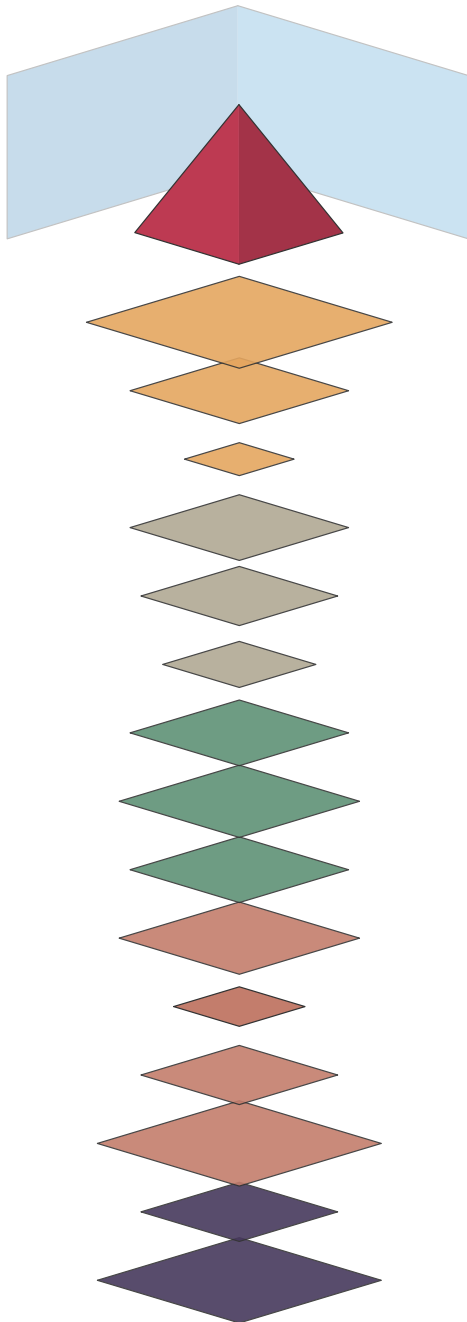




# OMAN



4.40

## CRIMINALITY SCORE

132<sup>nd</sup> of 193 countries

36<sup>th</sup> of 46 Asian countries

14<sup>th</sup> of 14 Western Asian countries



## CRIMINAL MARKETS

4.90

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	7.00
HUMAN SMUGGLING	5.00
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	2.50
ARMS TRAFFICKING	5.00
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	4.50
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	3.50
FLORA CRIMES	5.00
FAUNA CRIMES	5.50
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	5.00
HEROIN TRADE	5.50
COCAINE TRADE	3.00
CANNABIS TRADE	4.50
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	6.50
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	4.50
FINANCIAL CRIMES	6.50



## CRIMINAL ACTORS

3.90

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	1.00
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	5.00
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	4.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	4.00
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	5.50



5.21

## RESILIENCE SCORE



Funding provided by the United States Government.

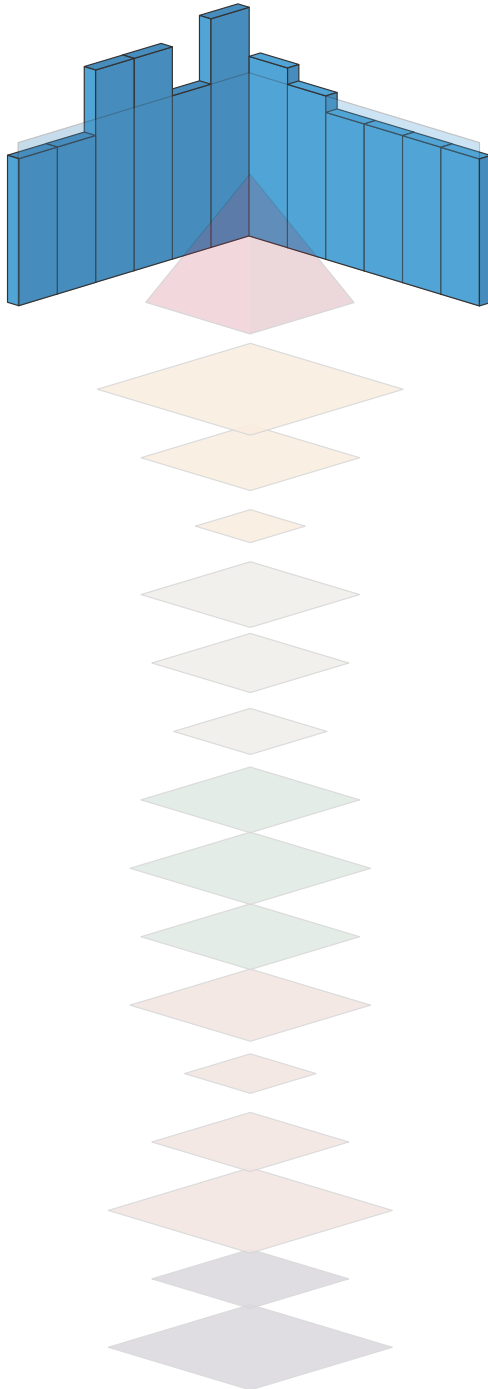


Funded by the European Union

ENACT is funded by the European Union and implemented by the Institute for Security Studies and INTERPOL, in affiliation with the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.



# OMAN



5.21

## RESILIENCE SCORE

77<sup>th</sup> of 193 countries

14<sup>th</sup> of 46 Asian countries

6<sup>th</sup> of 14 Western Asian countries

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	4.50
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	4.50
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	6.50
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	6.50
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	5.00
LAW ENFORCEMENT	7.00
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	5.50
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	5.00
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	4.50
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	4.50
PREVENTION	4.50
NON-STATE ACTORS	4.50



4.40

## CRIMINALITY SCORE



**CRIMINAL MARKETS** 4.90



**CRIMINAL ACTORS** 3.90



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# CRIMINALITY

## CRIMINAL MARKETS

### PEOPLE

With foreign nationals comprising the majority of Oman's population, a significant market for human trafficking exists in the country. Criminal groups exploit Oman's high demand for foreign labour, taking advantage of the country's popularity as a destination for migrant workers from Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe. While most migrants enter through formal channels, some become victims of human trafficking, particularly in the domestic servitude and labour sectors. Female migrant workers in Oman are at risk of sexual exploitation, while men, predominantly from African countries, face the threat of forced labour. Recent reports highlighted concrete cases of trafficking, namely of Malawian and Sierra Leonean women, in Oman. Victims revealed they had been recruited under the false pretences of work in the hospitality business in the US or even scholarships. The case was part of a network of people operating unregistered job recruitment agencies who were trafficking Malawians to countries like Oman under the pretext of finding them jobs. Economic migrants are subjected to various forms of exploitation, including non-payment of wages, movement restrictions, withholding passports, and physical or sexual abuse. Despite government reforms, Oman's use of the controversial Kafala system, which links the legal status of migrant workers to individual sponsors, still enables exploitation, as employers hold significant power over migrants' status and residency permits. Recruitment agencies in Oman work closely with agents in the migrants' home countries who employ deception and misinformation to attract migrants into the country for further exploitation. A key part of this process is charging sky-high recruitment fees, making migrants vulnerable to forced labour through debt bondage.

The human smuggling market, conversely, is less consolidated in Oman. Nevertheless, instances of smuggling of individuals, most of them with Asian and African nationalities, have been documented in the country. In 2022, the Royal Oman Police made several arrests of migrants, predominantly from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, attempting to enter the country illegally by boat with the help of Omani boat-owners and licensed fisherman acting as smugglers. The vast coastline of the country enables a significant portion of irregular migration carried out through maritime routes to occur undetected. In recent years, perpetrators have increasingly taken to platforms to extort money from the Omani population through a number of methods, including blackmail and emotional manipulation. Migrants and human trafficking victims are particularly at risk of extortion practices.

### TRADE

Oman's domestic market for weapons is small, although the country serves as a crucial transit point for arms shipments destined for Yemen. There have been accusations of Omani state actors collaborating with local criminal networks in transporting ammunition and arms to Yemen. Governmental missile transfers, for instance, occur through their shared border, and the Gulf of Oman is frequently used as a route for Iranian weapons, weapon systems and other military equipment destined for Yemen's Houthi rebels.

In addition, Oman has a small market for excisable and counterfeit goods. Local traders have been involved in selling counterfeit clothes and accessories of well-known brands to domestic consumers, including watches, perfumes, shoes and bags. With regard to the illicit trade of excise consumer goods, consumption of illegal/contraband cigarettes used to be high in the country in the past. However, in recent years, the Omani tax authority has taken important steps to curb the illegal trade and combat the population's high consumption rate of illicit cigarettes. Among the different measures taken to regulate the import, trade and sale of excise goods and facilitate collecting excise taxes, the government has also implemented, a few years ago, a 100% tax on tobacco which inadvertently resulted in a modest increase in cross-border smuggling of cigarettes and other tobacco products into Oman.

### ENVIRONMENT

Oman has a moderately-sized market for environmental crimes. The country is a major importer of illicitly produced Somali charcoal, and there is limited awareness about its origin and impact on forest resources among the Omani population. Firewood smuggling has also been observed, with perpetrators disregarding national regulations on logging and charcoal. Expatriates living in Oman have also been arrested for burning firewood to produce and sell charcoal in local markets.

In terms of fauna crimes, Oman acts as both a source and destination country. Certain endangered species originating from Oman, such as geckos, are illegally sold in European markets. Smuggling attempts involving Arabian leopards, falcons and ivory have also been reported. Local smugglers are typically in charge of domestic operations, while foreign actors have been reported to be involved in ivory smuggling operations into Iran. Falcons are frequently traded from Oman to the United Arab Emirates without the required documentation, and illegal hunting of Arabian gazelles and cheetah exports persist. In recent years, the government has also issued repeated warnings against the poaching of endangered reptiles. The environmental impact of the country's market for fauna crimes is significant, though it

provides livelihood opportunities for some locals involved in the trade.

Oman's market for non-renewable resources crimes pertains primarily to gold and oil smuggling. The country acts as a transit hub for illegal gold being smuggled to India by Indian criminal groups, as well as to Sri Lanka. In recent years, both foreign nationals and Omani nationals working for a state-owned company have been arrested for their involvement in diesel smuggling.

## DRUGS

Oman has a considerable market for synthetic drugs, and, to a lesser extent, for heroin and cannabis. The country's geographical location positions it as a vital transit point for transnational drug smuggling. Specifically, the Gulf of Oman serves as a central hub for drug trafficking operations connecting the Gulf with Asia and Africa.

The Makran Coast of Iran, located opposite the Gulf of Oman, plays a significant role in heroin shipments entering the country through Iran and Pakistan, often redirected to Europe via Africa, although Oman has a comparably small consumption market for the drug. Although cocaine is reportedly consumed in Oman, its market is not significant in scope and scale. The country also serves as a destination country for cannabis, which is typically smuggled into the country by foreign nationals collaborating with local groups. As for the synthetic drug trade, in recent years there has been a significant increase in the influx of synthetic drugs into the country, including Captagon and psychotropic substances. Among Oman's wealthy population, particularly its youth, the market for Captagon is highly lucrative.

## CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Oman has experienced a significant rise in cyber-dependent crimes in recent years, particularly since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown measures. Cybercriminals are using different techniques to perpetrate these crimes. The country's public infrastructure, including government agencies, has become a primary target for cyber threats and public data loss. The ministry of transport, communication, and information technology, along with other entities, has faced numerous attempted cyber-attacks on their networks and cyberspace. The majority of cybercriminals involved in the reported crimes in Oman are from outside the country.

## FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crimes have emerged as a concern in Oman, with criminals utilizing various techniques involving digital technology. Most of the reported crimes are related to financial fraud, which may be partially attributed to the country's economic growth. More than half of the population has reported having been exposed to financial crimes,

and the number of reported cases linked to fraudulent e-transactions has been steadily increasing. Furthermore, there has been a significant surge in phishing attacks in recent years. Tampering with bounced cheques remains the most prevalent crime, with thousands of such incidents recorded annually in the country. Moreover, numerous reports have surfaced regarding the embezzlement and mishandling of public funds by corrupt government officials. Tax evasion and other tax related financial crimes are also prevalent in the country.

## CRIMINAL ACTORS

Oman's criminal ecosystem consists of a mix of private sector actors, decentralized criminal networks, low-level state-embedded actors, and foreign actors. The private sector significantly contributes to the organized crime landscape. Recruitment agencies in Oman, aided by foreign agents, deceive foreign nationals, involving them in human trafficking and, to a certain extent, the narcotics trade. Private sector actors have been implicated in criminal activities related to the market for counterfeit goods and tax evasion. Criminal networks are also prominent actors in various criminal markets. Most of all, they are active in human trafficking market, extending their reach beyond Oman, connecting with local agents in the victims' countries of origin.

The involvement of state-embedded actors also continues to exacerbate the criminal landscape in the country with widespread corruption among low-level state-embedded actors. These actors are reported to facilitate trafficking activities at legal access points. Additionally, there have been allegations of authorities' involvement or complicity in illegal arms trafficking, despite the government's denial and claims of closed borders with Yemen.

Due to Oman's geographical location in the Gulf, there is a small smuggling community in places like Musandam, the northernmost exclave of Oman, catering to the Iranian contraband market. Some government officials are believed to be complicit in or tolerant of these operations. The organizations utilizing Omani territory for drug trans-shipment are predominantly of foreign origin but may collaborate with Omani nationals and potentially involve low-level state-embedded actors. There is no evidence to suggest the presence of mafia-style groups operating in Oman.

# RESILIENCE

## LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Oman is a sultanate, and its decision-making process is primarily influenced by the sultan's executive orders. The country's leadership has not taken a specific stance on organized crime, which is generally not discussed in political circles. Despite efforts to combat corruption, conflicts of interest persist within the government and on state-owned company boards, and there are instances of petty corruption in law enforcement agencies. These factors hinder effective measures against organized crime. While there is no concrete evidence of Oman's government aiding Iran in smuggling illicit weapons to Yemen, accusations have been made regarding their tolerance of such activities. The concentration of power around the sultan in Oman presents significant challenges to the country's transparency and openness. The government's supreme audit institution fails to meet international standards of independence since it does not audit the government's approved budget. Additionally, the executive budget proposal is not published, and there is limited disclosure of information regarding debt obligations, royal family budgets, and the earnings of state-owned enterprises.

Oman participates in various meetings to strengthen cooperation and combat crime. In terms of international conventions, Oman has ratified several important agreements, including the United Nations Convention on Transnational Organized Crime and the Palermo Protocols, the United Nations Convention Against Corruption, the Arab Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, and many other relevant treaties. Although it has not signed the Arms Trade Treaty, Oman has made efforts to comprehensively implement the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat, and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons. On the domestic front, Oman has established a comprehensive legal framework to combat organized crime, with a penal code that criminalizes organized crime as an enterprise, various criminal activities and membership in a criminal organization.

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Oman's judicial system is generally perceived as impartial, although cases related to corruption, particularly those involving the royal family, are not accessible to the public. There is no apparent evidence of organized crime influencing the judicial process. The country's judiciary lacks independence as it is subordinate to the sultan, who holds the authority to appoint and dismiss senior judges. Reports of abuse and torture in prisons have surfaced, although specific data on the prison population remains unavailable due to the lack of transparency in the penitentiary system. While the security and law enforcement apparatus in Oman

demonstrate strong civilian control, there have been instances of corruption among law enforcement officers. The Royal Oman Police, responsible for policing and border control, serves as the primary law enforcement entity. Specialized counter-trafficking units have been established.

As for the territorial integrity of the country, concerns persist regarding its border with Yemen and the smuggling activities in the Musandam province. The Musandam area, located separately from the rest of Oman, raises potential concerns. Due to its remoteness and proximity to Iran, a smuggling community has emerged catering to the Iranian market. This community thrives when sanctions are imposed, facilitating the exchange of contraband in one direction and potentially narcotics and individuals in the other. The extent of Omani authorities' involvement in these activities is subject to debate. Moreover, the Al Mahra border area remains a point of dispute between Oman and Saudi Arabia, contributing to tensions between the two countries.

Regarding its border with Yemen and the southwestern hinterlands, Oman has erected a security fence to prevent spillover and weapons smuggling. However, it has faced criticism for allegedly turning a blind eye to Iranian attempts to smuggle weapons to the Houthi militia through local connections in the Dhofar region. The reasons behind this ambiguity, whether stemming from capacity limitations or political considerations, remain unclear. Sultan Haitham bin Tariq has emphasized the importance of maintaining ties with Iran in line with Sultan Qaboos's foreign policy. Oman's cyber-preparedness ranks among the highest worldwide in terms of measures in place to protect its cyberspace. The country has taken steps to enhance cybersecurity and combat cyber-threats, and its territorial integrity is generally secure.

## ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Oman has garnered international recognition for its efforts to mitigate money laundering risks and deficiencies. The country has implemented significant measures to combat these crimes, including the establishment of an independent body tasked with investigating financial transactions associated with money laundering and terrorist financing. Oman has taken a proactive approach, enhancing capabilities and legislation through information exchange agreements and awareness programmes for stakeholders. However, concerns persist regarding the vulnerability of the real estate sector to money laundering, prompting calls from the Oman chamber of commerce and industry for increased monitoring and appropriate legislation. The judicial authority has actively addressed money laundering cases, reflecting ongoing efforts to tackle the issue.

In terms of Oman's economic environment, challenges arise from restrictive labour regulations, corruption in public procurement, and potential illicit activities in the labour recruitment industry, which hinder business operations and put both foreign and domestic workers at an economic disadvantage. Like other Gulf countries, Oman heavily relies on migrant workers while aiming to nationalize the job market. Despite these challenges, Oman has displayed positive economic indicators, with projected growth and reduced fiscal deficit. The country experienced significant GDP growth, supported by economic stimulus programmes that assisted sectors affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly small and medium businesses.

## CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Efforts to assist victims of crime, predominantly of human trafficking, take the form of the provision of shelters that provide psychological, legal and medical facilities, as well as the development of anti-trafficking capabilities by the police. Over the past year, the government has implemented awareness campaigns, established a counter-trafficking unit and launched a new national strategy to combat trafficking. However, the controversial Kafala sponsorship system continues to pose significant risks to migrant workers,

and the policy of 'Omanization' has pushed many workers into the illicit market. The reliance on self-identification by victims leaves those without embassy representation lacking support. Concerning drug trafficking, security operations aim to prevent the entry of drugs into the country. However, there is a lack of evidence-based prevention strategies for substance abuse, particularly among the youth. The introduction of digital tax stamps on excise goods aims to regulate trade and enhance tax collection.

Press freedom has experienced a decline, with prevalent self-censorship and consequences for criticizing ruling authorities. The opaque bureaucratic system limits NGO contributions in areas such as detention and migrant issues. Journalists and activists have faced arrests and charges for various infractions, including claims of violating the country's cybercrime laws. Workers are allowed to unionize, except for household workers and government officials, while strikes are prohibited in the oil and gas sector.

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*This summary was funded in part by a grant from the United States Department of State. The opinions, findings and conclusions stated herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the United States Department of State.*