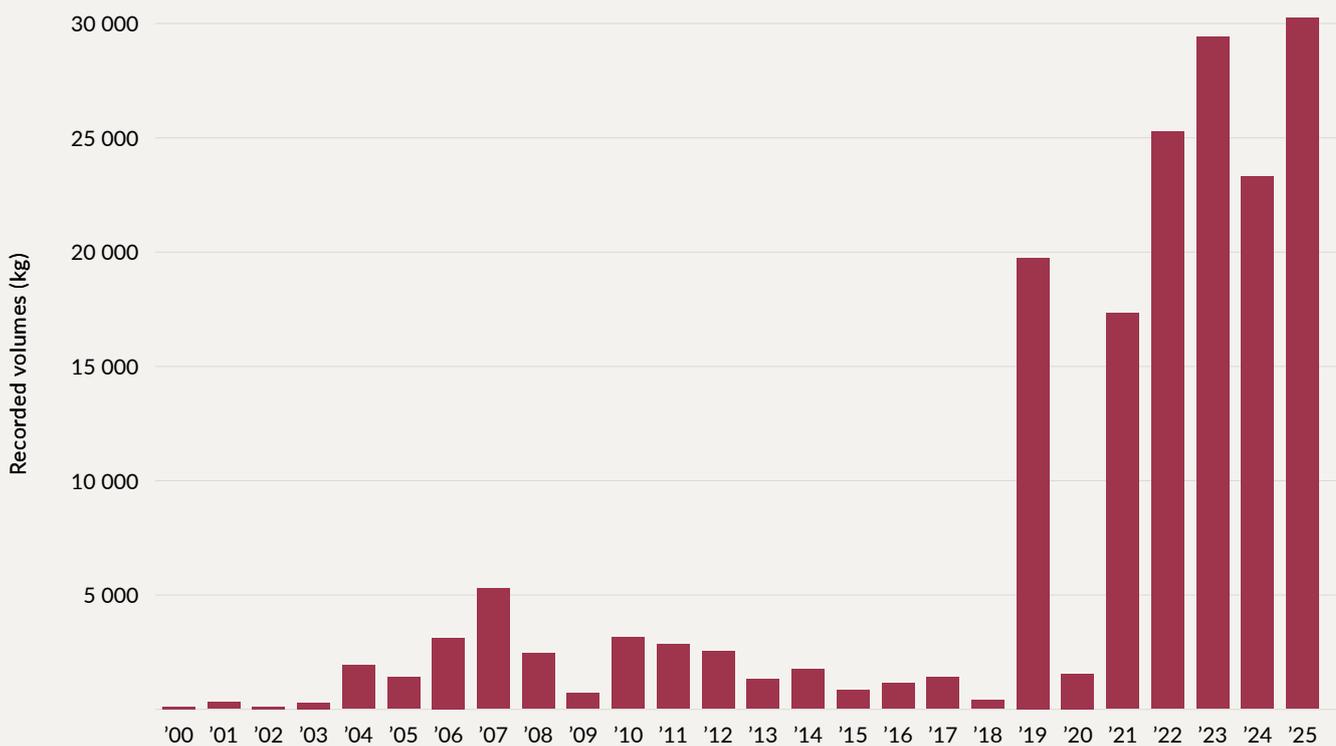


FIGURE 1 Cocaine seizures in West Africa, 2000–2025.

SOURCE: Data collated by the GI-TOC, including from UNODC Annual Reports Questionnaire and UNODC Individual Drug Seizure database; this has been supplemented with data from other UNODC sources, including regional UNODC field offices, and the WENDU Report (2024), published by ECOWAS. Where major cocaine seizures have taken place that are not reflected in UNODC data, the dataset has been complemented by official government and law enforcement data (including confidential seizure data as well as press releases), media publications, grey literature and peer-reviewed papers in academic journals.

Methodology

This baseline study draws on an extensive review of existing literature, including academic and grey literature, and analysis of international and local media. Secondary datasets analyzed included the products of judicial and law enforcement investigations in West Africa, Latin America, the US and Europe, including the Western Balkans. Where available, encrypted communications between criminal actors were analyzed. The messages were intercepted by European law enforcement and have been included in criminal indictments of individuals arrested in various jurisdictions.⁸ The status of some of these criminal cases is ongoing and formal acquittals remain a possibility. The exact status of each cited individual case is set out in the Annex. There are significant data gaps regarding West Africa’s cocaine trade, including surrounding the key criminal actors and networks within the trade. There have been greater efforts to map certain categories of actors, including research by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) on Western Balkan groups,⁹ shaping more available data for such players. This reflects the availability bias, rather than indicating greater prominence of certain groups. For the avoidance of doubt, Western Balkan groups, while important and thought to be growing, are not believed to be more prominent than certain other European nationalities in West Africa.

Open-source intelligence techniques were used to deepen the analyses of key actors; trading data and routes; vessel movements; and company registration and shareholder structures, and to sketch the outlines of West Africa’s online drug markets.

The research also draws on years of data collection on the cocaine trade by the GI-TOC and its affiliated researchers in West Africa, Latin America and Europe. This includes semi-structured interviews with investigative journalists, law enforcement officials, judicial representatives, academics, public officials and private-sector employees at maritime ports and airports, criminal actors in different roles in the cocaine trade, PWUD, health professionals, researchers, academics, representatives of international and regional organizations, and members of communities across West Africa.

Data collection for this report included over 190 semi-structured interviews conducted in 2025 with each type of stakeholder outlined above, as set out in the graphic below. Interviews were conducted remotely and in person across the region. Surveys were also conducted with PWUD in the focus countries to confirm pricing and consumption trends, and ensure PWUD perspectives remained at the centre of this report.

Widespread consultations with regional stakeholders and key international organizations working on the cocaine trade in West Africa and beyond further supported bilateral interviews. The key findings of the research were shared with numerous civil society and government stakeholders across the region for challenge and validation. A written draft was reviewed by several external experts in West Africa's cocaine trade. This process included a roundtable with Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) representatives and national focal points of the West African Epidemiology Network on Drug Use (WENDU).

Key findings from this research were presented at a high-level dialogue titled 'Mapping the future of drug markets in West Africa: synthetics, cocaine, criminal money and strategic responses', jointly convened by the Government of Ghana, the Government of the Netherlands and the GI-TOC, and held in Accra, Ghana, on 27 and 28 November 2025. The dialogue brought together around 160 participants, combining high-level representation from West African states, the Government of the Netherlands, and pivotal regional and international bodies, and expert government and civil society representatives from across Africa and Europe. Every country in West Africa was represented at the dialogue. Full drafts of this report were shared during

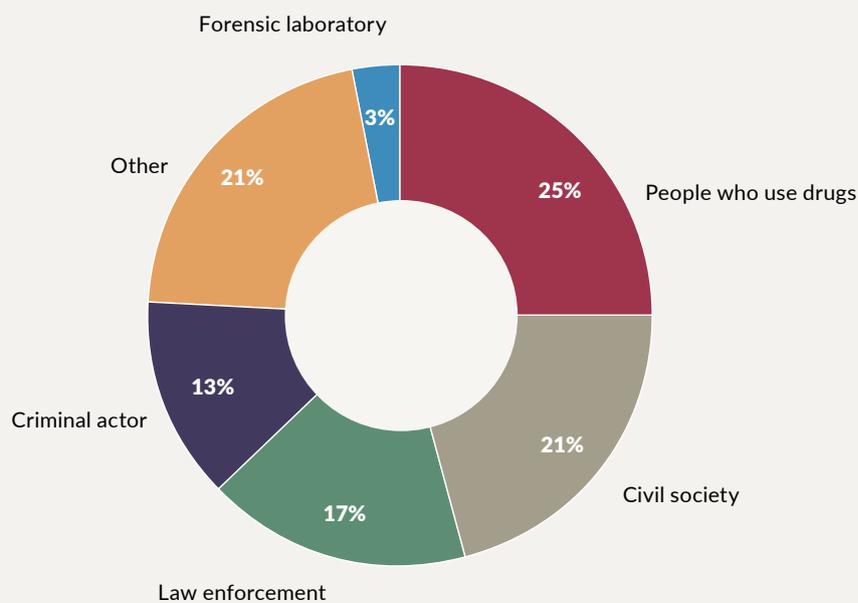


FIGURE 2 Categories of participants interviewed for the report.

the dialogue for consultation, with the consultation period remaining open for three weeks. All feedback received – oral and written – was considered and largely incorporated into the final draft. Inputs made by speakers and participants during interventions were also documented and included in the draft where relevant. A wide-ranging consultation and validation process was undertaken to ensure that the findings present a consolidated picture of the region's cocaine trade which aligns with the day-to-day realities of those who consume the drug and those involved in responding to it.

Key points

- West Africa is a growing warehousing, redistribution and containerization point in international cocaine trafficking routes.
- West Africa's cocaine market has expanded sharply since 2019. Record production in Latin America, surging European demand, growing European pressure on direct trafficking routes from Latin America, and improving West African trading infrastructure are among the drivers.
- The profitability of the market makes it extremely corrupting, undermining governance. In turn, corruption is a key enabler of cocaine trafficking in West Africa.
- Growing consumption of cocaine, particularly in the form of crack, poses an increasing public health challenge.
- By far the largest proportion of cocaine is trafficked through the region on maritime routes. Air trafficking drives a sustained high-frequency, smaller-volume flow. Overland trans-Saharan routes underpin smaller flows, and in the central Sahel these are intertwined with the conflict landscape.
- Transnational organized crime groups traffic bulk flows. State-embedded actors, foreign criminal actors and regional intermediaries form a triangle of players coordinating the large volumes trafficked through West Africa.
- Several indicators suggest that European criminal networks have since 2019 increased their operations in West Africa, often operating through brokers.
- Intelligence gaps pose an obstacle to effective, targeted responses. The market is changing rapidly, and tracking emerging trends is critical to shaping the response.

WHY IS WEST AFRICA A TRANS-SHIPMENT NODE IN INTERNATIONAL COCAINE TRAFFICKING?

Five key factors have shaped West Africa's role as a major trans-shipment node in the global cocaine trade: geography, gaps in governance, increased connectivity through expanding transport infrastructure, strengthened financial and communicative connectivity through digital innovation and the globalization of financial markets, and changes in law enforcement pressure on other routings to Europe. While the first two are static, and cannot explain why West Africa's role has been growing over the last five years, the final three are dynamic variables contributing to the region's increasing importance.

The region's location between cocaine cultivation areas in Latin America and consumption markets in Europe, Türkiye, North Africa and the Middle East has made it attractive to criminal networks supplying these markets. Escalating cocaine production in Latin America since 2017, reaching record highs in 2020 and exceeding them in subsequent years,¹⁰ has pumped more cocaine into global markets. A growing share of this overall larger total was sent through Europe-bound supply chains, as consumption on the continent substantially increased.¹¹ This is driving 'near-shoring' of cocaine stockpiles in West Africa.

Gaps in governance – due to resourcing shortfalls and corruption – have long contributed to creating an enabling environment for illicit trade, including cocaine trafficking.¹² However, as the profits of the cocaine trade reach record-breaking levels, the resources available to corrupt have swelled. Across the world, including in regions such as Europe, which historically have perceived themselves as largely unaffected by the corrupting influence of the cocaine market, the reach of corruption purchased through cocaine profits is being recognized to exceed previous estimates.

Traffickers buy protection from different elements of state institutions, decreasing the risks of disruption and therefore the cost of operating through the region. Consequently, although routings through West Africa may be longer than direct routes, they are more secure, with a lower risk of seizure. To different degrees in individual states in the region, protection is provided by political actors, criminal justice institutions, and – crucially – at the pivotal entry and exit points on cocaine routes: maritime ports and airports.

Growth in West Africa's connectivity to global financial and trade systems, and growing internet penetration, have also facilitated expansion of the trade. Increasingly well connected but poorly regulated formal financial systems create ample opportunities for laundering funds. According to the Global Organized Crime Index, anti-money laundering and economic regulatory capacity have decreased since 2023, and at the time of writing, one West African country – Côte d'Ivoire – is on the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) grey list, indicating significant gaps in processes for preventing money laundering and terrorist financing.¹³

West Africa's growing connections to global trade through expanding maritime, overland and aerial transport infrastructure have provided further opportunities for cocaine trafficking through and within the region. Large-scale investments in trade facilitation across West Africa – including into transport infrastructure, but also focused on reducing burdensome documentary requirements – have materially enhanced the efficiency of trade, boosting intra-regional, and global, connectivity. This has reshaped the geography of cocaine trafficking.

While airports and roads have been significantly expanded over the past five years, investments in maritime infrastructure have been particularly pivotal in underpinning expanded flows because most cocaine flowing through the region is trafficked by sea. While much of this involves non-containerized consignments – often bypassing formal ports – containerized trafficking remains critical, making maritime ports key nodes in the supply chain.

Between 2010 and 2022, container traffic in Africa grew by 57%, a rate surpassed only by Asia, reflecting significant development in the maritime sector.¹⁴ Within Africa, growth was fastest in West Africa,¹⁵ with container freight doubling at many ports in the region since 2010. The ports of Togo, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Senegal were among those that grew most sharply.¹⁶ Plans for further expansion of several ports, including Ndayane (Senegal) and Banjul (Gambia), herald further connectivity.¹⁷

However, this surging trade is often unmatched by improvements in cargo screening and inspection.¹⁸ This compounds the already significant vulnerabilities of containerized trade to criminal infiltration, as the scale of operations makes full screening virtually impossible. Across Africa and Europe, port authorities typically inspect fewer than 2% of containers.¹⁹

Finally, trends in law enforcement also played a role. Increased law enforcement pressure on direct routes between Latin America and Europe was reflected in an surge of more than 400% in seizures in Europe between 2010 and 2020.²⁰ Seizures then climbed further, from a total of 201.9 tonnes in 2019 to a record 424.1 tonnes in 2023.²¹ This encouraged traffickers to use trans-shipment points, and more cocaine was funnelled through West Africa. For example, it has been reported in the mainstream media that Albanian Armando Pacani, a large-scale cocaine purchaser for the European market working with a significant network in Brazil, started coordinating shipments through West Africa after a spate of seizures and losses on direct routes to Europe.²² Contributing to this, from around 2020 there was a parallel increase in pressure on Europe-bound cocaine trafficking by authorities in Morocco,²³ which also contributed to displacing routings via West Africa.

Between 2022 and 2024, retail prices in Europe remained broadly steady, indicating consistent supply – a significant proportion of which travelled through West Africa.²⁴

STRUCTURAL ASPECTS OF THE COCAINE MARKET

Supply chains: land, air and sea

By far the greatest volumes of cocaine are trafficked through West Africa by sea. Smaller, but regular and cumulatively substantial, volumes are trafficked on commercial routings. Substantial amounts of the drug are also trafficked on overland routes. These are likely to constitute far smaller volumes than are shipped by sea.

Maritime routes

Maritime trafficking routes underpin most of the flow of cocaine into and from West Africa. They use combinations of containerized and non-containerized trafficking methods.²⁵

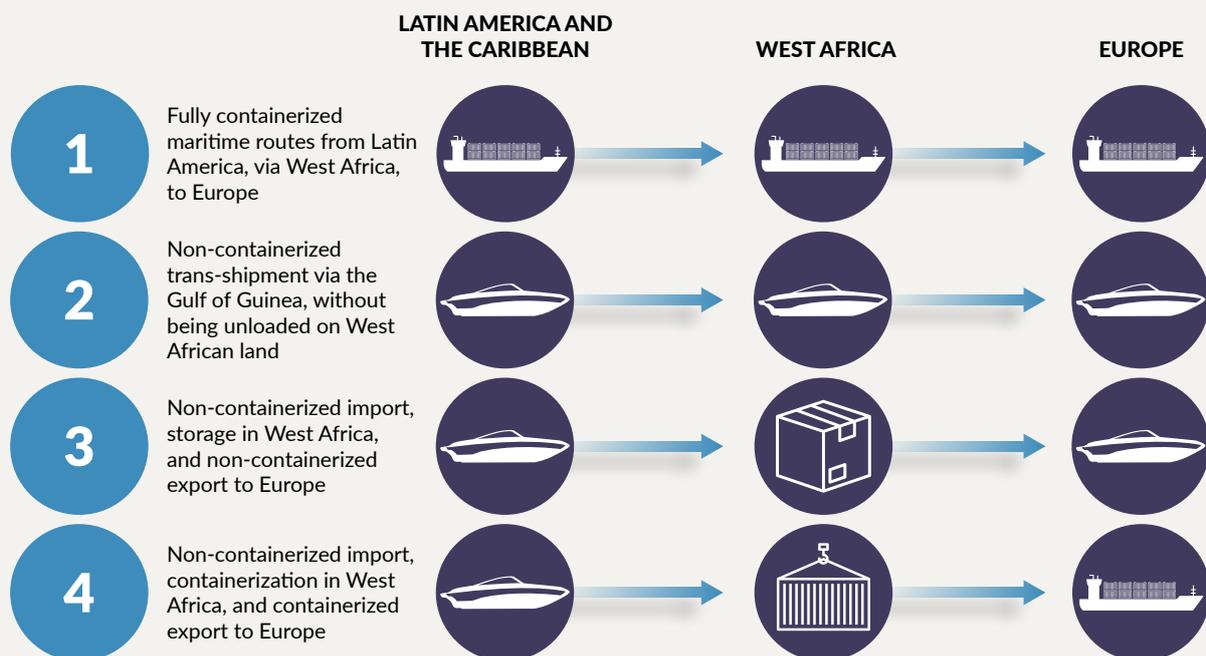


FIGURE 3 Maritime cocaine trafficking modalities for Europe-bound shipments via West Africa.

NOTE: This figure does not capture routing that includes land or air passages. In practice, overland routes will often link maritime entry and exit points.



FIGURE 4 Connections between ports in West Africa, Latin America and Europe.

SOURCE: GI-TOC analysis of online sources, including container shipping company websites and other industry resources.

Containerized

Inbound flows

Containerized consignments of cocaine are trafficked to West Africa from Latin America. They depart for Europe and other consumption markets, including Asia and the Middle East, from maritime ports. West Africa's maritime ports are well connected to both regions, as highlighted in Figure 4.

Most seizures at ports are on inbound routings. This probably reflects stronger intelligence on inbound flows and the concentration of screening on imports rather than exports, common across many ports globally, rather than being an accurate reflection of underlying trafficking trends.

Since around 2016, cocaine seized at ports in West Africa has predominantly come from ports in Brazil, particularly Santos.²⁶ This was shaped by increased law enforcement scrutiny of Europe-bound vessels,²⁷ and the growing influence of the Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC) – Brazil's most sophisticated organized crime group – as it pivoted towards cocaine exports.²⁸ Reflecting the growing importance of this routing, a significant proportion of cocaine seizures in the Port of Santos, a major global cocaine export point, between 2016 and 2022 were destined for Africa. Over 60% of these Africa-bound shipments connected to West Africa.²⁹

Since 2021, the reported volume of seizures at ports in West Africa has decreased. Data at the Port of Santos also shows a decline in overall seizures, and seizures on West Africa-bound routings in 2023 (the latest accessed data for Santos). Similarly, official maritime and port seizure data in Brazil for the period 2023–2025 does not highlight West Africa as a prominent destination.³⁰ This could be shaped by changes in contamination methods³¹ (increasingly once vessels have left ports in Brazil) and displacement to other ports of export. Taken together, however, decreased seizures in West Africa, Santos, and across Brazilian ports and water more broadly, could also indicate the growing importance of non-containerized modalities for trafficking cocaine into West Africa.³²

Cocaine seized at ports in West Africa is often shipped from ports in Brazil, including Santos. © Nelson Almeida via Getty Images



Outbound flows

Although the data is patchy, analysis of the evidence base as a whole indicates that containerized routings are likely to play a significant role in outbound flows from West Africa. Clusters of seizures on overland routes connecting significant maritime entry points to major maritime ports in West Africa support this analysis.³³

Analysis of Western Balkan groups, among the most prominent networks on global Europe-bound supply chains, highlighted that leaders of major networks are keenly aware of the export potential of different maritime ports in West Africa. Radoje Zvicer, leader of the Montenegrin Kavač clan, complained in intercepted communications included in the indictment against him, which according to prosecutors were sent by him to a senior Kavač-allied figure, that 'Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea and Guinea-Bissau are countries whose ports don't have significant export potential, so the MSC [container shipping] company doesn't visit them, they just pass by their coasts'.³⁴ While not entirely correct on MSC shipping routes, this close analysis indicates ongoing interest in the use of maritime ports in West Africa as export points for containerized cocaine.

Containerizing cocaine in West Africa effectively sidesteps the heightened screening and intelligence of Latin American exports at European ports. This was a modality used by a different network from the Western Balkans: the Serbian-led Starčević group imported non-containerized cocaine in a fishing vessel from Brazil, containerized it in Sierra Leone, and exported the consignment concealed among cocoa husks in a container bound for Antwerp, Belgium.³⁵

However, there have been very low numbers of reported seizures in European ports on container vessels leaving from West Africa.³⁶ Considering the significant volumes of cocaine flows reaching West Africa, and with Europe as the primary destination for most cocaine transiting the region, this paucity of container seizures is puzzling. While cocaine is trafficked from West Africa to Europe using other overland, air and non-containerized maritime routes, this probably provides only part of the answer.

Most seizures in containers in Europe are intelligence led, as the volume of trade makes it impossible to screen all flows comprehensively. This reflects global trends: according to the World Customs Organization, in 2023 88% of drugs (by volume) were seized through intelligence.³⁷ Limited intelligence on containerized routings from West Africa therefore likely contributes to lower seizure rates than on routings from regions with more established intelligence partnerships. Outdated risk assessments at some European ports are likely to compound intelligence gaps,³⁸ resulting in a significant under-estimate of containerized inflows from West Africa.

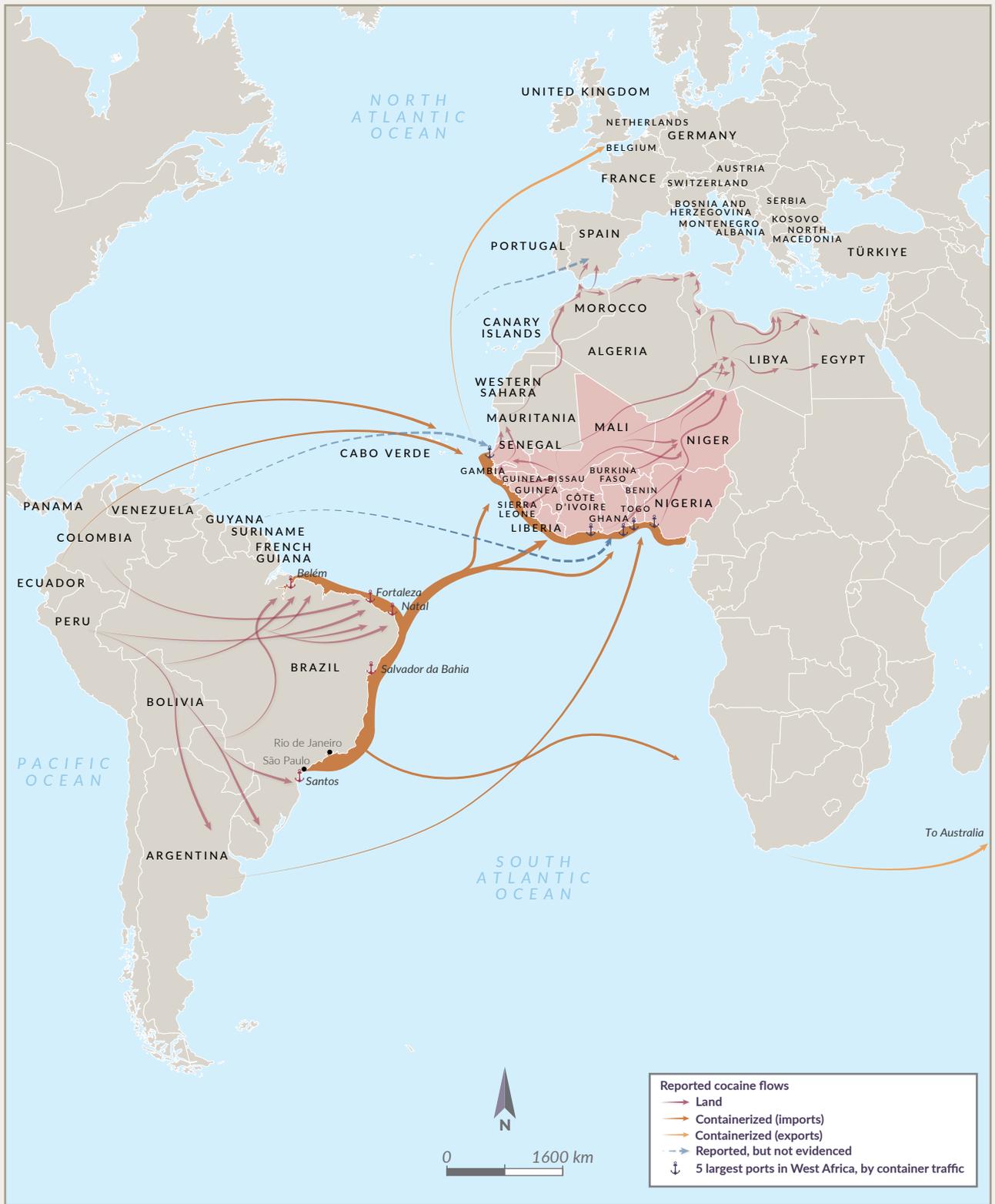


FIGURE 5 Containerized trafficking routes.

SOURCES: Ongoing GI-TOC monitoring

The growing connectivity of many West African ports to maritime ports in Europe, as shown in Figure 4, creates an increasingly enabling environment for contamination of containerized flows. This is not limited to primary ports but includes connections to secondary European ports, some of which have less rigorous screening capabilities. In June 2025, a 4.5-tonne seizure in the Port of Amsterdam from the Port of Tema in Ghana highlighted the vulnerability of secondary ports connected by maritime routings.³⁹ Similarly, secondary ports in West Africa are often subject to lower security oversight and are vulnerable to being used for cocaine trafficking. Investigations into Spanish national Miguel Devesa, convicted of large-scale cocaine trafficking by courts in Côte d'Ivoire, highlighted the pivotal role played by the Port of San Pedro in Côte d'Ivoire as a node in cocaine routes. This had been long suspected but not previously confirmed.⁴⁰

Stakeholders in West Africa reported cocaine being concealed among a wide range of commodities – including cashew nuts, metal ingots, rubber, cocoa beans, timber, cosmetics and soybeans – to Europe and beyond, including India,⁴¹ Türkiye, Vietnam, South Africa and the US.⁴² This supports assessments of West Africa's growing role as a containerization point for cocaine en route to a growing range of consumption markets.



The Port of Antwerp has reported by far the most significant volume and frequency of seizures from West Africa, most prominently from Sierra Leone. Trading connections play a role: Belgium's chocolate industry, with its imports of cocoa products from West Africa, creates a channel for concealing illicit goods. © Arterra via Getty Images

Can seizures be used to interpret cocaine trafficking?

Seizures – while helpful in analyzing illicit economies – are fickle indicators of volumes of illicit flows, or trends and patterns in trafficking. Seizures are indicators that illicit activity and enforcement activity have both occurred. If there is no law enforcement activity, there will be no seizures. More seizures are therefore erroneously equated

with greater volumes, and vice versa. However, seizures are often a better indicator of disruption to trafficking, and a lack of seizures may just mean that the trafficking activity is highly protected, or that there is no enforcement capacity to disrupt it. In this report seizures are used as part of the analysis, but in conjunction with other datasets.⁴³ ■

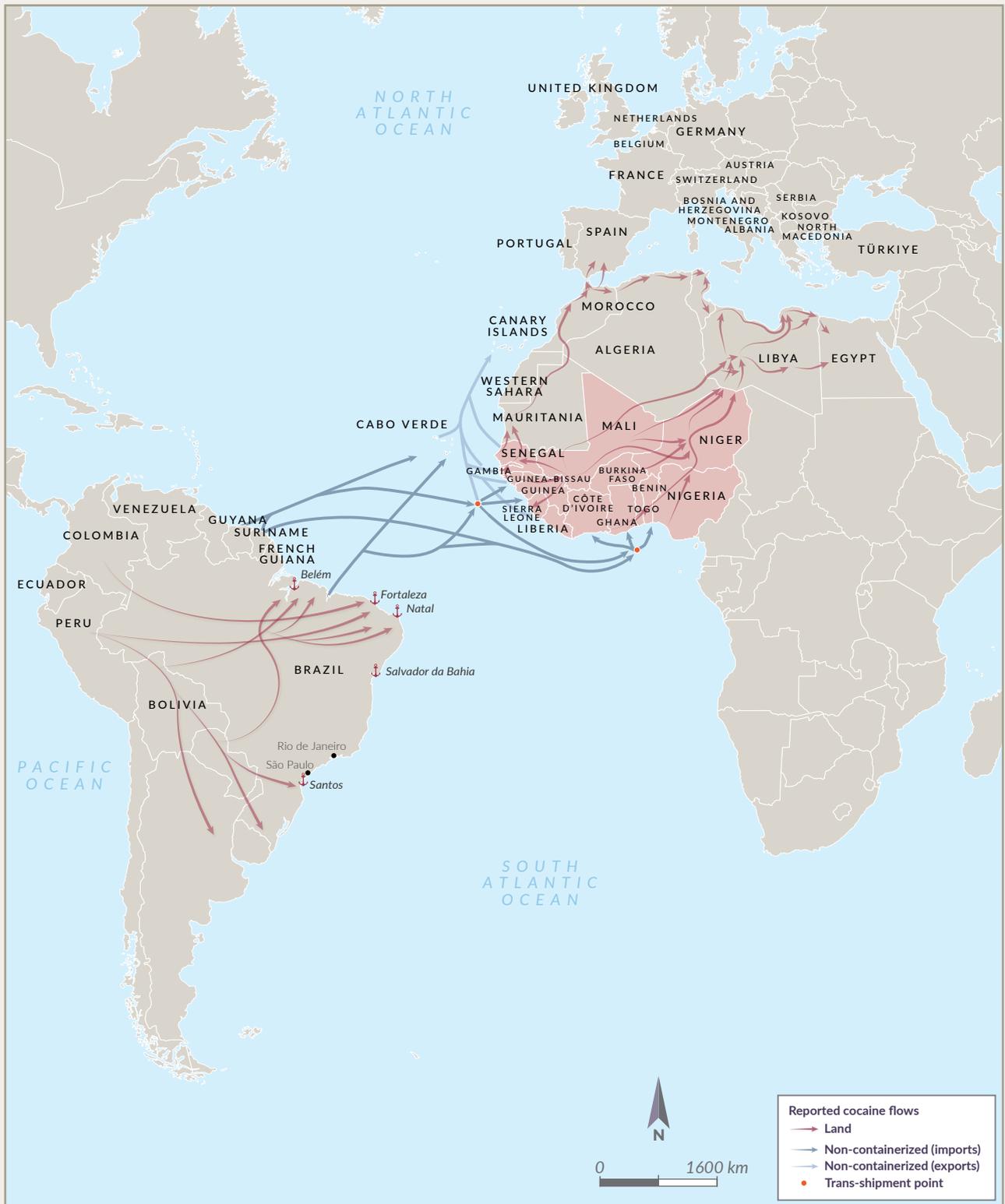


FIGURE 6 Non-containerized trafficking routes.

SOURCES: Ongoing GI-TOC monitoring

Non-containerized

Growing volumes of cocaine are trafficked from Latin America to the waters off the coast of West Africa (either in the Atlantic off the coast of Senegal and Sierra Leone, or further south in the Gulf of Guinea) then trans-shipped to 'daughter vessels', either directly or by throwing consignments overboard and locating them using GPS tracking technology. These consignments are not stored in containers. Instead, they are carried on vessels such as fishing boats, tugboats, cargo ships, bulk carriers, sailing ships and speedboats. Some of the consignments are picked up by daughter vessels from West African shores which then travel directly to Europe. Others are picked up at sea and disembarked in West Africa by smaller vessels using myriad entry points along the porous coastline. These non-containerized consignments are regularly multi-tonne. Illustratively, a March 2024 operation seized more than 10 tonnes on a fishing vessel in the Gulf of Guinea that had departed from Brazil.⁴⁴

Brazil, Guyana and Suriname are particularly prominent export points.⁴⁵ While Brazil has long been a key departure point, Guyana and Suriname emerged as major export points from 2023.⁴⁶ The Western Hub provides common disembarkation zones for non-containerized routing,⁴⁷ but routings also target the Gulf of Guinea, and countries in the Southern Hub.⁴⁸

Small vessels – fishing vessels and motorboats – are commonly used to move cocaine consignments between countries in the region, connecting storage and consumer hubs and transporting consignments from points of entry to convenient points for export. For example, coastal communities in Sierra Leone report an uptick⁴⁹ in incidents of fishermen being asked to transport cocaine between different points domestically or to other countries in the region, most prominently Guinea, whose port is larger than Freetown's Queen Elizabeth II Quay.⁵⁰ Consignments are reported to be more than 100 kilograms and coordinated predominantly by foreign actors.⁵¹

On export, evidence on non-containerized routes highlights routes towards southern European countries, most prominently Spain and particularly the Canary Islands.⁵² In recent years, the islands have become more important in non-containerized cocaine trafficking, particularly for sailing boats. Spanish authorities reported a dramatic escalation in cocaine trafficking towards the archipelago since early 2024.⁵³ However, analysis of encrypted communications by large-scale European traffickers highlights their use of West Africa-Canary Islands routings from at least 2020.⁵⁴



A Balkan cartel specializes in the smuggling of cocaine using yachts and sailboats, such as the Croatian-flagged *Majic*, from which nearly a tonne of cocaine was seized in 2020. Photo: Guardia Civil

Trafficking of cocaine in narco-sub

Semi-submersibles are increasingly used by trafficking networks operating between Latin America, the US and Europe.⁵⁵ To date, they have been most prominent on US-bound routings, and manufacturing has been concentrated in Colombia. In 2019, a semi-submersible from Brazil was intercepted in Europe, providing the first evidence of transatlantic crossings.⁵⁶ In 2025, a semi-submersible washed up on Black Johnson beach, Sierra Leone.⁵⁷ This indicates semi-submersibles are being used to transit the Gulf of Guinea. Some manufacturers are reportedly moving operations to countries in West Africa because it is easier to obtain the raw materials there than in Colombia, where they have become increasingly monitored.⁵⁸ There have been reports of growing use of submarines on routes from Latin America to West Africa, and some indicators of potentially increased movement from West Africa to Europe,⁵⁹ although available evidence remains limited. As European law enforcement continues to increase surveillance on inbound routes, including to secondary ports, these are likely to become increasingly prevalent trafficking modalities from West Africa.

Trafficking by air

Commercial air routes underpin a smaller yet significant flow of cocaine through West Africa to Europe, with mules swallowing consignments (typically around 1 kilogram) and larger volumes being trafficked in passenger baggage (10–15 kilograms in a suitcase) or freight shipments (up to 90 kilograms).⁶⁰ The consistency of air trafficking means that – while individual volumes are limited – annual volumes on specific routings can accumulate to several tonnes.

Large-scale investment in many of the region's airports has greatly improved air connectivity, expanding routings vulnerable to exploitation by trafficking networks. This has facilitated not only international, but intra-regional trafficking: illustratively, traffickers in Nigeria report that local commercial flights are used to move cocaine around the country.⁶¹ Brazil, and particularly São Paulo – the heartland of the PCC – were repeatedly identified as points of origin for seizures on commercial flights to West Africa, with Addis Ababa a commonly reported stopover. Nigerian networks are prominent in trafficking using commercial flights and have traditionally favoured the 'swallower' method.

Most cocaine trafficked out of the region on commercial aircraft is destined for Europe, but Asia, the Middle East and Australia are also regular destinations.⁶² In some cases, trafficking has been undertaken by politically connected individuals, probably relying on protection to evade detection.⁶³

General aviation is used to traffic cocaine from Latin America into West Africa, using official and informal air strips. A 2.63-tonne seizure of cocaine on a private plane landing in September 2024 at Bissau's international airport, reportedly having departed from Venezuela, underscored the volumes being moved by private aircraft and the role of Venezuela as a prominent point of origin for these flights.⁶⁴ The government of Venezuela has denied reports that the plane left from that country.⁶⁵ However, Venezuela is a prominent point of origin for cocaine flights which use the many clandestine airstrips across the country as well as secondary airstrips.⁶⁶ The border areas between Colombia and Venezuela – where the National Liberation Army (ELN) operates – have many clandestine airstrips and are believed to a prominent departure region for many cocaine flights, including some targeting West Africa.⁶⁷

The plane seized in Bissau in September 2024 was originally en route to Mali, which since the early 2000s has been a destination for cocaine flights. Some consignments reaching Bamako and surrounding airports are moved southwards, towards coastal export points. Private aircraft linked to the cocaine trade have also been tracked in several other countries in the region, including Sierra Leone⁶⁸ and Ghana.⁶⁹

While seizures on private planes are rare, investigations have repeatedly identified networks discussing the use of general aviation as a trafficking modality and several private plane landings have been suspicious,⁷⁰ even if a link was not proved by authorities.⁷¹ Cumulatively, this indicates that this modality is probably far more commonly used than is currently believed. Most private flights within West Africa are 'dark' (the transponder is switched off for most of the flight), heightening the opacity of general aviation in the region.

General aviation is probably also used for onward transit to Europe, but the evidence base for this is more limited. Investigations into networks have highlighted the use of general aviation routes through countries including Mali and Guinea to traffic cocaine from Venezuela to Europe.⁷² Many European countries have myriad poorly monitored landing strips, creating a significant vulnerability. In recent years, several private flights from the Canary Islands to a country in West Africa have been deemed suspicious due to unauthorized loading activity during stopovers. However, links to the cocaine trade have not been confirmed.⁷³

Similarly, general aviation is probably used to move cocaine within the region and across the continent. For example, analysis of encrypted EncroChat communications between members of Western Balkan groups demonstrated that they explored the use of private planes to import cocaine into West Africa and move it within the continent, including from Sierra Leone to South Africa, probably for onward export.⁷⁴ As trailed above, there are also credible reports that general aviation continues to be used to traffic cocaine northwards from Bamako to Gao.⁷⁵

Cocaine prices

There are significant variations in retail prices of cocaine across urban hubs in West Africa. Lower prices can be an indicator of increased supply, and could point to areas where there is more cocaine leaking into

the retail drugs market through overspill dynamics. Retail drug prices fluctuate in line with market dynamics, such as a major seizure making dealers more cautious, or a trafficker selling off stock for quick cash.

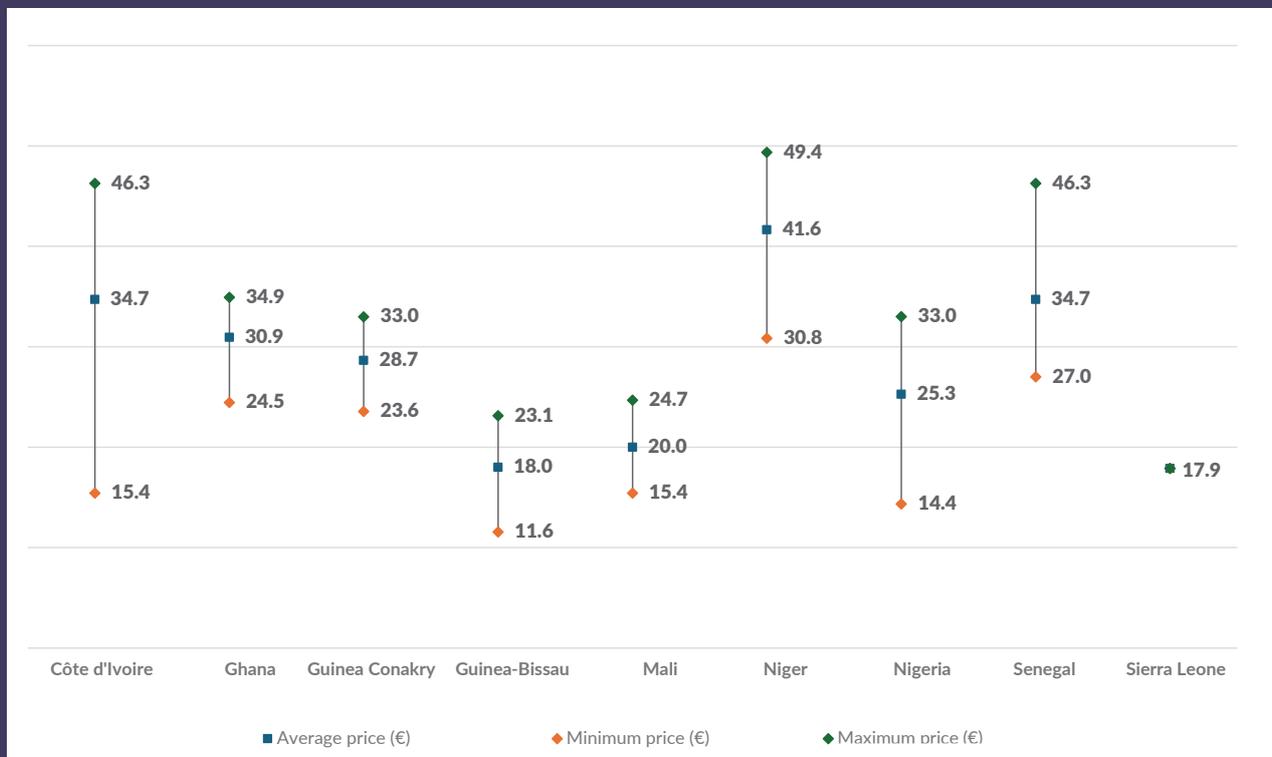


FIGURE 7 Cocaine prices in selected West African urban hubs, in euros.

SOURCE: Pricing data was collected from PWUD and dealers across the countries shown in the figure in 2025. At least five data points (but in many cases significantly more) were used to build each average.

Overland trafficking routes

Four main overland corridors link arrival ports in West Africa, bisect the Sahel, and exit via Libya, Morocco or Mauritania towards Europe – as shown in Figure 8. However, a far more complex and diverse web of routes are also used to connect points of entry with more logistically helpful points of exit – for example, connecting non-containerized imports through porous coastal areas with larger maritime ports in the region for export towards Europe. This forms a complex web of often bidirectional overland trafficking routes, with cocaine concealed among other commodities – prominently used cars⁷⁶ – and small amounts feeding consumption markets across the region.

All but one of the routings bisect the central Sahel, and are tightly intertwined into the region’s conflict dynamics. Instability in the central Sahel has, since 2012, driven displacement of a significant proportion of volumes elsewhere, including to routings through Mauritania. Between 2019 and 2023, there are several indicators that northbound trans-Saharan cocaine trafficking were increasing.⁷⁷ However, since 2023 the revival of conflict in northern Mali as the armed forces and their Russian allies pushed northwards, and the coup in Niger partly disrupted this trend. Growing operations by Jama’at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) in the Centre-Est region of Burkina Faso also most likely displaced these existing routings, contributing to an overall increase in the risk associated with routes through the central Sahel.⁷⁸



FIGURE 8 Overland cocaine trafficking routes in West Africa.

In Mali, displacement has been particularly sustained away from the east of Kidal region – where the Strategic Framework for the Defence of the People of Azawad (CSP-DPA) coalition of rebel and pro-government groups, lost control of key trafficking nodes and the ability to protect drug convoys. The sharp spike in armed violence raised the risk of attacks on convoys, decreasing Niger-bound flows and resulting in a significant loss of business for several intermediaries operating there.⁷⁹ In the words of one trader close to the FLA:

The routes and flow of cocaine trafficking in the northern regions have changed significantly since Wagner's arrival and the use of drones in the north by FAMA [Malian Armed Forces] and Wagner. These drones do not even spare a herd of donkeys, let alone pickup trucks known to belong to the FLA group in the north. Traffickers use specific routes close to the Mauritania and Algerian borders, pausing to gather information on drone movements and then continuing, which makes trafficking more difficult, the flow longer, and therefore the price of security even more expensive.⁸⁰

Niger's July 2023 coup also disrupted a long-standing protection system that enabled many traffickers to operate with a high degree of impunity.⁸¹ The result was a sharp drop in trafficking of cocaine and cannabis resin through northern Niger. Several high-level traffickers with close ties to the former regime have adopted a lower profile and scaled down operations.⁸² Increased state patrols along key trafficking corridors⁸³ and escalating instability fomented by Nigerien and Chadian bandit groups, which have frequently attacked and seized drug convoys, have also contributed to lower flows through northern Niger since 2023.⁸⁴

These trans-Saharan overland trafficking routings continue to operate, but the risks remain extremely elevated, leading traffickers to explore other options, including general aviation. The shifting routings mirror changing conflict and political landscapes, and have implications for which actors benefit from the trade, as explored below.

The fourth and final routing, bisecting Mauritania, is believed to have increased after the 2012 displacement from routes through the central Sahel. Typically, consignments would enter Mauritania through Senegal and then continue to Europe on maritime routes. While there are indicators that this route has remained active over the last five-year period, data is limited on the current scale of this routing.

IMPACTS

Public health: escalating consumption, particularly of crack

Comprehensive, reliable data on drug consumption in West Africa is scarce. While WENDU has made significant strides in enhancing data collection and analysis, it is reliant on national treatment data as indicators for consumption. This data indicates an overall increase in the number of people treated for problematic cocaine use in West Africa between 2020 and 2022.⁸⁵ However, as treatment options are scarce across the region and vary over time, it is difficult to elaborate consumption trends from this data.

According to United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) data, an estimated 516 000 individuals used cocaine across West and Central Africa in 2023, with an estimated prevalence of approximately 0.15%.⁸⁶ This represents a doubling of the estimated number of individuals using cocaine since 2017 (250 000).⁸⁷

UNODC prevalence estimates – as a percentage of population – have remained stable since 2018.⁸⁸ While stakeholders in most countries in West Africa reported an overall increase in the numbers of individuals using cocaine over this period,⁸⁹ it is difficult to draw further detailed conclusions from these broad prevalence estimates, which probably conceal significant subregional disparities.

Stakeholders in all countries except Benin and Côte d'Ivoire reported increased consumption of cocaine powder – and to a far larger extent crack – over the past five years. In Benin and Côte d'Ivoire there was greater divergence between reported trends.⁹⁰

Domestic markets are fed largely by overspill from the bulk transit trade. Smaller dealers and traffickers are sometimes paid in kind – namely, in cocaine. These lower-level actors typically lack the networks and resources to traffic cocaine towards regions with higher prices, and therefore offload it in the local market at an accessible price.⁹¹ Some large traffickers sometimes seek to offload produce onto domestic markets for fast cash when their liquidity is low. For example, in July 2025 a major trafficker in Guinea-Bissau tried to sell a significant volume of cocaine on the domestic market. The wholesale price of cocaine in Bissau dropped from €10 000–€16 000 per kilogram to €7 000.⁹²

The prevalence and upwards trend of reported crack consumption far outstrip those of powder in most countries,⁹³ and crack is repeatedly identified as one of the most consumed drugs in many urban hubs across the region. Illustratively, in Accra and Conakry, crack was cited as the second most consumed drug after cannabis by several PWUD.⁹⁴

A 2023 prevalence study in three Guinea-Bissau cities found that crack was among the two most commonly consumed injectable drugs and that prevalence had increased since the previous study in 2019.⁹⁵ This was supported by a 2024 survey of 50 PWUD who reported growing consumption of cocaine and crack, and said crack was among the most commonly consumed drugs.⁹⁶

Consumption largely appears to be concentrated in key urban hubs, sometimes spreading from the centre towards suburbs – as was reported in Dakar.⁹⁷ However, consumption is not always reported to be highest in capital cities – particularly for crack markets. In Togo, for example, crack is reportedly growing fastest in the north, where it is reportedly more available.⁹⁸ Similarly in Agadez, northern Niger's largest city, stakeholder interviews, and drug-related admissions data,⁹⁹ indicated growing crack cocaine consumption between 2018 and 2020, and beyond.¹⁰⁰ This trend is reportedly driven partly by overspill and partly by migrants and refugees transiting Agadez and surrounding regions on northward routes transporting small quantities of cocaine and crack.¹⁰¹

Crack consumption is concentrated among more vulnerable, socio-economically disadvantaged demographics. Crack is cooked with either benzene (more harmful) or sodium bicarbonate in West Africa. The crack market is highly profitable for retail dealers – far more so than the powder cocaine market. This is because it offers higher profits per gram.

While crack consumption across the region is mostly dominated by men, stakeholders in Senegal and Guinea reported consumption among young women to be expanding particularly sharply. Social stigma surrounding drug consumption is higher for women, typically masking the real rate of consumption and making under-reporting extremely likely.

Online markets

Most retail drug purchases in West Africa, particularly those involving crack and cocaine, are made in person. In the words of one dealer in Accra: 'The online drug markets business is still not popular in Ghana, especially when you talk about the cocaine. The cocaine ... trade remains mostly offline, face-to-face and network-driven, with hotspots, trusted suppliers and physical intermediaries. Lately there has been internet penetration ... with digital literacy increasing, but trust in in-person networks is still stronger than reliance on anonymous online vendors.'¹⁰²

However, PWUD in several countries reported an increase in the use of online platforms for cocaine purchases in the past five years.¹⁰³ Many identified the COVID-19 pandemic, during which in-person transactions were complicated by movement restrictions, as a key milestone in the growth of online purchases and courier delivery services.¹⁰⁴ Platforms cited included WhatsApp, Telegram and Facebook. One PWUD noted that purchases were made through closed WhatsApp groups to avoid adulterated cocaine, cited as a health concern by several PWUD. Membership of these closed groups is reportedly based on trust.¹⁰⁵ ■

Corruption and governance

Corruption and illicit markets have a mutually reinforcing relationship: corruption facilitates the operations and growth of the illicit market, while criminal actors leverage illicit proceeds to entrench existing corruption structures and drive the creation of new ones.¹⁰⁶

As the global cocaine market has grown, including in West Africa, it has become increasingly profitable to those who control and coordinate it, and crucially to those who protect its operations. This profitability makes it a powerful corrupting influence: it offers significant rewards to actors engaging in the corrupt practices that facilitate the drug business, further entrenching them and enhancing their resilience. In turn, the protection infrastructure ensures the trade can operate without disruption. Analysis of clusters of major seizures in the region over time indicates that they tend to occur in periods when the protection system is damaged – often at times of political volatility or change.¹⁰⁷ This supports analysis of the importance of protection to the everyday operations of large-scale cocaine traders in the region.

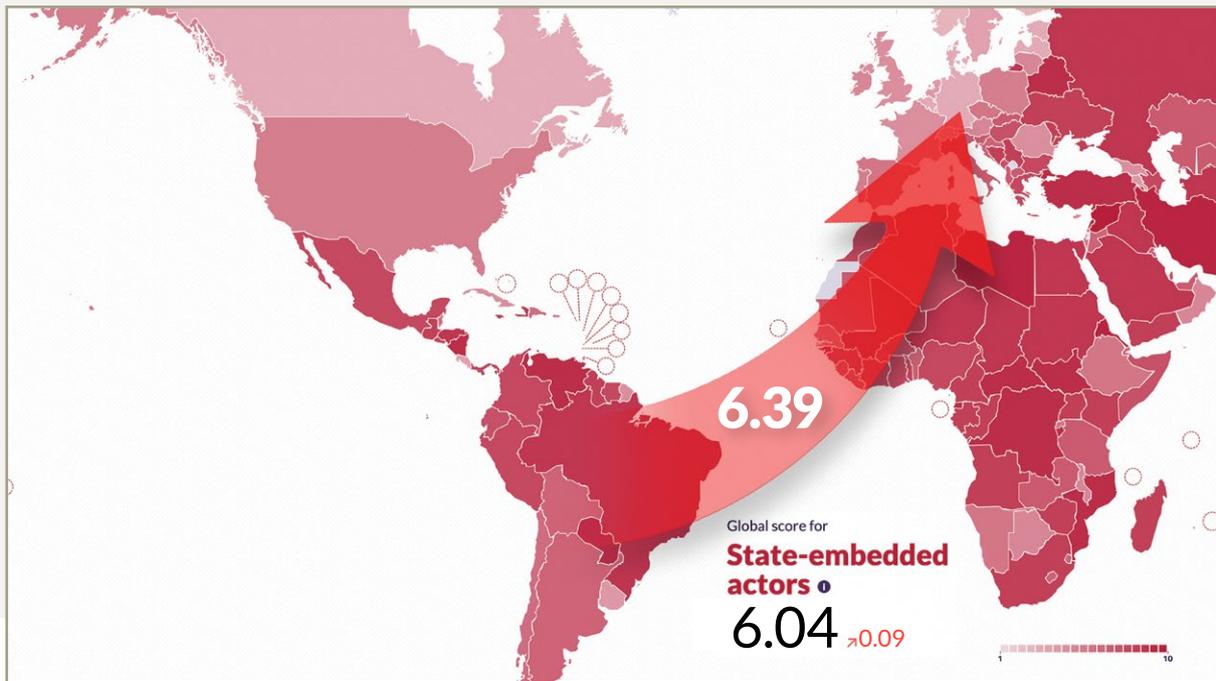


FIGURE 9 The growing influence of state-embedded actors.

NOTE: Data from the Global Organized Crime Index 2025 shows that the score for state-embedded actors is materially higher (by 0.35) across the supply chain to Europe than the global averages.

The cocaine trade uses a range of entry points to fuel corruption through state infrastructure. It is a tempting revenue source for the elite and drives rent-seeking behaviour in the higher echelons of the state, which become facilitators and protectors of the market. Positioned as a convenient source of finance for electoral campaigns, cocaine rents can warp democratic processes. They also corrupt elements of the public administration system with the greatest contact with the market's day-to-day operations, including the police, customs and border officials, penetrating upwards through state hierarchies. Consequently, the drug market drives material expansion of petty and grand corruption.¹⁰⁸ According to the Global Organized Crime Index 2025, state-embedded actors are the most powerful criminal figures in West Africa, underscoring the important role of corruption in enabling organized crime – including the cocaine trade – across the region.¹⁰⁹

Crucially, cocaine is a powerful corruption force around the world, while this report focuses on West Africa, similar trends have also been traced elsewhere and the region is by no means alone in experiencing the governance impacts of the trade.

Elite capture: the impact of drug profits on policymaking in West Africa

State protection has underpinned the growth of drug trafficking through West Africa, as it has in many regions globally. Burgeoning profits make the cocaine market a tempting source of rents for officials and political elites. While many illicit economies have a corrupting influence, the sheer profitability of the cocaine trade makes it stand out. Accessing these rents shifts the incentives of policymakers, with profound governance implications and devastating impacts on the provision of public services and the socio-economic development of states.

Where policymakers or the political elite can access 'unearned' sources of revenue, such as rents from illicit drugs or natural resources, they become less reliant on taxation and economic growth as their principal sources of income. In turn, this drives greater reliance on rents, creating a self-perpetuating cycle which diminishes accountability.¹¹⁰ This cycle drives the creation of patronage networks, where rents are distributed to a small

group of supporters:¹¹¹ an estimated 50% of cocaine trade protection payments in West Africa are allocated to supporting patronage networks.¹¹²

Widespread penetration of illicit profits within the state normalizes collusion with criminal markets, decreasing reputational and criminal sanctions for involvement. For example, according to widespread media reporting, Dutch national Jos Leijdekkers, sentenced in 2024 and 2025 on drug trafficking charges,¹¹³ was based in Sierra Leone and closely connected to members of the presidential family and other state actors.¹¹⁴ After an initial media storm, there were limited long-term consequences.

In Guinea-Bissau, since 2021, public scandals implicating certain Ministers in Government and the cocaine trade may trigger a temporary reshuffle, but not long-standing demotion or expulsion from government. Perceptions of impunity for high-level state actors over involvement in illicit markets undermine the social contract between the government and the population.¹¹⁵

Protection payments to elements of state institutions entrench the position of corrupt elements, drive underinvestment in development and feed into political processes, including elections.¹¹⁶ Electoral financing regulations across West Africa largely enable financing through private resources and allies, leaving processes vulnerable to corruption by criminal actors.¹¹⁷ Where profits from cocaine markets feed into electoral financing – as they have been repeatedly shown to do¹¹⁸ – this creates indebtedness to illicit actors which is repaid through protection and facilitation of the market, distorting the incentives behind policymaking.¹¹⁹ For example, in Guinea-Bissau cocaine rents have been repeatedly tied to financing elections.¹²⁰ While unproven, there have been indications that this recurred with the November 2025 presidential elections.¹²¹

Seizures pointing to direct links between elected representatives, senior government players and the cocaine trade are merely the most visible indicators of the intersection of electoral politics and cocaine.¹²² In 2022, more than 200 kilograms of cocaine were seized in the official vehicle of the mayor of Fachi in eastern Niger. The mayor was in the vehicle at the time.¹²³ In May 2024, a Bissau-Guinean member of parliament was detained at Lisbon airport after 13 kilograms of cocaine were found in his luggage.¹²⁴ In January 2025, Sierra Leone recalled its ambassador to Guinea after suitcases of cocaine were found in embassy vehicles.¹²⁵

Investigations by Ivorian authorities into Miguel Devesa, a major Spanish cocaine trafficker, highlighted the role of an elected member of the San Pedro regional council in providing protection for Devesa's activities and transporting tonnes of cocaine between San Pedro and Abidjan.¹²⁶ Devesa pleaded guilty, and was convicted in 2024.¹²⁷ Devesa appealed the sentence; however, the court upheld it in July 2025.¹²⁸

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Panel of Experts on Mali extensively documented the involvement of former parliamentarians and other politically connected individuals and members of groups involved in the 2015 Accord for Peace and Reconciliation as providers of protection for illicit drug markets.¹²⁹ In Mali, as in many countries in the region, many of the same actors continue to operate in the drug trade, leveraging protection structures that have remained remarkably resilient despite the political upheaval emanating from two coups since 2021.¹³⁰

The structure of democracy encourages the penetration of drug profits through state infrastructure. The risk of opposition victories requires criminal networks purchasing state protection to spread financial support between political players to safeguard business continuity from any electoral upheavals, meaning drug money infiltrates the whole political system. For example, a prominent cocaine trafficker in Guinea-Bissau was widely reported to have hedged his bets in the run-up to the November 2025 elections, adding politicians across the political spectrum to his financing list.¹³¹

The growing costs of regional political campaigning heighten the reliance of the political establishment on illicit funding sources including, to differing degrees, the illicit drug market.¹³² Electoral cycles which rely on financing from the cocaine trade and other illicit economies progressively strengthen the ties between politics and the cocaine trade across many key nodes in the region.

Impacts on criminal justice infrastructure, border patrol and navies

State institutions tasked with disabling drug markets are targeted by networks to purchase complicity, safeguard operations and create a culture of impunity. When state bodies start to draw profits from drug trafficking markets, the relationships between organs of the criminal justice infrastructure and illicit markets are fundamentally altered, transforming the former from disablers to enablers.

The illicit and cash-based nature of cocaine markets makes them highly corrupting of law enforcement. Many countries in the region ascribe to traditional law enforcement approaches to countering the drug trade, targeting street-level retail dealing and often PWUD. This enhances police vulnerability to drug-fuelled corruption.¹³³ Payments to police by street dealers are commonly reported across the region, as are incidents involving the disappearance and sometimes resale of portions of seized cocaine and crack consignments.¹³⁴

Corruption reaches beyond street-based bribery into the senior echelons of some police, prisons and specialist units tasked with responding to drug markets. One representative of a specialized counter-narcotics branch, in statements echoed in several countries, reported receiving regular 'calls from people promising huge sums of money ... to allow interceptions to go. These callers claim that most of the officers have already been bribed and that the respondent is the only one who has not.' Strange occurrences such as arrested cocaine traffickers being released and the detaining officer being arrested also point to high-level complicity. The unlawful release of individuals linked to cocaine trafficking has been repeatedly traced back to payments made to prison officials.¹³⁵

Most cocaine trafficked in West Africa is on its way elsewhere, so cross-border mobility – whether overland, by sea or by air – underpins the trade. Protection at points of entry and exit – airports and, arguably most importantly, maritime ports – is therefore critical.

Investigations into drugs have repeatedly resulted in the dismissal of security officials and senior representatives at ports and airports. For example, in October 2021 several members of the police charged with countering drug trafficking at Cotonou's international airport were arrested after being alleged to be implicated in drug trafficking.¹³⁶ In Côte d'Ivoire, a former commander of the San Pedro naval base, was tried and convicted for facilitating cocaine trafficking through San Pedro port by Devesa.¹³⁷ Such investigations, while illuminating, are rare. Widespread interviews at airports and maritime ports across the region – including with security officials, dock workers, private sector operators, freight forwarders and concessionaires – pointed to deep-rooted protection of illicit flows, including cocaine, at several airports and maritime infrastructure hubs.

Similarly, as outlined above, cocaine is trafficked across the region using overland routes. While the region's high number of land borders presents practical challenges to border control, illicit cross-border activity is also facilitated by the corruption of border officials.¹³⁸ Customs and law enforcement postings at border points on key cocaine trafficking routes are often plum positions, with officials aware that salaries are complemented by significant bribes.

CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE

Since its emergence in West Africa in the 1990s, the cocaine trade has become increasingly enmeshed in politics. Competition over profits has operated as a driver of political instability. In Guinea-Bissau, coups, political attacks¹³⁹ and high-level political assassinations have been tightly connected with the cocaine trade.¹⁴⁰ In 2025 in Sierra Leone, the alleged links between Dutch kingpin Leijdekkers and the presidential family were reportedly leaked to the press by opposition figures – perceived by several observers as a strategy to destabilize the president ahead of presidential elections scheduled for 2028.¹⁴¹

Violence occasionally flares between criminal entrepreneurs – rather than their protectors¹⁴² – but it is rare. Street-level clashes between networks and street gangs are regularly reported but typically not large-scale.¹⁴³ West Africa's cocaine economy is far less violent than its Latin American or European counterparts, with collaboration being common between criminal actors – even between networks that typically compete in other contexts.¹⁴⁴ Were national or regional markets to enter a period of contraction, with associated rents decreasing, a surge in violence could be expected.¹⁴⁵

Resourcing armed conflict

Cocaine has also resourced armed conflict in the Sahel, although rebel and pro-government groups – rather than violent extremist organizations – have been most active in cocaine trafficking. Since the late 2000s, cocaine has been an important source of financing for Sahelian insurgent and separatist groups, particularly in Mali since 2012 and Niger (2007–2009).¹⁴⁶ Several key actors in the cocaine trade in the Sahel have remained relatively stable since the early 2000s, and the links between non-state armed groups and cocaine therefore continue.

Competition over cocaine profits has engendered sometimes deadly conflict over control of key trafficking nodes, such as the strategic Malian town of Aguelhok, which was subject to peace deals between different factions in 2021.¹⁴⁷ Indeed, until mid-2023 – and the resurgence of conflict in the north – the key trafficking nodes in Mali's northern region were divided and agreed upon between armed groups and allied traffickers, as shown in Figure 10. While territorial control and cocaine trafficking routings have shifted since mid-2023, rebel armed groups (currently clustered under the FLA) and FLA-aligned traffickers remain a significant set of actors coordinating cocaine trafficking in northern Mali, albeit in smaller volumes than prior to 2023. Pro-government armed groups, and networks enjoying protection from state figures, also continue to be major players, enmeshing cocaine profits into Mali's conflict landscape.

There have been longstanding concerns that the violent extremist organizations operating across growing swathes of the region – namely the al-Qaeda-affiliated JNIM and Islamic State Sahel Province (IS Sahel) – are involved in and drawing financing from the lucrative cocaine trade.

Over the past five years, evidence of either organization drawing resources from the cocaine trade has centred on the collection of taxation payments on routes bisecting territories over which they have influence.¹⁴⁸ Resource flows from the cocaine trade to extremist groups are partly enabled by intertwined commercial interests, tribal affiliations and family relationships between key players in the cocaine trade, extremist organizations and political armed groups.

For example, Mohamed Ben Ahmed Mahri ('Rougi') is cited by US sanctions as having used the proceeds of cocaine and cannabis trafficking to support a range of armed groups, including the al-Qaeda-affiliated Al-Mourabitoun, one of the predecessors of the JNIM.¹⁴⁹ Mahri is a key actor in the Tilemsi Arab networks, which also have strong links to IS Sahel, as many key players in the Tilemsi ecosystem were former members of the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa, IS Sahel's predecessor.¹⁵⁰ This illustrates the complex interconnected web of crime and conflict ecosystems, which cannot be neatly divided between actors purportedly on different sides of the conflict.

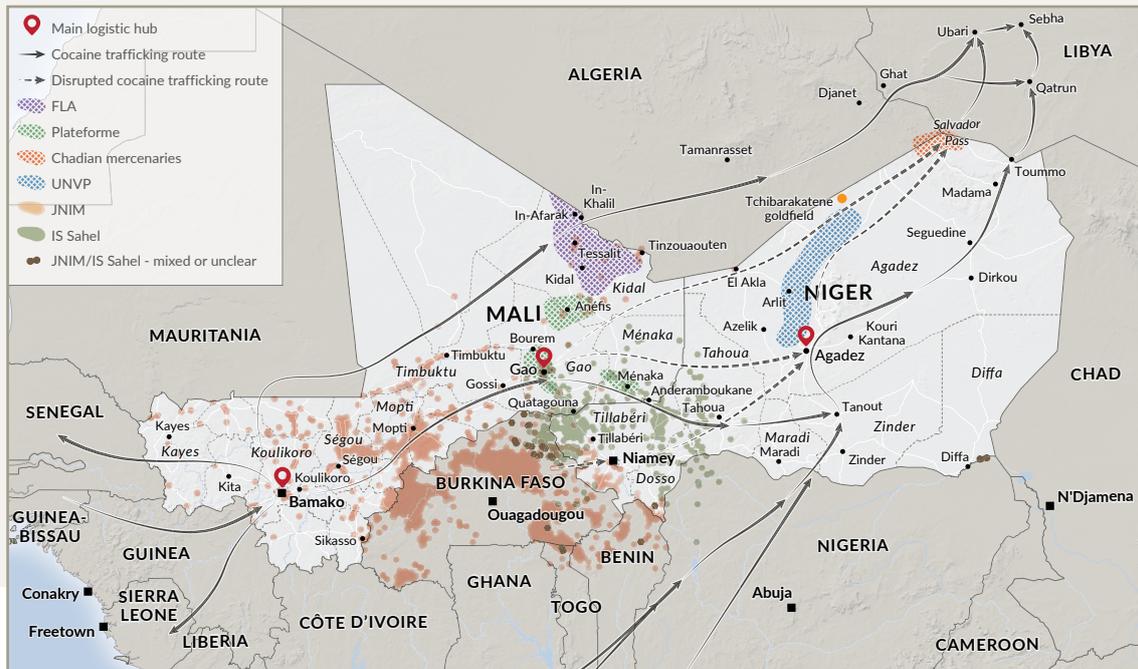


FIGURE 10 Sahelian cocaine trafficking routes, logistics hubs and armed-group areas of control.

For JNIM, the group's partial and fluctuating alliance with the FLA since at least 2021 means it allows FLA-associated traffickers to travel through the territory it controls, in exchange for payments. According to one source close to the FLA: 'It's clear that we cannot organize this travel without the jihadists' agreement [referring to JNIM]. In the Bassikouniou, Lerneb, Foita border area [at the Mauritania–Mali border], we [the FLA] have presence in key localities with mobile units to be able to monitor movements of Wagner and the army, but they [JNIM] have a much bigger presence in rural areas and along corridors.'¹⁵¹

For IS Sahel, the group's growing territorial influence, and reroutings triggered by the push northwards of FAMA and Wagner, may be making cocaine an increasingly important source of financing. Since 2022, IS Sahel has solidified influence in Gao and Menaka regions. Since 2023, due to instability in Kidal region and the end of the agreement with the FLA, the Tilemsi web of traffickers have started to move more cocaine shipments from Gao directly east via Menaka region towards Niger.¹⁵² The consolidation of IS Sahel control of Menaka region, the higher number of shipments using this route, and the already established link between the Tilemsi traffickers and IS Sahel leadership, suggest that IS Sahel may have increasingly benefited from cocaine trafficking via taxation since 2023.¹⁵³

West Africa's cocaine trade has also been linked to financing designated terrorist groups operating beyond the region. Lebanese nationals linked to cocaine consignments in the region have been designated financiers for Hezbollah on US sanctions lists, including one individual reportedly linked to the seizure of 600 kilograms of cocaine in Conakry port in 2023.¹⁵⁴ Hezbollah, operating mainly through Lebanese nationals but also through regional actors, has been reported to be linked to cocaine trafficking in the region.¹⁵⁵

ILLICIT FINANCIAL FLOWS LINKED TO THE COCAINE TRADE

The overarching economic outlook for West Africa remains mixed, with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank highlighting challenges, and a projected 4% regional growth rate in 2025 highlighted by the Inter-Governmental Action Group against Money Laundering in West Africa (GIABA) being seen to ‘mask significant divergences and [be] subject to considerable downside risks’.¹⁵⁶ This makes institutions and individuals yet more vulnerable to illicit economies – and among the most lucrative in the region, and therefore the most enticing, is the cocaine trade.

This was highlighted by GIABA in its 2025 regional risk review, which underscored that ‘narcotics trafficking, particularly of cocaine transiting from Latin America, remains a primary generator of illicit wealth’ in West Africa, echoing previous warnings.¹⁵⁷ Reflecting this, drug trafficking is repeatedly highlighted as a major predicate crime generating illicit financial flows in GIABA’s assessment reports of countries across the region. Illustratively, GIABA cited narcotics trafficking as a key predicate crime in the original risk assessments of all three West African countries – Burkina Faso,¹⁵⁸ Côte d’Ivoire¹⁵⁹ and Nigeria¹⁶⁰ – on the FATF grey list until the most recent update in October (when Burkina Faso and Nigeria were removed), which indicates significant gaps in processes for preventing money laundering and terrorist financing.¹⁶¹

West Africa operates as a destination for illicit financial flows generated from the cocaine trade outside the region, particularly in Europe. Some European drug traffickers have allegedly invested heavily in property in the region, including in Dakar, where the flourishing construction sector has been repeatedly identified as a hub for laundering drug profits.¹⁶² Illicit financial flows linked to the cocaine trade intricately connect West Africa and Europe, flowing in both directions, with West African traffickers also investing in European property or offshoring profits in European bank accounts.

Considering cocaine trafficked through the region itself, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and GIABA estimated it could represent a ‘a criminal flow worth over US\$3 billion annually’ as at 2018.¹⁶³ Using 2021 Europol and the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (now the European Union Drugs Agency – EUDA) estimates of the minimum retail value of Europe’s cocaine trade (the most recent available),¹⁶⁴ and estimates that at least one third of Europe’s cocaine is likely to be transiting West Africa,¹⁶⁵ the cocaine moving through the region was estimated to represent a criminal flow of at least €3.87 billion by 2021, representing a 29% increase since 2018. Since 2021, indicators suggest the volumes traded through West Africa have surged further, but cocaine prices across Europe – the largest consumption market linked to West Africa flows – have decreased, affecting the volume of linked illicit financial flows.

Most cocaine profits in West Africa are offshored. In a self-recognized conservative estimate, OECD reporting suggested that less than 2% of profit remained in West Africa, largely in the form of payments for protection and to regional intermediaries.¹⁶⁶ However, this is likely to be an under-count, although rightly reflecting how all types of actors often offshore profits. In Guinea-Bissau, for example, protection payments to the military and coordination payments to high-level traffickers are often partly offshored, and partly invested in property in Bissau.

The region’s property and construction sector has been repeatedly highlighted as vulnerable for laundering profits from the cocaine trade.¹⁶⁷ The characteristics of the property market – its reliance on cash transactions, high-value nature and opacity around beneficial ownership – make it an ideal vehicle for laundering money. Property allows illicit actors to conceal ownership and increase the value of their holdings through renovations and legitimate-looking resale. In many African jurisdictions, property professionals are not obliged to file suspicious transaction reports or verify the source of funds, creating a regulatory vacuum. In Ghana, more than

€41 million is estimated to be laundered annually through the property sector, aided by the lack of transparency in property ownership and verification.¹⁶⁸

The region's gambling sector and foreign currency exchanges are also suspected of operating as significant conduits for money laundering,¹⁶⁹ including for drug profits.¹⁷⁰ For example, in August 2025 Liberia's Financial Intelligence Agency fined 50/50 Casino Inc of Monrovia for alleged violations of anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing regulations.¹⁷¹ While digitalization has brought new options to the table – making misuse of mobile money platforms, international remittance platforms and virtual assets rapidly growing concerns that have been linked to laundering of drug profits¹⁷² – cash remains the foundation of illicit finance in West Africa.¹⁷³ The *hawala* system, which moves funds across borders outside the formal financial system, is a major conduit for transnational illicit financial flows.

The hospitality sector has also been highlighted as vulnerable to laundering cocaine-linked profits. For example, in 2024, Ivorian investigations penalized an Abidjan restaurant, Pasta e Pizza, for being involved in laundering funds from the cocaine trade.¹⁷⁴ A Lebanese national had cofounded the restaurant with Bartolo Bruzzaniti. The latter was convicted on cocaine trafficking charges in 2024 in Milan.¹⁷⁵ Lebanese networks, well embedded in regional trade, may play a key role in laundering finances linked to the cocaine trade, while also playing a role in regional bulk and wholesale operations.¹⁷⁶

Virtual assets, most prominently cryptocurrencies, are gaining traction across the region. Nigeria leads Africa in cryptocurrency adoption and ranks second globally after India.¹⁷⁷ The popularity of cryptocurrencies has surged recently, especially since 2023, driven by the depreciation of the naira, removal of fuel subsidies, soaring inflation and the lifting of the 2021 ban on banks serving crypto companies.¹⁷⁸ Nigeria received about €50.5 billion in cryptocurrency transactions between July 2023 and June 2024, €2.6 billion more than the previous year.¹⁷⁹ A crypto trader in Jos offered insight into the rapid growth, saying: 'In 2022, at least one in five young people I knew were into crypto, but since 2023 that number has exploded.'¹⁸⁰ A law enforcement officer in Nigeria noted: 'Cryptocurrency has added a new layer of complexity to tackling illicit financial flows in Nigeria. Criminals use it to extort and launder illicit funds across borders, and it's much harder to trace the real people behind these transactions.'¹⁸¹ While cryptocurrency is deeply intertwined with online fraud, it is also interconnected with cocaine trafficking in West Africa and among the diaspora overseas. For example, Nigerian organized crime groups, including Black Axe – a sophisticated cultist group operating internationally – have been using cryptocurrency and sophisticated money laundering operations to launder the international profits of criminal activities, which include cocaine trafficking.¹⁸² While some countries, including Ghana and Nigeria, are updating tailored regulations to mitigate the risks presented by a burgeoning cryptocurrency market, many are far from this point and lack the basic legal structures and technical expertise to monitor the sector.¹⁸³

Financial intelligence units across the region have insufficient financial and technical resources to address the challenges posed by illicit financial flows and have been repeatedly linked to corruption scandals. For example, the former director and comptroller of Liberia's Financial Intelligence Agency were suspended and are undergoing judicial proceedings in Liberia for alleged financial crimes.¹⁸⁴ All defendants have pleaded not guilty.¹⁸⁵

Financial transfers are sometimes avoided altogether through commodity swaps. These involve cocaine from Latin America for cannabis resin from West Africa (originally from Morocco¹⁸⁶) or cocaine in West Africa for ecstasy from Europe.¹⁸⁷

THE ACTORS

Cocaine is among the most lucrative criminal markets in the world. Reflecting this, while smaller regional networks play a key role in West Africa's cocaine trade, it also attracts some of the world's most sophisticated criminal networks, from Nigerian cultist groups and the Italian mafia 'Ndrangheta, to the Colombian Clan del Golfo and the Brazilian PCC.

Three major categories of actor operate in West Africa's cocaine trade: regional entrepreneurs and networks (with armed groups as a subset of this category); foreign criminal actors (state or non-state entities operating outside their home country, including foreign nationals and diaspora groups); and state embedded actors.¹⁸⁸ One regional law enforcement official highlighted the interconnected triangle of alliances that underpin the cocaine trade: 'There is a relationship of complicity. The state actors are the third angle of the triangle along with the international network and the local network.'¹⁸⁹

State-embedded actors

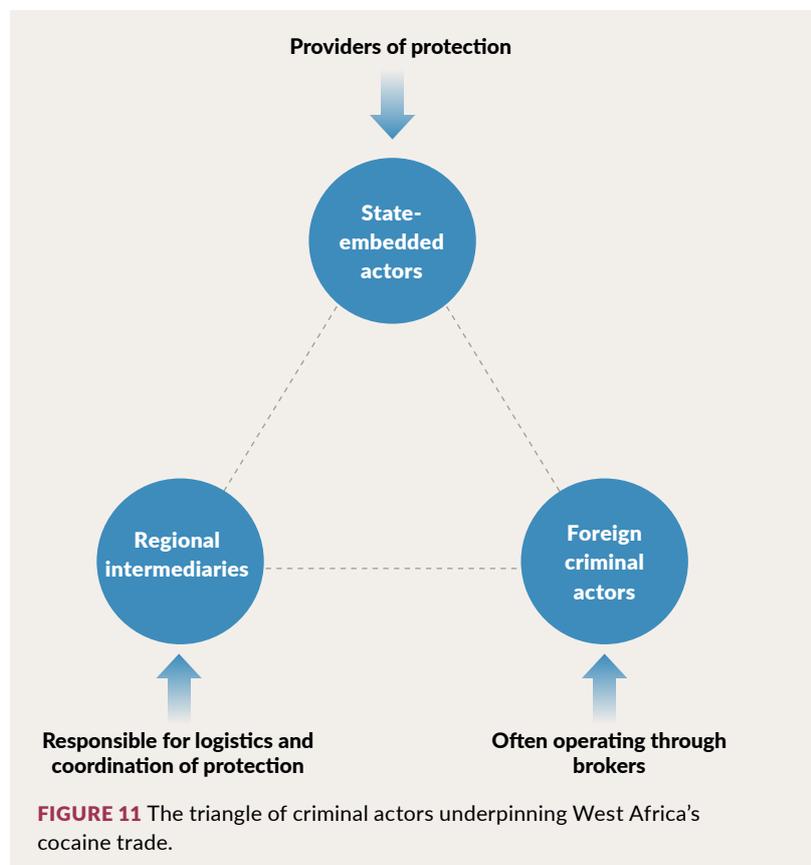
State-embedded actors – both within political and security structures, and at pivotal points of entry and exit, such as maritime ports and airports – are crucial in enabling West Africa's cocaine market. It is corruption, rather than violence, that primarily enables cocaine trafficking in the region.

The critical role of state-embedded actors in facilitating the cocaine trade is outlined above in the section titled 'Governance and corruption', and the roles of the other two categories of actor are explored below.

Regional networks

Regional and domestic criminal networks dominate West Africa's retail cocaine trade, driving the expanding consumption markets in crack, and to a lesser extent cocaine. They run drug consumption spaces (known as hideouts in Sierra Leone and *fumoirs* in Côte d'Ivoire), traffic a wide range of drugs between countries in the region, and deal in the doses and grams that supply consumers.

West African nationals in the bulk transit trade, who operate across the region, typically cooperate with foreign criminal actors as intermediaries, overseeing logistics and connecting foreign nationals with local and regional protection structures. This embedment in regional protection structures was repeatedly highlighted by law enforcement representatives as the most pivotal factor determining the success – or otherwise – of foreign criminal organizations operating in the cocaine trade. Commenting on why some foreign criminal groups succeed and others fail, a Bissau-Guinean Judicial Police inspector noted: 'It's so simple. It all depends on connections. The ones that have good connections are successful, the ones that don't, their products are seized and that's it. For example, a network that has connections that allow aircraft to land at the international airport in Bissau to pick up their products is not the same as those who use mules to transport their products.'¹⁹⁰



Regional intermediaries are frequently businessmen, often working in import/export. They hold dual European/West African citizenship and have spent time in Europe, where they built connections to the drug trade. One prominent Bissau-Guinean figure, Braima Seidi Bá, made connections with Latin American traffickers while living in Spain and Portugal.¹⁹¹ Similarly, Banta Keita, intended recipient of a three-tonne cocaine consignment seized in 2021 in Banjul, is a Malian/French/Gambian citizen and operated closely with Ecuadorian networks.¹⁹²

Regional entrepreneurs are remarkable in their resilience, with many operating since the early 2000s. Domestic enforcement attempts against large-scale players have typically been short-lived. For example, Bá was operating on a large scale by 2007, was convicted of cocaine trafficking in 2020, then cleared on appeal in 2022, on largely procedural grounds in a highly contentious judgment.¹⁹³ Reportedly, he continues to operate.¹⁹⁴ Similarly, the Malian government issued an arrest warrant for Mahri, the UN-sanctioned drug trafficker, in February 2013, but withdrew it eight months later.¹⁹⁵ In Niger, Ghoumour Itouwa Bidika, long reported to be a player in the transport of cocaine and cannabis resin through the north of the country, was arrested in 2021 in connection with 17 tonnes of cannabis resin. Charges were dropped just over a year later, allegedly due to procedural errors, and Bidika continues to operate, albeit increasingly in the illicit gold sector.¹⁹⁶

Three large-scale Guinean players in the country's cocaine economy started operating (2000–2008) during the presidency of Lansana Conté. They were subject to court proceedings in 2010 during the 2008–2010 presidency of Moussa Dadis Camara,¹⁹⁷ after which they fled, returning under the presidency of Alpha Condé (2010–2021).¹⁹⁸ While several sources reported that these actors continued to operate in the trade after their return, their role after the September 2021 coup is more disputed, with stakeholders disagreeing about whether they remain active.¹⁹⁹

Cultist groups in Nigeria

The globalization of Nigeria's organized crime is intimately linked to the country's economic trajectory. The oil price shocks of the 1920s crippled the Nigerian economy, driving significant emigration, including to Europe.²⁰⁰ From the 1990s, Nigerian diaspora networks also strengthened in Brazil, particularly in São Paulo. These migration trends underpinned the globalization of organized criminal networks across Europe and in São Paulo – the heartland of the PCC and a prominent point of origin for cocaine trafficked towards West Africa.²⁰¹

Currently, Nigerian criminal networks, including cult groups such as the Black Axe, Supreme Eiyé and Maphite,²⁰² are players in cocaine trafficking between Brazil, Africa and Europe.²⁰³ They have extensively collaborated with the PCC, as highlighted by the 2020 arrest of two Nigerian nationals and PCC senior operator Gilberto Aparecido Dos Santos in Maputo, Mozambique.²⁰⁴

One Nigerian cocaine dealer noted: 'I don't think you can discuss drug trafficking in Nigeria without talking

about cult groups. They are the major players when it comes to high-end drugs like cocaine.'²⁰⁵ A different trafficker emphasized the polycriminal nature of cultist groups: 'They are involved in whatever brings them money ... human trafficking, cybercrime ... but I believe drug trafficking – especially cocaine – is one of their major activities.'²⁰⁶

Crime abroad and politics back home are intricately intertwined: cult groups operate as paid providers of protection or instigators of violence for political actors in Nigeria.²⁰⁷ Some income from illicit activities in Europe is funnelled back to Nigeria, funding annual celebrations of the home chapters of the confraternities,²⁰⁸ supporting members in prison, paying bail,²⁰⁹ helping fund political campaigns, and financially supporting peers in violent conflicts.²¹⁰ Several former confraternity members stated that during times of 'cult wars', wealthy European members send money to buy arms and ammunition. For example, donations have reportedly poured in from Europe and north and south America to fund an ongoing war between Black Axe and Maphites in Benin City.²¹¹ ■

Foreign criminal actors

According to the Global Organized Crime Index 2025, foreign criminal actors were the fastest-growing category of criminal operators in West Africa between 2019 and 2025, underscoring the increasingly globalized nature of organized crime.²¹² Further, the 2025 Index placed West Africa among the regions with the greatest foreign criminal actor influence globally.²¹³ The booming cocaine trade is a key driver of this dubious honour.

Foreign criminal actors are particularly important for the bulk transit trade, though they also operate in regional wholesale and retail distribution.²¹⁴ Among the most prominent players are nationals from across the cocaine supply chain that bisects West Africa, namely Latin Americans (particularly Mexicans, Colombians and more recently Brazilians), Europeans and Lebanese diaspora groups, which have long been key traders in the region. While Latin Americans have long been present in West Africa, several indicators suggest a strong increase in European organized crime groups operating in the region since circa 2019. The presence of European actors is by no means new. However, European networks appear to have, in many cases, moved up the supply chain and increasingly coordinate the trafficking through West Africa.

To date, more efforts have focused on tracing European national involvement in West Africa's cocaine trade, probably shaping under-recognition of involvement by nationals from Asia and the Middle East. Preliminary evidence indicates the potential involvement in the cocaine trade of Chinese nationals working in the fisheries sector in Sierra Leone,²¹⁵ and growing involvement of Turkish nationals in Senegal and Guinea.²¹⁶ Data confirming the scale of such involvement remains scarce. However, as consumption in both regions increases, it is likely to grow.

Latin American criminal networks in West Africa

Latin American criminal networks, particularly Colombian²¹⁷ and Mexican cartels, have long been prominent players in West Africa's cocaine trade. They play a significant role as suppliers and financiers, often sending network members to West Africa to oversee the logistics of specific consignments.

In Côte d'Ivoire, Devesa was tried and convicted along with two Colombian nationals (among others) on cocaine trafficking charges.²¹⁸ The Spaniard from Galicia highlighted the role of Colombians in financing the bulk trade: 'At some point I invited about 20 Colombians to Ivory Coast, they were staying with us at home. They came to finance our drug trafficking activity.'²¹⁹ Colombia and Galician networks have worked in partnership since at least the early 2000s to route cocaine through West Africa.²²⁰ Press sources report that Devesa was linked to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia paramilitary organization and to Wilder Sanchez Farfan ('Gato'), an Ecuadorian cocaine kingpin.²²¹

Some Colombian and Mexican networks send long-term emissaries to West Africa who work in partnership with regional intermediaries for several years. This appears to have been the approach adopted by Clan del Golfo, as highlighted by the case of Ricardo Ariza Monje, who operated in Guinea-Bissau alongside Bá, then in Guinea, between at least 2018 and 2021, and likely after that point.²²²

However, many (probably most) Latin American network elements travel in and out of the region in connection with specific consignments rather than establishing a permanent base. This appears to mark a shift from their modus operandi in the early 2000s, when a larger number of nationals established themselves in the region for longer periods. The Sinaloa Cartel, a significant Mexican network active in a range of drug markets, reportedly also operates through Guinea-Bissau, with brokers and load guards regularly travelling in and out of the country.²²³

Mexican and Colombian networks appear to collaborate on routings through West Africa. This was highlighted by the September 2024 seizure of 2.63 tonnes of cocaine in Bissau, which resulted in the arrest of Colombian and Mexican nationals on the private plane carrying the consignment. Interviews indicate that the consignment was at least partly linked to the Sinaloa Cartel, which was probably the financier, with Colombian networks as the suppliers.²²⁴ Pooled consignments combining cocaine owned by distinct buyers are common.²²⁵

While Mexican and Colombian nationals continue to be the most frequently reported foreign actors in West Africa's cocaine trade, major points of export on maritime and aerial routings – namely Brazil and Venezuela – are also shaping the influence of criminal networks. The PCC, the most powerful player in Brazil's domestic cocaine market,²²⁶ is a key supply-side actor for predominantly maritime cocaine flows through West Africa.²²⁷ But while it is suspected of having influence in some West African countries through relationships with strategically placed actors, evidence of physical establishment in the region is limited. Instead, the group probably typically hands over consignments to local allies, including the 'Ndrangheta and Western Balkan networks.²²⁸ However, as the PCC consolidates its presence in Portugal, its physical presence in West Africa may grow.

Venezuela has long operated as a significant point of origin for private aircraft trafficking cocaine into West Africa. More recently, since 2023, Venezuelan nationals have increasingly been linked to consignments trafficked into the region on non-containerized maritime routes from Suriname and Guyana.²²⁹ Loading of consignments into private planes in Venezuela has been linked to the Colombian ELN and to the Cartel de los Soles, a loose grouping of criminal networks enmeshed in state structures.²³⁰

Latin American cartels and regional intermediaries

In 2019, two large seizures of cocaine in Guinea-Bissau – 789 kilograms in March and 1 800 kilograms in September – turned the spotlight on the country. These seizures and subsequent investigations provided insights into how major Colombian networks collaborated with a longstanding alleged criminal entrepreneur – prominent Bissau-Guinean businessman Braima Seidi Bá – to traffic large volumes of cocaine through the country.

Bá and his network had been monitored by Guinea-Bissau's Judicial Police since 2012. Believed to be behind the March 2019 operation, in March 2020 Bá was convicted *in absentia* of coordinating a drug import deal that was busted in the September 2019 seizure.²³¹ He was later cleared by the Supreme Court in a controversial judgment.²³² Bá allegedly coordinated the network with a Colombian-Mexican national, Ricardo Ariza Monje, who was convicted and later cleared alongside him.

According to subsequent journalistic investigations, Colombian authorities had concluded that the September 2019 consignment allegedly coordinated by Bá and Monje was linked to Colombia's Clan del Golfo.²³³ Collaboration between Bá and the Colombians was believed to have been longstanding: Bá was identified as the tenant of a warehouse where, in August 2007, the Bissau-Guinean Judicial Police arrested two Colombian nationals and found an organogram believed to map key figures in the protection of Guinea-Bissau's cocaine trade. They included the heads of the naval, terrestrial and aerial military brigades at the time.²³⁴

Thirteen individuals in Bá's network (six Colombians, six Bissau-Guineans and one Malian) were arrested and convicted alongside the ringleaders, and had their penalties reduced on appeal in October 2020.²³⁵ Their convictions were not affected by the 2022 Supreme Court ruling that acquitted Bá and Monje.

According to the initial judgment, Bissau-Guinean nationals drove boats and cars, unloaded and stored consignments, and were involved in financial transactions (using Wari, Western Union and MoneyGram money-transfer agencies). The judgment found that Colombian nationals were more prominently represented in senior coordination roles but also involved in issuing financial payments, primarily to recipients in Argentina, Spain, and to a lesser extent Colombia.

The regional court judgment detailed non-containerized maritime imports into islets forming a coastal archipelago in the north-west of Guinea-Bissau, before being transferred to the mainland for storage. The March 2019 seizure involved cocaine hidden in the false bottom of a truck in Safim, 15 kilometres from Bissau on the road to Senegal.

According to the regional court preliminary judgment, the network used expensive satellite telephones and radios to avoid interceptions of communications. It also used three shell companies to move funds: GB-Intercontinental SARL and GB Fenix SARL (incorporated by Bá), and Palmeiras Company Import & Export Business Centre, incorporated by Bá and Monje. The judgment concluded that these

corporate structures were used to employ and pay salaries to network members, launder proceeds, and provide a seemingly licit façade for operations in the form of wholesale and retail trade. The appeal court judgment challenged these findings and overturned the convictions relating to money laundering.²³⁶

GB-Intercontinental was a food and drink import company, importing narcotics alongside licit products. It used the 'rip on, rip off' method, in which narcotics are attached to the goods at the point of export (in this case, Colombia) then detached at the point of entry (in this case, Guinea-Bissau). This has long been identified as a logistics method used by Latin American drug-trafficking groups.

Monje also allegedly operated from neighbouring Guinea, specifically from Boffa, a small estuary harbour 130 kilometres north of Conakry. The town is the site of significant mining infrastructure, and is home to at least two large

nightclubs. Here, Monje allegedly established an ice cream business, said by prosecutors to operate as a money laundering front for drug trafficking activities. Monje and four other South American nationals (allegedly Cuban, Colombian and Brazilian) were charged with drug trafficking and complicity in drug trafficking in 2021 in Guinea. Monje, also the subject of an INTERPOL red notice,²³⁷ was charged *in absentia*, as he had fled. In July 2022, a Guinean court rejected an attempt by the defence to have the case thrown out. The other defendants denied any involvement in cocaine trafficking.²³⁸ The authors were not able to confirm the outcome of this case.

This illustrates how Latin American networks, in collaboration with regional intermediaries, typically operate across several countries in West Africa, switching between routes and bases. This flexibility and ability to operate across the region is also characteristic of European networks. ■

European criminal networks in West Africa

European criminal networks, which oversee the import and export of many consignments bound for Europe, operate across the region. They include several major organized crime groups, including the 'Ndrangheta, large Spanish Galician networks and key Dutch kingpins, and a wider constellation of smaller networks. As highlighted above, the operating presence of this category of actors appears to be increasing.

European nationals have predominantly been linked to bulk maritime trafficking, with some nationalities particularly linked to certain modalities. Spanish networks, for example, are commonly associated with 'go-fasts' – high-speed motorboats used to pick up consignments in the Gulf of Guinea and traffic them to Europe.²³⁹ Similarly, analysis of Western Balkan organized crime groups, which have operated since 2014 on routes through Cabo Verde and since 2019 in mainland West Africa, predominantly use West Africa as a logistical node in maritime routes. They focus on non-containerized import, and non-containerized and containerized export.²⁴⁰ Interviews indicate the ongoing presence of nationals from the Western Balkans operating in West Africa's cocaine trade.²⁴¹

European networks have also been linked to large-scale trafficking by air,²⁴² and to general aviation. For example, brokers and leaders from the Western Balkans have discussed links with pilots in West Africa, including in Senegal, and considered using private aircraft to move consignments between different countries in Africa, such as from Sierra Leone to South Africa.²⁴³ Potential processing facilities have also been linked to European nationals.²⁴⁴ As processing facilities in Europe have expanded, this could become a growing trend in West Africa.

European diaspora groups have been a key element of strategies adopted by several European criminal organizations, mirroring tracked approaches of criminal geographic diffusion.²⁴⁵ The 'Ndrangheta, implicated by international and regional law enforcement investigations in cocaine trafficking and laundering of proceeds across West Africa, have leveraged family ties and broader diaspora links.²⁴⁶ In 2015, a daughter of a clan member in Abidjan appeared to be a key node,²⁴⁷ while a 2018 investigation found that an Italian in the construction business had been a key intermediary in importing tonnes of cocaine from Brazil since 2014, using front companies to launder funds and working closely with an Ivorian business partner.²⁴⁸ Similarly, in

2024, one close Italian-national associate of the Bruzzaniti brothers – pivotal nodes in a key 'Ndrangheta clan (further detail provided below) – was convicted in Côte d'Ivoire on charges of money laundering and criminal conspiracy in connection to drug trafficking.²⁴⁹

Highly embedded networks have diversified beyond cocaine into other sectors in West Africa. For example, several high-ranking 'Ndrangheta clans long operating in West Africa diversified into extractives and toxic waste,²⁵⁰ allegedly laundering funds through diverse sectors including construction and fisheries.²⁵¹

Brokers: pivotal nodes in the operations of foreign criminal actors in West Africa

A defining feature of the operations of Latin American and European groups is the role of brokers – representatives of foreign criminal organizations sent to West Africa – to establish contacts for logistics and protection, organize and oversee operations, plan smuggling routes, effect financial transfers and oversee operational security. Brokers are pivotal in West Africa operations, whether established in the region permanently or for a period of months. They often work for more than one network, making them well-connected nodes in the overarching criminal ecosystem. They also typically operate in more than one country.

Some brokers have semi-permanent establishments in West Africa, such as the Mexican/Colombian Ricardo Ariza Monje, explored above, and Italian Bartolo Bruzzaniti, who was, until his arrest in 2023, a key 'Ndrangheta broker in Abidjan, alleged by investigations to have coordinated many shipments with the PCC. Bruzzaniti, part of the Bruzzaniti-Palamara-Morabito clan, was also a broker for other 'Ndrangheta clans and the Camorra. Based in Côte d'Ivoire since at least 2017 when he registered as a resident, Bruzzaniti (nicknamed 'Africa' in encrypted messages alleged to be his by investigations) boasts of 'knowing which keys to touch in Africa' and positions himself as able to move goods and buy protection on the continent. He had a close relationship with Rocco Morabito, who was a fugitive in Uruguay and Brazil until his arrest in 2021 and a key 'Ndrangheta intermediary with the PCC, effectively establishing a West African node for 'Ndrangheta-PCC operations.²⁵²

Many brokers move in and out of West Africa, rather than establishing a semi-permanent base. This has been the tracked modality for Western Balkan networks. For example, according to indictments and interviews with law enforcement sources, Mario Krezić was a key broker in West Africa for a Serbian-led network allied with the Kavač clan, one of Montenegro's dominant criminal organizations since at least 2020.²⁵³ Krezić allegedly spent several months in Freetown, a key operating base. He coordinated at-sea pickups and drop-offs through ship-to-ship transfers; imports into nearby coastal areas; and storage, containerization and export through the Port of Freetown towards Antwerp. Media accounts also link Krezić to operations in Côte d'Ivoire.²⁵⁴ Prosecutor filings describe him as a skilled logistician and liaison between different groups involved in operations.²⁵⁵ Krezić also provided services to other cells in the Slavic-speaking networks using the West Africa route.²⁵⁶

While Krezić is named in an indictment in Serbia and Croatia, he has not been formally charged. According to the media, Belgium has issued an arrest warrant.²⁵⁷ Press reports say that in 2020 Krezić travelled to Dubai, United Arab Emirates, where he was arrested in 2024.²⁵⁸ Spanish authorities expect his extradition,²⁵⁹ but as of November 2025 it is unclear whether this has occurred.

West Africa as a haven for fugitives from justice? Kingpins and leaders

There are several indications that powerful organized crime groups have identified West Africa as a safe space to flee to – and continue operating from – to avoid regional and international justice proceedings.

In encrypted communications with Raffaele Imperiale, among the most important traffickers of cocaine into Europe and based in Dubai at the time as a fugitive from European law enforcement, Bartolo Bruzzaniti suggested Imperiale move to Côte d'Ivoire, where he said he could arrange for his impunity.²⁶⁰

While Imperiale did not take Bruzzaniti up on his offer, other senior actors have evaded justice proceedings by moving to – or within – West Africa. Miguel Devesa probably arrived in West Africa as a broker, to open the West Africa route for Galician cocaine trafficking networks. Over time, he evolved into a more independent

operator servicing a range of consumption markets.²⁶¹ Devesa reportedly coordinated the 2009 landing of a Boeing 727 carrying cocaine on an airstrip in the desert near Gao, Mali,²⁶² and was arrested in Bamako in 2010 after being found at a murder scene. Although convicted of murder, Devesa received a light sentence which was quickly suspended. He then promptly disappeared.²⁶³

From at least 2018, Devesa sidestepped investigations by shifting operations to Côte d'Ivoire, where he first scoped out options for trafficking modalities – including his previously preferred general aviation routings – before establishing maritime operations around the Port of San Pedro. Between his arrival in Côte d'Ivoire and his arrest in 2022, Devesa operated on non-containerized and containerized routings and bought protection from law enforcement, government and port officials. He stated in court that he supplied markets beyond Europe (including India and Australia), suggesting he probably expanded beyond his original Galician purchasers. Devesa was tried alongside alleged 'Ndrangheta figures but well-evidenced connections were not established.²⁶⁴

Dutch national Leijdekkers also identified West Africa as a strategic operating base in the face of judicial proceedings, and is believed to have operated through Sierra Leone since at least 2022. In June 2024, Antwerp Criminal Court sentenced Leijdekkers in absentia to 24 years in prison for large-scale drug trafficking, and in February 2025 to an additional 13 years for attempting to steal 10 tonnes of cocaine.²⁶⁵ Leijdekkers' presence in Sierra Leone was widely reported by the media in January 2025, as were his alleged connections to members of the presidential family and other state actors.²⁶⁶ His apparent impunity in the country, despite widespread media and international law enforcement focus, may act as an advert for other kingpins fleeing justice elsewhere.

DATA GAPS UNDERMINING THE RESPONSE

Significant data gaps continue to hamper effective responses to cocaine trafficking and its associated harms in West Africa. Addressing these is essential for developing evidence-based policies and targeted interventions. Major gaps are outlined below.

- **Comprehensive data on crack and cocaine consumption, underpinned by empirical prevalence studies using consistent methodologies across the region.** While regional and continental efforts to increase data on drug consumption across West Africa, including by WENDU and the Pan African Epidemiology Network on Drug Use, have significantly contributed to the data picture, they are based on national reporting, which has its limitations. In most countries in West Africa, empirical, large-scale prevalence studies of drug consumption have not been conducted in recent years. This makes it challenging to provide evidence-based assessments of the scale of crack and cocaine powder consumption, shaping what are probably ongoing under-estimates.
- **The scale of containerized trafficking flows through West Africa.** Containerized cocaine is trafficked from Latin America to West Africa, and onwards to Europe and probably other destinations. However, the paucity of seizures in containers in West Africa and Europe, coupled with incomplete public-facing seizure datasets in Latin America and Europe, leave a shroud of mystery around the scale of this flow.
- **General aviation trafficking cocaine through West Africa.** The dynamics of cocaine trafficking through West Africa using general aviation are a patchwork of gaps. The limited evidence that exists suggests that it could be a far larger flow than has been identified, and could have significant security implications. It is key to combine official datasets, open-source intelligence and field reporting from clandestine landing strips and international airfields to enhance visibility and opportunities for intervention.
- **Dynamic, granular mapping of large-scale foreign criminal actors – most prominently Latin American, European, Middle Eastern and Asian – operating in West Africa.** Regional and European judicial investigations, and targeted research by civil society, have shone a spotlight on the operations of a handful of European networks in the region. However, major gaps remain, contributing to West Africa's vulnerability to entrenchment by these networks. Similarly, evidence-based analysis of West Africa's role as a trans-shipment point to Asia, and involvement of Asian and Middle Eastern networks in West Africa's cocaine trade, is weak.
- **Liquefaction of cocaine in West Africa.** Increasingly prominent as a concealment mode on direct routes from Latin America to Europe, there has been no clear evidence of liquefaction capabilities in West Africa, although this would be a trend of concern, facilitating onwards concealment to destination markets.
- **Semi-submersibles in West Africa routings, and potential construction in the region.** While there are indicators that this may be a growing modality in cocaine trafficking via West Africa, and that construction of such vessels may emerge in the region, the evidence remains limited and the scale poorly understood.

EMERGING TRENDS

West Africa's cocaine market is dynamic, with innovations adopted by criminal networks driving shifting operational trends across the region, and the fast-moving political and security landscape shaping constant evolution of the enabling environment. Understanding these dynamics is critical for anticipating future challenges and regional impacts, and adapting responses accordingly. The trends include the following:

- **Expanding consumption of crack, and to a lesser extent cocaine powder, in many urban hubs across West Africa.** While remaining materially below consumption of synthetic drugs, this upwards trend – which mirrors patterns in other major trans-shipment areas, such as Brazil – is likely to continue, and pose an increasing challenge to limited public health resources. The common practice in some countries of cooking crack with benzene (rather than the less harmful bicarbonate of soda) multiplies its harmful health effects.
- **West Africa is an increasingly important logistical node for emerging consumption markets in Asia and the Middle East.** The reported increase in involvement of Turkish nationals in West Africa's cocaine trade since about 2021 mirrors Türkiye's increased prominence as a node in the cocaine market since that point.²⁶⁷ While European markets are probably the destination for some flows, the Middle East and western Asia, which has high cocaine prices, could also be targeted.²⁶⁸ Chinese nationals have reportedly been involved in wholesale maritime trafficking in Sierra Leone. Containerized cashew shipments from Guinea-Bissau towards India have been reported to conceal cocaine. Asian destinations repeatedly feature on air trafficking routes out of the region. Cumulatively, this points to an under-reported but probably growing trafficking flow, cementing the role of West Africa as a logistics node for an expanding range of consumption markets.
- **'Near-shoring' of cocaine stocks in West Africa for European markets.** Significant volumes of cocaine are believed to be stored in West Africa. In some instances, European networks have sold large consignments to other networks straight from storage in West Africa. Keeping cocaine in West Africa may enable faster supply to wholesale purchasers. This trend is concerning for regional dynamics, as it is likely to continue feeding growing volumes of cocaine into local markets through overspill.
- **Likely convergence of a growing range of European criminal actors in West Africa.** Comprehensive efforts to map the presence of European criminal networks in West Africa's cocaine trade have been limited to date. Consequently, it is difficult to prove a sustained upwards trend in operations. However, several indicators point to the growing entrenchment of several European actors since 2019, particularly mirroring those who have gained prominence in European markets over this period.
- **Drug swaps, particularly of cocaine for synthetic drugs.** As consumption of ecstasy and other synthetic drugs increases in West Africa, it may make swaps of cocaine from West Africa for synthetic drugs from Europe increasingly attractive to networks seeking to evade financial transactions. This would interlink the cocaine and synthetic drug markets, possibly tying increased synthetic drug imports to West Africa's role as a growing trans-shipment node on cocaine routes to Europe.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

West Africa's cocaine market is operating at unprecedented scale. While shaped by global trends in cocaine supply and demand, the regional effects of the trade are expanding in line with increased profits. Several regional state institutions – in law enforcement, health and beyond – continue to operate with remarkable effectiveness in a context of limited resources. However, cocaine traffickers' power to corrupt has escalated in line with the market's profitability. Certain high-level traffickers have been able to purchase protection at pivotal nodes in some state institutions tasked with the response, and in high-level political structures, distorting policymaking incentives. In some countries in the region, the influence of cocaine on political calculations is pervasive, and the market operates as a central – largely invisible – obstacle to development.

As the region's role as a trans-shipment node becomes increasingly entrenched, domestic consumption markets, fed through overspill, are becoming increasingly embedded. This is particularly true of crack consumption, which affects the most marginalized elements of communities.

Resources for law enforcement and public health responses are limited. However, those that exist could be more strategically leveraged with greater regional coordination and prioritization. It is a pivotal moment for regional policymakers to consolidate and spearhead the response to the growing challenge posed by drugs in West Africa, and drive forwards evidence-based and coordinated responses.

Recommendations

This report focuses on mapping the cocaine market and its impacts. It does not delve into the state of the response, and the emerging policy reforms and innovative approaches across the region. Consequently, the recommendations set out below are intended as a broad framework for a strengthened response, rather than an exhaustive set of next steps.

Address the data gaps and establish a shared narrative through regular threat assessments

The response to cocaine trafficking in West Africa is hindered by significant data gaps. Further, fragmented and sometimes discordant understandings of the threat presented by cocaine markets pose an obstacle to building a coordinated response. Targeted data collection is required to fill each of the gaps highlighted above. Particularly key for shaping the public health response is more comprehensive and dynamic mapping of consumption of crack and cocaine across the region, using harmonized methodologies, feeding into regional (WENDU) and international (UNODC) reporting. Regular threat assessments, widely consulted on to establish consensus, are a critical element of building a shared threat picture and a more unified response. Efforts to strengthen state-led data collection initiatives should proceed in parallel with complementary civil society data collection and monitoring.

Respond to cocaine markets in West Africa as a public health concern, and not only a criminal justice challenge

- **Drive forward on legislative reforms to mitigate the harms of the cocaine market, including introducing alternatives to incarceration for PWUD.**

States across West Africa are rethinking approaches to regulating drug markets premised on prohibition and incarceration. For example, in 2020 drug law reform in Ghana took a first step towards achieving this.²⁶⁹

In 2022, Côte d'Ivoire introduced new legislation that similarly introduced alternatives to incarceration for PWUD.²⁷⁰ It is key that momentum is harnessed and more countries seek to introduce alternatives to incarceration for PWUD. In several countries, law enforcement approaches have in practice moved away from incarceration, but enshrining this in law would give PWUD more long-standing protection and provide clearer guidance to law enforcement. Legislation must distinguish appropriately between use, possession for use and possession with intent to deal, in a manner that avoids the penalization and imprisonment of PWUD for possessing small quantities of narcotics. Introducing civil penalties for drug use or mandatory treatment orders should also be avoided. The Model Drug Law for West Africa published by the WACD in 2018 is a key baseline document for reform.²⁷¹

- **Strengthen availability, access and quality of treatment services available to PWUD, particularly through community-based treatment approaches.**

While availability of treatment services has in some countries increased over recent years, this has been outstripped by an escalation in drug consumption. The aim should be to provide free access to high-quality and ethical community-based or peer-led treatment for PWUD, including women who have historically been particularly under-served by support services, who need and want it.²⁷² This includes empowering peer groups and supporting PWUD networks. Approaches that include mandated, court-referred treatment orders should be avoided. The risks pertaining to these have been consistently demonstrated globally.

- **Strengthen evidence-based prevention, including a key focus on preventing harms.**

Resources available for treatment are limited and available services often fall below international standards. As consumption of crack, cocaine and synthetics escalates, this is a critical moment to ensure that programming focused on raising awareness regarding the harms of drug consumption in West Africa is evidence-based and focused on mitigating associated harms. Many regional law enforcement bodies now include awareness raising as part of their mandates, supported by a constellation of civil society organizations. It is key to ensure greater consistency in the approach, in line with international protocols, to limit risks of counter-productive impacts, and maximize gains.²⁷³

Draw from lessons learned from legislative reform, and monitor emerging global approaches to regulation

Globally and in West Africa, states have reformed drug policies and laws, with mixed results. It is key to draw lessons from experiences elsewhere; West Africa does not have the time or resources to repeat known mistakes. In the region, Ghana has emerged as a pioneer of drug policy reform. However, while reform yielded many positive outcomes there were also identified flaws, some of which hindered effectiveness.²⁷⁴ Other countries in the region should amend their own processes to avoid the same pitfalls.

While there is growing consensus that the current approach to drug market management has failed, there is less unanimity on a more successful approach. Among the most prominent approaches are a shift to legal regulation of recreational drug markets. The evidence base for such reform is limited, and concentrated on cannabis markets. It is key that policymakers in West Africa consider such approaches and monitor the expanding evidence base globally, to ensure the region is well positioned to adopt best-evidenced approaches.

Reinforce multi-stakeholder coalitions to enhance collaboration

- **Increase public-private partnerships and expand the role of the private sector in responding to cocaine trafficking.**

Particularly in a context of limited state resources in West Africa, it is key that the private sector enhances its role in responding to cocaine trafficking. The maritime shipping industry, courier and air freight services, and the financial sector (formal financial institutions but also mobile money providers and money transfer services) are key private sectors that play a significant role in the cocaine trade. Further, sectors identified to be particularly vulnerable to laundering of profits from the drug trade, including real estate, hospitality and gambling, must implement more stringent due diligence and enhance intelligence sharing with the

authorities.²⁷⁵ Improved coordination, clearer responsibilities and targeted investment between public and private actors are needed.²⁷⁶

- **Strengthen mechanisms for government and civil society engagement in policymaking on drugs, and for intra-regional coordination.**

Civil society across West Africa has been active in advocating drug policy reforms, with significant successes. Many governments have established mechanisms for incorporating civil society insights into law enforcement and broader government policymaking on drugs, including in Ghana, Senegal and Sierra Leone. These successes underscore the importance of such partnerships and highlight the need to strengthen them and roll them out them geographically. Regional civil society coalitions such as the West Africa Drug Policy Network provide platforms that can be leveraged for enhancing regional collaboration. In addition, networks of PWUD across the region should be key stakeholders consulted in shaping the response, while civil society can support in acting as a bridge with government.

- **Strengthen media coverage of drug trafficking and its consequences for public health and governance across the region.**

The media play a key role in shining a spotlight on contentious subjects, operating as a check on corruption and in shaping public narratives. Much media reporting on drug markets in West Africa is sensationalist, and in some cases propagates harmful myths. Greater engagement by journalists and media houses in ensuring data-driven coverage of drug trafficking in the region, and in shaping public discourse on reducing harms, are key steps in creating policy space for reforms that can better respond to escalating drug challenges. Strengthened investigations into the corruption protecting the cocaine trade is an important step in undermining impunity. Targeted investigations using follow-the-money techniques are an essential element of journalistic work on the subject, but they require a specialist skill set currently held by relatively few experts in the region. These kinds of skills must therefore be fostered and expanded. Supporting community resilience through press groups and empowering them to be able to report on corruption and traffickers is one part of the approach, while minimizing the personal risk to journalists.

Pursue more strategic criminal justice approaches

- **Enhancing intelligence and diversifying information sources.**

Criminal networks have proved adept at adapting approaches to evade law enforcement pressures. Investment in criminal intelligence measures to improve market surveillance can decrease the time that such adaptive measures go undetected. Granular, dynamic datasets are required to underpin this surveillance. Drawing on an expanded network of data providers – including PWUD, service providers and civil society – can provide support in achieving this.

- **Asymmetric enforcement strategies and focused deterrence: disrupting bulk trafficking by targeting foreign brokers and regional intermediaries.**

Asymmetric enforcement involves targeting resources where they will have the largest impact rather than symmetrically trying to suppress the entire market, which has proved unsuccessful. Adopting such approaches in West Africa would indicate greater focus on foreign brokers and major regional intermediaries, both of which are pivotal nodes in bulk cocaine trafficking. They often offer services to several networks and operate over long periods. They are repeatedly the best-connected nodes in West Africa's cocaine criminal ecosystem, and are likely to yield the greatest impacts from law enforcement intervention as they are among the hardest elements to replace. Their profiling and arrest can therefore cause medium-term disruption. Strengthening intelligence-led policing methods to identify high-impact players – whose removal or containment could significantly disrupt market operations and reduce associated violence and societal harm – is a key step in supporting such approaches.

- **Targeting protection frameworks and disrupting the links between elections and politics.**

Targeting the protection structures encasing West Africa's cocaine trade is difficult as they are enmeshed in powerful political structures. This is specific not only to West Africa, but true to cocaine markets globally.

However, it remains key to any long-term disruption of the cocaine trade. Governments have a critical role to play in calling out this high-level protection and making it reputationally toxic. Media and law enforcement also have key roles to play.

Severing the links between electoral politics and the cocaine trade would vastly diminish harms of the market. Reform to political party and campaign funding rules is key to mitigate the risks of grey financing supporting electoral campaigning and creating indebtedness later repaid through protection. Enforcement of financial reporting by political parties and enacting wider information disclosure laws are key to enhancing transparency of election financing.

■ **Law enforcement partnerships across the cocaine supply chain.**

Greater collaboration and coordination are required between countries and regions across the cocaine supply chain, prominently including Latin America, West Africa and Europe. While partnerships and cooperation mechanisms exist, they are less developed than international collaboration platforms elsewhere and could be significantly strengthened. Within West Africa, more regular convening of key stakeholders – remotely and in person – could facilitate more established data sharing, brainstorming around key challenges, and strengthened networks for engagement.²⁷⁷

■ **Strengthening and implementing asset recovery, management and redistribution frameworks.**

Several states across West Africa struggle to redistribute assets seized in criminal cases, which instead often depreciate once seized. Strengthening asset recovery, management and redistribution frameworks – as well as their implementation – would grant additional resources and incentives to the criminal justice response. This should include considering the introduction of frameworks for non-conviction asset recovery, in line with recognized best practice.

ANNEX: STATUS OF LEGAL CASES

Named individual	Source	Jurisdiction	Status of the case	Pleas and/or public denial
Armando Pacani	Judiciary Federal Justice, Rio Grande do Sul Judiciary Section, 22nd Federal Court of Porto Alegre, Petition No. 5014337-91.2023.4.04.7100/RS, dated 15 March 2023; Jusbrasil, <i>Jurisprudência sobre Hinterland</i> , https://www.jusbrasil.com.br/jurisprudencia/busca?q=hinterland&p=5 .	Brazil/Dubai	Pacani was released by a court in Dubai in November 2024 due to perceived errors in the filing for extradition by Brazil.	Pacani and his lawyers have alleged his innocence. Statements that have been publicly reported are quoted in the report.
Mario Krezić	Indictment against Miroslav Starčević and others, KTO 89/23, 1 November 2023; Indictment against Nenad Petrak and others, KO-US-57/2024, 1 October 2024; Begoña P Ramírez, <i>Dos de los detenidos en la operación que desmanteló el cartel de los Balcanes se escondían en Dubái</i> , Infolibre, 14 June 2024, https://www.infolibre.es/economia/detenidos-operacion-desmantelo-cartel-balcanes-escondian-dubai_1_1817898.html .	Belgium/UAE	Krezić is not facing indictment in Serbia or Croatia. However, prosecutors from both countries mention his name in cases involving Miroslav Starčević and Nenad Petrak related to international drug trafficking. Additionally, media reports state that authorities in Belgium have issued an arrest warrant for Krezić, while the Spanish Guardia Civil expects that Krezić will be extradited.	No records of statements made by Krezić or his legal representative exist on official government websites/archives.
Nenad Petrak	Indictment against Nenad Petrak and others, KO-US-57/2024, 1 October 2024.	Croatia	The prosecution submitted an indictment against Petrak in October 2024. However, according to media reports from July 2025, the court has not yet formally approved it. The trial has not yet commenced. According to media reports, maximum pretrial detention would end in April 2026.	Lawyer Anto Nobilo, representing the defence for Petrak, confirmed in January 2025 that they were close to reaching a plea agreement with the prosecutors. Petrak was expected to admit to the crimes, but this plan was leaked to prison, where many group members are detained. Some members opposed the deal, leading Petrak to withdraw his consent.
Miroslav Starčević	Indictment against Miroslav Starčević and others, KTO 89/23, 1 November 2023.	Serbia	The trial is presently ongoing.	Starčević has maintained his innocence. He stated that he will present the defence at a later stage, once the original documents from Sky ECC are received from the French authorities.
Radoje Zvicer	Indictment against Radoje Zvicer and others, Kt-S. 172/22, 30 December 2022.	Montenegro/Serbia/Austria	Several arrest warrants issued. Zvicer remains free. Trial has not been concluded.	No records of statements made by Zvicer or his legal representative exist on official government websites/archives.

Named individual	Source	Jurisdiction	Status of the case	Pleas and/or public denial
Miguel Devesa	RFI, Côte d'Ivoire: <i>des peines confirmées et des relaxes au procès en appel de l'affaire de trafic international de cocaïne</i> , 28 July 2025, https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20250728-côte-d-ivoire-des-peines-confirmées-et-des-relaxes-au-procès-en-appel-de-l-affaire-de-traffic-international-de-cocaïne? ; Marine Jeannin, <i>Trafic de cocaïne en Côte d'Ivoire: 13 accusés dans une vaste affaire condamnés à 10 ans de prison</i> ; RFI, 7 May 2024, https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20240507-traffic-de-coca%C3%AFne-en-c%C3%B4te-d-ivoire-13-accus%C3%A9s-dans-une-vaste-affaire-condamn%C3%A9s-%C3%A0-10-ans-de-prison ; AllAfrica, <i>Cote d'Ivoire: Des peines confirmées et des relaxes au procès en appel de l'affaire de trafic international de cocaïne</i> , 28 July 2025, https://fr.allafrica.com/stories/202507290097.html .	Côte d'Ivoire	On 7 May 2024, the court of first instance of Côte d'Ivoire sentenced Devesa to 10 years in prison for drug trafficking charges. On 28 July 2025, the Court of Appeal confirmed the sentence of the first instance. Devesa's lawyer stated to the press that the sentence will be appealed to the Court of Cassation.	Devesa pleaded guilty. His lawyer has repeatedly stated that the sentence is too severe because Devesa cooperated with law enforcement to identify other perpetrators, and should therefore receive a reduced sentence.
Bartolo Bruzzaniti	LaC News, <i>Narcotraffico gestito da 'ndrangheta e camorra: condannato Bartolo Bruzzaniti a Milano</i> , 18 October 2024, https://www.lacnews24.it/cronaca/narcotraffico-gestito-da-ndrangheta-e-camorra-condannati-a-milano-i-broker-bartolo-bruzzaniti-e-raffaele-t825smm0 ; Rivieraweb, <i>Maxiprocesso Eureka, attesa la sentenza per 81 imputati</i> , 21 June 2025, https://www.rivieraweb.it/maxiprocesso-eureka-attesa-la-sentenza-per-81-imputati-chiesti-1658-anni-di-carcere ; Calabria Magnifica, <i>Processo "Eureka": vent'anni ai vertici dei clan di San Luca e Africo</i> , 3 October 2025, https://www.calabriamagnifica.it/cronaca-e-attualita/processo-eureka-ventanni-ai-vertici-dei-clan-di-san-luca-e-africo ; LaC News, <i>Narcotraffico, Bartolo Bruzzaniti rientrato in Italia dopo l'arresto in Libano</i> , 3 August 2023, https://www.lacnews24.it/cronaca/narcotraffico-bartolo-bruzzaniti-rientrato-in-italia-dopo-l-arresto-in-libano-fp20t1vw .	Italy/Lebanon	In June 2023, Bruzzaniti was arrested in Lebanon and extradited to Italy on 3 August 2023. In mid-October 2024, a court in Milan sentenced Bruzzaniti to 20 years in prison for drug trafficking charges in the 'Money Delivery' trial in the first instance. On 2 October 2025, a Calabrian Court sentenced Bruzzaniti to 20 years in prison on drug trafficking charges in the 'Eureka' trial in the first instance.	This research identified no records of statements made by Bruzzaniti or his legal representative.
Raffaele Imperiale	RAI News, <i>Il narcos Imperiale condannato ad altri 15 anni. Confiscata l'isola di Dubai</i> , 10 July 2024, https://www.rainews.it/tgr/campania/articoli/2024/07/il-narcos-imperiale-condannato-ad-altri-15-anni-confiscata-lisola-di-dubai-439c6ec9-5b7d-4477-a155-a25ad1d09010.html ; Rosaria Federico, <i>Napoli, chiesta la conferma dei 16 anni di carcere per il narco boss Raffaele Imperiale</i> , <i>Cronache della Campania</i> , 22 July 2025, https://www.cronachedellacampania.it/2025/07/napoli-chiesta-la-conferma-dei-16-anni-di-carcere-per-il-narco-boss-raffaele-imperiale ; LaC News, <i>Narcotraffico gestito da 'ndrangheta e camorra, condannati a Milano i broker Bartolo Bruzzaniti e Raffaele Imperiale</i> , 16 October 2024,	Italy/UAE	On 4 August 2021, Imperiale was arrested in Dubai. On 25 March 2022, he was extradited to Italy to face trial on drug trafficking charges. On 10 July 2024, a court in Naples sentenced him to 15 years and eight months in prison on drug trafficking charges in the first instance. The appeal trial is currently ongoing before the Second Section of the Court of Appeal of Naples, with a ruling expected by December 2025. In October 2024, a court in Milan sentenced Imperiale to six years in prison for drug trafficking charges	In 2022, lawyers acting for Imperiale tried to argue that his extradition was a kidnapping that violated the European Convention on Human rights, and filed an appeal to request the cancellation of his detention. An Italian court said there were no grounds to bring a direct appeal to the Supreme Court. Imperiale's lawyer has emphasized the cooperation of his client with authorities.

Named individual	Source	Jurisdiction	Status of the case	Pleas and/or public denial
	<p>https://www.lacnews24.it/cronaca/narcotraffico-gestito-da-ndrangheta-e-camorra-condannati-a-milano-i-broker-bartolo-bruzzaniti-e-raffaele-t825smm0; Calabria Inchieste, <i>Droga smerciata nel porto di Gioia Tauro, 25 condanne per 236 anni di carcere</i>, 4 December 2024, https://www.calabriainchieste.it/2024/12/04/droga-smerciata-nel-porto-di-gioia-tauro-25-condanne-per-236-anni-di-carcere; Anteprema24, <i>Droga, estradato da Dubai il narcotrafficante internazionale Raffaele Imperiale</i>, 27 March 2022, https://www.anteprema24.it/napoli/droga-estradato-da-dubai-il-narcotrafficante-internazionale-raffaele-imperiale; <i>Sunday World</i>, Kinahan gang ally Raffaele Imperiale claims extradition from Dubai to Italy was 'kidnapping', September 2022, https://www.sundayworld.com/crime/world-crime/kinahan-gang-ally-raffaele-imperiale-claims-extradition-from-dubai-to-italy-was-kidnapping/1763766811.html.</p>		<p>in the 'Money Delivery' trial in the first instance. On 5 December 2024, the regional court of Calabria sentenced Imperiale to three years and five months in prison on drug trafficking charges in the 'Three Crosses' trial in the first instance.</p>	
César Ouattara	<p>Marine Jeannin, <i>Trafic de cocaïne en Côte d'Ivoire: 13 accusés dans une vaste affaire condamnés à 10 ans de prison</i>, RFI, 7 May 2024, https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20240507-traffic-de-coca%C3%AFne-en-c%C3%B4te-d-ivoire-13-accus%C3%A9s-dans-une-vaste-affaire-condamn%C3%A9s-%C3%A0-10-ans-de-prison; Abdoul Aziz Diallo, <i>Côte d'Ivoire: des peines confirmées et des relaxes au procès en appel de l'affaire de trafic international de cocaïne</i>, RFI, 28 July 2025, https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20250728-c%C3%B4te-d-ivoire-des-peines-confirm%C3%A9es-et-des-relaxes-au-proc%C3%A8s-en-appel-de-l-affaire-de-traffic-international-de-coca%C3%AFne.</p>	Côte d'Ivoire	<p>On 7 May 2024, the court of first instance of Côte d'Ivoire sentenced Ouattara to 10 years in prison on drug trafficking charges. On 28 July 2025, the Court of Appeal reduced the sentence to 5 years in prison. The judgment can still be appealed to the Court of Cassation.</p>	<p>No records of statements made by Ouattara or his legal representative exist on official government websites/archives.</p>
Wilder Sanchez Farfan	<p>US Attorney's Office Southern District of California, <i>Alleged drug trafficker Wilder Emilio Sanchez Farfan extradited from Colombia</i>, 26 January 2024, https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdca/pr/alleged-drug-trafficker-wilder-emilio-sanchez-farfan-extradited-colombia; City News Services, <i>Ecuadorian man pleads guilty in San Diego court to international drug trafficking</i>, 15 May 2025, https://www.nbcsandiego.com/news/local/ecuadorian-drug-trafficker-pleads-guilty-san-diego/3826845; Ecuavisa, <i>El Gato Farfán, narco ecuatoriano, se declara culpable en EE. UU. de tráfico internacional de drogas</i>, 16 May 2025, https://www.ecuavisa.com/noticias/seguridad/gato-farfan-culpable-california-YE9350375; David Muñoz, <i>Alias Gato Farfán conocerá su sentencia en Estados Unidos por narcotráfico en noviembre</i>, Ecuavisa, https://www.ecuavisa.com/noticias/seguridad/alias-gato-farfan-sentencia-estados-unidos-narcotrafico-noviembre-FI9820722.</p>	United States/ Colombia	<p>Farfan was extradited from Colombia to the US in January 2024. The trial at a court in San Diego is ongoing, the court's ruling is expected in November 2025.</p>	<p>Farfan has pleaded guilty to international conspiracy to distribute controlled substances before the court in San Diego.</p>

Named individual	Source	Jurisdiction	Status of the case	Pleas and/or public denial
Ricardo Ariza Monje	República da Guiné-Bissau, <i>Tribunal Regional de Cacheu, Acórdão No. 13/2020</i> ; República da Guiné-Bissau, <i>Tribunal de Relação, Câmara Criminal, Acórdão No. 03/2020</i> ; Camara Criminal, <i>Processo No. 11/2020</i> , 11 July 2022, signed by Judge Lima Antonio André; Ouest-Afrique, <i>Guinée-Bissau : Des peines de prison records pour des trafiquants de cocaïne</i> , 14 April 2020, https://ouest-afrique.com/guinee-bissau-des-peines-de-prison-records-pour-des-trafiquants-de-cocaine ; Guineematin, International drug trafficking: Cuban, Colombian and Mexican citizens arrested and tried in Conakry, 26 July 2022, https://guineematin.com/2022/07/26/trafic-international-de-drogue-des-citoyens-cubain-colombien-et-mexicain-arretes-et-juges-a-conakry ; RTP, <i>Mandados de captura para luso-guineense e colombiano por tráfico de droga na Guiné-Bissau</i> , 30 September 2019, https://www.rtp.pt/noticias/mundo/mandados-de-captura-para-luso-guineense-e-colombiano-por-trafico-de-droga-na-guine-bissau_n1175972 .	Guinea-Bissau	In 2019, Monje was subject to an INTERPOL red notice. On 2 April 2020, the Regional Court of Cacheu in Bissau sentenced Monje, in the first instance, to 16 years in prison on charges of criminal association and drug trafficking. On 14 October 2020, the Tribunal de Relação (Guinea-Bissau's Court of Appeal) reduced the sentence to five years in prison. On 4 July 2022, the Supreme Court of Guinea-Bissau acquitted Monje, in a judgment widely criticized by lawyers in Guinea-Bissau. Monje was charged with drug trafficking and complicity in drug trafficking in 2021 in Guinea, in absentia. In July 2022, a Guinean court rejected an attempt by the defence to have the case thrown out. The authors were not able to confirm the status of this case.	Monje was absent through the court proceedings. No records of statements made by Monje or his legal representative exist on official government websites/archives.
Braima Seidi Bá	República da Guiné-Bissau, <i>Tribunal Regional de Cacheu, Acórdão No. 13/2020</i> ; República da Guiné-Bissau, <i>Tribunal de Relação, Câmara Criminal, Acórdão No. 03/2020</i> ; Camara Criminal, <i>Processo No. 11/2020</i> , 11 July 2022, signed by Judge Lima Antonio André; Ouest-Afrique, <i>Guinée-Bissau : Des peines de prison records pour des trafiquants de cocaïne</i> , 14 April 2020, https://ouest-afrique.com/guinee-bissau-des-peines-de-prison-records-pour-des-trafiquants-de-cocaine .	Guinea-Bissau	On 2 April 2020, a court in Bissau sentenced Bá, in the first instance, to 16 years in prison on charges of criminal association and drug trafficking. On 14 October 2020, the Tribunal de Relação (Guinea-Bissau's Court of Appeal) reduced the sentence to five years in prison. On 4 July 2022, the Supreme Court of Guinea-Bissau acquitted Bá, in a judgment widely criticised by lawyers in Guinea-Bissau.	Bá was absent through the court proceedings. No records of statements made by Bá or his legal representative exist on official government websites/archives.
Jos Leijdekkers	Europol, Europe's most wanted fugitives – Leijdekkers, Joseph Johannes (Jos), last modified 18 July 2025, https://eumostwanted.eu/#/leijdekkers-joseph-johannes-jos ; <i>NL Times</i> , Wanted criminal 'Bolle Jos' sentenced to 24 years in prison, 26 June 2024, https://nltimes.nl/2024/06/26/wanted-criminal-bolle-jos-sentenced-24-years-prison .	Netherlands	On 25 June 2024, a court in Rotterdam sentenced Leijdekkers in absentia to 24 years in prison on drug trafficking charges in the first instance. Leijdekkers is listed on Europol's most wanted fugitives list.	Leijdekkers is still at large. No records of statements made by Leijdekkers or his legal representative exist on official government websites/archives.
Malam Bacai Sanha Jr.	US Attorney's Office, Southern District of Texas, Former Guinea-Bissau president's son sent to U.S. prison for international drug trafficking, 26 March 2024, https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdtx/pr/former-guinea-bissau-presidents-son-sent-us-prison-international-drug-trafficking ; US Attorney's Office, Southern District of Texas, <i>United States of America v Malam Bacai Sanha Jr</i> – Detention hearing, 6 September 2022; Plea agreement, 9 June 2023.	United States/ Tanzania	On 23 July 2022, Sanha Jr. was arrested in Tanzania and extradited to the US on 26 August 2022. On 26 March 2024, the court of the Southern District of Texas sentenced him to six years and eight months in prison on drug trafficking charges in the first instance.	Sanha Jr. pleaded guilty on 6 September 2023 'to conspiracy to distribute a controlled substance for the purpose of unlawful importation'.

Named individual	Source	Jurisdiction	Status of the case	Pleas and/or public denial
Mohamed Ould Mataly	UN Security Council, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali and renewed pursuant to resolution 2484 (2019), S/2020/785, para 80-83, 85, 2020, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S_2020_785.pdf ; UN Security Council, Terminated sanctions regimes, accessed 16 October 2025, https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/sanctions/terminated-sanctions ; UN Security Council, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali and renewed pursuant to resolution 2541 (2020), S/2021/714, para 75, 2021, https://docs.un.org/en/S/2021/714 ; UN Security Council, Mohamed Ould Mataly, https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/mohamed-ould-mataly ; UN Security Council, Mohamed Ben Ahmed Mahri, https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/mohamed-ben-ahmed-mahri ; Peter Tinti, Drug trafficking in northern Mali: A tenuous criminal equilibrium, ENACT, September 2020, https://enactafrica.org/research/research-papers/drug-trafficking-in-northern-mali-a-tenuous-criminal-equilibrium ; OFAC, Sanctions list search, accessed 18 October 2025, https://sanctionssearch.ofac.treas.gov/Details.aspx?id=27154&utm .	UN sanctions	On 9 July 2019, the UN Security Council sanctioned Mataly for obstructing the peace process in Mali, in accordance with Resolution 2374 (2017). On 31 August 2023, the sanction measures related to Resolution 2374 (2017) expired. Mataly remained on OFAC sanctions lists as at October 2025.	Mataly has denied the allegations against him.
Mohamed Ben Ahmed Mahri ('Rougi')	European Union, Council Implementing Decision (CFSP) 2020/118 of 27 January 2020 amending Decision (CFSP) 2017/1775 concerning restrictive measures in view of the situation in Mali, Official Journal of the European Union, L 22, 28 January 2020, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32020D0118 ; UN Security Council, Terminated sanctions regimes, accessed 16 October 2025, https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/sanctions/terminated-sanctions ; UN Security Council, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali and renewed pursuant to resolution 2484 (2019), S/2020/785, para 80-83, 85, 2020, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S_2020_785.pdf ; UN Security Council, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali and renewed pursuant to resolution 2541 (2020), S/2021/714, para 75, 2021, https://docs.un.org/en/S/2021/714 ;	UN sanctions	On 10 July 2019, the UN Security Council sanctioned Mahri for violating UN sanctions identified in resolution 2374 (2017) and trafficking in persons as well as drugs, arms and cultural property. On 31 August 2023, the sanction measures related to resolution 2374 (2017) expired. Mahri remained on OFAC sanctions lists as at October 2025.	No records of statements made by Mahri or his legal representative exist on official government websites/archives.

Named individual	Source	Jurisdiction	Status of the case	Pleas and/or public denial
	UN Security Council, Mohamed Ould Mataly, https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/mohamed-ould-mataly ; UN Security Council, Mohamed Ben Ahmed Mahri, https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/mohamed-ben-ahmed-mahri ; Peter Tinti, Drug trafficking in northern Mali: A tenuous criminal equilibrium, ENACT, September 2020, https://enactafrica.org/research/research-papers/drug-trafficking-in-northern-mali-a-tenuous-criminal-equilibrium ; CS21: Interviews with three journalists, and one representative of an international organization, Mali, by phone, September 2025; European Union, Council Implementing Decision (CFSP) 2020/118 of 27 January 2020 amending Decision (CFSP) 2017/1775 concerning restrictive measures in view of the situation in Mali, Official Journal of the European Union, L 22, 28 January 2020, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32020D0118 . OFAC, Sanctions List search, accessed 25 October 2025, https://sanctionssearch.ofac.treas.gov/Details.aspx?id=27153&utm .			
Guy Serge Leïla Kouassi	Marine Jeannin, Côte d'Ivoire : <i>l'ancien chef de la police antidrogue du port d'Abidjan détournait de la cocaïne</i> , 7 March 2025, https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2025/03/07/cote-d-ivoire-l-ancien-chef-de-la-police-antidrogue-du-port-d-abidjan-detournait-de-la-cocaine_6577059_3212.html ; Marine Jeannin, Trafic de cocaïne en Côte d'Ivoire: 13 accusés dans une vaste affaire condamnés à 10 ans de prison; RFI, 7 May 2024.	Côte d'Ivoire	On 7 May 2024, a court in Abidjan sentenced Kouassi to 10 years in prison on drug trafficking charges in the first instance. The appeal process has been ongoing at the Court of Appeal in Abidjan as of March 2025, and no ruling has been issued as of the date of publication.	No records of statements made by Kouassi or his legal representative exist on official government websites/archives.
Stanley Ford	Socrates Smythe Saywon, Tweah trial suspension triggers doubts on accountability for Liberia's millions lost to corruption, Smart News Liberia, 4 July 2025, https://smartnewsliberia.com/tweah-trial-suspension-triggers-doubts-on-accountability-for-liberias-millions-lost-to-corruption ; All Africa, Liberia: Court suspends argument in Tweah's case, 2 July 2025, https://allafrica.com/stories/202507020172.html ; Republic of Liberia, Executive Mansion, President Boakai suspends FIA Director General Stanley Ford, press release, Monrovia, 30 March 2024, https://www.emansion.gov.lr/media/press-release/president-boakai-suspends-fia-director-general-stanley-ford .	Liberia	Ford has been charged with economic sabotage, including fraud, misuse of public funds, property or records, and illegal disbursement or expenditure of public funds. On 1 July 2025, the Supreme Court suspended legal arguments in the case, citing 'unforeseen circumstances beyond the court's control'. No ruling has been issued as of the date of publication.	Ford pleaded not guilty to all charges.

Named individual	Source	Jurisdiction	Status of the case	Pleas and/or public denial
Moses Cooper	Socrates Smythe Saywon, Tweah trial suspension triggers doubts on accountability for Liberia's millions lost to corruption, Smart News Liberia, 4 July 2025, https://smartnewsliberia.com/tweah-trial-suspension-triggers-doubts-on-accountability-for-liberias-millions-lost-to-corruption ; All Africa, Liberia: Court suspends argument in Tweah's case, 2 July 2025, https://allafrica.com/stories/202507020172.html ; Republic of Liberia, Executive Mansion, President Boakai suspends FIA Director General Stanley Ford, press release, Monrovia, 30 March 2024, https://www.emansion.gov.lr/media/press-release/president-boakai-suspends-fia-director-general-stanley-ford .	Liberia	Cooper has been charged with economic sabotage, including fraud, misuse of public funds, property or records, and illegal disbursement or expenditure of public funds. On 1 July 2025, the Supreme Court suspended legal arguments in the case, citing 'unforeseen circumstances beyond the court's control'. No ruling has been issued as of the date of publication.	Cooper pleaded not guilty to all charges.
Samuel Tweah	Socrates Smythe Saywon, Tweah trial suspension triggers doubts on accountability for Liberia's millions lost to corruption, Smart News Liberia, 4 July 2025, https://smartnewsliberia.com/tweah-trial-suspension-triggers-doubts-on-accountability-for-liberias-millions-lost-to-corruption ; All Africa, Liberia: Court suspends argument in Tweah's case, 2 July 2025, https://allafrica.com/stories/202507020172.html .	Liberia	Tweah faces charges including misappropriation of public funds, criminal conspiracy and abuse of office. On 1 July 2025, the Supreme Court suspended legal arguments in the case, citing 'unforeseen circumstances beyond the court's control'. No ruling has been issued as of the date of publication.	Tweah pleaded not guilty to all charges.
Banta Keïta	UN Security Council, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali and renewed pursuant to resolution 2541 (2020), S/2021/714, 2021, https://docs.un.org/en/S/2021/714 ; Amadou Jadama, Witness explains how Banta Keita's account was opened in absentia, <i>The Standard</i> , 3 November 2023, https://standard.gm/witness-explains-how-banta-keitas-account-was-opened-in-absentia ; Lamin Jahateh, A tale of two countries: How alleged drug traffickers from Guinea Bissau find home in Gambia, <i>The Standard</i> , 10 November 2023.	Gambia	On 14 January 2021, an INTERPOL red notice was issued against Keïta. The trial against Keïta commenced in May 2022 at the Mile 7 High Court in Bakau, Gambia, in absentia. No ruling has been publicly reported as of the date of publication.	No records of statements made by Keïta or his legal representative exist on official government websites/archives.
Ghousmour Itouwa Bidika	UN Security Council, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali and renewed pursuant to resolution 2484 (2019), S/2020/785/Rev.1, 2020, https://docs.un.org/en/S/2020/785/REV.1 ; UN Security Council, Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali and renewed pursuant to resolution 2541 (2020), S/2021/714, 2021, https://docs.un.org/en/S/2021/714 ; Mondafrique, <i>Le plus célèbre narcotraffiquant du Niger élu chef de tribu</i> , 1 October 2024, https://mondafrique.com/a-la-une/le-plus-celebre-narcotraffiquant-du-niger-elu-chef-de-tribu .	Niger	The UN Panel of Experts for Mali extensively documented Bidika's involvement in drug markets. Bidika was arrested on 2 March 2021 in connection with a hashish seizure in Niamey. In October 2021, Bidika was released, on the grounds of procedural error.	No records of statements made by Bidika or his legal representative exist on official government websites/archives.

Named individual	Source	Jurisdiction	Status of the case	Pleas and/or public denial
Ousmane Conté	Célia Lebur and Joan Tilouine, <i>Mafia Africa: Enquête</i> . Paris: Flammarion, 2023; RFI, <i>Ousmane Conté, fils du défunt président de Guinée Lansana Conté, recouvre la liberté</i> , 15 July 2010, https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20100715-ousmane-conte-fils-defunt-president-guinee-lansana-conte-recouvre-liberte ; Africaradio, <i>Drogue en Guinée: le fils aîné du défunt président Conté remis en liberté</i> , 15 July 2010, https://www.africaradio.com/actualite-2023-drogue-en-guinee-le-fils-aîne-du-defunt-president-conte-remis-en-liberte ; Mohamed Sylla, <i>Armée Guinéenne : Décès colonel Ousmane Conté, fils aîné du général Lansana Conté</i> , Conakry Infos, 25 March 2020, https://conakryinfos.com/2020/03/25/armee-guineenne-deces-colonel-ousmane-conte-fils-aîne-du-general-lansana-conte/ .	Guinea	In February 2009, Conté was arrested and charged with alleged drug trafficking. On 14 July 2010, Guinea's Supreme Court overturned the decision that had referred Conté to the criminal court, granting him provisional release after more than 16 months in detention. There are no reports of Conté being convicted on drug trafficking charges. Conté passed away on 25 March 2020.	Conté admitted to 'being involved in drug trafficking' and apologized to the people for the 'harm caused' but denied being a major figure in international drug trafficking.
Gilberto Aparecido Dos Santos	Ministério Público do Estado de São Paulo, <i>Aliado do PCC é condenado a mais de 25 anos de prisão por tráfico de drogas</i> , 31 October 2022, https://www.mpsp.mp.br/w/aliado-do-pcc-%C3%A9-condenado-a-mais-de-25-anos-de-pris%C3%A3o-por-tr%C3%A1fico-de-drogas ; Max Radwin, <i>Arrest of top trafficker unlikely to slow growth of Brazil's PCC</i> , Insight Crime, 17 April 2020, https://insightcrime.org/news/brief/pcc-fuminho-arrest-brazil/ ; Rafael Villarroel, <i>Justiça inocenta Fuminho, braço direito de Marcola, por mortes de chefes do PCC</i> , CNN Brasil, 29 April 2024, https://www.cnnbrasil.com.br/nacional/justica-inocenta-fuminho-braco-direito-de-marcola-por-mortes-de-chefes-do-pcc ; Diário Do Nordeste, <i>Justiça Federal recusa embargo da defesa de 'Fuminho' contra decisão de inclusão em presídio federal</i> , 25 January 2021; Correio do Povo, <i>Moçambique anuncia extradição para o Brasil de líder do PCC detido em Maputo</i> , 19 April 2020, https://www.correiodopovo.com.br/not%C3%ADcias/mundo/mo%C3%A7ambique-anuncia-extradi%C3%A7%C3%A3o-para-o-brasil-de-l%C3%ADder-do-pcc-detido-em-maputo-1.413968 .	Brazil/ Mozambique	On 13 April 2020, Dos Santos was arrested in a joint operation by Mozambique's police, the US DEA and the Brazilian federal police. On 19 April 2020, he was extradited to Brazil where he was charged with alleged drug trafficking and homicide. On 31 October 2022, the São Paulo Court of Justice sentenced Dos Santos to 26 years and 11 months in prison for charges of drug trafficking, illegal possession of firearms and participation in a criminal association. In April 2024, the Ceará Court of Justice acquitted Dos Santos in the homicide case.	No records of statements made by Dos Santos or his legal representative exist on official government websites/archives.

Named individual	Source	Jurisdiction	Status of the case	Pleas and/or public denial
Rocco Morabito	Judicial documents from Operation Eureka, DDA Reggio Calabria (et al) with Eurojust/Europol JTs with Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, Romania, Spain et al, May 2023; Analysis of Italian judicial investigation documents shared, as part of (i) Operation Zio, with the District Anti-mafia Directorate of Naples, 2022; and (ii) Operation Eureka, District Anti-mafia Directorate of Reggio Calabria (et al), with Eurojust/EUROPOL Joint Investigation Teams in Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, Romania, Spain et al, May 2023; INTERPOL, Fugitive mafia boss extradited from Brazil to Italy, 6 July 2022, https://www.interpol.int/News-and-Events/News/2022/Fugitive-mafia-boss-extradited-from-Brazil-to-Italy ; INTERPOL, Fugitive Italian mafia boss arrested in Brazil, 25 May 2021, https://www.interpol.int/News-and-Events/News/2021/Fugitive-Italian-mafia-boss-arrested-in-Brazil ; Reuters, Extradited drug lord returns to Italy to serve 30-year sentence, 6 June 2022, https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/extradited-drug-lord-lands-italy-serve-30-year-sentence-2022-07-06 ; Corriere della Calabria, <i>Il "potere" di Rocco Morabito: la latitanza dorata in Uruguay e la «fuga sospetta» dal carcere</i> , 14 October 2024, https://www.corrieredellacalabria.it/2024/10/14/il-potere-di-rocco-morabito-la-latitanza-dorata-in-uruguay-e-la-fuga-sospetta-dal-carcere .	Italy/Brazil/Uruguay	On 13 October 1994, Morabito escaped justice in Italy where courts in Milan, Palermo and Calabria had convicted him on drug trafficking charges and sentenced him in absentia to 30 years in prison. On 4 September 2017, the fugitive Morabito was arrested in Uruguay based on an Italian arrest warrant and an INTERPOL red notice on charges of drug trafficking and participation in a criminal association. On 23 June 2019, Rocco escaped from detention in an Uruguayan prison. On 25 May 2021, he was arrested again in Brazil and was extradited to Italy on 6 July 2022 to serve his prison sentence.	No records of statements made by Morabito or his legal representative exist on official government websites/archives.

NOTES

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