

Overview of Serious and Organized Crime in Central Africa

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ANALYTICAL REPORT



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**THE GLOBAL INITIATIVE
AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL
ORGANIZED CRIME**

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Executive Summary

Transnational organized crime in the Central African region poses a wide range of serious threats to security both locally and globally. As a result, INTERPOL under the ENACT Project has sought to identify and assess organized crime in the region to drive a more strategic law enforcement response.

International criminal organizations continue to target Central Africa because of the significant illicit wealth that can be generated. Potential criminal proceeds stem from illicit market opportunities that exploit various social and political vulnerabilities, state fragility, limited policing capacities, and corruption issues present to varying degrees throughout the region.

International criminal organizations or networks operating in Central Africa rely on key facilitators who interlink crime syndicates that provide illicit goods and services throughout the region and to the rest of the world. Crime syndicates typically operate across borders and are active in a number of illicit markets, notably fraud and financial crimes, drug trafficking, environmental crimes, human trafficking as well as organized theft and robbery. In addition, there are a number of enabling crimes such as cybercrime and the trade in small arms and light weapons that support organized criminality throughout the region. These crimes overlap with all of the illicit markets noted in complex ways. Organized crime in the region generates significant profits for all those involved with substantial interregional financial flows and illicit profits heading offshore, as well as money laundering occurring on a global scale.

The threat posed by organized crime to the Central African region is substantial yet there is limited capacity amongst law enforcement to manage this complex phenomenon. Although organized crime in Central Africa may go underreported and undetected in some cases, various data sources nonetheless reveal important illicit activities and dynamics of criminal groups and networks active in the region which need to be urgently addressed through strong, strategic partnerships between law enforcement agencies as well as with other concerned stakeholders.

Key Findings

- ❖ Crime syndicates are a common trans-border criminal element in the region, connected to the world's illicit markets through close collaboration with transnational criminal networks of associates that target the region specifically to maximize illicit gains.
- ❖ Asian and Middle Eastern organized crime elements are implicated in a number of criminal markets throughout the region. By operating legitimate businesses, their direct involvement in criminality is highly concealed and well insulated.
- ❖ A number of other international criminal elements from West Africa, Europe and the Americas have links to criminal markets ongoing in the region and these elements are suspected to be active in most countries, beyond the rates of detection; these elements often link local gangs to the international supply of illicit commodities.
- ❖ International criminal organizations active in the Central African region are able to exploit a range of socio-economic dynamics to maximize illicitly gained profits. Their involvement in illicit markets is often met with only limited law enforcement response and sometimes even enabled by corruption.
- ❖ Ongoing conflicts have made war profiteering a major aspect of organized crime in the Central African region, by increasing criminal market opportunities, inter alia, for the trafficking of weapons, the illicit extraction and movement of natural resources, and the exploitation of people.
- ❖ Wildlife crimes affect Central Africa. While the trafficking of elephant ivory receives much attention, lesser-known targets such as apes and pangolins are also suspected of being trafficked in high volumes and for high profits. Wildlife crimes are believed to be linked to a host of other crimes in this region, notably illegal logging and mining.
- ❖ Organized theft of cattle and motor vehicles are often syndicated, with smaller groups or cells likely collaborating with larger illicit networks involved in other trans-border crimes such as terrorism and arms/drug trafficking.
- ❖ Illicit firearms significantly fuel organized crime and embolden criminal networks in the region. Easily finding their way into the hands of criminals and non-state armed groups, the presence of illicit firearms in Central Africa has ultimately weakened state institutions and contributed to protracted conflicts.

- ❖ Certain major sea and airports in Central Africa are central hubs for the importation and exportation of illicit goods, such as illegal timber, illegally-mined minerals, and wildlife products.
- ❖ Criminal syndicates active in the illicit diamond industry in the Central African region are most certainly linked to the illicit diamond industry in West and Southern Africa.
- ❖ The traditional cash-based nature of the economy in the Central African region places a significant volume of financial transactions outside the reach of government, and money laundering is commonly linked to other crimes perpetrated in the region, notably fraud.
- ❖ The Central African region is a global hub for the trafficking of illicit narcotics, with international airports playing a significant role by connecting the region to criminal associates in other parts of the world.
- ❖ Armed conflict in the region drives people from their homes and subsequently fuels people smuggling and human trafficking, including forced labor, sexual exploitation, illegal imprisonment, forced enlistment of children and kidnapping; analysis strongly suggests that migrant smuggling networks exist within the majority of the Central African countries facilitating travel to Europe via North Africa.
- ❖ The trafficking of counterfeit and/or substandard medicines and medical products represents a major threat to health and public safety in the region.
- ❖ Available information suggests that cyber- and cyber-facilitated crimes affect African and African-based organizations, institutions, and businesses at a rate above the average of other regions in the world. The complex nature of cyber criminality and the lacking knowledge and capacity of law enforcement to effectively detect and combat it means that cybercrime and cyber-facilitated crimes are likely to evolve and expand in Central Africa in a largely uninterrupted manner.

Introduction

Organized crime, categorized in this study as all crimes committed by groups of individuals, working in concert to generate illicit profits over time, for continued and collective gain, is a global issue, leaving no jurisdiction unaffected. Groups of individuals, in order to carry out a range of crimes, will form networks or syndicates, often characterized as criminal organizations. These criminal organizations will seek to grow and expand their illicit activities, taking advantage of opportunities wherever they may exist. By nature, they operate in ways that are reflective of the jurisdiction they operate in, exploiting weaknesses and entrenching themselves in any way possible.

The nature and dynamics of organized criminality jeopardizes sustainable peace and development, political stability, erodes trust in public institutions, nurtures corruption, and fuels violence. It disrupts the rule-of-law and undermines real economic potential and growth. In many instances, organized crime and associated criminal activities are linked to the activities of armed insurgent groups or terrorist organizations, which accents the increasing threats posed by organized crime to public safety and social order. It is a major threat to all aspects of any society, and, for this reason, must be understood in detail for law enforcement to have an effect.

Criminal organizations will exploit any aspect of society that is, either by law or convention, illegal, as long as it is lucrative. Therefore, they pose a direct threat to government and civil society. Crime groups are responsive to what is explicitly illegal, given any particular local set of laws and regulations, and thus will take on different forms, norms, and practices depending on where the group is based in the world. They will operate at a level commensurate with the state's ability to respond, and their activities may be accepted in varying ways by the general public and society at large. Criminal organizations therefore form and function in ways reflective of the given cultural,

economic, and political realities in which they are based. They will differ accordingly and take on unique systems and practices from country to country, region to region, and will pose different challenges to law enforcement as a result. It is the intent of this report to outline these details for the Central African region.

Organized crime systemically controls every aspect of complex criminal enterprises. Africa is not immune to organized crime and in fact may be at an even greater risk of harm, given its distinctive set of socio-economic realities: vast natural resources, an array of political jurisdictions and systems, porous borders, varying and differing criminal or penal laws, varying levels of corruption, poverty, high levels of unemployment, and a range of security and state fragility issues including the lack of full effective control over the entirety of a state's territory. The free movement of people and goods, varying levels of development and economic prosperity, and the interconnectivity of it all, are therefore fueling complex crime in the region in a unique way. All of these socio-economic realities underpin a strong and unique organized crime element that is operating throughout the region.

To better understand organized crime in the Central African context, and indeed to combat it more effectively, a thorough understanding of how it functions must be attained. Law enforcement and decision makers need to understand how organized crime operates locally and transnationally. They must also understand the workings and relationships of so-called "enabling crimes." Finally, the dynamics of criminal groups operating transnationally in the region must be assessed along with how they facilitate the flow of illicit funds.

With these analytical objectives in mind, the ENACT Project (Enhancing Africa's response to transnational organized crime) has undertaken

this assessment of serious and organized crime in the Central African region.

Two versions of this report exist. This report is the public version of the completed analysis, which included police information; where specific police information was used, this information has subsequently been sanitized for public distribution.

Scope and Methodology

The objective of this report is to provide a comprehensive assessment of organized crime in the Central African region, which includes the following countries: Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Republic of Congo, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe.

The assessment draws upon an analysis of available data and presents conclusions about the current nature, scope, dynamics, and activities of organized crime in the region.

The following assessment provides an overview of the major aspects of organized crime both in terms of which groups are active throughout the region and the types of illegal enterprise in which they are engaged.

This assessment follows an all source intelligence analysis methodology. It is the result of integrating multiple data sources. The integration of multiple data sources provides the most accurate picture of what is occurring in the region. Only when various data are used in conjunction, can an accurate picture of complex issues emerge, seeing them beyond any constituent part or perspective. Multiple data sources allow for cross-referencing and information verification or corroboration. All data sources herein are combined through analysis; analytical judgments were made throughout the analysis based on all facts available at the time of writing.

Analysis and Findings

This analysis is broken down into four parts as per the INTERPOL strategy on organized and emerging crimes, thereby covering criminal organizations or networks, illegal trafficking and illicit markets, enabling crimes and criminal convergences, and finally the illicit flow of money and assets. Many of these sections have several sub-types and are broken down by those patterns and trends detected through the analysis. This analysis was completed for the Central African region, however, any substantial links to the rest of the continent and world are also highlighted throughout. Despite there being many ongoing crime-types in the region, this assessment highlights those that most affect the region as a whole.

Criminal Organizations or networks

This section examines the various dynamics of those crime syndicates found to be engaged in serious and transnational organized crime in the Central African region. It highlights how criminal networks connect across the region and focuses on the activities in which groups or gangs are involved and how. Where possible, it draws attention to specific criminal networks and outlines how they operate locally, regionally, and transnationally.

Structure and Dynamics

Organized crime throughout Central Africa involves vast criminal networks, linking many of the countries in the region together, and to other regions of the world. These networks, with limited high-level or centralized leadership, undertake a range of criminal activities, driven by constant criminal opportunities, arising out of the many unique socioeconomic conditions found within countries across Central Africa.

Based on research, criminal syndicates in Central Africa involved in transnational crime operate mostly at the national or regional level. However,

ties to international criminal groups and syndicates, particularly Asian and West African syndicates, appear highly probable.

Many countries in the Central African region are affected by armed and terrorist groups. These groups' ideology and goals vary greatly from country to country, but information indicates that they are all involved, at some level, in transnational criminal activity, or, at the very least, act as facilitators in the commission of these crimes. Some of these groups operate in vast and remote territories, in some cases spanning across several countries. In terms of the degree of threat and harm, including involvement in transnational crime, the groups of greatest concern in the Central African region are, in no particular order, the following:

- Boko Haram (also known as the Islamic State in West Africa): A Salafist Jihadist group from Nigeria operating in Northern Cameroon and in the Chad Basin.
- The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) (also known as "Tongo-Tongo"): A group from Uganda led by Joseph Kony operating in North and East of the Central African Republic and Northern Democratic Republic of Congo. Its members follow a vaguely Christian ideology.
- Ex-Seleka groups: An ethnic/religious group predominantly Muslim. It was formed in the Central African Republic in the context of the third civil war of 2013.
- Anti-Balaka groups: An ethnic/religious group predominantly Christian. It was formed in the Central African Republic in the context of the third civil war of 2013.
- The Allied Democratic Forces (ADF): A radical Islamist group from Uganda, operating in the Kivu region of the Democratic Republic of Congo.
- The Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda: A group from Rwanda with a Hutu nationalist ideology, operating in North and South Kivu regions of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The involvement of some of these groups in transnational criminal activities is likely due to the fact that they operate in areas renowned for rich natural resources (precious metals, gems, ivory, oil, etc.) combined with their need to ensure access to weapons and logistical support (food, fuel, etc.) to sustain their military or terrorist operations.

Large and powerful international criminal organizations control global criminal markets and drive the supply and demand for illicit goods and services.

Many of these transnational groups or cartels maintain links to individual actors and/or criminal networks active in the Central African region. In this regard, available information strongly suggests connections between crime networks in Central Africa and international criminal organizations based in the Middle East and Asia. These larger, transnational groups are typically thought of as cohesive systems, with clear and established hierarchies and membership, especially in their countries of origin. However, information suggests that foreign-based crime groups are increasingly dependent on partnerships with locally-based criminal associates. As a result, it is rare to find clear indications that a global crime syndicate is operating on the ground in Africa, even when they are apparently indirectly involved in illicit activities going on there.

Links between local networks and those operating in other countries are typically deduced from the known trafficking of illicit commodities between the regions.

War Profiteering

A significant organized crime phenomena in the Central African region is war profiteering. Various forms of inter- or intra- state conflict or political instability create substantial criminal opportunities for groups, gangs, or syndicates in the region. Conflict increases the criminal market

opportunity for the trafficking of weapons, the manipulation of natural resources in combination with corruption, or the exploitation of persons for human smuggling and trafficking, amongst others. There are often significant profits to be made in armed conflicts and these profits drive crime which in turn becomes a driver or incentive to prolong the conflict, ultimately destabilizing and/or weakening state institutions. Conflict enables powerful crime syndicates and opens opportunity for them to increase their influence and profits. Syndicates may encourage violence to ensure existing criminal markets continue and in hopes that new opportunities to profit will emerge.

**CONFLICTS IN THE CENTRAL
AFRICAN REGION INCREASE
CRIMINAL MARKET OPPORTUNITIES
ATTRACTING LOCAL AND
INTERNATIONAL CRIME GROUPS**

War profiteering is problematic in the Central African region on the whole and exacerbates the ongoing threat of organized crime where it occurs.¹ Currently in the region, there are ongoing cases of alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The alleged war crimes in the Central African Republic stem from the peak of armed conflict there, between 2001 and 2003, and may be linked to ongoing criminality today.²

The alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in the Democratic Republic of Congo date back to 2002 with the consequences still being felt today. Ongoing instability in the Democratic Republic of Congo allows for criminal opportunity, not only for syndicates operating there, but also syndicates operating across the region, from the southern and eastern regions, and also the rest of the African Continent. Currently, there is a preliminary examination of crimes against

humanity in Gabon, linked to the presidential elections held on 27 August 2016.³ These activities were, and likely still are, linked to criminal elements. Finally, in southwest Cameroon there has been violence related to the alleged growth of an English-speaking separatist movement that has had reported clashes with Cameroonian troops and police.⁴ All of these activities continue to drive organized crime in the region.

War profiteering, in general, is difficult to investigate and prosecute. It is highly transnational, and is linked to most countries across the region, even if a particular armed conflict is occurring further afield. Conflicts are not typically contained within borders, even if they appear largely intrastate, due to the movement of refugees, and the smuggling of contraband and/or weapons. It is highly likely that war profiteering is a major aspect of organized crime in the Central African region, despite being one that is rarely addressed.

Trafficking and Illicit Markets

This section highlights the serious and more significant organized criminal activities underway in the Central African region. Each criminal market will be assessed separately and in detail in order to determine what illegal commodities and other illicit goods or services are being trafficked in the region and how. This section highlights the many elements of each criminal market broken down into specific commodities where applicable, transportation routes, countries affected, modus operandi, etc. The ensuing analysis covers the most significant criminal markets currently detected and operating in the Central African region including wildlife crime, illegal logging and timber trafficking, the trafficking of precious metals (diamonds and gold), drug trafficking, the trafficking of counterfeit and sub-standard medicines and medical supplies, human trafficking and people smuggling, and financial crimes.

Wildlife Crimes

The Central African region is home to a diverse range of fauna including some of the most endangered, and subsequently, vulnerable, species on the planet. A range of animal species from the region are particularly susceptible to poaching and trafficking as they are in high demand in certain parts of the world, specifically in Asia. Targeted are the following species: elephants, rhinoceros, pangolins, tortoises, chimpanzees, gorillas, ostriches, crocodiles, great kudu, giraffes, hippopotamus, buffalos, lions, and leopards.

Wildlife crime contributes to the erosion of biodiversity and threatens the environmental integrity of Central Africa. It also undermines good governance and decreases income from sustainable economic utilization of wildlife-based tourism.⁵

Criminal networks involved in wildlife crimes are largely based in the region but operating in close collaboration with criminal networks in other parts of the world such as Asia, which is the main destination for illegal wildlife products.

Beyond “organized” poachers and traffickers operating in the region and abroad, non-state armed groups are also reportedly perpetrating wildlife crime as a means of generating profits to conduct their operations. The main groups are Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), Janjaweed and the Anti-Balaka and ex-Seleka fighters.⁶ In 2015, for example, LRA leader, Joseph Kony, sent fighters to Central Africa to collect 100 elephant tusks.⁷ Nomadic Fulani cattle herders operating in Central Africa are also involved in perpetrating wildlife crimes, hunting giant eland and buffalo to consume their “bush meat.” The Fulani are also suspected of smuggling wildlife products, including elephant ivory and leopard skins across national borders.⁸

The port of Douala in Cameroon, a major commercial seaport through which a large amount of merchandise enters and leaves the

region, is a likely hub for this type of criminal activity as it offers a way to connect the region to Asia while avoiding stricter controls at airports.

Great Apes

Central Africa is home to different species of apes who live in the region’s rain forests. Although little information is available about how apes are either poached or captured and subsequently trafficked, ape trafficking is apparently a lucrative criminal enterprise. Unlike other illicit wildlife trades such as elephant ivory, pangolin scales, and tiger bones, ape trafficking also involves live animals. Apes are either captured as pets or, alternatively, hunted for food. With regard to the latter, illegal logging and mining camps in ape range regions of Central Africa have fueled the market for ape “bush meat.”⁹ Apes are apparently smuggled from the forests in Central Africa via loosely policed ports and airports destined for luxurious homes, the tourist entertainment industry, and zoos in Asia, the Middle East, and Europe.¹⁰

Pangolins

Pangolins are the most trafficked wild mammals in the world. Pangolin scales are more in demand than elephant ivory and rhino horns.¹¹ Pangolins are targeted for their meat, their skin for leather products, and especially, their keratin plates (i.e. scales) for traditional medicines in Africa and Asia. Annually, 2.71 million pangolins from three different species are killed in six Central African countries: Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Republic of Congo.¹²

To fill the vacuum in Asian markets left by the decline of the Chinese pangolins,¹³ transnational criminal syndicates are looking towards Central Africa. There has been evidence of pangolins smuggled over remote routes from the Congo Basin to Asia. During operation Thunderstorm, an INTERPOL-led operation against the illegal trade in wild animals and plants which ran in May 2018, nearly 4 tons of pangolin scales were seized by Asian maritime authorities from a ship coming from Central Africa.¹⁴ Furthermore, a number of Asian nationals working in the logging industry

and other Asian-backed projects in the Congo Basin are suspected of sourcing pangolin products for the Asian market. Available information suggests that criminal export networks are using specialized hunters to reach remote areas that are not easily monitored by law enforcement, such that the poaching of pangolins is likely to go undetected.¹⁵

Elephants

The elephant population in Central Africa has been decimated by years of civil war and poaching. In the Democratic of Congo's Garamba National Park, the elephant population has decreased from 20,000 in the 1980s to around 1,100 to 1,400 elephants today.¹⁶

Like other wildlife crimes, rebel militias have been involved in elephant poaching in the region as a source of income. The Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) was found to be one of the main groups involved in this criminal activity.¹⁷

In Central Africa, poachers are typically from the countries where they poach. However, cross-border poaching has also been detected within the region, and on occasions with the illegal haul smuggled to Douala in Cameroon, a major hub for the export of ivory.¹⁸

The Central African region appears to be evolving from an open local retail trade of "processed" ivory to underground transactions aiming to export raw ivory to foreign markets, particularly to Asia. This change is likely due to an increase in domestic ivory prices in recent years linked to the limited supply and high demand from abroad.¹⁹ Asian nationals are suspected of operating within organized criminal syndicates as key actors in the Central African elephant ivory trade.²⁰

Illegal Logging and Timber Trafficking

Central Africa has vast forested areas and is home to the world's second largest contiguous tropical rain forest, the Congo Basin. Nearly 65 per cent of the Republic of Congo's territory is

covered in forests totaling approximately 22 million hectares, while 85 per cent of Gabon is also covered by forests.²¹ As the global demand for the region's forest resources grows, so does the illegal logging trade,²² a very lucrative business that is quickly depleting Central Africa of this natural resource.

Illegal logging in Central Africa accelerates the degradation of the region's forest ecosystem. Between 2001 and 2014, it is estimated that 657,000 hectares of forest were destroyed in Cameroon.²³ This type of criminality seems to occur due to high profit margins and a growing demand from abroad. Illegal logging ultimately leads to losses of economic opportunities and tax revenue which, in turn, affects local populations, contributing to poverty and violent conflicts in forest-dependent communities.

Estimated yearly losses in revenues and assets related to illegal logging amount to an estimated USD 5.3 million for Cameroon, USD 4.2 million for the Democratic Republic of Congo, and USD 10.1 million for Gabon.²⁴

INDUSTRIAL LOGGING COMPANIES HAVE PLAYED A MAJOR PART IN THE REGION'S ILLICIT LOGGING

Industrial logging companies have played a major part in the region's illicit timber trafficking where there have been cases of the misuse of artisanal logging permits. Several companies have been found to have under-reported the quantity of timber they were felling, as well as harvesting timber below the legal size and outside designated concessions.²⁵ In the first quarter of 2016, Cameroon issued warning notices to 35 companies, postponed the licenses of four logging companies and generated CFA 54.2 million (around USD 97,000) in fines related to illegal activities in the forest sector.²⁶ However, companies continue to exploit the absence of law enforcement in certain areas, as well as the lack of surveillance practices, and weak financial

penalties. All these factors contribute to the proliferation of illegal logging in the region by companies working in this industry.²⁷

The region's forest resources have attracted foreign companies. In the interest of attracting and retaining foreign investors, authorities in concerned Central African countries may not be rigorous in applying regulations and controlling restrictions in the logging industry.²⁸

Several foreign companies in the Congo Basin have been found to be over felling, felling outside designated areas, harvesting below minimum diameter, not paying taxes on profits and offering bribes to state officials to ignore these violations.²⁹

The region's illegal logging trade is also suspected of being linked to terrorism financing. A company which exports timber from Central Africa to international markets, and allegedly linked to Hezbollah, is accused of illegal logging and labour rights abuses.³⁰

Information also suggests that armed groups in Central Africa are also involved in illegal logging in the region to fund their operations, notably anti-Balaka and ex-Seleka militias³¹ and the Allied Democratic Forces.³² According to analysis, criminal syndicates involved in illegal logging and timber trafficking in the region are generally locals who operate within their country. Illegal logging is a very profitable business. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has stated that criminal syndicates in Central Africa make more profits from the sale of illegal wood products - around USD 9 billion each year- than dealing drugs.³³

Central Africa is both a transit and a source region.³⁴ One of the main exit points in Central Africa for the smuggling of timber to Asian and European markets is, once again, the seaport of Douala in Cameroon.³⁵ An estimated 3 million cubic meters of timber are exported from the Congo Basin to Asia annually with a significant quantity resulting from illegal logging, facilitated by corruption.³⁶

Precious Minerals

The precious mineral industry in the Central African region is suspected of having important links to organized crime. Specifically, diamonds and gold illicitly mined from Central African countries are often smuggled, traded and trafficked within and beyond the region providing a means for criminals and organized crime groups to gain, conceal and move illicit funds.

The Illicit Diamond Industry

According to analysis, criminal syndicates involved in the illicit diamond trade in Central Africa are operating within the region. The criminals involved in this illicit activity in the region appear to be nationals from Europe, the Americas, as well as countries in the Central African region. These syndicates are also linked with networks outside of Africa since criminal associates from the Americas, Middle East, and Asia have been identified.³⁷

Various armed groups in Central African countries divided by political tensions, land grievances and ethnic conflicts have sought to control the diamond-rich regions.

Ex-Seleka militias, for example, control some diamond mines and generate profits by selling mining rights and concessions. They have created illegal taxation systems for diamond miners, collectors, and aircrafts landing in the region.³⁸

The control of diamond mines has likewise fueled conflicts between rival rebel groups as this trade is very lucrative and is a source of income for their operations. In the Central African Republic, the main groups are estimated to earn between USD 3 million and USD 6 million annually from the illegal diamond trade.³⁹

The Central African Republic is one of the few countries in the world today that sources so-called conflict diamonds or "blood diamonds." According to the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme, these are rough diamonds mined in locations controlled by armed groups whose sale

is used to sustain the insurgents' activities. The Central African Republic is known for producing high quality diamonds, with 80 percent estimated to be of gem quality.⁴⁰ This would suggest that the smuggling of diamonds in the region is significant. Open sources corroborate this claim as there have been reports of diamonds from Central African countries entering the region's legitimate markets.⁴¹

Case Study

According to a report produced by the United Nations Central African Republic Sanctions Committee, 160 carats of undocumented diamonds, worth approximately USD 28,000, were seized in Yaoundé, Cameroon in April 2015. It was reported that these diamonds were smuggled from Kentzou, Cameroon by two Indian nationals who had been previously in Bangui, Central African Republic.

Charbonneau, L. Cameroon involved in Central Africa "blood diamond" trade: UN experts. Reuters, September 2015.

The lack of regulation within the diamond sector and weak traceability in the region make it an attractive place for diamond smugglers.⁴² The Democratic Republic of Congo, a country with a number of diamond mines, also has important links to the illicit diamond industry, according to analysis, most notably to markets in Middle East, Europe, and North America. Furthermore, criminal syndicates active in the illicit diamond industry in the Democratic Republic of Congo have also been found to be linked to criminal syndicates in West and Southern Africa, two diamond producing regions. This suggests that networks involved in the Central African illicit diamond industry are very likely implicated in the Southern and Western African illicit diamond industry as well.⁴³

The Illicit Gold Industry

The Central African region is also rich in gold. An estimated USD 28 billion worth of gold lies in the

Eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo.⁴⁴ Similar to the illegal diamond industry, different actors, including mining companies, armed groups, and state officials have illicitly profited from the region's gold resources.

Armed groups in the region are implicated in the illegal gold industry in order to fund their operations. Ex-Seleka and anti-Balaka rebels control gold mining areas in the region, as well as the armed group called "Union for Peace".⁴⁵ Terrorist groups, such as Al-Shabaab and the Allied Democratic Forces-National Army for the Liberation of Uganda, are also suspected of involvement in Central Africa's illicit gold trade to finance their operations. They have allegedly smuggled gold from the region, before introducing it on global markets.⁴⁶

Some dredging companies, particularly the semi-industrial, have also played a role in sustaining the illegal gold industry in the region and have been accused by authorities of not paying taxes and smuggling gold.⁴⁷ Some exporters ignore due diligence requirements to source gold from validated, conflict-free mining sites, in accordance with UN recommendations. Finally, certain brokers may mix legally and illegally-sourced gold, making it impossible to distinguish from where the gold has originated.⁴⁸

There are also indications that some state officials may be involved in the chain of illicit gold supply. For example, open sources indicate that Central African mining authorities produced falsified declarations of origin in order to enable illicit gold exports.⁴⁹ There have also been reports of state officials in the region demanding illegal taxes, fees and levies from gold miners without producing services to them in return.⁵⁰

Drug Trafficking

Central Africa does not appear to be a dominant hub for intercontinental drug-trafficking when compared with the Western and Eastern regions of the continent. Despite this, it is nonetheless confronted by the myriad of health and security

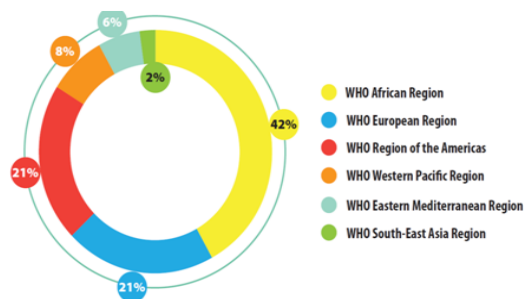
risks related to the global trade in illicit substances and narcotics.

Central Africa is a regional hub for the trafficking of narcotics, in particular cocaine. The coastal city of Douala is very well connected to South America, Europe, Asia and the Middle East through its major commercial port. Both the cities of Yaoundé and Douala also represent notable regional hubs due to the presence of international airports. According to the United States Department of State, instability and the subsequent return of displaced refugees in the region has resulted in disruption along borders, which facilitated the trafficking of goods between Central African countries, including drugs and weapons. The same source indicated that drugs from the region, mainly cannabis and cocaine, were transported via Eastern Africa to the Arabian Peninsula.⁵¹ Both military and rebel groups in the region were known to be involved in the production of cannabis, according to open sources.⁵²

Pharmaceuticals Crimes and Counterfeited Medicine Trafficking

The trafficking of counterfeit and/or substandard medicines and medical products represents a major threat to health and public safety across the entire African continent and the countries of the Central African region are in no way spared from these risks. According to the global surveillance efforts of substandard and falsified medical products by the World Health Organization (WHO) ongoing since 2013, the most commonly reported cases of substandard or falsified medicines concerned antimalarials as well as antibiotics. Between 2013 and 2017, over 40 per cent of reported cases came from African countries.⁵³

Figure 1: Percentage of reports from each region to the World Health Organization (2013-2017)



On 16 August 2016, Cameroonian Customs launched the operation “Halte au commerce illicite”, in partnership with local businessmen. In the context of this operation, customs officers seized a cargo of four tons of counterfeit medications at the central market of Yaoundé. According to these authorities, these counterfeit pharmaceuticals were trafficked in from West Africa.⁵⁴ Other open sources indicate that counterfeit pharmaceuticals enter the region from West Africa.⁵⁵

Case Study

Meningitis Scare in the Democratic Republic of Congo

In December 2014, an outbreak of suspected meningitis was investigated in the Ituri District, northeastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)... with over 400 patients experiencing neck spasm, interpreted as neck stiffness. However, further investigations suggested that bacterial meningitis was not the cause of this outbreak. It was subsequently revealed that patients in the region believed they had been taking the medicine *Diazepam* to treat a wide range of illnesses. However, laboratory analysis of the product labelled as *Diazepam* showed that, in fact, it did not contain *Diazepam*, but a drug called *Haloperidol* used primarily for the treatment of schizophrenia. The levels of *Haloperidol* present in the falsely-labelled tablets represented a serious health risk, particularly to the young.

Sources: “An epidemic of dystonic reactions in Central Africa.” *The Lancet*. Vol. 5 February 2017.

WHO. Medical product alert No. 4/2015: adverse reactions caused by falsified diazepam in Central Africa

Human Trafficking

Human trafficking is a crime threat of significant concern to the entire Central African region with nearly all countries qualifying as source, transit, and/or destination countries. Vulnerable men, women, and youth in search of employment

opportunities and a better way of life are inevitably exposed to a very high risk of falling victim to human trafficking for labor and/or sexual exploitation. With regard to regional trafficking trends, open sources indicate that adult men and boys are vulnerable to labor exploitation both within and beyond the region, including in the agricultural and mining sectors.

Artisanal mines in certain areas are associated with forced labor, including debt bondage, by mining bosses, other miners, family members, government officials, and armed groups. Children have also been reported as being subjected to forced labor in the illegal mining of diamonds, copper, gold, cobalt, tungsten ore, tantalum ore, and tin, as well as the smuggling of minerals.⁵⁶

Women and children (both boys and girls) in Central African countries are also subject to both labor and sex trafficking. Women in the region may be lured to Europe and other regions by fraudulent internet marriage proposals or offers of well-paying jobs, and subsequently subjected to forced prostitution or forced labor, especially in domestic servitude. Some women have reported being recruited for domestic work in the Middle East only to find themselves in slave-like situations. Trafficking networks typically involve destination-country recruitment agencies that use Central African intermediaries to fraudulently recruit fellow Central Africans for work abroad. Reports suggest local awareness-raising activities targeting fraudulent recruitment have caused intermediaries to operate with greater discretion, often directing victims to travel to the Middle East through neighboring countries.⁵⁷ Information also suggests that Central Africa may be an important transit region for women and girls being brought from West Africa and destined for Europe.

Children, both boys and girls, across the region are particularly vulnerable to trafficking internally. It is not uncommon for families in many African countries to send their children to live with distant relatives in hopes they might evolve in an environment which would improve their

socioeconomic status. However, the custom, known as “confiage,” may also render children more vulnerable to the risks of being trafficked. There are numerous cases of children being sent to urban centers after being promised educational opportunities only to be subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking. Similarly, some children who leave their villages to attend schools may be forced into begging, street vending, domestic servitude, or other labor.

Another important regional factor which has driven citizens from several Central African countries to migrate is armed conflict. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), internally displaced persons, migrants and other transient populations are readily exposed to different types of trafficking, including forced labor and sexual exploitation.⁵⁸ In March 2017, it was estimated that more than 402,000 people remained internally displaced in the Central African Republic and approximately 464,000 had sought refuge in neighboring countries.⁵⁹

TRAFFICKING NETWORKS TYPICALLY INVOLVE DESTINATION-COUNTRY RECRUITMENT AGENCIES THAT USE CENTRAL AFRICAN INTERMEDIARIES TO FRAUDULENTLY RECRUIT FELLOW CENTRAL AFRICANS FOR WORK ABROAD

Human organ trafficking is also taking place in the region. Open sources indicate that human organ trafficking is prevalent in Central African countries. Analysis suggests that Central Africans are involved in respective criminal organizations perpetrating so-called “crime rituals,” or cult crimes, which involve killing young girls, prostitutes, or children and trafficking their organs for use in cult rituals.⁶⁰

People Smuggling (and Illegal Migration)

Literally millions of persons living in sub-Saharan Africa migrate annually in seek of economic opportunities, physical security, or both. Regardless of the reason, it is a well-documented fact that the majority of African migrants resettle or seek refuge in other African nations. This is also the case in the Central African region where migrants primarily remain either within the region or in neighboring African regions. While migration between the countries of Central Africa may potentially be dangerous due to dense vegetation and the lack of interconnecting roads, given the protocol of free movement which has been established by the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), they are not, per se, illegal.⁶¹ Given this and the absence of information to suggest otherwise, it appears unlikely that migrant smuggling⁶² within the region itself is prevalent.

According to the IOM, conflicts in the Central African region have led to internal and regional displacement of local populations. The same source informs that migrants from around the region attempt to reach North Africa and return there if turned back at North African borders. Central Africa also receives migrants fleeing insecurity in West Africa as well as returnees and refugees fleeing conflict in East Africa.⁶³

**PEOPLE SMUGGLING REPRESENTS A
PREVALENT CRIME AND A THREAT TO
THOSE WHO SEEK TO EMIGRATE AIDED BY
THE ILLICIT SERVICES OF SMUGGLERS**

Based on the presence and increased arrival of irregular migrants from sub-Saharan Africa, including from the Central African region, in Europe, the Middle East and North America, it is highly probable that people smuggling represents a prevalent crime and a threat to those who seek

to emigrate with the services of smugglers.

There may be important crime networks smuggling migrants from Central Africa to Western Europe, according to research. Global migration data collected by the Pew Research Center suggests this trend is indeed plausible. According to the Pew Center, Western Europe appears, by far, to be one of the most important destinations for migrants from the Central African region.⁶⁴

Although the Pew statistics do not specifically indicate what percentage of the migration is “illegal” or has been facilitated by a so-called migrant smuggler, it is a well-documented fact that many migrants from sub-Saharan African countries have paid smugglers to facilitate travel to North Africa to reach one of the several departure points from which to attempt the perilous journey across the Mediterranean Sea in order to enter Europe.

The notable case of African migrants, including from the countries of Central Africa, seeking the services of migrant smugglers to travel to Europe and being held captive in “detention centers” and sold in clandestine slave markets in North Africa recently caught international attention in 2017 and 2018. According to Frontex, the emergence of North Africa as a collecting point for African migrants has a long history. Until 2010, North Africa’s relative prosperity offered job opportunities for migrant workers from sub-Saharan African countries who either viewed it as a final destination or as a transit region where they could earn money to pay smugglers for the last leg of their journey to the European Union.⁶⁵

Although the record numbers of migrants attempting to enter Europe through the Eastern Mediterranean (most often via Turkey into Europe) and the Central Mediterranean routes (departing from North Africa to cross the sea towards Europe) have mostly tapered since 2016, the number of migrants traveling along the Western Mediterranean route has increased significantly.

Of the illegal border crossings detected and recorded by Frontex along the Western Mediterranean route between January 2017 and March 2018, 1,713 (approximately 6 per cent) of the 27,943 irregular migrants were nationals from the countries of the Central African region.

However, when compared with the number of illegal entries recorded by Frontex along both the Central and Eastern Mediterranean routes, it becomes apparent that the route of choice for migrants from the Central African region seeking to enter Europe is the former.

Between January 2017 and March 2018, 3,696 (approximately 3 per cent) of the 128,237 migrants who took the Central Mediterranean route were from countries in the Central African region.

Along the Eastern Mediterranean route, during this same time period, 2,201 (approximately 4 per cent) of the 57,773 irregular migrants detected by Frontex were from the Central African region.

Most persons departing from countries in the Central African region, regardless of which route is taken, will almost surely require the services of one or multiple smugglers to facilitate travel across the rugged terrain and to handle negotiations with the militant or Islamist groups whose control it may be under. Research and interviews conducted by the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) in 2016, specifically focusing on the migration corridor between West Africa and North Africa, indicated that migrant smugglers operated both in highly organized networks as well as loosely formed alliances. Most of the smugglers they encountered had previously been involved in the movement of contraband and illicit goods, including cigarettes, narcotics, and small arms through the Sahara and the Sahel and only turned toward the movement of migrants when the demand for such services shot up around 2012.⁶⁶

With the passing of years and migrant flows remaining, for the most part, constant, the smuggling system has apparently grown and

formalized – with many livelihoods along these routes now dependent on the profits it generates.

Financial crimes

Financial crimes are complex, multinational, frequently undetectable and, subsequently, difficult to measure. Although often underreported, the significance of the threat posed by financial crimes cannot be underestimated as the consequences are not only suffered by companies but also governments, national institutions, and ultimately the citizens that rely on them.

In order to conduct an analysis of global and regional trends in financial crimes, extracting relevant data from studies and surveys carried out by multinational institutes, banks and firms with a vested interest in understanding, detecting, and mitigating the many risks facing businesses and investors is often indispensable.

According to the survey of one such international firm⁶⁷ conducted in 2016, while some regions reported lower rates of economic crime, global crime trend rates appeared to remain stable (at 36 per cent in 2016 compared to 37 per cent in 2014). Despite this, however, the opposite occurred in Africa. Reported economic crimes had increased by 7 per cent among African companies compared with the results from 2014 (see Figure 2).

Economic crime: a global problem, but not the same everywhere

Region	Reported economic crime in 2016	Reported economic crime in 2014
Africa	57%	50%
Western Europe	40%	35%
North America	37%	41%
Eastern Europe	33%	39%
Asia Pacific	30%	32%
Latin America	28%	35%
Middle East	25%	21%
Global	36%	37%

Figure 2
Source: Pricewaterhouse Coopers

The overall key findings of the PwC report, although not specific to Central Africa or even the African Continent, are nonetheless worth mentioning given the apparent higher percentage of companies affected by financial crimes in Africa compared to the global average. According to the survey, while more traditional, easily-detectable, financial crimes, including asset misappropriation, bribery and corruption, procurement fraud and accounting fraud, continued to lead globally, it was the reports of cybercrimes against companies that increased most significantly.⁶⁸

Another global survey focusing on the cost of financial crimes⁶⁹ published in 2018 by Thomson Reuters surveyed 2,373 senior business leaders in international companies and organizations across the world. This survey also concluded that African companies suffer from fraud, theft, money laundering and other financial crimes at a rate greater than the global average. According to the Thomson Reuters's study, 53 per cent of those business leaders questioned in Africa compared to 47 per cent of respondents globally, affirmed that their company or organization had suffered at least one incident of financial crime over the past 12 months, with fraud cited as the most common financial crime⁷⁰. In terms of impact, the companies surveyed estimated a total loss of USD 1.45 trillion, or around 3.5 per cent of their global turnover.⁷¹

Information relating to the frequency and/or gravity of financial crimes specifically in the countries of the Central African region is scarce. However, given the information found in these broader studies, it is certainly plausible that the Central African region is as affected by financial crimes, including fraud, money laundering and a range of cyber-facilitated financial crimes, as other regions in Africa.

According to analysis, within the Central African region, Cameroon, by far, appears to be most affected by financial crimes, notably embezzlement and fraud. Gabon and the Democratic Republic of Congo also appeared among the top countries to be affected by

financial crimes in the Central African region. The Democratic Republic of Congo, Cameroon, and Gabon (in descending order) have the highest gross domestic products⁷² in the region which may contribute to making them susceptible to being targeted for financial crimes.

Organized Theft and Robbery

Theft of a wide variety of property is an ongoing crime phenomenon in the region. Syndicates are routinely involved in cross-border theft rings that target select items for smuggling, trafficking, and resale. Syndicates are engaged in robberies, hijackings, home invasions, and break-and-enters to obtain cash as well as other material items.

Organized theft and robbery, including theft, aggravated theft or armed robbery, are prevalent crimes in the region.

The following section will examine three specific transnational crime phenomena involving organized theft and/or robbery which represent a significant threat to security in the Central African region. These include stolen motor vehicles, maritime piracy, and cattle rustling.

Stolen Motor Vehicles

Organized vehicle crime impacts safety and security on a global scale. Organized crime syndicates rely on stolen vehicles to support the logistics of their criminal operations or conduct other criminal activities, such as trafficking in illicit goods, drugs and arms smuggling. It is also known to be a major currency in drug deals, a system which bypasses more easily traced money transactions. Stolen motor vehicles have truly become an integral part of organized crime.

Countries in the Central African region are vulnerable to this crime type as conflicts and political instability often render rural territories difficult to govern. Furthermore, in more remote

locations, vehicles may have no license plates at all. These conditions make it very complex for stolen motor vehicles to be traced by law enforcement in the region, and creates an opportunity for organized crime syndicates to get involved in this criminal activity with potentially high profits and low risks.

Regarding modus operandi for vehicle theft, criminal groups have to keep their tactics up-to-date to avoid detection from law enforcement and due to technological advancement in motor vehicle security, such as automated security devices that are installed in vehicles to geolocate them. In response to the use of this technology, criminals have been using tow-away vehicles to steal cars, bringing them to garages where they are dismantled and sold as spare parts. This method of dismantling a vehicle makes it nearly impossible to trace.⁷³ Other tactics used by criminal syndicates to make stolen vehicles difficult to trace include the changing of license plates numbers, the repainting of the vehicles, the alteration of the engine and chassis numbers, and the production of false vehicle documents in hidden garages before the vehicles are resold.⁷⁴

Hijacked luxury or off-road vehicles and taxis form the bulk of this trade. Toyota-type cars are at the top of the list since they are in large demand in Africa.⁷⁵ Commuter taxis are also popular for theft among organized crime groups. In a police operation carried out in the Central African region, 32 stolen commuter taxis were discovered with altered chassis and engine numbers. In general, cars that are between 10 and 15 years old and still in good condition are prone to being stolen as they are likely to be common on the local market and their spare parts are high in demand.⁷⁶

Due to poor infrastructure in many parts of Central Africa, stolen vehicles frequently end up in the local market. However, a significant number are also resold in neighboring countries. Open sources corroborate this trend indicating that annually, at least 600 cars are stolen in East Africa, most of which end up in the Central African region.⁷⁷ In 2016 alone, more than 500 cars and

400 motorcycles were stolen from the East African region and sold in Central Africa by cross-border criminals. The majority of the vehicles are stolen from car parks and car washes in busy towns throughout the country, notably with the complicity of security guards and car park employees. In other instances, vehicles are stolen in front of supermarkets, bars and nightclubs. In all cases, vehicles are stolen either at gun point or by surprise such as threatening drivers with weapons or breaking into vehicles.⁷⁸

It has furthermore been reported that stolen motor vehicles found in the Central African region also originate from outside Africa. In October 2015, a heavy duty equipment transport drop deck trailer with a plate number from an East African country was intercepted as it was crossing from Central Africa into East Africa. This vehicle was stolen in Asia.⁷⁹

Maritime Piracy

Since 2011, the Gulf of Guinea has been the main maritime piracy hotbed in Africa.⁸⁰

Acts of piracy and theft in the Gulf of Guinea count for more than a quarter of reported attacks globally.⁸¹

In 2016, more than half of the kidnappings for ransom happened there, with 34 kidnapped seafarers compared to 62 globally.⁸² Pirates are attracted to the Gulf of Guinea since it is home to some of the biggest offshore oilfields in the world.

Increasingly, acts of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea are carried out by professional well-coordinated organized criminal groups who are driven by the low-risk, high-profit nature of maritime piracy.⁸³ They hijack or attack vessels or maritime structures such as petrochemical tankers, oil and petroleum storage and transportation platforms. According to the International Maritime Bureau, in 2017 there were 16 incidents involving a vessel coming under fire, 7 of which happened in the Gulf of Guinea.⁸⁴

**MARITIME PIRACY IN THE GULF OF GUINEA
AFFECTS THE TRADE OF AROUND 455
MILLION PEOPLE AND IMPACTS THE
SHIPMENT OF 5 MILLION BARRELS OF OIL
EVERY DAY**

Maritime piracy can also involve human trafficking and the transportation of illegal substances by criminal syndicates.⁸⁵ Pirates generally employ the kidnap-for-ransom tactic and use firearms and violence to take crew members hostage. The attacks often happen at night at anchorages and off the coast. Another practice is to hijack ships for numerous days to steal oil cargo and other assets.⁸⁶

Acts of piracy have occurred along Central African countries' shores. On 9 February 2018, thieves armed with AK-47 assault rifles hijacked a fishing vessel and kidnapped three crew members.⁸⁷ In 2013, between 12 and 15 pirates with AK-47 assault rifles hijacked a European oil products tanker with 24 crew members onboard.⁸⁸ For the period between 2013 and 2017, a total of 35 attempted and actual acts of piracy were reported for the Central African region. It should be noted that 54 per cent of the attacks recorded for the region took place between January 2015 and December 2017, and only 2 attacks (10 per cent of the attacks and attempts which occurred between 2015 and 2017) were reported for the year 2017. This appears to indicate a considerable decrease in the number of piracy attacks and attempted attacks in the region.⁸⁹

Acts of maritime piracy have a significant impact on Central Africa. They pose an obvious threat to the security of navigation, the physical safety of people working at sea, sea vegetation and animals, the regional economy and the international oil and natural resource business. Maritime piracy in the Gulf of Guinea affects the trade of around 455 million people and impacts the shipment of 5 million barrels of oil every day,

accounting for 40 per cent of European and 29 per cent of American imports.⁹⁰

Despite maritime piracy being a prominent crime in the region, many of the Central African countries bordering the Gulf of Guinea lack the judicial provisions, capacity and legislation to effectively carry out prosecutions against these criminal acts.⁹¹

Cattle Rustling

Cattle rustling is a growing criminal threat for countries in the Central Africa region with potential links to organized crime and terrorism financing. Cattle rustling involves the direction, organization and theft of livestock by a group of individuals for commercial gain. This criminal activity is increasingly transnational since most cases involve moving cattle across borders.⁹²

Cattle rustling is used in initiation practices, payment of dowries and as a revenge tactic between tribal groups.⁹³ For example, "cattle wars" occurred regularly during the sectarian violence that gripped the region in 2015 harming the region's economy where cattle represent a prominent revenue for people.⁹⁴

Open sources have highlighted Boko Haram's involvement in cattle rustling in the region. The terrorist group is believed to have exported thousands of cattle from Central Africa to West Africa where they are reintroduced on the market. Boko Haram fighters use different methods to profit from this criminal activity, including, establishing their own markets, scattering and selling the cattle in small numbers at distant markets to evade detection by law enforcement, selling the cattle in small local markets below market prices and hiding cattle in West Africa to be sold later on.⁹⁵

In August 2016, one of the main cattle markets in the region was closed down by local authorities after Boko Haram was suspected of using it to sell stolen cattle.⁹⁶ Some estimates allege that Boko Haram has stolen in the tens of thousands of livestock in West and Central Africa.⁹⁷

Case Studies

In September 2014, Boko Haram appropriated 7 000 cows from Chad to Nigeria.

In January 2016, 4 244 cows from Choa Arab owners in Hilé Alifa, Fotokol and Makary, in Northern Cameroon were stolen by Boko Haram.

In April 2016, 13 511 cows were taken by Boko Haram in Kolofota subdivision in Cameroon.

According to the Financial Action Task Force, the minimum value of the 24 755 cattle stolen by Boko Haram in these 3 cases was around EUR 12 377 500⁴.

Source: The Financial Action Task Force. Terrorist Financing in West and Central Africa. October 2016.

Cattle rustling is a complex crime to combat. Cattle are sold and processed rapidly and brand markings are easily altered making it difficult for law enforcement to detect their origins and ownership.

Enabling Crimes and Criminal Convergences

Beyond an assessment of each distinct criminal market detected in the Central African region, this section assesses the links between different organized criminal activities, and identifies several “crime enablers” such as the use of cyber-tools and firearms in the commission of various offences. Cybercrime easily enhances the scope of the operations of any group, as well as their ability to go undetected, and firearms increase the level of violence used by groups to further their criminal objectives across all criminal markets. These types of enabling crimes may vary from country to country, but are critical to assess because they may be important areas for law enforcement to focus on in order to prevent criminal elements from growing or from becoming more entrenched. The following enabling crimes are outlined in this section: cybercrime and illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons (i.e. illicit firearms).

Cybercrime

The Central African region is, as is the African Continent as a whole, particularly vulnerable to cybercrime. The population is young, rapidly growing, increasingly equipped with smart devices, and eager to connect globally. Although economies around the world and in the Central African countries specifically have moved and continue to move online, governments have yet to devise and implement effective cybersecurity strategies including cooperating with the private sector and building-up the capabilities of law enforcement.⁹⁸

THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REGION IS PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE TO CYBERCRIME. THE POPULATION IS YOUNG, RAPIDLY GROWING, INCREASINGLY EQUIPPED WITH SMART DEVICES, AND EAGER TO CONNECT GLOBALLY.

The region appears to be a prominent source for malware, spam and phishing hosts. There has also been credit card frauds, with cyber-criminals operating within and outside of the region.⁹⁹

Personal and corporate bank accounts are also increasingly being hacked by cyber-criminal networks in Central Africa, which has resulted in millions of dollars being diverted. In 2015, for example, authorities from Central Africa investigated four West African nationals for stealing information from ATM machines in order to access their victim’s passwords.¹⁰⁰

SIM box fraud is another significant crime in the region, allowing people abroad to place calls at local tariffs via a SIM box, and leading to big financial losses to businesses as well as the national treasury. In October 2015, 4 telephone operators in Central Africa, MTN, Orange, Camtel and Nextel, lost large amounts of money to this type of fraud. The companies did not disclose the

exact amount, but it was reported that in 2015 this illegal activity cost telephone companies around CFA 18 billion (approximately USD 31 million).

The region has also fallen victim to website interface modification, email hacking to dupe citizens, fake social network profiles and web defacement. Government departments have also fallen victim to these crimes.¹⁰¹

The Central African region has also experienced the dissemination of false information on social networks and the broadcasting of personal photographs.¹⁰²

Identifying cyber-criminal networks is complex in general and even more so in Central Africa where the required technology and know-how are lacking. In addition, it is likely that cybercrime incidents in the region often go undetected and unreported making it difficult to accurately quantify the phenomenon.¹⁰³

Small Arms and Light Weapons

Firearms are not an illicit commodity on their own, rather, they become illicit when traded and trafficked to criminal elements.

The trafficking of weapons and small arms around the region is a significant criminal issue, and is a driver of organized crime everywhere. With a ready supply of weapons, gangs, criminal organizations and terrorist groups are equipped to carry out campaigns of violence against local populations empowering them to exert control over a given jurisdiction.

In general, firearms enable a range of violent criminal behavior from armed robbery, kidnapping, hijacking, to criminality tied to terrorism, piracy, genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.

Central Africa is a source, transit and destination region for illicit arms trafficking. In the region, the trafficking of firearms can be linked to countries with internal armed conflicts or post-conflict environments, where weapon imports were extreme and often unregulated.

WEAPONS, FROM ARMED CONFLICTS, HAVE FOUND THEIR WAY INTO THE HANDS OF CRIMINALS AS WELL AS TERRORIST GROUPS RESULTING IN PROTRACTED INSTABILITY IN THE REGION

Information suggests that many of the illicit firearms in the region are linked to the various armed conflicts that have occurred there over time. As these conflicts evolve and those involved have migrated, weapons have found their way into the hands of criminals as well as armed and terrorist groups resulting in protracted instability in the region.¹⁰⁴ For example, the violence inflicted by Boko Haram in West Africa has caused unrest in neighboring Central African countries. Firearms fueling conflict in the Central Africa have been smuggled to West Africa. In January 2014, law enforcement authorities from the region arrested an individual who tried to smuggle 655 weapons into West Africa.¹⁰⁵

Illicit flows of money and assets

The laundering of illicit proceeds is a fundamental aspect of organized criminality. Several notable methods of money laundering have been detected in the Central African region. These include the creation of front or “shell” companies, the use of legitimate businesses, illicit dealings in the gold and/or diamond industry, and the importation and trade of used and/or stolen motor vehicles. It is difficult to quantify the amount of money laundered in the region, however, there is some evidence that a significant proportion of the money laundered ends in Europe or Southern Africa.¹⁰⁶

According to open sources, there have been money laundering links between Central African countries and European countries, and the offences most commonly linked to money laundering schemes between European and Central African countries are cocaine trafficking and fraud.

Terrorism appears to have links to money laundering in Central Africa. According to open source information, Hezbollah allegedly ran an international money laundering scheme selling used cars in the region. Cars were bought in North America and then shipped and sold in West and Central Africa. The money from these sales was then reportedly transferred to the Middle East. The criminal network reportedly used the Lebanese Canadian Bank and exchange houses to launder around USD 446 million.¹⁰⁷

crime has the potential to erode the rule of law by undermining the efficacy and even the legitimacy of state institutions in the region. The potential impacts this would have on the development and economic progress of Central African countries would be devastating.

Conclusion

This assessment sought to identify and examine the various illicit markets and organized crime networks that operate in the Central African region and beyond. It also took a closer look at several enabling crimes and criminal convergences affecting the region, notably cyber-capabilities and illicitly trafficked arms. Finally, this assessment considered the illicit flow of money and assets, looking at core money laundering activities taking place throughout the region.

Whether trafficking in narcotics, wildlife, natural resources, stolen property, or targeting vulnerable populations for subsequent exploitation, criminal networks operating in the Central African region will continue to grow and evolve in response to the unique political, socio-economic, and security landscape in which they operate. They will constantly seek to adapt and expand their illicit activities in an opportunistic manner and in order to gain greater profits. In this regard, the powerful nexus between organized crime, terrorism, and armed conflict is critical and is likely to continue to destabilize the Central African region in the near future.

In summary, this assessment suggests that most organized crime groups and networks operating in Central Africa have the intent and capabilities to continue exploiting the region for criminal gain and, to varying degrees, to build their illicit enterprises in nearly every country in the region. Left unchecked by law enforcement, organized

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► **ABOUT INTERPOL**

INTERPOL is the world's largest international police organization. Our role is to assist law enforcement agencies in our 194 member countries to combat all forms of transnational crime. We work to help police across the world meet the growing challenges of crime in the 21st century by providing a high-tech infrastructure of technical and operational support. Our services include targeted training, expert investigative support, and specialized databases and secure police communications channels.

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