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1.5. Criminality

As mentioned in the section 1.3 Conflict layers and main developments, criminality in Somalia represents another source of insecurity in the country. Based on INSO CHDC data, in the period 2023 – March 2025, crime as 'initiating actor' accounted for 26 % of all security incidents registered in the country.345 Based on the Africa Organized Crime Index, the following main areas of criminality were identified in Somalia as of the end of 2023:

- **Smuggling and trafficking in human beings**. Somalia is a primary source country for smuggling across East Africa. Trafficking in human beings, including forced labour and sex trafficking, usually starts as smuggling, possibly with vulnerabilities, and then becomes trafficking later along migratory routes, in countries such as Sudan, Libya, or Yemen. Most victims come from south-central Somalia on their way to destinations such as Europe, the Gulf states, and Southern Africa. Smuggling is an ingrained feature in the country, with large segments of society not perceiving migration facilitation as a crime. Smuggling networks are typically run by Somalis and are considered a 'viable source of income'.346

- **Child labour**. Children are 'forced into labour in agriculture, domestic work, livestock herding, and selling khat internally and abroad'. Particularly vulnerable are IDPs children, children belonging to marginalised ethnic minorities, or those living in Al-Shabaab's territory.347

- **Extortion and protection racketeering**. Extortion and protection money are a major source of income for terrorist groups such as Al-Shabaab and ISIS-Somalia. Citizens, companies, NGOs, and humanitarian organisations regularly pay 'extortion' fees to these groups to protect their personnel and physical assets.348 For further information see section 1.10 Individuals who have to pay 'taxes' to Al-Shabaab or other groups and militias in the EUAA COI Report Somalia: Country Focus (May 2025).

- **Arms trafficking**. Somalia hosts one of the most pervasive arms trafficking markets in the whole Africa.349 Clan militias, transnational criminal networks based in the north, particularly Puntland and eastern Somaliland, and militant groups linked to Al-Shabaab and ISIS substantially engage with arms trafficking in Somalia.350 The trade, eased by sophisticated transnational maritime trafficking networks, operate to smuggle small arms and light weapons from Iran, Yemen, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman.351 After more than 30 years the arms embargo on the Somali government was lifted by the UNSC in December 2023.352

- **Counterfeit pharmaceutical products**. Pharmaceutical products are the most commonly circulated counterfeit items in Somalia, but no violence is associated with this trade.353 Among other measures, the Medicine Regulation Bill, proposed at the beginning of March 2025, seeks to address the widespread circulation of counterfeit, expired, or substandard medicines in the country.354

- **Charcoal, frankincense, and gold trade**. With 98 % of households in Somalia's towns and cities relying on charcoal for cooking and heating, charcoal trade remains prevalent in the country.355 The ban on charcoal exports, in place since 2012,356 has substantially prevented external trade,357 as also reported by the UN at the end of 2024.358 However, the domestic market is expanding due to rising gas prices,359 while Al-Shabaab enforces crackdowns on the cutting and transporting of wood from leafy trees.360 Both Al-Shabaab and state representatives profit from the internal trade.361 Clan militias are also involved in the exploitation and 'overharvesting' of the Boswellia trees, which is used to produce frankincense,362 with most of world's production coming from the Horn of Africa.363 Disputes over the trafficking of frankincense often become violent.364 The artisanal and informal gold mining sector centred around Milxo, in the Golis mountains (Sanaag), is subject to Al-Shabaab and ISIS revenue collection.365

- **Criminal networks**. Entrepreneurs, who often control ethnic and clan-based groups, lead criminal networks, many of which operate in conjunction with Al-Shabaab, and engage with smuggling commodities out of the country. State officials are also involved in organised criminal activities, including the misappropriation of international aid and tax flows, as well as the gatekeeping of 'illegal activities for bribes'.366

- 345

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- 347

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- 366

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