



World Customs
Organization

ENFORCEMENT
AND COMPLIANCE

Illicit Trade Report 2024





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AND COMPLIANCE

Illicit Trade Report 2024

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This Report will serve as a reference to policy makers, academia and all those who are interested in understanding trends and patterns with regard to the safety and security of cross-border trade.

FOREWORD

Dear Reader,

It is my honour to present the 2024 edition of the World Customs Organization (WCO) Illicit Trade Report (ITR), offering a comprehensive analysis of the current dynamics, evolving trends, and far-reaching impacts of illicit trade.

This report reflects our collective commitment to advancing the World Customs Organization's (WCO) mission, underscoring our shared responsibility to drive meaningful change and deliver tangible results, balancing robust enforcement with the facilitation of legitimate trade. In an era of global security threats that no single entity can face alone, strategic partnerships and shared intelligence are of paramount importance. We must look beyond our respective borders to collaborate with one another and together with other key motivated stakeholders.

Illicit trade remains one of the most significant threats to the global economy, public safety, and environmental sustainability. In response, this year's report highlights our multifaceted enforcement efforts across critical domains including cultural heritage protection, drug interdiction, anti-money laundering, combatting environmental crime and the protection of intellectual property rights, health and safety, revenue and global security. The findings of the ITR are drawn from case studies, operational intelligence, open-source data, and statistical analysis of data submitted to the WCO's Customs Enforcement Network (CEN).

Our progress is rooted in experience and learning. By turning the insights found in this report into actionable strategies, we can establish a solid foundation to strengthen our enforcement capacity and provide a clear framework for our partners to follow. As you read this report, I encourage you to reflect on the critical relationship between operational enforcement and the policies, standards, and frameworks that guide it. The ITR not only informs but seeks to inspire further innovation, collaboration, and action. Together, by leveraging data, building partnerships, and investing in technology, we can advance our shared goal of a safer, more secure, and more prosperous global trading environment.

I extend my sincere thanks to the WCO Secretariat, Regional Intelligence Liaison Offices, and WCO Members for their invaluable contributions to this report. Your continued dedication to confronting illicit trade is vital to shaping a more transparent and resilient future.



Ian SAUNDERS
Secretary General, World Customs Organization



INTRODUCTION

1. WELCOME TO THE ILLICIT TRADE REPORT 2024

Since its inception in 2012, the Illicit Trade Report (ITR) has served as an important resource in the global response to transnational crime. The Report, published annually by the WCO, delivers a comprehensive, data-driven overview of illicit trade and related enforcement activities by Customs administrations around the world.

Drawing on seizure data voluntarily submitted by WCO Members and enriched by multiple sources, the Report offers a unique insight into the scope, evolution and complexity of cross-border criminal activity. It remains a cornerstone of the mutual effort to safeguard international trade and enhance collective and national security.

2. OBJECTIVES

The ITR fulfils two core objectives:

1. Raising awareness of critical risk areas and enforcement challenges faced by Customs administrations globally; and
2. Contributing to knowledge through data analysis combined with intelligence to inform strategy, policy and capacity-building initiatives.

Together, these objectives support the WCO's broader mission, namely strengthening the global Customs community through enhanced cooperation, innovation and shared intelligence in the fight against illicit trade.

3. KEY ENFORCEMENT PRIORITIES

The 2024 edition of the ITR centres on six strategic enforcement areas in which Customs plays a pivotal role in combating illicit activity:



1. ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING AND COUNTER-TERRORISM FINANCING



2. DRUG TRAFFICKING



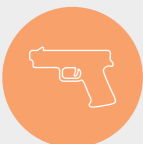
3. ENVIRONMENTAL CRIME



4. INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS, HEALTH AND SAFETY



5. REVENUE FRAUD AND SMUGGLING



6. SECURITY

Each section examines trends, operational challenges and enforcement achievements in these domains, highlighting the essential contribution of Customs to international peace, security and sustainable development.

4. DATA SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

The ITR relies primarily on data drawn from the WCO Customs Enforcement Network (CEN) - the Organization’s central, Customs-led enforcement database. This edition of the ITR is based on data covering the 2024 calendar year.

At the core of the CEN lies a global repository of seizure and offence records submitted by Customs administrations, joint task forces and other law enforcement agencies. Currently, the system hosts over one million records, with more than 3,500 users from over 185 Customs administrations actively contributing to this dynamic platform.

The CEN plays a critical role in enabling data-driven analysis of global illicit trade trends. Its strength lies not only in its extensive scale, but also in its adaptability and continuous development. Data can be entered manually or transferred automatically through system-to-system integration, enabling efficient, secure and high-volume exchanges. This flexibility ensures that WCO Members, regardless of their technological capabilities, can both contribute to and benefit from the platform.

Each chapter of this Report is based on data voluntarily submitted by WCO Members via the CEN. As data submission is not mandatory, the dataset may contain gaps or inconsistencies, which can affect year-to-year comparability. Additionally, because the CEN is Customs-focused, it does not capture the full range of illicit trade activity or enforcement efforts across all sectors. The scope and content of reported data may also vary depending on each administration’s enforcement priorities, operational capacity and discretion in reporting.

To support clear interpretation, the ITR follows specific terminology conventions:

- The term “country” is used when referring to CEN data fields - such as in graph titles or when indicating the country of seizure, departure or destination.
- The term “Member” is used in the narrative when referring to WCO Members, especially in relation to case studies or survey responses.

This distinction ensures consistency with the CEN structure, while accurately reflecting the institutional identity of reporting entities.

Readers may find that their country appears as a departure, transit or destination location for seizures they did not report themselves. This occurs when another Member reported the seizure and identified them in one of those roles.

The analysis includes both the frequency and volume of illicit trade by presenting the number of seizures alongside the quantities involved. In some cases, due to space limitations, the analysis may focus on a selection of Members or commodities that represent the majority of reported activities.

To visualize the geographical scope of illicit trade in 2024, heat maps are used. These maps highlight countries that were identified as an origin, destination or transit point for at least one seizure, regardless of which country reported it or where the seizure took place. By disaggregating individual seizure records, the maps reflect all countries known as being involved or meant to be involved in the movement of illicit goods.

Maps included in this Report are for illustrative purposes only. The boundaries, names and designations do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the WCO.

5. THE ROLE OF RILOS IN SUPPORTING ENFORCEMENT

A cornerstone of the CEN's reliability and strategic impact is the work of the **Regional Intelligence Liaison Offices (RILOs)**. Operating across the six WCO regions, the twelve RILOs act as intelligence and coordination hubs, supporting enforcement efforts through a range of critical functions. These include:

- **Data validation and quality control:** ensuring the accuracy, consistency and integrity of the data entered into the CEN.
- **Information exchange:** facilitating the timely sharing of intelligence between Customs administrations and enforcement partners.
- **Regional analysis:** developing intelligence products that provide insights into region-specific threats, trends and smuggling patterns.
- **Operational support:** coordinating and participating in regional and global enforcement operations and promoting cross-border cooperation.

The RILOs are instrumental in transforming raw data into actionable intelligence. Their contributions not only enhance the quality of the Report but also strengthen the collective ability of WCO Members to detect, analyse and respond to illicit trade across different regions and domains.



6. UNLOCKING INSIGHT THROUGH DATA VISUALIZATION

One of the most transformative developments in recent years has been the integration of advanced data visualization tools within the CEN - a project funded by Indian Customs. These interactive dashboards enable users to view and interpret complex data intuitively, without the need for technical expertise.

This innovation democratizes access to actionable intelligence, allowing all Member administrations to analyse trafficking patterns, uncover concealment methods and adjust their enforcement strategies in real time. The visualization platform also enhances collaboration by providing a shared analytical interface, making it easier to exchange insights and best practices across borders. In this way, it serves as a companion to the ITR, offering a bespoke dashboard tailored to the requirements of each Member administration.



Courtesy of Federal Revenue of Brazil.

7. THE POWER OF CASE STUDIES

To bridge the gap between data and practice, the Report features a selection of compelling case studies drawn from real-world enforcement operations. These narratives bring context to statistics and serve a range of purposes:

- Demonstrating operational impact through tangible enforcement outcomes.
- Revealing criminal methodologies and patterns of concealment or evasion.
- Sharing replicable best practices for interdiction, investigation and prosecution.
- Fostering collaboration, highlighting joint operations and international cooperation.
- Providing training and education, offering practical scenarios for capacity building.
- Supporting policymaking with evidence-based insights into emerging threats.

These case studies not only make the data more relatable; they empower Customs officers, analysts and decision makers through real examples of success, innovation and resilience in enforcement.

8. ADDITIONAL INTELLIGENCE SOURCES

To provide a comprehensive and well-rounded view of illicit trade, the Report also draws upon a variety of supplementary information sources. These include:

- Official publications and media releases from WCO Members.
- Partner international organizations involved in enforcement, regulatory, or policy-related work.
- WCO Member surveys, used to collect operational insights and national perspectives.
- Open-source intelligence (OSINT), particularly showcased in the Customs Enforcement Scan section, which broadens situational awareness by leveraging publicly available data.

This multi-source approach enhances the depth and relevance of the Report, enriching the analysis with diverse inputs and reinforcing its value as a global reference tool for policymakers, enforcement bodies and researchers.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Chapter 1. Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing



The WCO Illicit Trade Report 2024 opens with a comprehensive review of global smuggling dynamics, grounded in seizure data and operational insights submitted by WCO Members. This year's findings reveal shifting trafficking patterns, increasing sophistication in concealment methods, and the persistent adaptability of transnational criminal networks. The Report highlights a surge in the trafficking of cannabis, counterfeit goods and illicit environmental commodities, alongside a rise in seizures of small arms components and ammunition - underscoring the evolving global security landscape.

The **Customs Enforcement Scan** section provides a thorough overview of global illicit trade through seizure statistics from WCO Members. It details year-over-year changes in seizure frequency and volume across various commodities. Furthermore, it outlines Member administrations' enforcement priorities concerning commodities and modes of transport. Recognizing the escalating threat of synthetic opioids, this edition includes inaugural seizure data for fentanyl, highlighting its insidious impact on societal security and public health. Finally, drawing upon the WCO's "Infiltration of Maritime Cargo Supply Chains" report, it elucidates the concealed dangers posed by internal conspirators within the supply chain, and aims to visualize threats that are not readily apparent.

The Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing (AML/CTF) Chapter provides a comprehensive, evidence-based analysis of cross-border smuggling trends involving undeclared currency, gold and other precious commodities, drawing on seizure data submitted by WCO Members through the CENcomm and CEN platforms. Covering over 22,600 cases reported during 2023-2024, the chapter highlights the strategic relevance of Customs administrations in identifying and disrupting financial flows linked to money laundering and terrorism financing.

The analysis is structured around two key typologies - currency smuggling and precious metal trafficking - examining value thresholds, concealment techniques, trafficking routes, modes of transport, and seizure locations. It is divided into "General Observations" (descriptive data trends) and "Enforcement Insights" (practical guidance), offering actionable intelligence on high-risk concealment strategies such as express courier parcels and personal carriers. Regional analysis reveals emerging laundering corridors involving Southeast Asia, West Africa and the Middle East. The chapter also underscores the dual challenge of addressing frequent, low-value smuggling cases while detecting high-impact, low-frequency flows of large sums or precious metals. Findings are reinforced by operational outcomes under Project TENTACLE and the strategic discussions held during the 2024 Hot Zone Prioritization Forums under Project OCTAGON. When interpreted in conjunction with national offence databases, this chapter can serve as a practical guidance

Chapter 2. Drug Trafficking



tool to help Customs administrations enhance their risk management modules, strengthen inter-agency coordination, and proactively address emerging financial crime threats, including trade-based money laundering and value transfers involving gold and gemstones.

The **Drug Trafficking** Chapter analyses the global illicit drug trade, outlining overall trends and providing a detailed examination of each drug category. In 2024, cannabis was the most seized substance, accounting for almost half of all reported seizures, followed by psychotropic substances and cocaine. North America stands out as one of the regions most frequently cited as a source, transit or destination point for narcotics.

The WCO has implemented a number of comprehensive actions aimed at supporting Customs administrations in their efforts to combat drug trafficking. All its initiatives, from the COLIBRI Project to the Passenger and Cargo Control Programme (PCCP), are aimed at increasing knowledge-sharing, promoting international coordination and interagency cooperation, and encouraging the Customs community to adapt to emerging threats.

Chapter 3. Environmental Crime



The **Environmental Crime** Chapter presents a comprehensive analysis of seizures involving environmentally sensitive goods. The analysis was based on seizure data reported by WCO Members through the CEN, including data from enforcement operations such as DEMETER X (focused on waste and substances controlled under the Montreal Protocol), THUNDER 2024 and PRAESIDIO III (both addressing wildlife).

The breadth of the issue, as reported by WCO Members, is captured in the 2024 data: ranging from wildlife and timber to waste, ozone-depleting and global warming substances, and hazardous chemicals. The number of illegal trade cases involving species of fauna increased slightly by 5% in comparison with 2023, yet it was accompanied by a significant increase in the total quantity of fauna specimens intercepted, which surged by 3,049%. Illegal trade cases in flora fell by 14%, while the quantity intercepted rose by 25%. Waste trafficking saw a sharper rise in the number of seizures (23%), while the volume of waste seized (measured in kg) dropped by 38% (although the number of pieces of waste seized increased by over 750%), resulting in an overall net decrease of 43%. The number of ozone-depleting substance (ODS) and hydrofluorocarbon (HFC) seizures also increased by 5%, leading to a noteworthy 96% rise in the volume of such substances. In contrast, while the number of seizures of hazardous materials declined by 19%, the total volume seized surged significantly by 118%, driven by a rise in chemical and pesticide shipments.

Chapter 4. IPR, Health and Safety



These trends reflect a changing enforcement landscape and reinforce the critical role of Customs administrations in addressing the illicit trade in environmentally sensitive goods through sustained vigilance, risk-based interventions and strengthened cooperation. Driven by profit and facilitated by low penalties and limited enforcement capacity in some regions, this illicit trade undermines conservation efforts and contributes to the depletion of natural resources. In many cases, environmental offences are also linked to broader transnational criminal activities, including document fraud, the smuggling of other restricted and prohibited commodities, and illicit financial flows.

The **Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), Health and Safety** Chapter of the ITR 2023 attracted a great deal of interest from a number of stakeholders, particularly in the academic world, who place great value on the WCO's work in this area. In 2024, WCO Members reported 30,842 IPR-related cases and 97,806 seizures, leading to the confiscation of approximately 48,645,797 pieces of counterfeit goods. With respect to medical products, 8,188 cases and 10,312 seizures were reported, totalling 148,567,046 pieces of illicit medicines. A total of 103 WCO Members reported seizures involving IPR and/or medical products in 2024. An analysis of the ITR data from 2019 to the present day reveals an upward trend in counterfeit trade, with a marked exponential increase in offences related to e-commerce, which continues to play a prominent role in the trafficking of illicit goods. In 2024, 72.1% of IPR seizures and 64.7% of medical seizures were linked to e-commerce transactions, highlighting the challenges posed by small parcels and online sales channels. The WCO Secretariat's current priorities include a comprehensive approach to combating counterfeiting through e-commerce. This involves global enforcement operations ([STOP](#) series), capacity-building activities, the [development of tools](#), and awareness-raising through a series of symposiums titled "[Removing counterfeits from e-commerce](#)".

Chapter 5. Revenue Fraud and Smuggling



The **Revenue Fraud and Smuggling** Chapter is focused on risks associated with the smuggling of highly-taxed goods, and various forms of commercial fraud such as undervaluation, misclassification, misuse of origin and preferential duties, and drawback fraud. The primary goods subject to these taxes include alcohol and tobacco products. The illicit trade in excise goods poses significant challenges to governments' efforts to secure global supply chains and deprives them of essential revenue required for public services. Increasingly sophisticated smuggling techniques and well-networked traffickers' complicate enforcement efforts.

In 2024, a total of 109 WCO Members reported approximately 85,000 cases involving the illicit trade in alcohol and tobacco products

Chapter 6. Security



to the CEN database - an increase from over 38,000 to more than 46,000 tobacco-related cases and from 2,000 to nearly 2,900 alcohol-related cases reported by 90 Members in 2023. This reflects a 21% rise in tobacco cases, a 28% increase in alcohol cases, and an overall year-on-year increase of 21% in total reported cases. Additionally, more than 55,000 individual seizure records were entered into the system in 2024, up from 48,000 in 2023.

The **Security** Chapter underscores the central role of Customs administrations in countering the illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons (SALW), ammunition, explosive precursors and related components. Drawing from Customs seizure data submitted by 90 WCO Members through the CEN, the chapter highlights both persistent and emerging security threats faced at borders. While data collection remains uneven with a limited number of Members accounting for the majority of cases, the findings point to evolving trafficking patterns and shifting concealment strategies, particularly involving firearms parts and ammunition.

In 2023 and 2024, there was a marked increase in the trafficking of critical firearm components, most notably auto-sears, auto-switches, magazines and frames. These parts, which enable the illicit assembly or modification of firearms, were frequently trafficked separately via courier and postal services, thus complicating detection. These devices are often small, concealable and increasingly produced using 3D-printing technologies, posing significant detection and seizure challenges.

Ammunition seizures also rose sharply, particularly in terms of volume, suggesting both increased trafficking activity and enhanced operational focus. This trend indicates the need for greater oversight and cross-border intelligence-sharing. Seizures of ammunition components, such as primers, casings and projectiles, reinforce the trend toward illicit manufacture, where individual parts are moved discreetly and reassembled elsewhere.

Conveyance analysis reveals the continued dominance of land transport, especially private vehicles, for trafficking complete firearms and bulk ammunition. However, air, courier and mail channels were increasingly used to move smaller, high-risk components, highlighting traffickers' adaptation to detection vulnerabilities in global logistics networks. While maritime trafficking accounted for a smaller share of total seizures, vessels were linked to significant movements of ammunition, firearms and parts.



The WCO also maintained its focus on the strategic role of Customs in fragile and conflict-affected contexts by conducting two major operations in 2024:

- **Operation Calypso**, carried out under Project BOLT, focused on SALW trafficking and poly-criminal smuggling in the Caribbean, resulting in over 234 cases including firearms, ammunition, narcotics, bulk cash, and gold.
- **Operation Secure Horizon**, carried out under Programme Global Shield, targeted the movement of explosive precursors and components in Southeast Europe and the Baltic region, resulting in over 153 cases including explosive precursors, bulk cash, tobacco, IPR goods, and weapons and ammunition.

The Security Chapter concludes that as trafficking methods become more diverse and technology-enabled, Customs must adapt enforcement strategies accordingly. Continued investment in detection technologies, risk profiling, inter-agency collaboration, and data-sharing remain essential to strengthening global supply chain security and combating transnational threats.



CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT SCAN

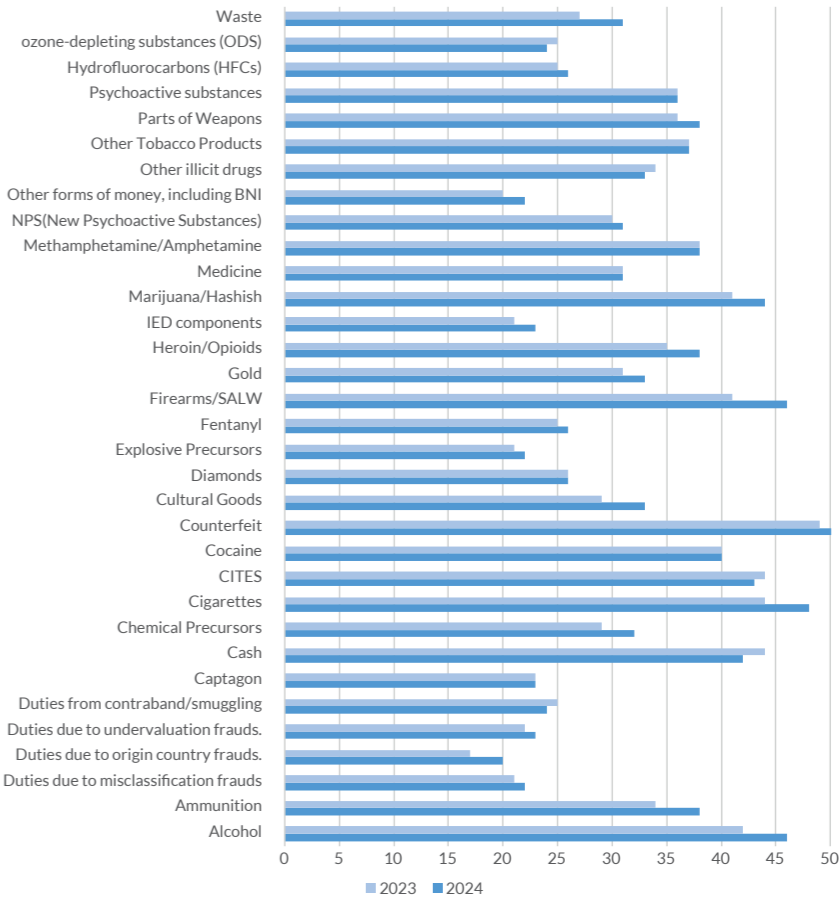
1. WCO seizure statistics

This section presents an analysis of the seizure statistics compiled by the World Customs Organization (WCO) since the Illicit Trade Report (ITR) 2022, aiming to provide an overview of the illicit trade landscape. The WCO Secretariat annually conducts a survey to gather data from Members on the number of seizure cases and the quantities of major commodities involved in illicit trade. The outcomes of this survey and subsequent analysis are published in the ITR each year.

This year witnessed an encouraging increase in the overall response rate to the survey, with an average of 33 data submissions per commodity, up from 29 in the previous year (Chart 1). Furthermore, the variation in the number of responses across different commodities showed a reduction compared to the last reporting period, indicating a more consistent process of data collection.

1.1. The Number of Responses to the WCO Seizure Statistics

Chart 1: The Number of Responses to the WCO Seizure Statistics



1.2. Trends in seizure cases and quantities

Chart 2: Change in the Number of Cases and in Quantity from 2023 to 2024

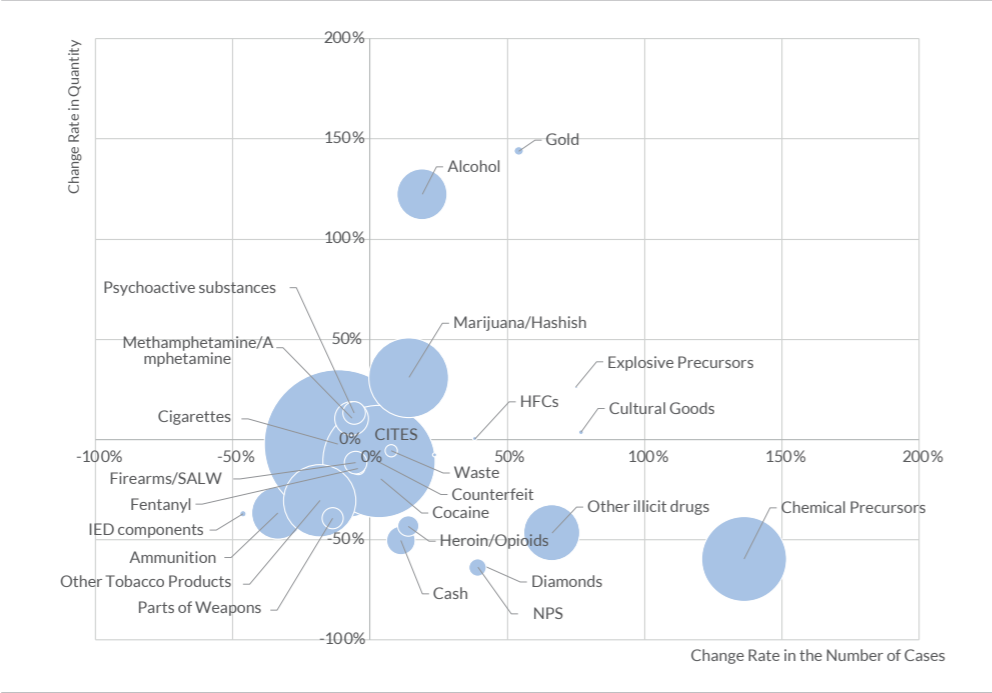
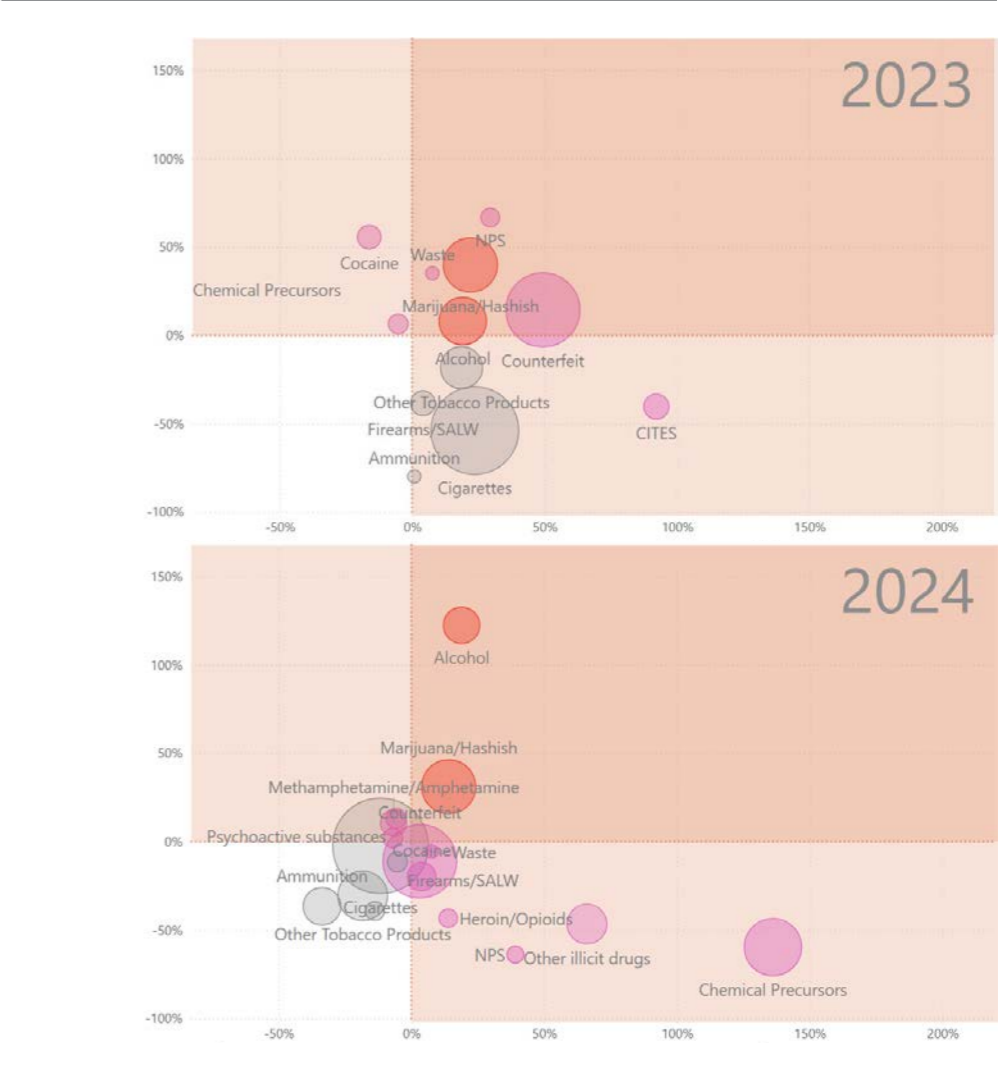


Chart 3: Year on Year Comparison

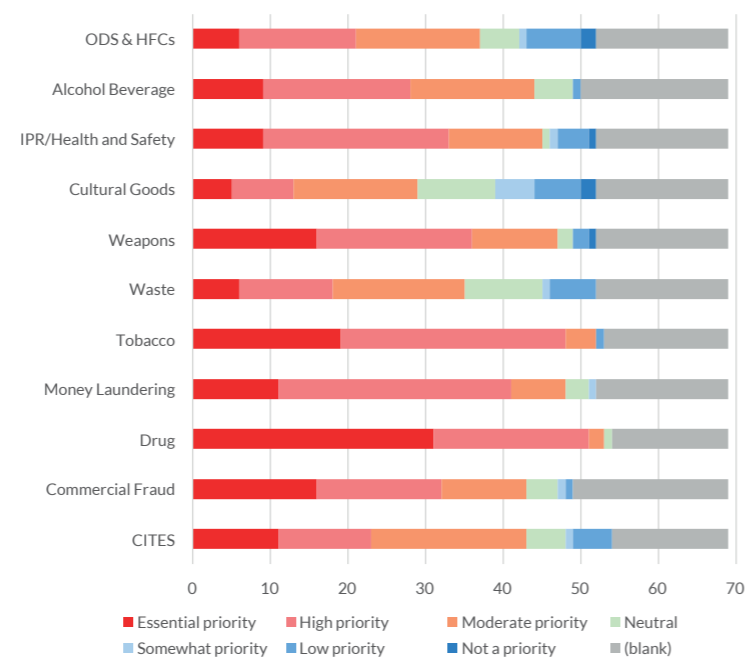


2. Members priorities

2.1. Commodity priorities

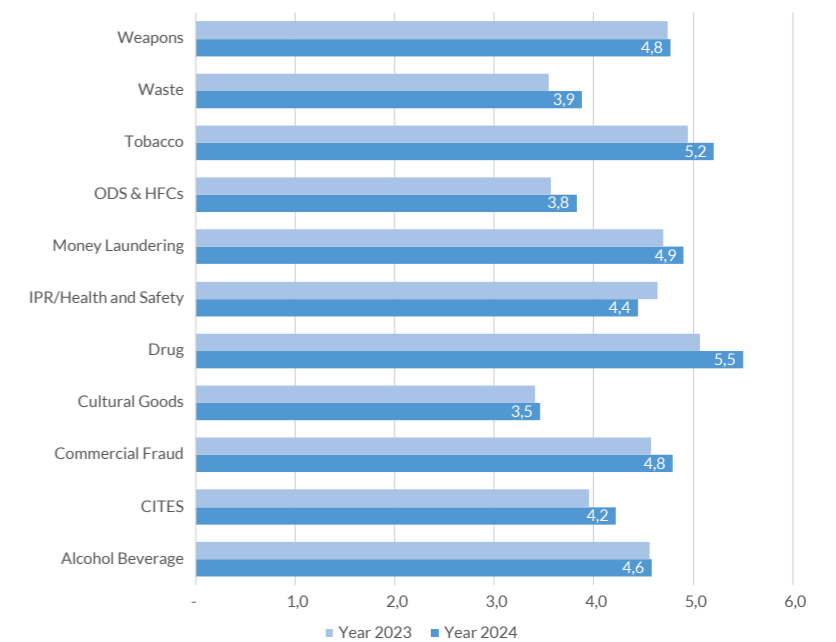
The survey inquired about the priority level each Customs administration places on anti-illicit trade efforts across commodities. An analysis (Chart 4) shows that the detection of drugs is the highest priority for Member administrations, followed by tobacco and commercial fraud, indicated by their “Essential” priority status (shown in red).

Chart 4: Priorities by Commodity



Furthermore, a comparison of commodity priorities with the previous year (Chart 5) reveals a significant increase in the priority assigned to drugs, tobacco, money laundering, commercial fraud, ODS & HFCs, and waste.

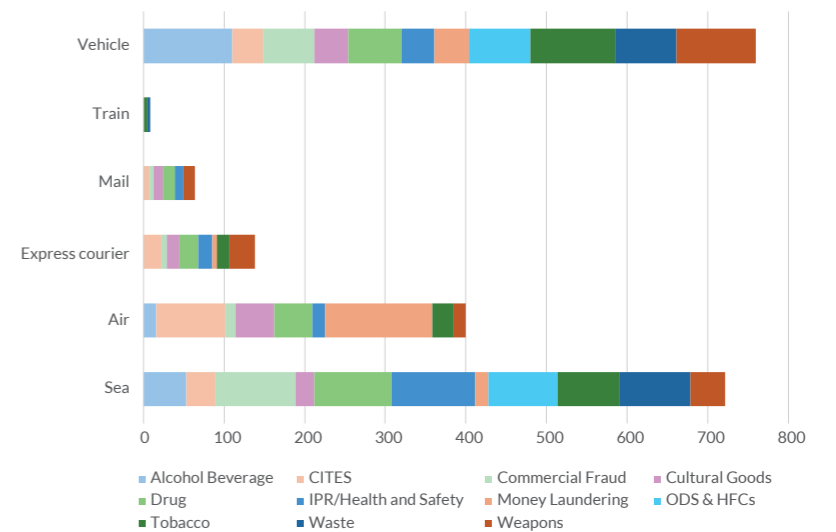
Chart 5: Priority Scores from 2023 to 2024



2.2. Transportation mode priorities

Furthermore, for each commodity, the WCO also collected data on which modes of transport Customs administrations prioritize for smuggling enforcement. The analysis (Chart 6) indicates a consistent trend, with vehicles being the highest priority for seizures, followed by sea and air.

Chart 6: Priority Scores by Transportation Mode



Compared to the previous year, the express courier sector has emerged as a transportation mode being given relatively higher priority for enforcement efforts compared to mail in the context of illicit trade.

The specific commodity priorities identified for each transportation mode further refine targeted enforcement strategies:

- Focus on **tobacco, alcohol**, and **weapons** being transported via **land vehicles**.
- Prioritizing Intellectual Property Rights (IPR)-infringing goods, items related to commercial fraud, and drugs being moved through **maritime routes**.
- Emphasized scrutiny of **money-laundering** activities, **CITES**-listed items, and **cultural goods** transported via **air cargo and passenger luggage**.
- Increased attention on **weapons, drugs**, and **CITES**-listed items being shipped through **express courier** services.

This analysis serves as an alert to Customs administrations, highlighting the evolving trends in transportation methods and the specific commodities requiring heightened attention within each mode. This analysis of the WCO seizure statistics provides insights into the evolving trends and priorities in illicit trade.

3. “Invisible” threats of synthetic opioids

3.1. Statistics on fentanyl

Considering the significant threat that fentanyl poses to community health and safety, the ITR will start to incorporate associated data. According to the statistics, the seizure of fentanyl was observed by 11 WCO Member administrations across the Americas and Caribbean (AMS), Europe, West and Central Africa (WCA), East and South Africa (ESA) and Asia-Pacific (AP) regions.

Excluding the United States, the average amount seized in 2024 was 13 kg. Although the volumes are relatively low compared to other major illicit drugs, its potential impact must not be underestimated. Even in small quantities, fentanyl has the potential to cause significant community harm, as it is approximately 100 times more potent than morphine and 50 times more potent than heroin.¹

1 US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), <https://www.cdc.gov/stop-overdose/caring/fentanyl-facts.html>

3.2. Unawareness of usage

When synthetic opioids are mixed into drugs like heroin or cocaine, users are often unaware they are consuming them. According to a press release by Bremen Health Department² in Bremen, Germany, tests of heroin in a drug consumption room revealed the presence of nitazene, a potent synthetic opioid. This finding, confirmed by lab tests in early December 2024, indicates a growing danger of new and unpredictable drug combinations.

In some cases, people thought they had bought other illicit drugs and ended up in an emergency room due to the presence of synthetic opioids. The absence or low amount of seizure data of synthetic opioids does not always mean there is a true absence, and their presence as an adulterant may not be recorded. This makes it difficult to fully understand the threat that they pose.

3.3. Exploiting small packages

Due to the extreme potency of synthetic opioids, even small-sized shipments make the illicit business “profitable”. This enables traffickers to exploit the highly expanded and interconnected supply chain network via small-sized packages.

For example, according to a press release by the Australian Federal Police (AFP), between January 2023 and September 2024, the Australian Border Force (ABF) detected 64 imports of nitazenes at the border. “The imports originated from Hong Kong, the United Kingdom and Canada, and primarily were imported via the international mail stream.”³ This indicates a worldwide network of trading synthetic opioids.

In this regard, attention should also be paid to the ongoing discussion surrounding the exploitation of the duty exemption on low-value goods (generally small-sized packages), known as “de minimis”, and whether these regulations mitigate against effective risk management due to their simplified data requirements and clearance procedures, meaning that the information required for effective risk management is not provided to Customs.

2 Freie Hansestadt Bremen, “Die Senatorin für Gesundheit, Frauen und Verbraucherschutz”, 22 January 2025. <https://www.senatspressestelle.bremen.de/pressemitteilungen/gesundheitsamt-bremen-warnt-vor-gestrecktem-heroin-460640?asl=bremen02.c.732.de>

3 Australian Federal Police, «AFP warn over alarming potent synthetic opioids,» 3 December 2024. <https://www.afp.gov.au/news-centre/media-release/afp-warn-over-alarming-potent-synthetic-opioids-2024>



Courtesy of Spanish Tax Agency (AEAT).

3.4. Inter-agency collaboration against money laundering

As fentanyl trafficking networks develop and evolve, so do the networks to launder the profits gained from this illicit trade. In recent years, organized criminal groups have adopted increasingly sophisticated techniques to launder the proceeds of fentanyl trafficking, exploiting vulnerabilities in global financial systems and leveraging technology to obfuscate money trails. In April 2025, the US Department of Justice announced the indictment of three individuals on charges of conspiring to launder at least \$30 million in proceeds related to the distribution of illegal drugs, including cocaine and fentanyl.

The Trade Based Money Laundering (TBML) operation was arranged through transactions designed to conceal the illegal source of the proceeds, including disguising the source by moving money through a shipment of electronic goods to China and the Middle East. These evolving threats underscore the urgent need for Customs administrations to enhance the targeting of cross-border cash and high-risk shipments. This can be achieved by integrating financial intelligence with border risk profiling systems.

Traditional money-laundering techniques remain prevalent. One illustrative case involved a Colombian-based organization that laundered more than US\$6 million through the Black Market Peso Exchange (BMPE), a long-standing informal value transfer system⁴. This method involved exchanging drug dollars for Colombian pesos via peso brokers, who used money couriers to deposit funds into multiple bank accounts, disguising them as legitimate business transactions.

The scheme spanned multiple jurisdictions, including intermediary banks in the US, the Caribbean and Europe, which complicated law enforcement efforts. Disrupting such schemes requires robust inter-agency collaboration between Customs, the police, financial intelligence units (FIUs), and anti-narcotics divisions. Joint task forces and shared seizure databases can significantly enhance early detection of dual-risk cargo and bulk cash smuggling. It is crucial that Customs have the ability to intercept suspected cash couriers and scrutinize trade flows.

4. Internal conspirators in cargo supply chains

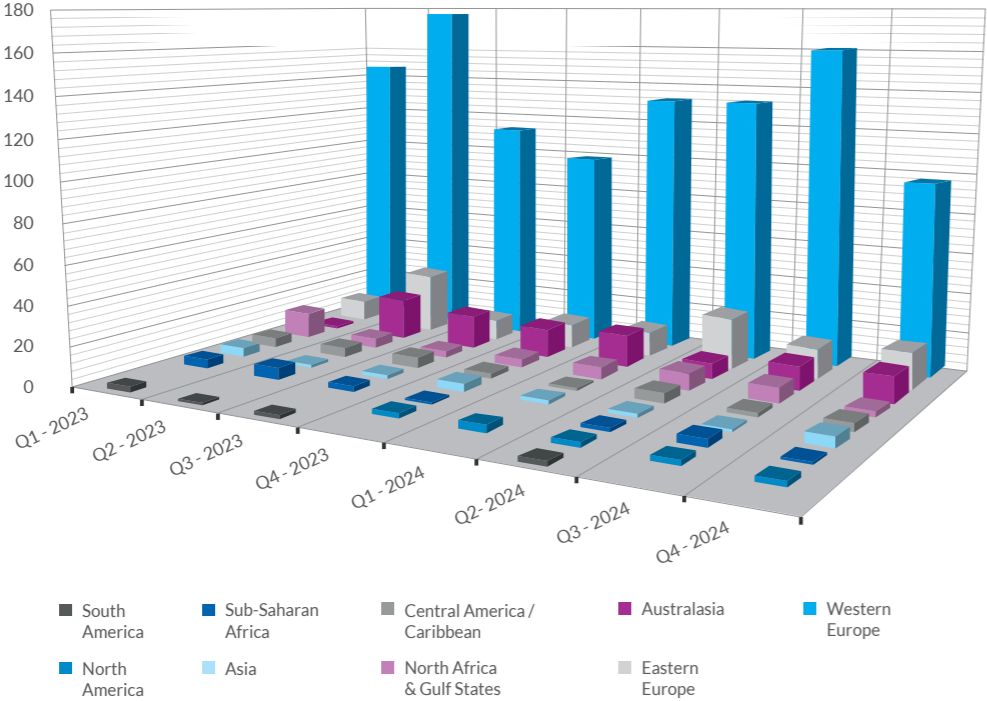
4.1. Background

The presence of “internal conspirators” employed in global cargo supply chains is also worthy of mention. The WCO’s Report on “Infiltration of Maritime Cargo Supply Chains” (“Infiltration Report” hereinafter in this section), published in June 2025, estimates that approximately 68% of detection events observed in 2023-2024 have had some level of involvement by an internal conspirator employed within the maritime cargo supply chain. These events accounted for the seizure of at least 548,500 kilograms of cocaine.

The Infiltration Report details the principal drug trafficking methods involving internal conspirators, i.e. the container rip-on/rip-off method, known as ‘rips’ (378.4 tonnes); concealments in container structures (66.4 tonnes); underwater hull attachments (12.2 tonnes); and drug drops at sea (71.5 tonnes). Notably, methodologies exploiting maritime containers – specifically rips and structural concealments – are being increasingly detected in all parts of the world, as illustrated in Figure 1 of the Infiltration Report.

⁴ US Drug Enforcement Administration, “Two money couriers for Colombian-based drug money laundering organization sentenced” 8 February 2025. <https://www.dea.gov/press-releases/2025/02/08/two-money-couriers-for-colombian-based-drug-money-laundering-organization>

Figure 1: Quarterly number of container detections (internal conspirator related) by destination region, excerpt from WCO Report “Infiltration of maritime cargo supply chains”



To illustrate the inherent risks posed by internal conspirators, the Infiltration Report highlights the international banana trade as an example of a supply chain vulnerability that is being exploited. The data shows that of a total of 2,252 container-based drug detections, 564 involved shipments with ‘bananas’ as the reported commodity. Furthermore, the majority of the 564 cases had a reported container origin of Ecuador.

These examples demonstrate the control exerted by organized crime networks over the banana trade, enabling them to evade law enforcement scrutiny across the supply chain. Moreover, the increasing prevalence of larger-scale rips concealed within container structures suggests evolving tactics and shifts in methodologies. Certain crime groups are likely to be utilising insiders with access to empty container facilities. Such access would enable greater control over where contaminated containers are exported to, and create more opportunities to adapt the complexity of structural concealments in response to law enforcement interventions.

The WCO remains committed to elucidating both visible and less apparent threats within the supply chain, working collaboratively with and providing support to its Member administrations worldwide.

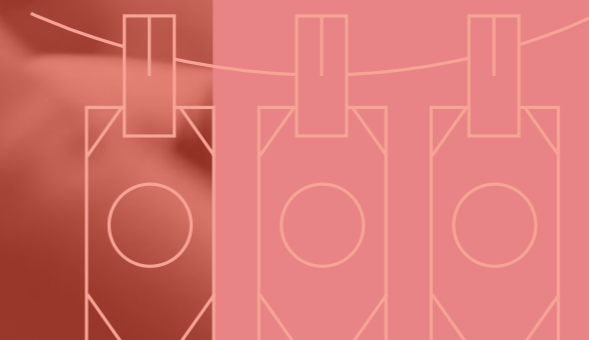




Rather than isolated seizure statistics, the chapter teaches how cross-border movements of cash and high-value commodities function as an enabling layer for many crime types. It shows why Customs data, when standardized and shared, becomes strategic intelligence: revealing preferred corridors, concealment methods, and how offenders adapt to controls and declaration rules. It also underlines a recurring risk logic—many small, low-visibility transfers coexist with a small number of high-impact events—so prioritization matters. The practical lesson is to pair risk profiling with deeper cooperation, analytics, and consistent reporting to protect the wider financial system.

1

ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING AND COUNTER-TERRORISM FINANCING



KEY INSIGHTS – MONEY LAUNDERING & TERRORISM FINANCING

- **Currency smuggling remains the most prevalent risk:** Over 22,000 currency-related cases were reported during 2023–2024, with a significant concentration in the US\$10,000–50,000 threshold, a range often selected to avoid declaration requirements. This underscores the need for Customs to intensify targeting at known structuring levels and enhance cross-checking with passenger and freight declarations.
- **High-value currency seizures are rare but disproportionately significant:** Though only 0.5% of cases involved over \$500,000, these seizures accounted for nearly half of the total currency value confiscated. Targeting these low-frequency, high-impact cases requires advanced profiling, multi-agency intelligence sharing, and specialized risk indicators.
- **Airports and land ports are the primary risk zones:** The majority of both currency and gold seizures occurred at airports (personal and baggage-based smuggling) and land borders (including bulk gold movements). Customs officials should maintain strong passenger screening protocols, non-intrusive inspection capabilities, and inland inter-agency coordination units.
- **Express courier and on-person concealment are strategic hotspots:** WCO-led AML/CTF operations revealed that 67% of bar gold and 100% of jewellery gold seizures in courier channels, and over 50% of body-concealed gold, were intercepted through targeted enforcement. This indicates a need to embed concealment typologies into automated risk engines and enhance real-time screening of parcels and travellers.
- **Regional operations enhance real-time intelligence and legal alignment:** Member engagement in AML/CTF operations under Project TENTACLE has not only improved seizure outcomes but also supported cross-border policy harmonization and joint intelligence testing. Continued participation is essential to close regulatory gaps exploited in gold-based laundering schemes.
- **Operational data can guide risk-based targeting models:** Seizure patterns by value threshold, conveyance, and concealment method provide Customs with actionable insights to calibrate automated risk management systems. Integrating these findings with national offence data analysis can improve early warning mechanisms and targeting efficiency.
- **Precious metal smuggling is increasing in volume and complexity:** With nearly 19 tonnes of precious metals seized, mainly gold bars, jewellery, and other forms, the trend points to increased diversification in laundering methods. Customs must expand inspection focus beyond bulk currency to include trade-based movement of precious commodities, especially in mail, freight, and courier domains.



Courtesy of Bangladesh's National Board of Revenue (NBR).

1. Introduction

This chapter presents an evidence-based analysis of illicit trends related to the cross-border movement of undeclared currency, precious metals, and precious stones, with direct implications for global efforts to combat money-laundering and terrorism financing. The analysis is grounded in seizure data submitted by WCO Members through the CENcomm and nCEN platforms, and consolidated on the WCO CEN database. These data sets form the empirical foundation for identifying risk patterns, evolving concealment tactics, and enforcement gaps tied to AML/CTF-related offences.

During the 2023–2024 period, WCO Members reported more than 22,600 seizure cases linked to currency and precious commodity smuggling. As illustrated in Figure 1A, the majority of these cases involve the illicit movement of bulk cash, but also include significant quantities of gold, rhodium, silver, and precious stones, including diamonds. These materials, due to their high value-to-weight ratio, fungibility, and ease of transport, remain attractive to criminal networks seeking to transfer or launder proceeds across borders while evading detection.

The analysis is structured into two main parts:

- **Typology and trend detection analysis:** Seizure data is disaggregated by value thresholds, commodity types, directions of movement, and concealment techniques. The approach includes spatial mapping of origin and destination corridors, behavioural patterns linked to specific smuggling routes, and indicators of threshold structuring – where transactions are broken into smaller units to evade reporting obligations.
- **General observations and enforcement insights:** Each data segment is supported by interpretive commentary.

- General observations describe the factual trends captured by the data.
- Enforcement insights draw operational and policy-relevant conclusions, offering guidance on where enforcement resources might be focused and how vulnerabilities may be addressed.

This dual-layered structure is designed to support Customs administrations in enhancing their enforcement strategies and policy frameworks, particularly in areas where Customs intersects with financial crime and national security. The data also underscores the growing role of Customs as a first-line actor in AML/CTF operations, particularly in identifying high-risk flows of cash and high-value commodities that are often overlooked in traditional financial surveillance systems.

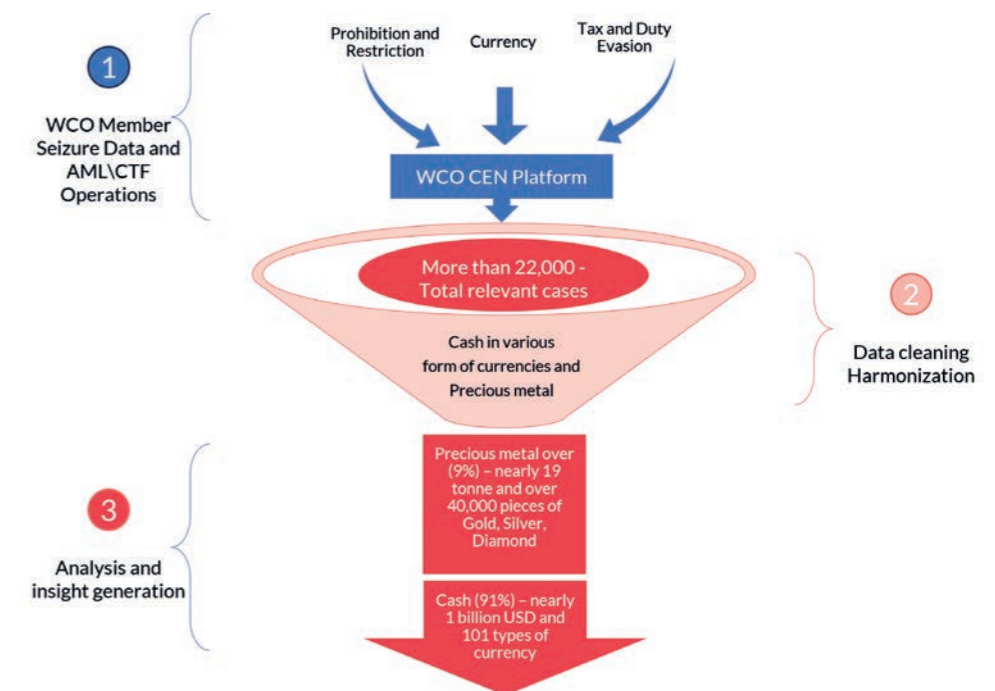
Crucially, the findings also reflect the operational gains made under WCO-led capacity-building programmes, notably Project TENTACLE and Project OCTAGON, which have directly contributed to increased detection and reporting capabilities among Member administrations. These initiatives have empowered front-line officers with better targeting tools, risk indicators, and inter-agency coordination mechanisms, resulting in higher detection rates and more strategically targeted seizures.

The full value of this chapter is realized when Customs administrations cross reference its findings with their national offence databases. Doing so enables administrations to use this trend and typology analysis as a practical guidance document to inform:

- Development of risk management modules,
- Design of profiling and targeting systems, and
- Strategic alignment of border operations with new-generation AML/CTF challenges, including trade-based money-laundering, value transfer through gold, and bulk cash movement.

By integrating global patterns with local intelligence, Customs can evolve towards a more proactive, intelligence-led model of enforcement – essential for mitigating financial crime risks at the border in an increasingly complex and interconnected threat landscape.

Figure 1: Analytical snapshot of AML/CTF-related seizures submitted via CENcomm and nCEN, 2023–2024



2. Trends and typologies in currency, precious metals, and gem smuggling

2.1 Currency smuggling

Currency smuggling remains the most frequently reported typology associated with potential money-laundering and terrorism financing risks, as evidenced by Member submissions to the WCO CEN platform. While legal and procedural terminology may vary – some jurisdictions recording incidents as “detentions” rather than “seizures” – this chapter adopts an inclusive analytical approach, treating all reported cases as indicators of illicit cross-border currency movement.

The data for the 2023–2024 period reveal the scale, adaptability, and structural sophistication of currency smuggling practices, often designed to circumvent declaration thresholds and regulatory controls. Through an analysis of reported value ranges, regional distribution, detection locations, concealment strategies, and enforcement methods, this section offers insight into evolving behavioural patterns and enforcement challenges. The findings underscore the strategic importance of targeted profiling, cross-border intelligence sharing, and harmonized operational practices in detecting and disrupting illicit cash flows.

2.1.1 Global Distribution of Currency Seizures

Figure 2: Global distribution of reported currency seizures, 2023–2024

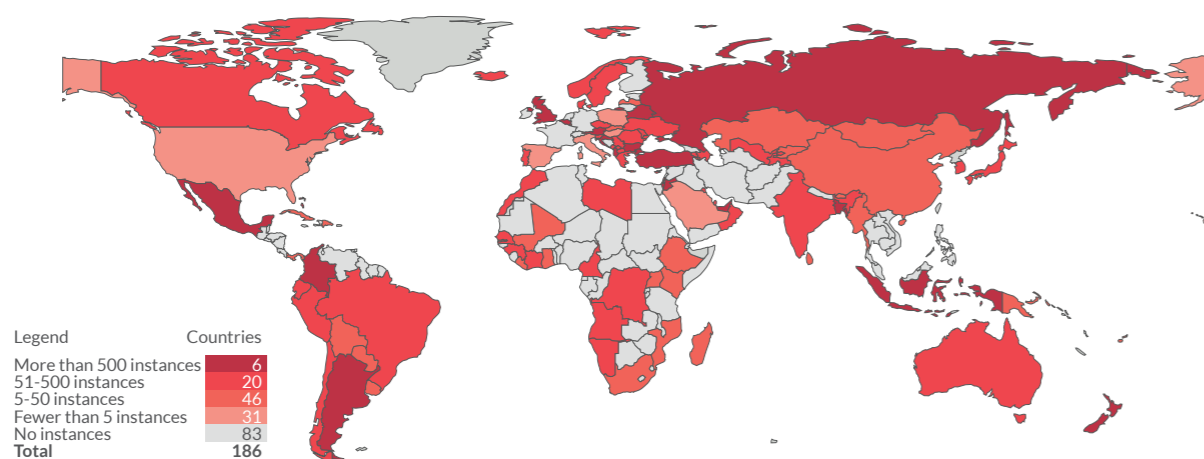


Figure 2 presents the global distribution of reported currency seizures from WCO Members over the 2023–2024 period. The data reveal that reporting is heavily concentrated in a limited number of jurisdictions, while many countries remain absent from the data set.

General observations:

- **Concentration of reporting:** Only six Members reported more than 500 seizure cases each, collectively accounting for 16,830 cases. This small group dominates the overall data set.
- **Moderate activity tier:** An additional 20 Members reported 51–500 cases, contributing 2,770 more seizures.
- **Low-volume participation:** 46 Members logged 5–50 cases, and 31 Members reported fewer than five, indicating limited engagement or operational reach.
- **Significant reporting gaps:** A total of 83 Members did not report any seizure data during the period, representing a major gap in global visibility.
- **Regional clusters of activity:** High levels of seizure activity are notably concentrated in Europe, North America, the Middle East, and parts of Asia, suggesting active enforcement in known high-risk corridors.



Courtesy of Customs Administration of Serbia (CAS).

Customs enforcement and risk insights:

- **Uneven enforcement capacity:** The data suggest disparities in institutional capability, with some Members lacking the infrastructure or training to detect and document cross-border currency smuggling.
- **Potential blind spots:** The absence of data from over 83 Members points to serious risk blind spots, where illicit flows may be going undetected due to weak border control or non-reporting.
- **Need for technical assistance:** Members with low or no reporting should be prioritized for capacity-building support, including:
 - Implementation of standardized seizure reporting tools
 - Risk-based targeting methodologies
 - Inter-agency coordination frameworks
- **Importance of data participation:** Active and consistent use of platforms like nCEN and CENcomm is critical for building a complete and actionable global picture of currency smuggling.
- **Strategic collaboration opportunities:** Encouraging broader participation in WCO-led operations and regional data-sharing mechanisms can enhance detection, disrupt laundering networks, and support the global AML/CTF agenda.

2.1.2 Currency Seizures by Value Threshold and Year

Figure 3: Currency seizures by value threshold and year, 2023–2024

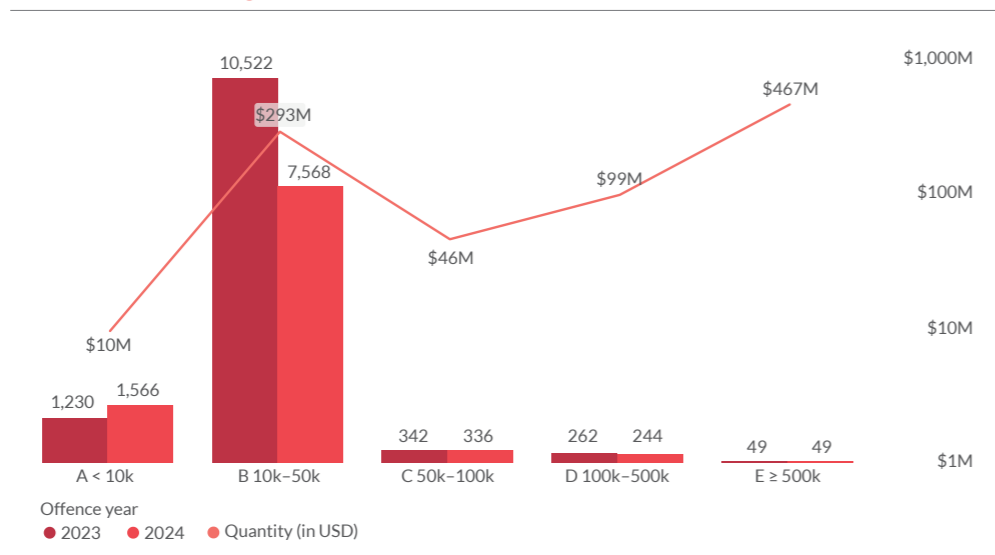


Figure 3 shows the distribution of reported currency seizures across five defined value thresholds, illustrating how the frequency and monetary impact of smuggling events vary by range and year.

General observations:

- **Threshold B (\$10,000–\$50,000)** dominated the data set with over 18,000 cases, representing more than 80% of all reported incidents. This threshold closely aligns with common declaration limits and is likely targeted for structuring.
- **Threshold A (<\$10,000)** accounted for over 2,700 cases, reflecting smaller, fragmented movements likely designed to evade detection without crossing reporting thresholds.
- **Threshold E (≥\$500,000)** recorded only 98 cases, yet contributed nearly half of the total seizure value, showing the outsized financial weight of high-value smuggling despite low frequency.
- **Year-on-year trends** reveal:
 - **Threshold B** saw a decrease in value from \$293 million in 2023 to \$240 million in 2024, while maintaining high volume.
 - **Threshold E** saw an increase in total value from \$179 million to \$288 million, even with relatively stable case counts.
 - **Thresholds C and D** showed slight declines in both volume and value, possibly due to displacement towards lower-value structuring or greater enforcement attention.

Enforcement and risk management insights:

- **Threshold B** continues to be the primary operational challenge for Customs, requiring sustained efforts in profiling, behavioural analysis, and front-line detection techniques. The prevalence of this threshold suggests widespread use of structuring tactics to stay just below declaration limits.
- **Threshold E**, though rare, poses the highest risk per incident and demands specialized targeting strategies, including inter-agency cooperation, data-driven flagging, and post-seizure financial tracing.

- The declining average per-case value in **thresholds B to E** suggests adaptive behaviour by smugglers, possibly shifting towards smaller, more frequent transfers to lower the risk of seizure.
- **Threshold-based risk profiling** remains a crucial Customs tool. Enforcement resources should be calibrated to:
 - Detect high-frequency, low-value structuring (thresholds A–B)
 - Interdict low-frequency, high-value laundering (Threshold E)
 - Monitor and stop emerging mid-tier concealment trends (thresholds C–D)
- Continued investment in **analytics, technology, and cross-border intelligence sharing** will be essential to anticipate these evolving concealment and value strategies.

2.1.3 Temporal Patterns Across Seizure Thresholds

Figure 4: Currency seizures by value threshold over time, 2023–2024

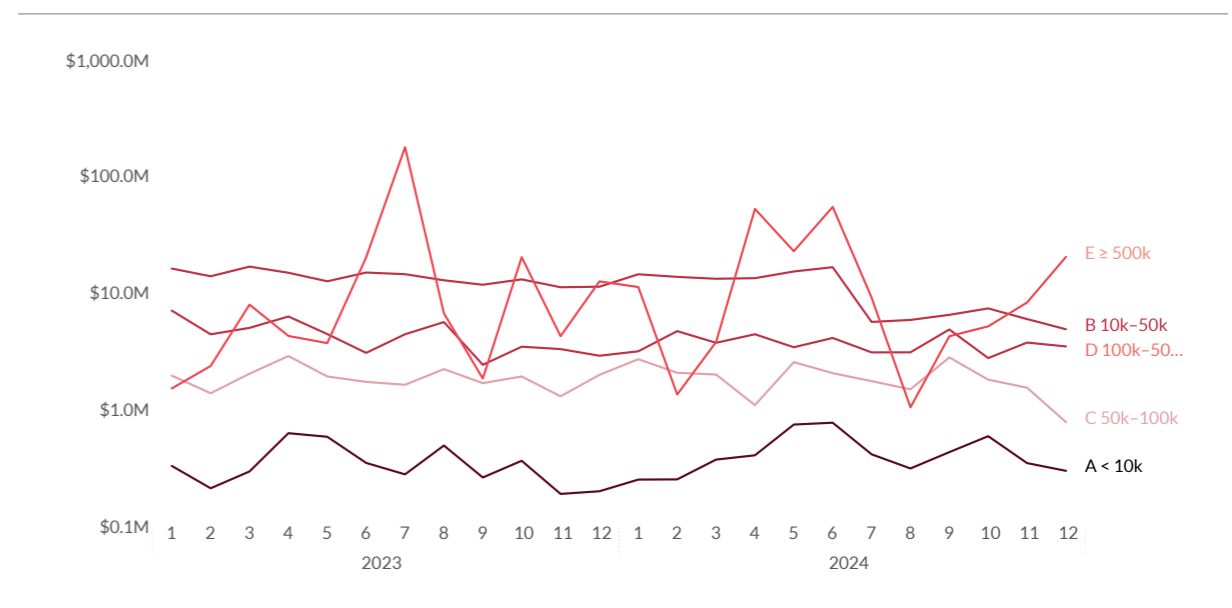


Figure 4 presents monthly fluctuations in the value of currency seizures across five defined thresholds. The visual trend lines reveal varying temporal and behavioural patterns, ranging from routine, structured courier movements to episodic, intelligence-led interceptions.

General observations:

- **Threshold A (<\$10,000):** Seizure values remained consistently low and stable, typically ranging from \$200,000 to \$600,000 per month. This reflects frequent low-denomination smuggling, likely structured below declaration thresholds.
- **Threshold B (\$10,000–\$50,000):** A flat but dominant trend, with seizure values mostly between \$10M and \$20 million monthly. This consistency suggests persistent mid-tier courier movement that continues undeterred across the timeline.
- **Threshold C (\$50,000–\$100,000):** Maintained a moderate and steady activity level (\$1.5 million to \$3 million per month), with limited fluctuation. This may suggest that this range is less attractive to smugglers or selectively targeted by enforcement.

- **Threshold D (\$100,000–\$500,000):** Periodic spikes observed in April, July, and November 2023, and May 2024, with seizure values exceeding \$5 million to \$10 million during peak months.
- **Threshold E (≥\$500,000):** Displayed the highest volatility. Notable peaks include:
 - **July 2023:** Over \$105 million, the highest monthly seizure total.
 - **Early and late 2024:** Significant upticks, including December 2024, suggesting seasonal laundering flows.

Enforcement insights and operational implications:

- **High-value peaks reflect intelligence-led success:** The sharp fluctuations in thresholds D and E align with targeted operations or information-driven interdictions rather than routine screening. These include:
 - **July 2023:** Potential multi-jurisdictional disruption or interception of a high-volume cash consignment.
 - **May & July 2024:** Recurrent spikes indicating either a seasonal laundering pattern or repeat exploitation of known corridors.
 - **December 2024:** A year-end surge suggests strategic consolidation of illicit proceeds – common in underground financial cycles.
- **Routine versus strategic enforcement:** Thresholds A and B represent routine enforcement visibility, with low variability. In contrast, spikes in D and E demonstrate Customs' ability to disrupt large-scale smuggling when risk indicators are effectively applied.
- **Risk-based profiling must be adaptive:** The effectiveness of high-value interdictions suggests that risk profiling, when informed by real-time intelligence, can yield substantial impact. However, ongoing calibration is necessary to match evolving smuggling tactics.
- **Operational timing matters:** Peaks often align with predictable windows (e.g., Q2 and Q4), indicating a need to integrate seasonal, behavioural, and financial timelines into enforcement cycles.

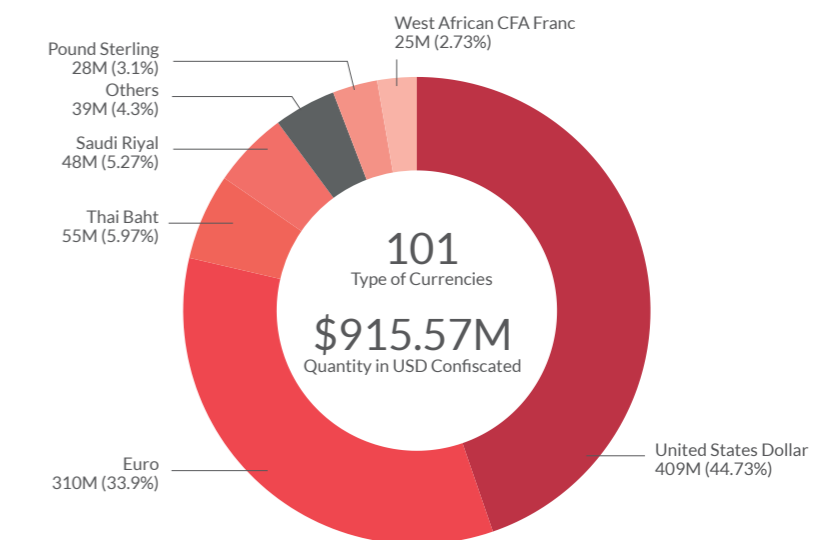
Strategic recommendations:

- **Enhance predictive targeting for thresholds D and E:** Use behavioural analytics, passenger routing data, and transaction triggers to anticipate bulk cash movements, particularly through high-risk transit hubs such as major international airports and land-border crossings. Targeting should be prioritized along corridors historically linked to smuggling, with tailored attention to outbound flights from known laundering hotspots and land ports servicing cross-border informal trade routes.
- **Sustain routine detection for lower thresholds:** Continue rigorous screening for thresholds A and B to prevent the undetected escalation of structuring behaviour.
- **Prepare for seasonal risk cycles:** Align enforcement surges with periods of elevated smuggling activity, such as midyear and year-end, to capitalize on interdiction potential.
- **Expand cross-border intelligence coordination:** Synchronize timing and intelligence sharing with neighbouring Customs services and FIUs,

especially those overseeing shared land borders, maritime exit points, and courier hubs. Real-time collaboration should be focused on high-volume transportation nodes, such as regional seaports and postal sorting centres, where high-value currency consignments may transit or fragment across jurisdictions.

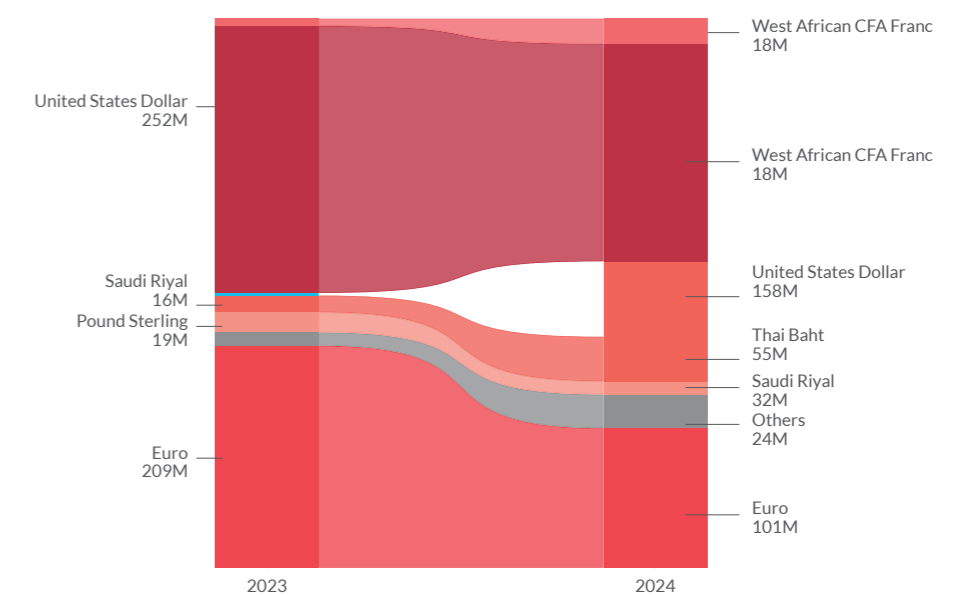
2.1.4 Top Seized Currencies and Value Trends

Figure 5. Most seized currencies by quantity (in USD), 2023–2024



Figures 5 and 6 analyse the distribution and temporal trends of seized currencies by total reported value. The data reveal strong concentration in a small number of currencies and notable shifts in seizure dynamics, especially in Southeast Asia.

Figure 6. Value trend in top seized currencies, 2023–2024



General observations:

- A total of **101 different currencies** were intercepted across all seizures, yet just six accounted for over 94% of the total US\$915.57 million confiscated.
- The **United States dollar (US\$)** and **Euro (EUR)** together represented nearly 80% of the total value seized:
 - US\$: US\$409 million (44.7%)
 - EUR: US\$310 million (33.9%)
- A **sharp year-on-year increase in Thai Baht (THB) seizures**, which rose to US\$55 million, placed it as the third-most intercepted currency, surpassing traditionally higher-risk denominations like the UK pound and Saudi riyal.
- The **Saudi Riyal (SAR)** and **West African CFA franc (XOF)** also featured prominently, accounting for US\$48 million and \$25 million respectively, signalling currency movements from the Gulf and West Africa.
- The **UK pound (GBP)** saw a moderate presence at US\$28 million, mostly linked to cross-border activity involving the UK and its neighbouring jurisdictions.
- As shown in **Figure 2D-2**, year-on-year value comparisons revealed:
 - **US\$** and **EUR** both declined in volume from 2023 to 2024.
 - **THB** and **SAR** showed strong upward trends, reflecting shifting laundering patterns or increased targeting success.

Enforcement insights:

- Concentration of high-risk currencies:** The overwhelming share of seizures in US\$ and EUR underscores their **central role in transnational laundering networks**. These reserve currencies continue to be preferred for both **large-value smuggling** and **cross-border trade-based schemes**, warranting consistent Customs focus.
- Emerging Southeast Asian risk corridor:** The notable rise in THB seizures suggests either:
 - A shift in smuggling routes towards Southeast Asia, or
 - Improved enforcement capabilities in the region (e.g., through increased inspections, targeted operations, or joint task forces). This shift may also reflect laundering linked to gold trade, narcotics proceeds, or underground financial systems.
- Gulf and West African currencies as regional risk signals:** The steady presence of SAR and XOF indicates:
 - Active laundering via informal remittance systems, especially hawala-style networks.
 - Currency movement through high-risk regional corridors, often underregulated and weakly monitored.
 - Customs and FIUs should view such regional currency trends as early indicators of evolving typologies.
- Need for currency-based risk profiling:** The trends emphasize the value of tracking currency type as a core profiling criterion. Customs administrations should:
 - Maintain watch lists of high-risk currencies.
 - Analyse geographic patterns linked to specific denominations.
 - Align enforcement strategies with emerging regional laundering behaviours.

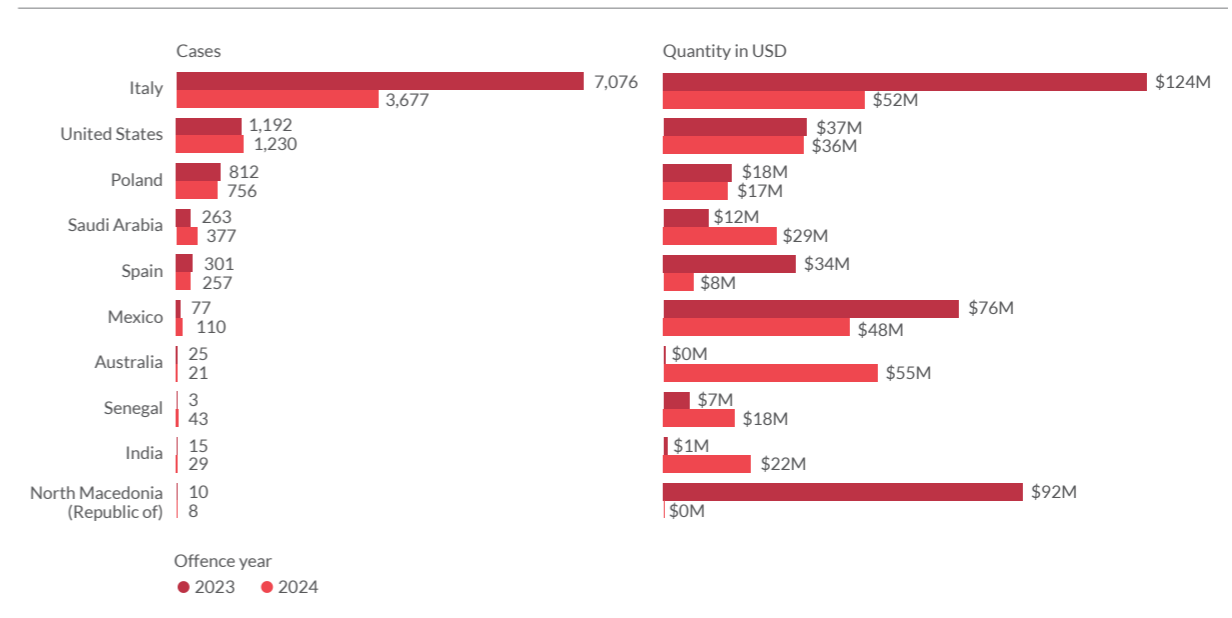
2.1.5 Top Reporting Members – Currency**Figure 7.** Top 10 reporting members by case volume and seizure value, 2023–2024

Figure 7 highlights significant variances in how different WCO Members contributed to global currency seizure data over the two-year period.

While some Members exhibited consistently high case volumes, others – despite fewer reports – accounted for disproportionately large seizure values. This dichotomy illustrates the diversity of enforcement strategies, regional risk profiles, and typologies encountered across Member administrations.

General observations:

- Italy** led in case volume by a wide margin, recording over 10,700 cases across two years. Despite a decrease in volume in 2024, the country's total seizure value exceeded \$175 million, indicating sustained pressure on structured courier activity and positioning Italy as a key transit and destination hub for illicit cash.
- The **United States** maintained steady reporting with more than 1,200 cases each year and consistent seizure values (~\$36–\$37 million annually). This reflects an ongoing interception of both inbound and outbound smuggling across diversified air and land borders.
- Mexico**, though reporting relatively few cases (187 in total), recorded the third-highest seizure value (\$124 million), indicating high-value consignments most likely tied to transnational laundering networks and criminal proceeds linked to narcotic importations and other illicit trade activities into the United States.
- North Macedonia** stood out as an extreme outlier: with only ten (10) cases in 2023, it accounted for \$92 million, the second-highest single-year total in the entire data set. This signals a major disruption event and reinforces the need to distinguish strategic interdictions from routine volume-based enforcement.



Courtesy of Bangladesh's National Board of Revenue (NBR).

- **Saudi Arabia** and **Spain** both recorded substantial increases in total seizure value in 2024, despite modest case volumes. These trends may reflect improved targeting, new risk corridors, or increased enforcement coordination in the Gulf and Mediterranean regions.
- **Australia** reported fewer than 50 cases, yet posted US\$55 million in seizures in 2024, highlighting successful targeting of bulk cash couriers or parcel-based transfers.

Strategic enforcement insights:

- **Volume ≠ Value:** Members like North Macedonia, Australia, and Mexico demonstrate that large-scale financial disruption can result from a small number of high-value cases, underscoring the effectiveness of intelligence-led targeting and risk-based profiling over reliance on high inspection volumes alone.
- **Operational archetypes:**
 - *High-volume, low-value:* Italy, Poland, and the US – focused on intercepting structured cash flows, often just below reporting thresholds.
 - *Low-volume, high-value:* Mexico, Australia, and North Macedonia – capable of detecting large consignments, likely via high-risk profiling, advanced analytics, or tip-offs.
- **Geopolitical and regional shifts:** The rise in values from Saudi Arabia and Spain suggests potential changes in laundering routes or increased Customs effectiveness along these corridors. Both regions could benefit from continued investment in joint operations and data-driven profiling tools.
- **Case-specific analysis needed for outliers:** Countries with extremely high per-case averages should trigger post-seizure financial investigations and FIU referrals, as such incidents may reveal organized laundering pipelines rather than isolated violations.

2.1.6 Threshold-Based Distribution of Currency Seizures

Figure 8: Distribution of seizure cases by threshold and member

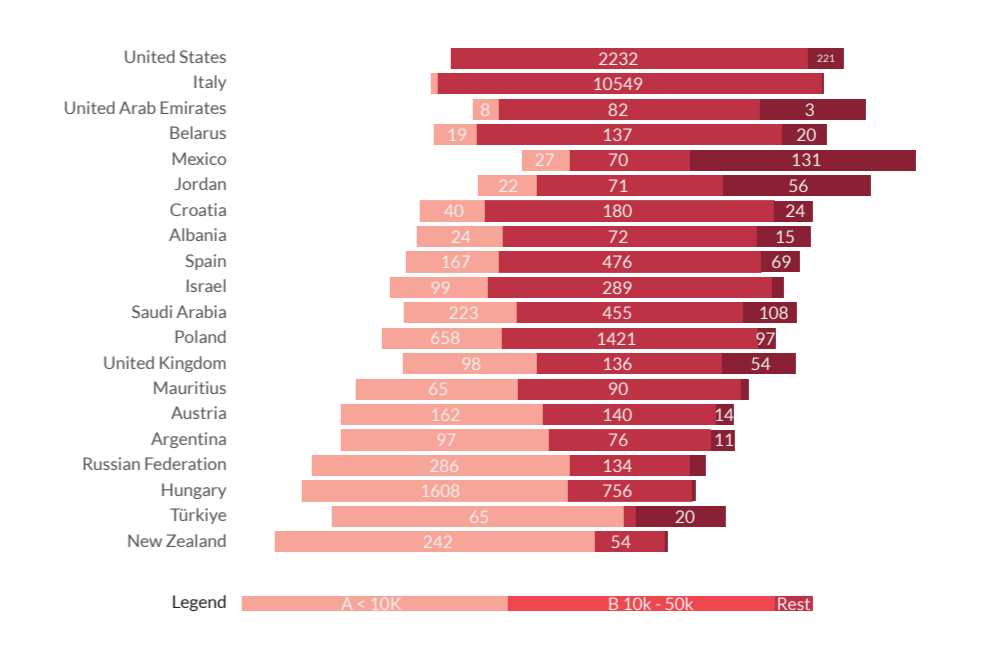


Figure 8 presents the threshold-based distribution of reported currency seizures across selected WCO Members. The three thresholds, A (< \$10,000), B (\$10,000–50,000), and Rest (> \$50,000), help illustrate the enforcement profiles, concealment behaviours, and typologies specific to each country.

General observations:

- **Italy** displays an overwhelming concentration in **threshold B**, indicating a systematic structuring of currency movements just below typical declaration limits, consistent with the country's role as a transit hub in Europe for courier-based smuggling.
- The **United States** demonstrates a broad risk coverage, with sizeable activity across both mid-range and high-value thresholds, and virtually no sub-\$10k activity, reflecting a profiling strategy focused on more impactful seizures.
- **Poland and Hungary** exhibit a dual profile, with high volumes in both **threshold A and B**. This suggests high-frequency intra-EU courier movements using fragmented sums, likely aiming to minimize detection risk under legal reporting thresholds.
- **Mexico and Jordan** show a wider distribution across all thresholds, indicating fluid trafficking typologies that combine small-scale structuring with intermittent bulk consignments, pointing to agile and adaptive smuggling methods.
- Across nearly all Members, low-value seizures dominate in volume:
 - **Threshold A** appeared in **19 of 20 Members**,
 - **Threshold B** in **all 20 Members**, confirming that subdeclaration courier tactics remain the most common concealment strategy globally.
- The "Rest" category (seizures > \$50,000) was less frequent but strategically critical. Five (5) Members, the United States, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, Poland, and Spain, accounted for over two-thirds of these high-value interceptions.

Enforcement archetypes:

Two distinct operational models emerge:

I. Threshold-saturation members (e.g. Italy, Hungary):

- Characterized by high volumes of low- to mid-value seizures, often reflecting a structured smuggling model.
- Enforcement is driven by frequent airport or land-border inspections but yields lower per-case financial impact.

II. High-impact Members (e.g. United States, Mexico):

- Focused on larger, risk-profiled seizures with significant financial disruption despite fewer cases.
- Likely supported by deeper intelligence integration, inter-agency coordination, and advanced targeting tools.

Strategic insights for customs administrations:

- **Tailored capacity building needed:**

- *Threshold-saturation Members* benefit from advanced data analytics to detect repeat couriers and smuggling patterns.
- *High-impact Members* require sustained intelligence exchange, case debriefing, and post-seizure financial tracing capabilities to dismantle laundering networks.

- **Blend of volume and value strategies:**

Customs agencies should strive to combine high-volume front-line detection with intelligence-led high-value targeting to balance disruption and deterrence.

- **Enhanced profiling algorithms:**

Members with a wide threshold spread (e.g. Jordan, Saudi Arabia) may benefit from machine learning-based profiling models that adapt to both fragmented and bulk movement patterns.

- **Regional collaboration opportunities:**

Members showing parallel seizure patterns (e.g. Poland and Hungary; Saudi Arabia and Jordan) should explore coordinated operational weeks or data-sharing frameworks to intercept cross-border networks.

2.1.7 Currency Seizures by Value Threshold, Route and Detection Method

Figure 9: Currency seizures by threshold, route, and detection method

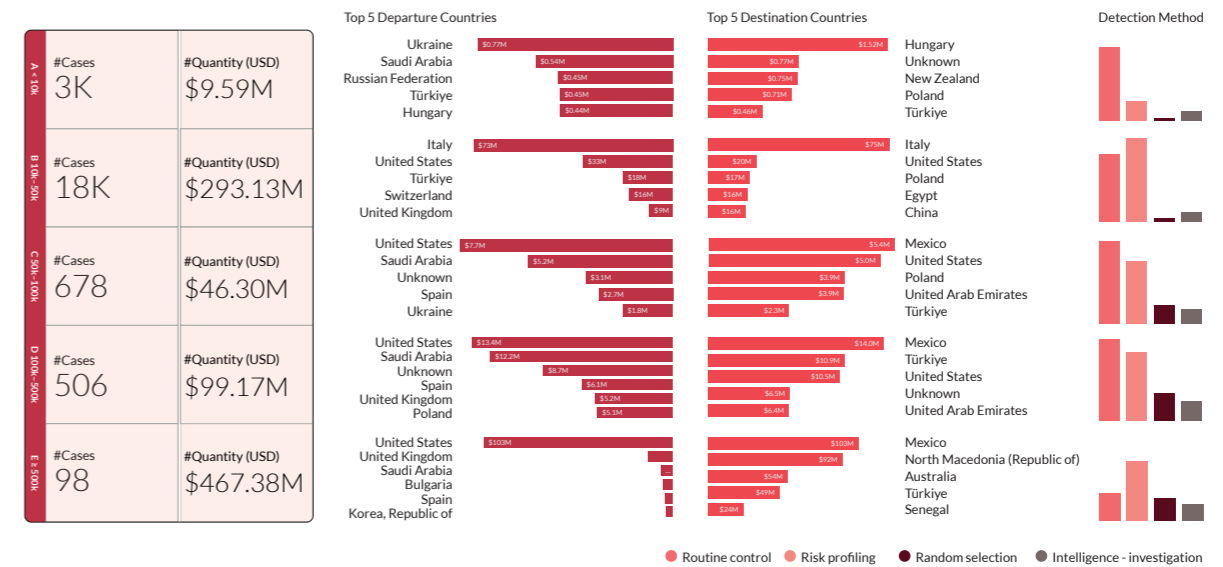


Figure 9 disaggregates currency seizure data by value threshold, analysing top departure and destination countries and corresponding detection methods. The chart reveals clear distinctions in trafficking patterns, concealment behaviours, and enforcement responses across the five (5) threshold categories.

General observations across thresholds:

- **Threshold A (<\$10,000)**

Small-scale movements dominate, often structured to fall below declaration limits. Ukraine, Saudi Arabia, and Russia were key departure points; Hungary and New Zealand led as destinations. Detection was overwhelmingly dependent on routine control, reflecting low-profile smuggling along familiar corridors.

- **Threshold B (\$10,000–\$50,000)**

The most prevalent band by case volume. Italy and the US were both major sources and destinations, suggesting bidirectional laundering circuits. Risk profiling became the dominant detection method, targeting behavioural and travel indicators, highlighting entrenched, mid-level courier-based operations.

- **Threshold C (\$50,000–\$100,000)**

Activity concentrated around the US, Saudi Arabia, and Spain as departure hubs. Mexico received the largest share of these mid-high value flows, reinforcing its exposure to organized finance-driven laundering. Detection was more diversified, combining routine checks, profiling, and emerging intelligence inputs.

- **Threshold D (\$100,000–\$500,000)**

This mid-bulk category reflects operational laundering involving well-funded couriers and test runs for high-value channels. The US and Saudi Arabia led as source countries, while Mexico and Türkiye were frequent destinations. Detection relied increasingly on risk-based targeting, supported by random inspections.

- **Threshold E (≥\$500,000)**

Though the least frequent, this category accounted for the highest total seizure value (~\$467 million). The US alone contributed over \$100 million in departures. Mexico, Poland, and Türkiye emerged as key destinations. Seizures were almost exclusively risk profiling-driven, requiring multi-agency coordination, advanced analytics, and intelligence-led targeting.

Strategic insights for customs enforcement:

- **Volume versus Value Dichotomy:** Thresholds A and B account for the majority of cases but relatively low monetary value. Thresholds D and E, while rare, are high-impact and intelligence-sensitive, demanding a specialized operational focus.
- **Risk profiling emerges as core tool:** Across higher thresholds (C–E), risk profiling consistently outperforms routine control. This validates investment in passenger screening, behavioural analysis, and predictive profiling systems, particularly when supported by integrated watch lists and historical route data.
- **United States–Mexico axis remains critical:** Recurrent flows across these two jurisdictions indicate a robust laundering corridor, requiring sustained binational coordination, information exchange, and strategic disruption operations.
- **Hungary as a consolidation hub (threshold A):** Its status as a top destination, particularly with disproportionate inbound volume, suggests use as a collection or redistribution node in subdeclaration laundering chains.
- **Emergence of Türkiye and Poland in high-value segments:** Their presence at the upper thresholds indicates their growing role as European anchor points for large-scale criminal finance, potentially connected to trade-based laundering or underground remittance systems.

Policy and operational recommendations:

- **Segmented targeting strategies:**
 - For **threshold A–B:** Scale routine detection and improve courier pattern analysis.
 - For **threshold C–E:** Deepen risk-based operations, enrich profiles with airline, banking, and travel data, and prioritize inter-agency coordination.
- **Machine learning potential:** E-threshold reliance on profiling reinforces the case for AI-driven targeting tools. Incorporating seizure history, travel patterns, and concealment typologies could significantly improve prediction accuracy.
- **Follow-up investigations essential at higher thresholds:** Given their strategic nature, D and E cases should trigger immediate financial tracing and FIU engagement, with cross-border referrals where appropriate.

2.1.8 Currency Seizures by Location and Movement Direction

Figure 10: Currency seizures by location and movement direction

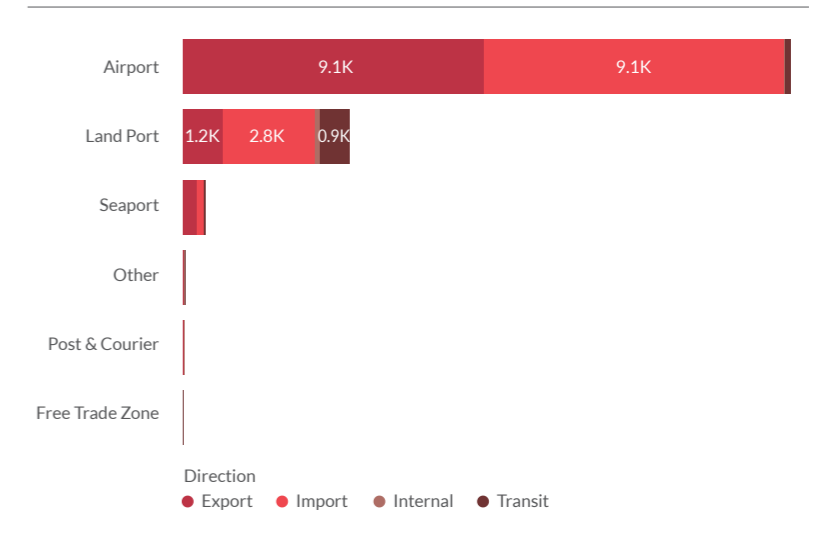


Figure 10 provides a comparative overview of currency seizure volumes across major control points: airports, land ports, seaports, and lower-volume nodes such as post and courier services. The data confirms the dominance of airports in both structured and bulk movement of illicit currency, with significant activity also observed at land borders.

General observations:

- **Airports** recorded the **highest seizure volume** across all movement directions (export, import, and transit) and all value thresholds. Notably, over **14,000 cases** were linked to the **\$10k–\$50k range**, confirming airports as central vectors for mid-tier courier smuggling.
- **High-value thresholds** (over \$50k) were also well represented, with **250+ cases** intercepted via air routes – demonstrating that air corridors facilitate both fragmented and consolidated illicit financial transfers.
- **Land ports** saw significant seizure volumes, particularly in the **sub-\$10k** range, reflecting **structuring techniques** commonly used at land crossings. The presence of over **140 cases above \$100k** also indicates the use of terrestrial routes for bulk movements, particularly in transit contexts.
- **Seaports**, while low in total volume, still recorded a notable number of **high-value cases (\$100k to over \$500k)**. These likely involve **maritime passengers or concealment in mixed-use cargo**, suggesting targeted laundering through port infrastructure.
- Lower-volume locations, **free trade zones, post & courier**, showed limited involvement in high-value activity but appeared in **thresholds A and B**, possibly reflecting courier-based concealment in small parcel shipments.

Enforcement and intelligence insights:

- **Airports are multifunctional smuggling hubs**, exploited for both frequent, low-value courier drops and high-value consolidation efforts. Their prominence across all thresholds underscores the need for sustained profiling, X-ray inspection, and intelligence integration at international terminals.

- **Land borders are exploited for structured, low-value crossings**, particularly in regions with porous transit regimes or limited on-the-spot declaration enforcement. These routes demand tighter controls, vehicle inspection systems, and repeat-offender tracking.
- **Seaports, though lower in volume, are high-risk for bulk movement**, often concealed within legitimate cargo. Investment in risk-based targeting and container profiling at maritime entry points is warranted to address this issue.
- **Outbound movement (exports) of cash** continues to pose a serious AML/CTF vulnerability. The consistent appearance of high-value export seizures across both airports and land borders reinforces the need for outbound currency declaration enforcement and greater cooperation with financial intelligence units (FIUs) for follow-up tracing.

Recommendations for Customs administrations:

- **Airports:** Prioritize integration of behavioural risk indicators and automated scanning tools for passenger and baggage screening. Expand joint interdiction teams with police and FIUs.
- **Land ports:** Enhance low-value structuring detection through data analytics, repeat-offender tracking, and cooperation with neighbouring Customs administrations.
- **Seaports:** Apply container risk assessment models to identify anomalies related to bulk cash concealment. Coordinate inspections with shipping lines and port authorities.
- **Parcel & courier monitoring:** Develop capabilities to screen small shipments for concealed cash, particularly in regions with high outbound parcel volume linked to diaspora remittances or e-commerce.

2.1.9 High Seizure Transit Countries by Seizure Location

Figure 11: High seizure countries by transit countries and seizure location

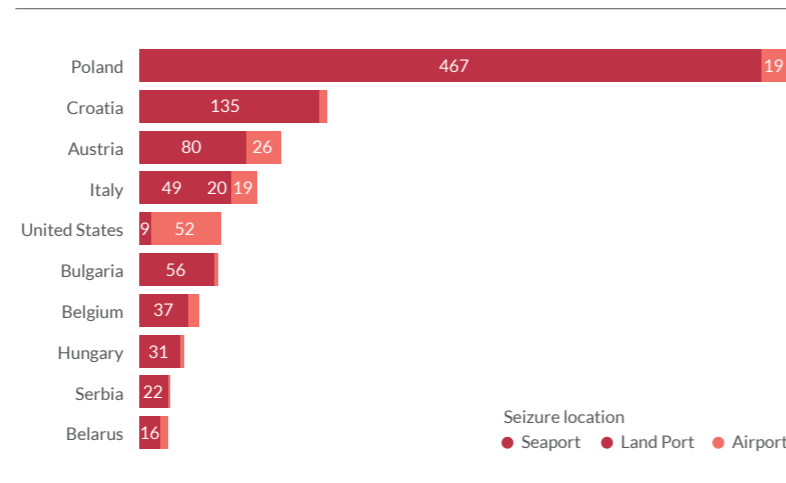


Figure 11 highlights the top reporting countries in terms of transit-related currency seizures, disaggregated by seizure location type – land ports, airports, and seaports. The data illustrates how certain jurisdictions function not as points of origin or destination, but as key transit hubs in cross-border money-laundering schemes.

General observations:

- **Poland** leads by a significant margin, with 467 transit seizures, almost exclusively at land borders. This suggests systematic use of intra-EU terrestrial corridors for moving undeclared cash, often in structured, mid-value amounts. Preliminary case analysis indicates that a substantial portion of these movements involve outbound flows from the EU, raising concerns about potential sanctions evasion, particularly in the context of ongoing geopolitical tensions. The directionality of these transfers underscores the importance of integrating sanctions screening into risk profiling for cross-border currency flows transiting through Central and Eastern Europe.
- **Croatia** (135 cases) and **Austria** (80 cases) also rank highly, reinforcing the strategic role of Central and South-eastern Europe in laundering networks that rely on mobility across Schengen borders.
- **Bulgaria** (56 cases), **Serbia**, and **Hungary** show similar patterns, indicating the existence of a south-eastern laundering corridor extending into and out of the EU through the Balkans.
- The **United States**, though not geographically part of the same corridor, recorded 52 transit seizures at airports, suggesting its role as a logistical waypoint in global illicit financial flows – potentially linked to connecting flights, parcel hubs, or money couriers using multi-leg itineraries.
- **Italy** was the only Member with significant transit seizures at seaports (49 cases). Seizure data highlights that ferry routes through key Italian ports such as Brindisi and Genoa are increasingly exploited for currency smuggling linked to Albania and North Africa. Routes like Albania → Italy → Switzerland and Italy → Morocco via domestic seaport indicate the use of ferry-bound vehicles and passenger cars to transport undeclared cash. These movements often originate in high-risk jurisdictions and exploit Italy's strategic position as a transit hub, turning seaports into laundering gateways. Customs administrations should enhance screening at ferry terminals, particularly for vehicles on Balkan and North African routes, and embed these ferry-based concealment typologies into automated profiling and risk targeting systems.

Enforcement and intelligence insights:

- **Land-based transit routes remain highly exploited:** The concentration of transit seizures at land ports in Central and Eastern Europe points to the exploitation of open border regimes, limited physical checks, and cross-border courier tactics. Enhanced inter-agency coordination is essential in these zones.
- **Transit countries function as laundering gateways:** Members like Poland and Austria may not be final destinations for illicit cash but are being used as pass-through points, where criminal networks reroute funds to fragment law enforcement trails. Risk profiling should account for non-linear routing patterns.
- **Airports as midpoint risk nodes:** The U.S. data illustrates how airports in well-connected jurisdictions can become transit vulnerabilities, especially when cash is not declared during transfers or routed via third-party hubs to mask origin and purpose.

- **Maritime transit risk is underreported but relevant:** Italy's seaport data, though limited in volume, may indicate the use of ferry routes for large-scale currency smuggling. Maritime inspection units should incorporate cash detection into their profiling matrix, especially in Freeport settings.

Operational recommendations:

- **Reinforce border surveillance in key transit zones:** Deploy mobile inspection teams and expand joint patrols at land crossings in Poland, Austria, and the Balkans. Implement vehicle scanning systems that detect currency concealment alongside contraband.
- **Integrate transit risk into routing algorithms:** Customs and FIUs should flag travel or cargo itineraries that include high-frequency transit hubs – even when the origin and destination appear low-risk.
- **Conduct regional transit risk assessments:** Initiate regional threat assessments for transit corridors, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe, to quantify laundering exposure and guide operational planning.

2.1.10 Concealment Methods by Value Threshold

Figure 12: Concealment methods by value threshold (in USD)

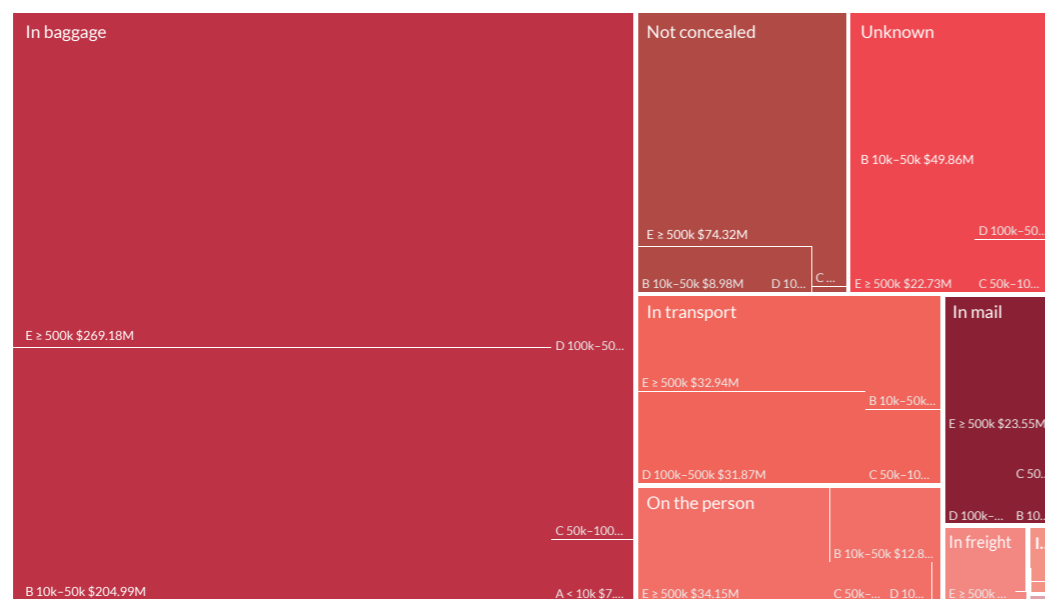


Figure 12 maps the distribution of currency seizures across various concealment methods, segmented by value thresholds.

The data confirms that baggage-based concealment is the dominant technique across most categories, particularly for mid-value courier movements. However, mail, freight, and personal concealment methods emerge disproportionately in high- and low-value segments, revealing distinct smuggling behaviours and typologies.

General observations:

- **Baggage is the dominant concealment method**, particularly in the \$10,000–\$50,000 threshold, with over 13,000 cases in this range. Its continued prominence underscores its role in threshold-structured courier smuggling via both land and air.
- **Over 600 baggage cases occurred in higher thresholds** (≥\$50,000), confirming its dual use for both structured and bulk currency movement.
- **Mail and courier shipments**, though limited in frequency, show a disproportionate presence in high-value bands (thresholds C, D, and E). Mail concealment alone accounted for 103 seizures above \$50,000, including eight (8) over \$500,000, highlighting an operational shift towards low-visibility, high-value logistics.
- **Body concealment methods**, e.g., “on the person” or in clothing, are almost entirely concentrated in low and mid thresholds (A and B). These tactics indicate courier-based structuring to avoid suspicion at declaration points.
- **Cargo-related concealment**, such as in freight, showed the highest average value per case, consistent with strategies used by organized crime to hide large sums in trade channels or containerized shipments.
- The “**unknown**” category, with nearly 3,000 cases, particularly in threshold B, reflects significant gaps in front-line reporting. This undermines the ability to develop accurate risk profiles and adapt targeting strategies. Consistent and complete seizure documentation must be prioritized.
- **Non-border seizures**, such as those not concealed or concealed in premises, suggest successful post-border or inland enforcement actions. These emphasize the role of domestic investigations in complementing border controls for AML/CTF objectives.

Customs enforcement and operational insights:

- **Enhance baggage screening** at air and land ports using integrated behavioural and document profiling, supported by AI-enabled scanning systems.
- **Strengthen inspection and profiling in mail and courier hubs**, where high-value concealments are masked by low detection visibility. Collaborate with postal authorities and e-commerce logistics providers.
- **Improve data reporting practices**, making concealment method a mandatory field in seizure entries to close the intelligence gap from the “unknown” category.
- **Target inland cash flows** through joint investigations with FIUs and police units, especially for seizures occurring beyond traditional borders.
- **Deploy advanced cargo profiling** in ports and free trade zones, using commercial data analytics to detect suspicious freight patterns linked to financial crime.
- **Develop profiling algorithms for mail/courier modes**, flagging shipments based on sender/receiver patterns, declared content anomalies, and origin-destination risk links.
- **Collaborate with postal authorities and freight forwarders** to build a detection framework for concealed currency in non-traditional concealment environments.

2.1.11 Conclusion

The 2023–2024 analysis underscores the strategic importance of Customs administrations in disrupting illicit cross-border currency flows that fuel money-laundering and terrorism financing. With over 22,600 reported seizures, the data reveals clear typological patterns: dominance of mid-value structured movements, concentration in global reserve currencies, the emergence of new risk corridors (particularly in Southeast Asia) and the continued exploitation of baggage and courier concealment methods.

High-value but low-frequency seizures, especially in thresholds D and E, demonstrate the operational impact of intelligence-led enforcement. Meanwhile, routine detections in lower thresholds reflect the scale of structured, everyday laundering practices that require sustained front-line vigilance.

The findings emphasize the need for targeted capacity building, wider Member engagement in seizure reporting, and expanded use of risk-based profiling. WCO-led AML/CTF initiatives under Project TENTACLE and Project OCTAGON have played a pivotal role in enhancing Member detection capabilities, and should remain central to global AML/CTF strategies at the border. As smuggling methodologies evolve, so must enforcement – through technology, collaboration, and intelligence.

2.2 Precious metals and gem smuggling

Beyond the global circulation of undeclared currency, the smuggling of precious metals, especially gold, continues to play a central role in money-laundering. Owing to its high value-to-weight ratio, liquidity, and ease of concealment, gold remains a favoured instrument for money-laundering, tax evasion, and duty fraud. This chapter presents an analysis of seizure data reported by WCO Members under the categories of Prohibitions and Restrictions and Tax and Duty Evasion, providing insight into the scale, concealment patterns, and enforcement responses associated with gold smuggling.

Drawing from cases involving gold in bars, jewellery, and other processed forms, the section explores how these commodities are moved across borders through personal carriage, cargo, courier, and freight systems. It also incorporates notable trends related to other precious metals and gemstones where relevant. By highlighting key departure and destination corridors, concealment methods, and seizure locations, the analysis underscores the strategic misuse of high-value commodities in transnational smuggling networks and emphasizes the importance of Customs vigilance in mitigating related financial and security risks.

2.2.1 Global Distribution of Precious Metals and Gem Seizures

Figure 13: Heat map of precious metals and gem seizures, 2023–2024

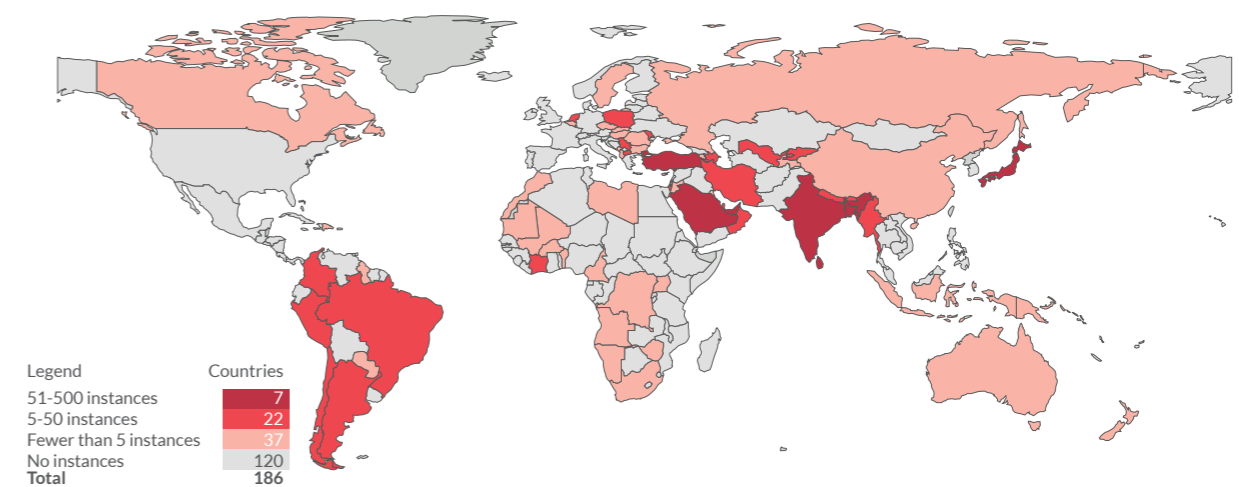


Figure 13 illustrates the global distribution of reported smuggling cases involving gold and gemstones, based on seizure data submitted by WCO Members. The data reveals a sharply uneven reporting landscape, with a small number of Members contributing the bulk of detected incidents.

General observations:

- **Limited global reporting:** Out of 186 WCO Members, only 66 reported any gold or gemstone smuggling cases during the reference period, reflecting low overall global participation.
- **High-frequency reporting zones:** Seven Members reported between 51 and 500 cases, forming concentrated hotspots in South Asia, the Middle East, and South America – regions known for both high consumer demand and active gold markets.
- **Moderate activity belt:** An additional 22 Members reported five (5) to 50 cases, forming a secondary belt of enforcement across parts of East Asia, Central Europe, and select African and Pacific nations.
- **Low-level detection:** 37 Members reported fewer than five (5) cases, suggesting either minimal smuggling activity, underreporting, or nascent detection efforts.
- **Data gaps:** A substantial 120 Members reported no cases, indicating potential disparities in enforcement focus, detection capacity, or data submission practices.

Enforcement insights:

- **Persistent regional hotspots:** The geographic clustering of cases in South Asia and the Middle East reflects long-standing vulnerabilities linked to gold-driven informal economies, high-value physical trade, and a cultural demand for precious metals which are often exploited by transnational criminal networks.
- **Underreporting and detection blind spots:** The lack of reporting in over 65% of countries raises concerns about underdetection, especially in regions where gold is known to be a major trade commodity. This highlights the need for increased awareness, technical assistance, and seizure reporting integration.

- **Mismatch between trade exposure and reporting:** Many countries with active gold import/export sectors did not report any cases, suggesting that Customs administrations may lack specialized risk indicators, equipment, or targeting protocols specific to precious metal concealment.
- **Operational gaps in high-risk corridors:** Given that illicit gold movements often intersect with money-laundering, value-added tax (VAT) fraud, and terrorist financing, the absence of case data in known illicit trade routes signals a need for regional operational coordination and joint enforcement exercises to risk test this trade.

2.2.2 Overview of Precious Metal Seizures

Figure 14: Overview of precious metal seizures, 2023–2024

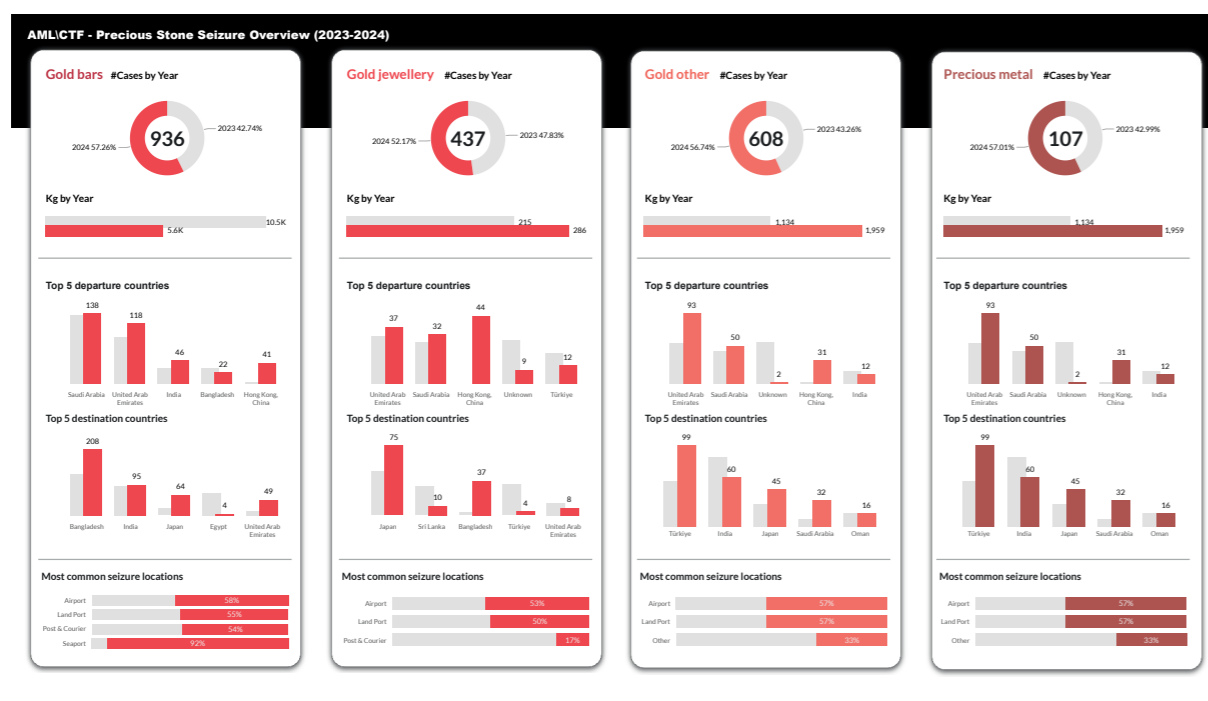


Figure 14 provides a comparative overview of precious metal seizures across four main categories – gold bars, gold jewellery, gold in other forms, and other precious metals – from 2023 to 2024.

A total of 2,088 cases resulted in the confiscation of nearly 19 tonnes of material, illustrating the continued misuse of gold and precious metals for cross-border smuggling.

General observations:

- **Gold bars:** This was the most frequently seized category with 936 cases, accounting for the majority of seized weight (approximately 16 tonnes). However, 2024 saw a nearly 50% decline in the total weight seized, indicating changes in smuggling volume or detection trends. Top departure countries included Saudi Arabia, UAE, while top destination countries were India and Bangladesh, with Bangladesh alone reporting 208 cases as a destination – double the previous year. Most seizures occurred at airports, land ports, couriers, and seaports (92% of which were recorded in 2024).
- **Gold jewellery:** With 437 cases, this category remained consistent year-over-year. While the overall seized quantity was lower (just over 0.5 tonnes), the high number of individual pieces suggests hand-carried, structured movements aimed at avoiding declaration thresholds. Leading source countries were UAE, Saudi Arabia, Hong Kong-China, and Türkiye, while Japan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka featured prominently as destination countries. Seizures were concentrated at airports and land borders.
- **Gold - other forms (e.g. coins, medals, compound gold):** This category had 608 cases, amounting to over three (3) tonnes of seized material. Major departure points included UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Hong Kong-China, with Türkiye, India, and Japan being key destinations. Detection occurred across a mix of airports, land ports, and “other” classified points, implying more diverse concealment environments.
- **Other precious metals (e.g., silver and platinum):** Although less frequent, this segment showed substantial growth, increasing from 1.1 tonnes in 2023 to nearly two (2) tonnes in 2024 – a 76% year-on-year increase. There were 107 cases in total. Departures were mainly from UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Hong Kong-China, with Türkiye, India, and Japan serving as primary destinations. Most seizures occurred at airports and land borders.

Enforcement insights:

- **Gold bars and other forms drive enforcement pressure:** These two categories accounted for the majority of seizures by both frequency and weight, reflecting their use in large-scale, structured smuggling operations. The shift in bar-related weight despite high case numbers may suggest fragmentation of consignments or increased concealment sophistication.
- **Jewellery and silver-based items require consistent vigilance:** While lower in mass, jewellery seizures, especially hand-carried, are harder to detect and exploit personal thresholds. The year-on-year consistency suggests an established modus operandi that depends on couriers or travellers using repeat low-value movements.
- **Persistent departure-arrival corridors identified:** The UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Hong Kong-China were dominant as departure points across all categories, while Türkiye, India, and Japan appeared repeatedly as destinations. These corridors likely involve a mix of refining, high domestic demand, and integration into informal financial systems.

- **Airports and land ports as detection hubs but emerging risks elsewhere:** The concentration of seizures at airports and land borders reflects effective passenger screening and vehicle profiling, but also underscores a need to expand vigilance across postal channels, courier networks, seaports, and free trade zones, where lower inspection coverage may be exploited by organized actors.

2.2.3 Top Reporting Members - Gold

Figure 15: Top reporting members by gold seizures (cases, pieces, and kilograms)

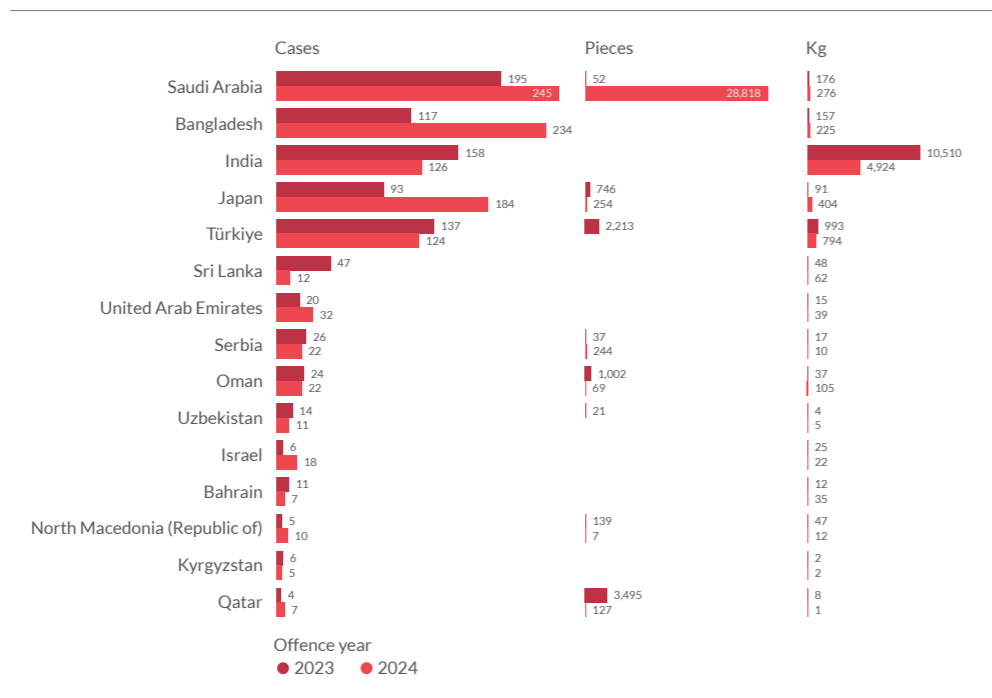


Figure 15 highlights the top 15 countries reporting gold seizures during 2023–2024. It disaggregates the data by number of cases, quantity (in kilograms), and number of seized pieces (e.g. jewellery, coins, processed items), offering insight into enforcement patterns, smuggling trends, and regional pressure points.

General observations:

- **By number of cases:**
 - **Saudi Arabia (245 cases)** and **Bangladesh (234 cases)** led global reporting in 2024, showing consistent upward trends from 2023.
 - **India (158)** and **Türkiye (137)** followed, marking them as major enforcement zones or transit/consumption hubs.
 - **Japan** saw a sharp increase from 93 to 184 cases, reflecting elevated vigilance or targeting at air borders.
- **By quantity (in kilograms):**
 - **India** reported over 15.4 metric tonnes of seized gold – more than three times the combined total of all other top countries.
 - Other significant contributors included **Türkiye (1.8 tonnes)** and **Saudi Arabia (451 kg)**, aligning with their regional trade activity and consumer demand.
- **By number of pieces:**
 - **Saudi Arabia** accounted for over 28,800 pieces in 2024 (up from just 52 in 2023), the highest recorded by any Member.

- **Türkiye (2,213 pieces)** and **Japan (999)** followed, suggesting a trend of jewellery-dominant smuggling through high-volume air travel channels.
- **Qatar**, with only seven (7) cases in 2024, reported over 3,400 pieces in one major seizure – likely a consolidated shipment or high-value courier event.
- **Year-on-year increases:**
 - **Saudi Arabia** and **Bangladesh** both saw significant case increases and jumps in both weight and piece count.
 - **Japan** doubled its cases, while **Türkiye** maintained consistent volumes with marginal growth, pointing to persistent exposure.

Enforcement insights:

- **South Asia and the Middle East as enforcement hotspots:** Countries like **India, Bangladesh, and Saudi Arabia** remain at the epicentre of global gold smuggling trends, reflecting:
 - High regional demand
 - Complex smuggling supply chains
 - Widespread use of gold in informal and illicit financial systems
- **India's dominance in volume indicates systemic laundering pressure:** **India's** extraordinary seizure volume, exceeding 15.4 metric tonnes, reflects not only entrenched structuring, undervaluation, and trade misinvoicing schemes, but also the country's deep cultural demand for gold as a traditional store of wealth. This intrinsic domestic appetite creates fertile ground for smuggling networks seeking to meet consumer demand while bypassing tariffs and financial scrutiny. Furthermore, intelligence from WCO's Operation TENTACLE has confirmed the use of gold as an alternate currency by methamphetamine traffickers operating along border corridors. These dual pressures – household consumption and transnational crime convergence – underscore the need for enhanced cargo profiling, post-clearance audit systems, and financial-trade intelligence coordination to disrupt high-volume illicit flows.
- **Jewellery smuggling via couriers remains a key modality:** The high number of pieces seized in **Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, and Japan** indicates frequent interception of concealed jewellery worn or carried by passengers, underlining the importance of profiling high-risk travellers and body-worn concealment detection.
- **Isolated high-value seizures warrant follow-up investigations:** Countries like **Qatar** illustrate how a single well-coordinated interception can involve thousands of pieces, pointing to transit exploitation, organized courier rings, or gold-in-parcel concealment.
- **Detection capacity strengthening evident in Japan and Bangladesh:** Year-on-year increases in these countries reflect either enhanced screening technologies, better profiling, or participation in joint operations, suggesting replicable best practices for other Members with underreporting trends.

2.2.4 Direction of Seizures by Commodity Type

Figure 16: Direction of seizure cases by commodity type, 2023–2024

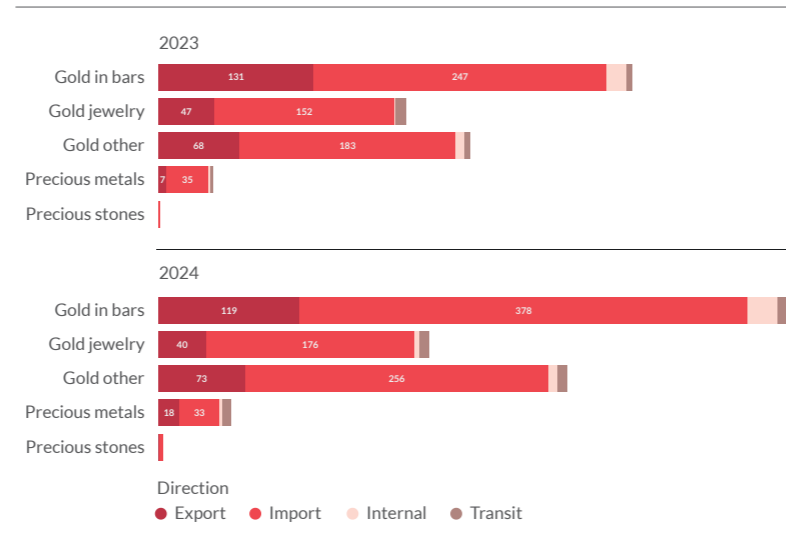


Figure 16 categorizes seizure cases by commodity type and direction of movement – import, export, internal, or transit – across the two-year period. The data emphasizes gold in various forms as the dominant commodity intercepted across all movement types.

General observations:

- **Imports account for the majority of seizures:**
 - Imports consistently represented the largest share across all categories.
 - For gold bars, import-linked cases rose from 247 in 2023 to 378 in 2024.
 - Gold jewellery and gold in other forms also showed increases in import-related seizures year-on-year.
- **Exports remain a consistent channel:**
 - Export-linked cases were also notable in gold jewellery and other forms, indicating that outbound smuggling remains relevant.
 - Gold bars (export) maintained high volumes: 131 cases in 2023 and 119 in 2024.
- **Internal and transit movements present but smaller:**
 - Internal movement of gold bars and jewellery increased in 2024, indicating rising detection inside national borders.
 - Transit cases remained low but present, pointing to limited but ongoing cross-border intermediary flows.

Enforcement insights:

- **Import channels are the primary risk vector:** The dominance of imports, especially for gold bars and processed forms, suggests a persistent attempt to move undeclared or undervalued gold into domestic markets, possibly to bypass import duties, AML checks, or origin documentation requirements.
- **Exports signal dual flow vulnerability:** Continued high volumes of export seizures highlight that gold smuggling is not unidirectional. Outbound movements may reflect efforts to:
 - Repatriate illicit proceeds, or
 - Traffic raw or processed gold into other laundering networks.

- **Rise in internal movement cases indicates national enforcement gains:** Increased reporting of in-country smuggling (particularly in 2024) signals improved domestic surveillance, possibly driven by internal investigations, road checks, or post-border inspections by police and Customs.
- **Multi-directional threat profile:** The presence of seizures across import, export, internal, and transit flows illustrates the operational complexity of gold smuggling networks. This underscores the need for:
 - Holistic border management strategies.
 - Strong inter-agency cooperation at both entry and domestic enforcement levels.

2.2.5 Comparative Overview of Gold Seizure Across Different Locations

Figure 17: Seizure locations by cases, pieces, and kilograms, 2023–2024

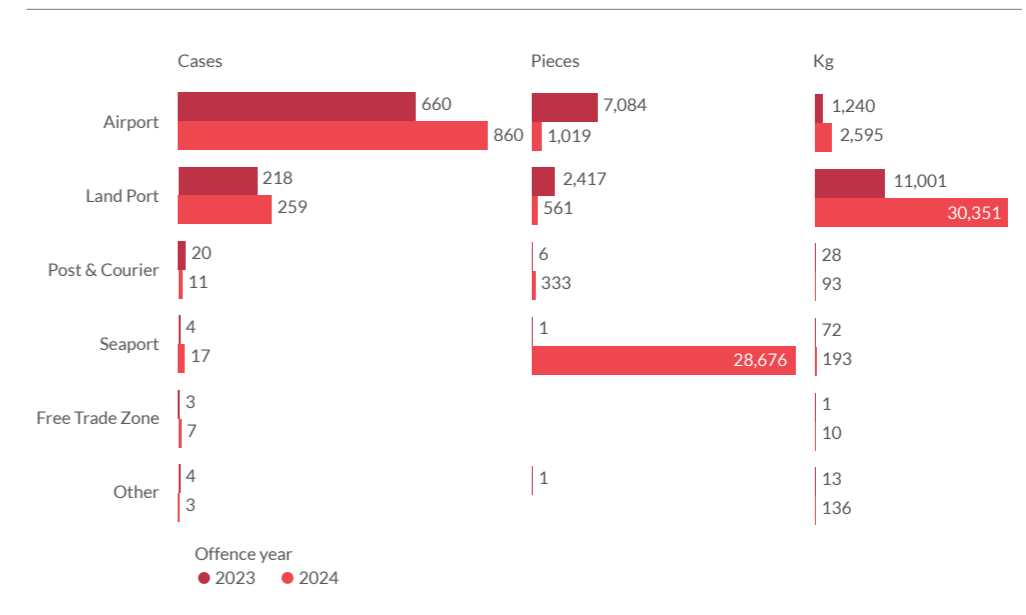


Figure 17 presents a comparative overview of gold seizure activity across different locations – airports, land ports, postal channels, seaports, and others – measured by the number of cases, quantity of pieces, and total weight intercepted.

General observations:

- **Airports remained the primary interception point,** with reported cases rising from 660 in 2023 to 860 in 2024. While the number of seized pieces dropped significantly from 7,084 to 1,019, the total weight more than doubled from 1,240 kg to 2,595 kg. This suggests a shift towards bulkier, higher-value consignments, possibly in the form of jewellery or gold bars concealed in hand luggage or air cargo.
- **Land ports experienced notable growth,** with case numbers increasing from 218 to 259 and total weight rising sharply from 11,001 kg to 30,351 kg. The relatively low number of seized pieces indicates that smuggling through these routes likely involves raw or semi-processed gold, rather than finished jewellery.
- **Seaports showed modest but growing activity,** with 17 cases in 2024, up from 4 in 2023, and a total of 28.6 kg seized. While the

volume remains low, this may reflect a gap in detection capabilities, suggesting that maritime smuggling of gold could be under the radar due to limited scanning technologies or the absence of precious metal-focused risk management frameworks at seaports.

Enforcement insights:

- Airports remain the front line for personal and high-value smuggling:** The drop in number of pieces alongside a sharp increase in total weight indicates that smugglers are shifting from fragmented jewellery to bulkier shipments, such as gold bars or consolidated items. This trend calls for intensified baggage scanning, passenger profiling, and enhanced capabilities to detect body-worn or concealed air cargo movements.
- Land ports as expanding corridors for large-scale illicit transfers:** The surge in tonnage, nearly tripling in one year, points to an evolving strategy where smugglers use road cargo or personal vehicles to transport raw or unprocessed gold in bulk volumes. Customs must prioritize investment in non-intrusive inspection systems, cargo profiling tools, and land-border intelligence fusion units to respond effectively.
- Postal and courier channels as low-frequency, high-impact threats:** Despite limited case numbers, seizures from postal and express freight routes involve massive volumes per shipment, suggesting targeted abuse of lower-risk inspection environments. Pre-arrival screening, machine learning-based anomaly detection, and stronger collaboration with private courier operators are essential to mitigate this risk.
- Seaports require strategic monitoring and technology upgrades:** Although seizures at seaports remain low in volume, the increasing trend signals the potential exploitation of maritime routes for smuggling precious metals via containerized cargo or misdeclared goods. The low figures may reflect detection blind spots due to insufficient scanning infrastructure or the absence of a precious metals-specific risk targeting system. There is a pressing need to build port-level gold smuggling risk profiles, especially for dual-use cargo and high-risk transshipment points.

2.2.6 Concealment and Detection Methods

Figure 18: Concealment and detection methods, 2023–2024

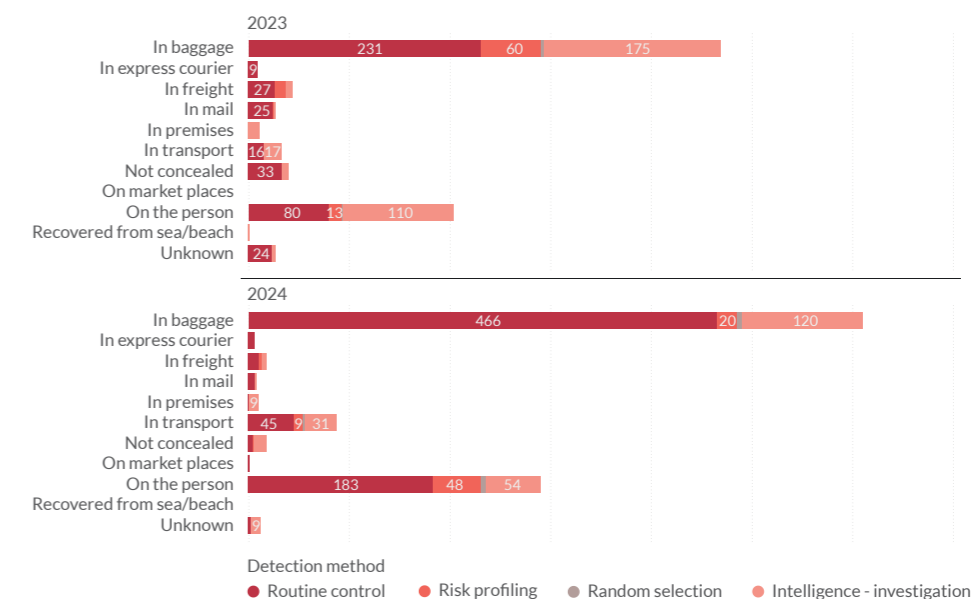


Figure 18 examines how precious metals were concealed and the methods Customs used to detect it. The data highlights both the evolving concealment strategies employed by smugglers and the growing use of intelligence and profiling tools by enforcement agencies.

General observations:

- Baggage concealment remained the most commonly used method** of gold smuggling, with reported cases rising from 231 in 2023 to 486 in 2024. Most detections were made through routine controls, which nearly doubled year-on-year. There was also a substantial increase in the number of cases supported by risk profiling and intelligence, reaching over 140 in 2024.
- Concealment on the person was the second most prevalent method**, with cases increasing from 203 to 285 over the same period. Detection remained evenly split between routine inspections and targeted profiling, reflecting consistent enforcement attention on individual travellers.
- Transport, freight, and courier-based concealment methods showed a marked increase** from just 16 cases in 2023 to 75 in 2024. While most of these were detected through routine checks, a considerable portion were intercepted through profiling and intelligence. Although infrequent, seizures in freight and courier channels were typically high in value.
- Mail, premises-based, and unconcealed cases remained limited.** Mail and premises seizures held steady, while cases involving no concealment (e.g. improperly declared or openly carried gold) declined, suggesting that traffickers are increasingly turning to more deliberate and sophisticated concealment techniques.

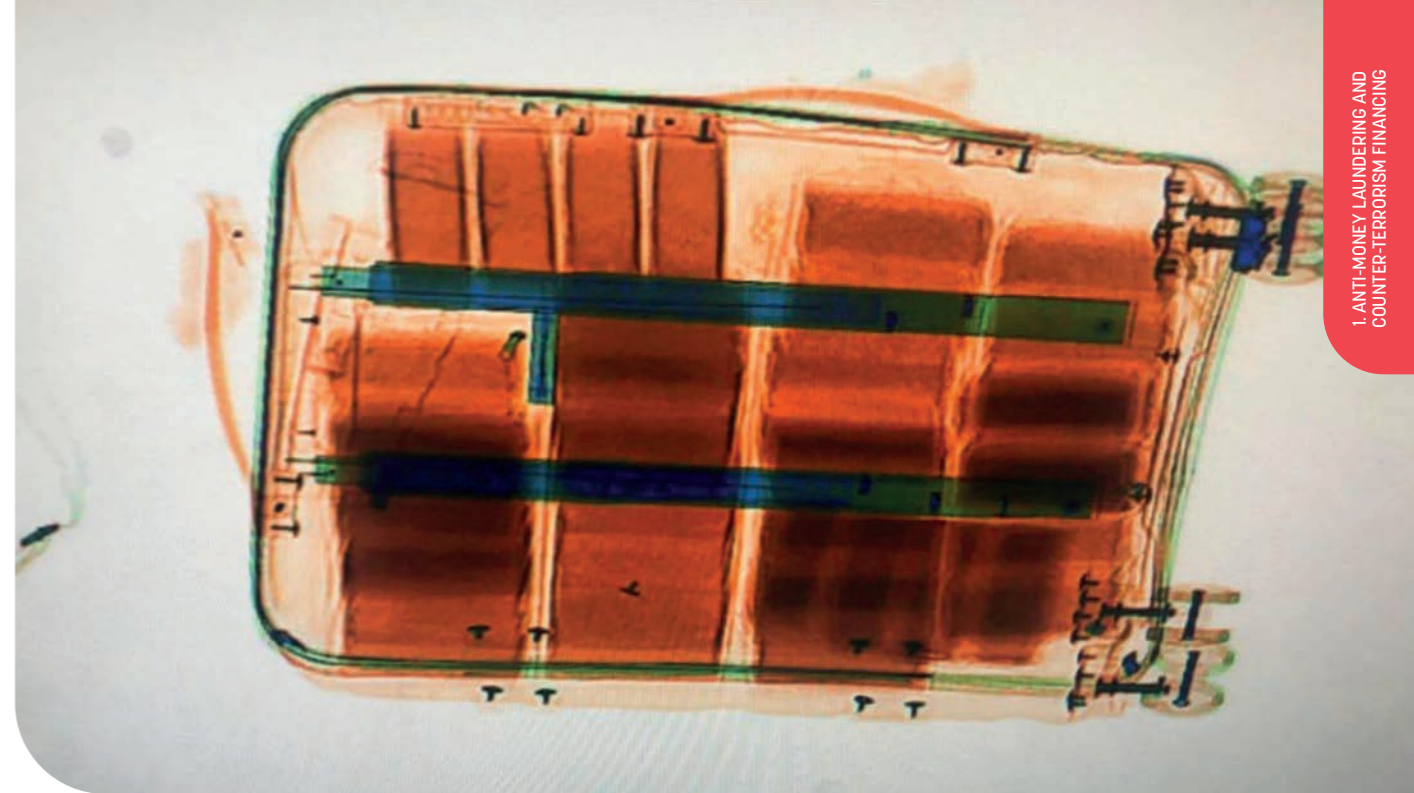
Enforcement insights:

- **Baggage concealment demands continuous screening enhancements:** The dominance of baggage-based smuggling, coupled with its rise, demonstrates the need for sustained investment in X-ray screening, body scanners, and smart baggage analytics. The uptick in intelligence-assisted detection highlights effective use of passenger risk indicators and travel history analysis.
- **On-person smuggling requires behavioural targeting:** The increase in cases involving direct body concealment calls for enhanced pre-arrival data analysis, behavioural observation, and manual search protocols to detect concealed gold under clothing or within body cavities.
- **Growth in overland and mixed cargo risk:** The surge in vehicle and transport-based concealment confirms a strategic shift towards land and commercial cargo routes. Customs must scale up NII systems, driver profiling, and cross-border coordination to manage this emerging threat.
- **Courier and freight channels remain high-impact despite low volume:** Although low in frequency, the per-case value of seizures in courier services is high, reinforcing the importance of pre-arrival processing, Customs-courier partnerships, and targeting algorithms for small, high-risk shipments.
- **Intelligence and profiling capacity is expanding but must be sustained:** The overall rise in seizures driven by risk profiling and intelligence confirms the value of targeted enforcement. However, to remain effective, this must be accompanied by continued capacity building, real-time data sharing, and integration with financial and trade data.

2.2.7 Conclusion

The 2023–2024 seizure data confirms that precious metal smuggling, particularly involving gold in various forms, remains a strategically exploited modality for illicit trade and financial crime. Gold bars alone accounted for the highest volume of cases and weight, while jewellery and compound forms revealed the continued use of hand-carried, courier-based structuring to evade Customs controls. The dominance of airports and land borders as interception points illustrates both the progress made in passenger and vehicle screening, and the need to expand detection capabilities across postal, freight, and maritime channels.

A core concern lies in the mismatch between trade exposure and reporting activity: many countries with substantial gold import/export activity failed to report cases, indicating operational blind spots or a lack of targeting tools. The consistent involvement of departure points like UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Hong Kong-China, and destination corridors into India, Türkiye, Japan, and Bangladesh, suggests entrenched regional laundering networks that demand multi-jurisdictional enforcement.



Courtesy of Maldives Customs Service.

Critically, the rise in detection via profiling and intelligence-led control, particularly for concealed baggage and on-person smuggling, signals an encouraging shift towards targeted interdictions. However, sustaining this progress requires closing the data gaps among non-reporting Members, investing in concealment detection tools, and embedding precious metal risk indicators into Customs risk engines.

As gold increasingly intersects with organized crime, underground banking, and even drug trafficking, as evidenced in WCO's Operation TENTACLE, the strategic imperative is clear: Customs administrations must reinforce cross-border intelligence collaboration, deepen their forensic audit capacity, and establish specialized enforcement frameworks to disrupt high-value smuggling routes and protect national revenue and financial integrity.

Case study 1. Chile

CHILE'S COORDINATED CUSTOMS RESPONSE TO GOLD AND CURRENCY SMUGGLING (OPERATION TENTACLE SOUTH AMERICA 2024)

Overview

Between 2022 and 2024, the Chile National Customs Service intensified its focus on detecting and disrupting illicit cross-border movements of undeclared currency, gold, and precious commodities. Leveraging insights from WCO's AML/CTF programme and capacity-building support under Project TENTACLE, Chile adopted a more structured and intelligence-led enforcement strategy at its air, land, and courier entry points. The case illustrates how strategic use of real-time intelligence, inter-agency coordination, and risk profiling tools can produce measurable enforcement outcomes in complex financial crime environments.

Context and background

Chile has long served as a regional transit and destination country for illicit goods and value flows. In recent years, authorities have noted an upward trend in the misuse of personal transport, commercial courier services, and mail channels for transporting bulk cash and undeclared gold, often linked to informal financial networks and laundering schemes.

To counter this, Chilean Customs aligned its operational priorities with WCO's AML/CTF framework, incorporating concealment typologies, profiling criteria, and risk thresholds derived from global seizure data. A significant turning point came with Chile's participation in WCO-led operations under Project TENTACLE, during which national teams tested live targeting protocols in collaboration with regional and international counterparts.

Operational highlights

During a recent multi-agency operation supported by the WCO, Chilean enforcement authorities:

- **Interdicted over \$2 million in undeclared currency**, mostly concealed in luggage and body-carried by air passengers.
- Seized **nearly 50 kg of gold and jewellery**, with concealment ranging from courier parcels to false compartments in personal effects.
- Identified **structuring behaviours** – including multiple small-value shipments below the declaration threshold and inconsistent travel declarations.
- Strengthened real-time communication with the **FIU and police**, allowing immediate investigation triggers following high-value seizures.

The strategic location of seizures, predominantly at **Santiago International Airport**, **land crossings with Peru and Bolivia**, and express courier terminals, demonstrated that illicit actors were testing multiple routes and conveyances simultaneously.

Key enablers of success

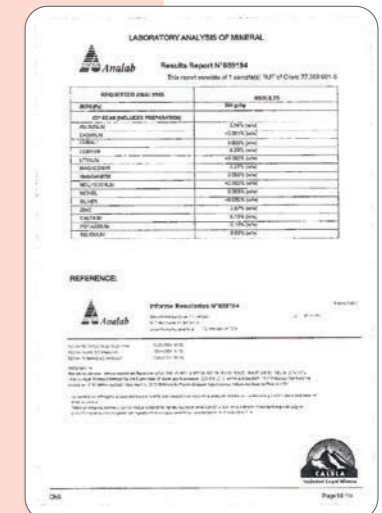
- **FIU integration:** Close coordination with the Chilean Financial Intelligence Unit ensured post-seizure financial tracing and supported prosecutorial referrals.
- **Customs-Police cooperation:** Chile's inter-agency task force model allowed operational information to flow seamlessly between Customs, national police, and border control agencies.
- **Risk-based screening:** Adoption of WCO profiling indicators helped Chile move beyond random checks to more risk-based inspections.

Insights and lessons learned

- Live operations provide essential field-testing of risk indicators.** Chile used TENTACLE-driven typologies to flag high-risk travellers and courier shipments, directly contributing to multiple interdictions.
- Cross-agency communication must be institutionalized, not ad hoc.** Rapid referrals to the FIU and police ensured seized assets became part of broader financial investigations.
- Courier and mail systems require deeper integration into AML risk frameworks.** Many high-value seizures involved parcels with misdeclared goods or hidden compartments.
- Human intelligence from front-line officers remains critical**, especially in spotting behavioural red flags that automated systems may miss.
- Post-seizure analytics matter.** Chile's review of concealment methods, routes, and profiles helped refine its targeting models for future operations.

Conclusion

Chile's case demonstrates the operational value of aligning national Customs enforcement with WCO's AML/CTF risk models. Through its involvement in Project TENTACLE and regional coordination efforts, Chile not only disrupted significant illicit flows but also built a sustainable intelligence and enforcement model that can be replicated in other Member administrations. The country's proactive approach serves as a model of integrated border enforcement, especially in high-risk zones for gold laundering and bulk currency movement.



Falsified certificates of analysis.



Sampling and analysis of mining products.

Case study 2. India

INDIA'S TARGETED INTERDICTION OF CONCEALED GOLD IN INDUSTRIAL EQUIPMENT (OPERATION TENTACLE ASIA-PACIFIC 2024)

Overview

In April 2024, Indian Customs, under the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI), executed a high-impact interdiction of foreign-origin gold smuggled through air cargo at IGI Airport, New Delhi, during a WCO-led AML/CTF operation in the Asia-Pacific region. The case involved a sophisticated concealment method using industrial equipment imported from Hong Kong.

Context and background

India remains one of the world's largest consumers of gold, and its porous entry points, particularly at major air cargo hubs, have made it a frequent target for transnational smuggling networks. Intelligence suggested that illicit actors were moving away from hand-carried gold and shifting towards trade-based laundering, using legitimate-looking cargo to conceal high-value contraband.

During Operation TENTACLE Asia-Pacific 2024, the DRI Delhi Zonal Unit launched a targeted inspection of an inbound consignment declared as "lens centre instruments." The shipment, consisting of 24 heavy metal units, was flagged due to inconsistencies in shipment weight and abnormal import patterns when cross-referenced with India's national Customs offence database.

Operational highlights

- Customs officers conducted a deep dismantling of the imported machines and uncovered 423 cylindrical gold discs, each wrapped in copper coils and electrical tape to simulate industrial components.
- The total weight of seized gold was 31.4 kg, with purity ranging from 993 to 999, suitable for immediate market resale or covert value transfer.
- The operation concluded with the arrest of three individuals, dismantling an active node in a regional smuggling network with suspected links to Hong Kong and Thailand.
- The case marked one of the most technically sophisticated concealments intercepted at Delhi's air cargo complex and highlights the importance of Customs intelligence units maintaining access to updated concealment typologies and import anomaly databases.

Key enablers of success

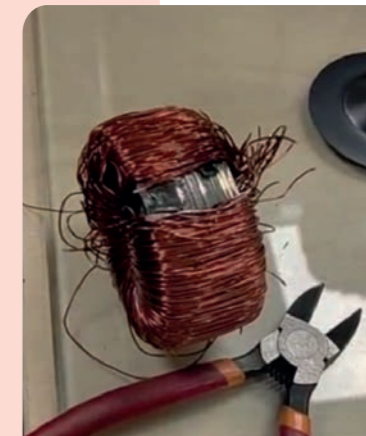
- **Advanced data profiling:** The case began with a thorough analysis of air cargo data, importer profiles, historical declarations, and anomalies in product type versus weight.
- **Controlled delivery mechanism:** Authorities tracked the consignment post-clearance to intercept the final recipient, facilitating broader network disruption.
- **Use of WCO operational intelligence:** Profiling criteria developed under Project TENTACLE directly informed the Customs risk assessment model used in this operation.
- **Collaborative field action:** Enforcement was supported by real-time coordination between the DRI, airport Customs, and national border intelligence.

Insights and lessons learned

1. **Technical concealment is increasing**, requiring Customs to invest in both dismantling capabilities and domain-specific knowledge of machinery and electronics.
2. **Air cargo risk management must evolve** from commodity flagging to behavioural and profile-based shipment targeting.
3. **Trade-based laundering through gold is no longer limited to jewellery or personal effects**; entire cargo consignments can be weaponized for value transfer.
4. **Real-time information sharing between WCO Members is vital**, particularly for identifying repeat consignors and high-risk routing patterns.
5. **Machine-readable concealment indicators** should be embedded into national risk engines for early anomaly detection.

Conclusion

India's targeted enforcement action demonstrates how proactive intelligence use, data mining, and inter-agency coordination can effectively disrupt high-value gold laundering schemes. The operation not only thwarted a major smuggling attempt but also generated new concealment intelligence for the global Customs community. As the WCO AML/CTF programme continues to enhance Member capacity across regions, cases like this affirm the value of real-time typology sharing and the strategic integration of operational insights into national targeting frameworks.



*Courtesy of
Central Board of
Indirect Taxes &
Customs of India
(CBIC).*

Case study 3. Bulgaria

BULGARIA DISRUPTS CONCEALED GOLD AND CASH SMUGGLING IN OVERLAND FREIGHT TRANSPORT (OPERATION TENTACLE EASTERN EUROPE 2024)

Overview

On 7 February 2024, Bulgarian Customs authorities at the Lessovo Border Crossing Point executed a high-impact interdiction targeting the overland smuggling of undeclared gold and foreign currency. The seizure, conducted under the Operation TENTACLE Eastern Europe Operation, involved a commercial truck arriving from Germany, and led to the recovery of gold bars and undeclared cash.

Context and background

Bulgaria serves as a strategic external border of the European Union and a major transit corridor for commercial and informal trade between Western Europe and the Balkans. Bulgarian Customs has historically faced smuggling threats involving narcotics, counterfeit goods, and fuel. However, recent intelligence gathered through the TENTACLE operational efforts indicated a growing shift towards value-based smuggling, particularly involving gold, cash, and dual-use goods.

This case arose during a multi-agency inspection, where Bulgarian Customs applied threshold-based profiling indicators and concealment typologies to high-volume commercial cargo flows. The subject vehicle appeared routine on its declaration forms and was not flagged for inspection until anomalies were detected in the vehicle's cabin weight distribution.

Operational highlights

- During a detailed cabin inspection, officers discovered €12,900 in undeclared cash and four (4) kg of gold bullion, tightly packed and hidden beneath the driver's sleeping area, a common concealment point in overland smuggling.
- The gold was not declared in any accompanying documentation, and the driver provided no satisfactory explanation for its origin or intended destination.
- Immediate actions were taken in coordination with national investigative authorities, triggering post-seizure financial tracing and legal proceedings.

The concealment method and value of the commodities indicated that the shipment was part of a coordinated laundering or value transfer scheme, potentially involving multiple actors along the transit route from Germany through Bulgaria into the Western Balkans.

Key enablers of success

- **Profiling and inspection protocols:** Customs officers applied AML/CTF risk indicators to assess cargo and vehicle profiles, enabling the inspection team to identify and focus on the cabin compartment.
- **Cross-agency communication:** Seamless coordination between front-line officers, enforcement units, and financial crime investigators ensured swift legal handling and follow-up.
- **Training on concealment typologies:** Bulgarian Customs had participated in Project TENTACLE Pre-operational hands-on training where similar concealment methods were discussed.

Insights and lessons learned

1. **Land-border freight remains a high-value smuggling vector,** especially for gold and cash, where Customs is often reliant on document review and surface inspections unless risk profiling is rigorously applied.
2. **Smugglers are exploiting informal cargo environments,** concealing precious metals and currency in driver-operated compartments rather than freight containers.
3. **The blending of currency and precious metals in a single concealment scheme** suggests complex laundering operations that aim to move undeclared assets while evading currency reporting thresholds.

Conclusion

Bulgaria's success in detecting and seizing gold and cash at the Lessovo land border reflects the operational power of risk-based inspections informed by global typology sharing. The case reinforces the need for WCO Members to invest in both profiling technologies and field-level capacity building, especially at high-volume freight corridors vulnerable to transnational laundering threats.



Case study 4. Brazil

BRAZIL UNCOVERS CROSS-BORDER LAUNDERING NETWORK IN AGRICULTURAL MACHINERY TRADE (OPERATION TENTACLE SOUTH AMERICA 2024)

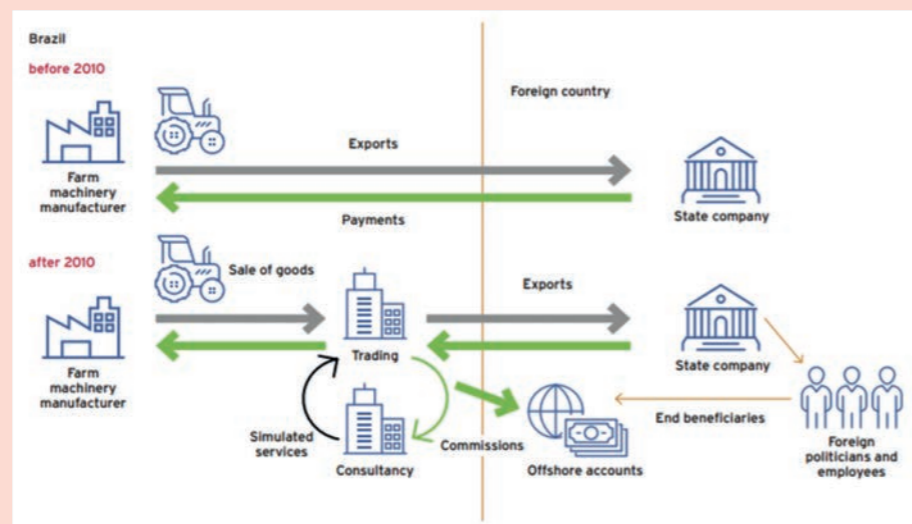
Overview

Between 2014 and 2017, Brazilian authorities dismantled a transnational laundering scheme involving the export of agricultural machinery from Brazil to a foreign state-owned company, resulting in the illicit movement of over BRL 200 million disguised as sales commissions and consultancy payments. The scheme was uncovered through a joint effort by Brazil's Federal Revenue office (RFB) and COAF, the national FIU, and demonstrated how legitimate trade structures can be exploited to enable cross-border corruption and laundering.

The case, which involved shell companies in Brazil and abroad, fraudulent invoices, and multi-jurisdictional fund transfers, was shared under Operation TENTACLE South America 2024. It provides a textbook example of service-based money-laundering (SBML) through foreign trade.



Consultancy trade of farm equipment biofuels



Context and background

The investigation was triggered by a tax audit of a trading company in Brazil, which reported unusually high operating expenses, specifically inflated sales commissions and consultancy fees. A deeper review by the RFB tax intelligence unit flagged irregularities and prompted a request for financial intelligence support from COAF.

The analysis revealed that the real beneficiary of the trading company was a former director of one of the machinery manufacturers. Additional links were found between the company's partners and a São Paulo-based consulting firm. Payments were traced to offshore accounts in Panama, the United States, and Switzerland, indicating classic laundering behaviour structured through false invoicing and overpricing.

Operational highlights

- The agricultural equipment was originally sold directly to a foreign state-owned company at market prices.
- To launder illicit funds, a trading company was inserted as an intermediary, artificially overpricing the exports by 30–40% under the guise of inflated commissions and consultancy fees.
- The consulting firm, closely tied to the trading company, was set up to “prospect suppliers,” creating a façade for commission flows.
- COAF's financial intelligence identified BRL 50 million in export proceeds that never reached suppliers, but instead circulated through accounts held by individuals linked to the scheme.
- An offshore account with millions in available credit was also used to launder funds through exchange contracts appearing legitimate on the surface.

Key enablers of success

- **Financial transaction analysis:** COAF tracked layered transfers and reverse flows, identifying the beneficial owners and shell entities involved.
- **Cross-agency coordination:** Effective collaboration between the FIU and RFB enabled rapid information exchange, asset tracing, and legal escalation.
- **Proactive use of open-source intelligence:** Patterns were confirmed with support from media coverage and external investigations in both Brazil and Venezuela.
- **Strategic tax auditing:** The RFB's ability to identify unusually high and unjustified expenditures provided the initial red flag to trigger the operation.

Insights and lessons learned

1. **Trade-based laundering schemes can disguise illicit value through legitimate export channels**, turning Customs and tax authorities into critical players in financial crime detection.
2. **Overpriced services and false commissions are highly effective laundering tools**, particularly when paired with offshore financial circuits.
3. **Customs and FIUs must jointly analyse service-related documentation**, as money-laundering is not always product-based.
4. **Despite delays**, formal mutual legal assistance channels produced essential evidence from foreign jurisdictions.
5. **Integrated training on AML typologies for tax and Customs officials** improves early warning systems and detection capacity.

Conclusion

Brazil's successful dismantling of this laundering network illustrates the importance of integrating Customs, FIU, and tax intelligence capabilities when investigating complex laundering through trade in services. By targeting inflated commissions and suspicious export structures, authorities were able to recover over BRL 200 million and secure convictions exceeding ten (10) years in prison for key actors.

4. WCO AML/CTF Programme – Overview

The WCO's Anti-Money-Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing (AML/CTF) programme plays a pivotal role in strengthening the front-line capacity of Customs to detect and disrupt illicit financial flows. Anchored in three core objectives, the programme equips WCO Members with the tools, knowledge, and operational coordination needed to effectively confront emerging money-laundering and terrorism financing threats.

Firstly, through Project TENTACLE and Project OCTAGON, the programme delivers both hands-on operational training and tailored learning interventions. Project TENTACLE emphasizes enforcement readiness and risk-based targeting through live operational exercises, while OCTAGON complements this by offering structured capacity-building modules for selected administrations.

Secondly, the programme supports Members in aligning with global AML/CTF standards by helping them strengthen legal, institutional, and procedural frameworks. This includes enhancing regulatory compliance and elevating the integrity of Customs enforcement mandates.

Thirdly, it fosters international and subregional cooperation by promoting information sharing between Customs, FIUs, and law enforcement agencies. This multi-agency approach ensures that illicit trade and associated financial crimes are addressed comprehensively and in real time.

Together, Projects TENTACLE and OCTAGON reflect the WCO's commitment to developing agile, intelligence-led, and operationally capable Customs administrations that can anticipate and counter the next generation of transnational financial crime risks.

4.1 Project TENTACLE

Launched in 2019, Project TENTACLE has evolved from an awareness-raising initiative into a robust operational and capacity-building programme aimed at equipping Customs with the tools to combat money-laundering and terrorism financing. In 2024, the initiative deepened its focus on Member empowerment, delivering targeted training, facilitating live operations, and tailoring support through data-informed needs assessments. TENTACLE's capacity-building journey now emphasizes operational readiness, cross-border intelligence sharing, and strategic inter-agency coordination.

Evidence-based capacity building through targeted surveys

To ensure interventions reflect Member-specific needs, TENTACLE deployed regional AML/CTF surveys in early 2024. Thirty Members from Asia-Pacific, South America, and Eastern Europe participated in these surveys. These surveys enabled the:

- Mapping of legal, institutional, and operational readiness,
- Benchmarking of enforcement practices, and
- Clustering of Members into customized capacity-building groups using the graduation model, as highlighted in the 2024 Illicit Trade Report.

This approach allows WCO to deliver tailored support, ensuring resources are directed where they are most impactful.



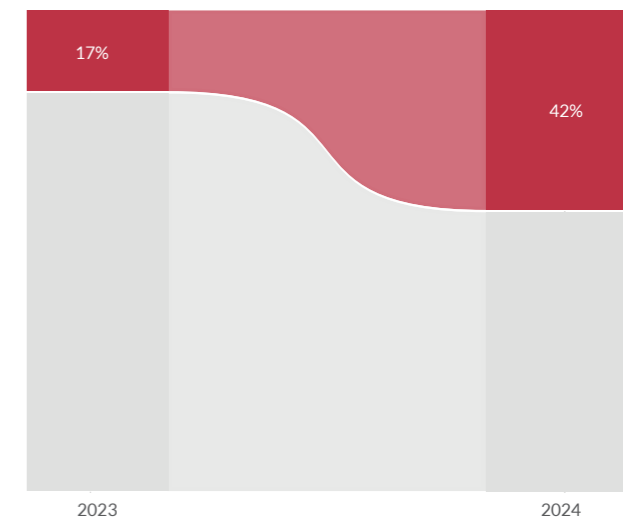
Tangible operational impact in 2024

Through five (5) regional AML/CTF operations and seven (7) training workshops in 2024, TENTACLE provided capacity-building to 266 officials from 64 WCO Members. Operational outcomes were unprecedented:

- US\$267 million seized in gold, rhodium, currency, and misinvoiced goods (surpassing \$325 million in total since 2019).
- 859 kg of gold, 39 kg of rhodium, and 1,733 tonnes of other precious metals seized.
- \$84 million in cash, and \$85 million in TBML-linked trade flows intercepted.
- 267 individuals arrested for money-laundering or terrorism financing.

These figures underscore the growing complexity and scale of precious metal laundering schemes and the emerging role of Customs in dismantling them.

Figure 19: Operational impact on gold detection



In 2023, only **17% of the total value of gold seizures** was linked to operations conducted under the programme's framework. By 2024, this figure **rose sharply to 41%**, demonstrating the growing impact of structured, intelligence-led interventions targeting gold smuggling.

This substantial increase in detection effectiveness can be directly linked to the active participation of **Customs, Financial Intelligence Units, and police agencies from 39 WCO Members** across Eastern Europe, West Africa, the Asia-Pacific, South America, and the Mediterranean. These engagements have gone beyond isolated enforcement actions, serving as real-time testing environments for Members to:

- Align operational enforcement efforts,
- Strengthen inter-agency collaboration, and
- Improve cross-border, real-life intelligence exchange protocols.

Moreover, regional operational initiatives have enabled participating Members to critically examine and harmonize their national AML/CTF frameworks, ensuring that regulatory loopholes, often exploited in gold-based laundering schemes, are progressively closed. This has helped reduce the fragmentation of legal approaches that criminals traditionally manipulate in order to move gold and illicit value across jurisdictions undetected.

The operational results underscore the importance of sustained technical assistance, tailored risk indicators, and coordinated multi-agency targeting models provided through WCO's Project TENTACLE and Project OCTAGON. When Member administrations integrate these tools into their national enforcement strategies, the outcomes are not only measurable, as evidenced by the 2024 increase, but also strategically transformative.

Ultimately, this trend affirms that as smuggling methodologies evolve, so too must detection frameworks. By participating in joint regional operations, Customs administrations are not only enhancing gold interdiction outcomes but also future-proofing their enforcement and policy architecture against emerging financial crime typologies.

Figure 20: Precious metals detection by conveyance (based on operational data)

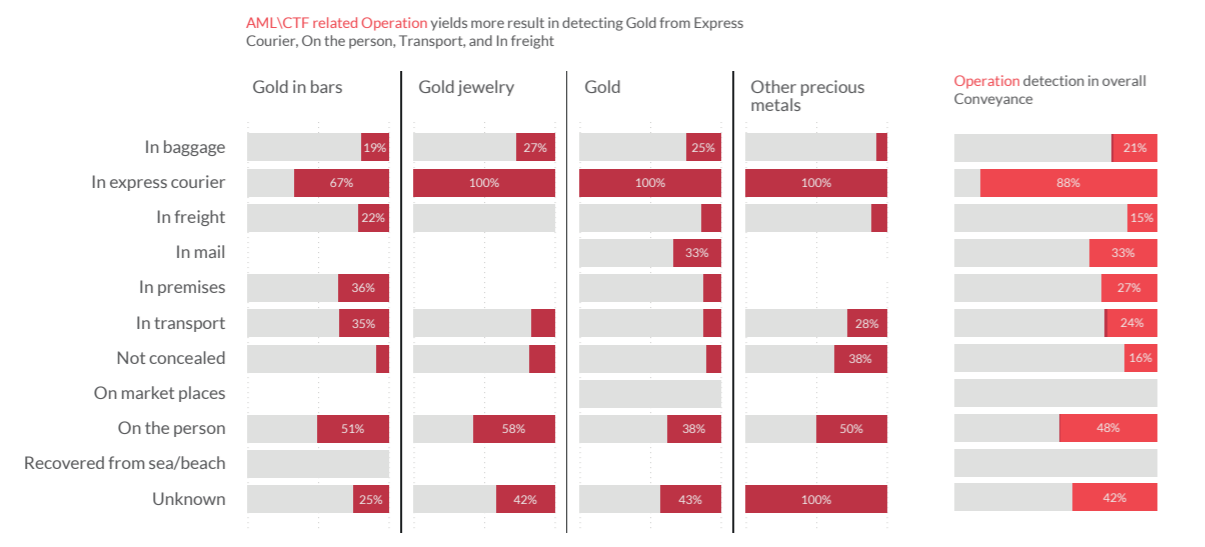


Figure 20 presents an analytical breakdown of operational outcomes from WCO-led AML/CTF operations, showing the share of total seizures by concealment and conveyance mode that were directly linked to coordinated AML/CTF enforcement efforts.

The data set draws on seizures involving different forms of gold (bars, jewellery, processed forms) and other precious metals, offering granular insights into how targeted operations translate into enforcement results across smuggling methodologies.

The data reveals that operational interventions are significantly more effective in certain areas, particularly:

- **Express courier:** Operations contributed to 88% of all gold bar seizures through express couriers. This figure confirms the value of active profiling and intelligence-based screening in postal and courier environments, where concealment sophistication tends to be higher.

- **On-person concealment:** Yielded high attribution as well, with 51% of gold bar cases, 58% of gold jewellery, and 50% of other precious metals seized during operations. These patterns align with known smuggling behaviours involving body-worn gold or concealed personal effects, often structured to bypass declaration thresholds.

This operational performance suggests that certain smuggling typologies are highly deliberate and structurally embedded, particularly in couriers and on-body movements. Participation in real-time joint operations provides Customs agencies with critical exposure to packaging materials, concealment methods, route selection, and behavioural patterns – insights that can be directly translated into strategic enforcement.

From an AML/CTF risk management standpoint, these findings provide a solid foundation for automated profiling system development. Operational data can be used to train machine learning models to identify risk indicators, including:

- Misalignment between declared and actual parcel weights,
- Recurring low-value shipments from high-risk postal zones,
- Passenger travel anomalies or inconsistent travel histories.

These indicators can then feed into risk engines that trigger non-intrusive inspections or secondary screenings, enabling a shift from manual profiling towards data-driven, proactive enforcement.

Shifting from seizure to network disruption

Project TENTACLE's hallmark in 2024 was its shift from isolated seizures to intelligence-led, multi-agency enforcement. This shift is evident in:

- 1,338 intelligence exchanges among Customs, FIUs, and police.
- 146 joint Customs-police detections, and 167 coordinated investigations.
- One (1) joint Customs-police-FIU interdiction, signalling deepened inter-agency collaboration.

These results align with Figure 4A and 4B of the Illicit Trade Report, which show that Members engaged in TENTACLE operations demonstrated higher detection efficiency and increased interdiction of gold and currency smuggling via couriers, transport, and personal concealment methods.

Policy alignment and high-risk corridor engagement

Through TENTACLE, Members have started aligning their national AML/CTF frameworks to close policy loopholes exploited by cross-border criminals. In 2024, operations revealed:

- Gold movement linked to conflict-adjacent regions,
- Exploitation of courier and mail networks, and
- Persistent undervaluation and misclassification in trade.

These findings helped shape key enforcement priorities discussed in Project OCTAGON's 2024 Hot Zone Prioritization Forum, referenced throughout the Report as critical context for customizing future interventions.



Conclusion

Project TENTACLE's 2024 efforts represent a turning point in Customs-led AML/CTF enforcement. With data-driven targeting, multi-agency collaboration, and region-specific strategies, the project now serves as both an operational engine and a policy development catalyst. As emphasized in the 2024 Illicit Trade Report, TENTACLE's graduation model offers WCO Members a scalable, replicable framework for building institutional resilience against evolving financial crime threats.

4.2 Project OCTAGON

Project OCTAGON complements the operational thrust of Project TENTACLE by translating field-level insights into long-term capacity-building strategies, particularly in high-risk sectors such as gem trafficking and regional laundering hotspots. While TENTACLE focuses on real-time interdictions, joint operations, and tactical intelligence exchange, OCTAGON provides the strategic backbone: equipping Customs officers with the specialized skills, certification, and regional threat awareness needed to sustain enforcement gains. Together, the two projects form a comprehensive AML/CTF ecosystem, aligning immediate operational impact with enduring institutional capability, as emphasized throughout the 2024 Illicit Trade Report.

In 2024, Project OCTAGON played a pivotal role in strengthening Customs AML/CTF resilience, complementing WCO's AML/CTF operational outcomes and reinforcing the policy relevance of the 2024 Illicit Trade Report. OCTAGON's activities were anchored across three core thematic areas, each producing tangible results that fed directly into Member State efforts to counter transnational financial crime threats.

Strategic risk mapping through the Hot Zone Prioritization Forum (HZPF)

Held in Sofia, Bulgaria (4–8 November 2024), the second edition of the HZPF convened over 70 participants from 24 countries, including representatives from Customs administrations, the Egmont Group of Financial Intelligence Units, and George Mason University's TraCCC. Discussions focused on identifying and evaluating the world's most vulnerable zones for money-laundering, terrorism financing, and illicit trade convergence. The Steering group, comprising nine (9) key Members (e.g. Australia, India, Nigeria, USA), helped align risk prioritization with regional enforcement realities.

These dialogues informed the Illicit Trade Report's risk classification framework, offering Member Customs administrations a geopolitical lens to guide enforcement resource allocation and inter-agency coordination.

Specialized certification on gem-linked laundering risks

In collaboration with the Gemological Institute of America (GIA), six (6) Customs officers from high-risk countries advanced through the Gem Certification Programme in 2024. The training focused on identifying illicit flows involving diamonds and coloured gemstones, a typology increasingly linked to terrorism financing and value-concealed laundering.



This certification programme supports the WCO's call for greater Customs capability in detecting high-value, non-cash laundering methods, particularly in jurisdictions exposed to mineral-based illicit finance.

Tailored training and mentorship for vulnerable jurisdictions

OCTAGON conducted mentorship activities for Botswana and Nepal, addressing country-specific AML/CTF implementation gaps. Additionally, a subregional AML/CTF workshop was held in Mauritius, involving nine (9) Customs administrations from Eastern and Southern Africa. These efforts focused on strengthening internal controls, inter-agency intelligence flow, and the role of Customs in national AML strategies.

These initiatives directly support the WCO's emphasis on regional capacity building and empowerment, especially in emerging risk zones where policy alignment, enforcement coordination, and intelligence access remain fragmented.

Conclusion

In 2024, Project OCTAGON played a vital strategic role in complementing WCO's operational impact by building long-term AML/CTF capacity among Customs administrations. Through targeted initiatives, such as the Hot Zone Prioritization Forum, Gem Certification Programme, and tailored training for high-risk regions, OCTAGON enhanced the ability of Members to detect and disrupt complex laundering schemes.



2

DRUG TRAFFICKING

Illicit drug trafficking continues to pose great and evolving challenges on Customs and law enforcement agencies. Upward trend in reported seizures, an expanding consumer market, and the rapid globalization of distribution channels highlight the growing sophistication and exploitative practices of criminal organizations. Addressing this challenge entails coordinated, intelligence-led responses.



Courtesy of German Central Customs Authority.

INTRODUCTION

Drug trafficking poses a serious threat to our communities, with devastating social, health and economic effects. Given the sheer scale and continual evolution of the illicit drug market, it is essential that the fight against it remains a priority for Customs and other law enforcement agencies.

The illicit traffic of narcotics and psychotropic substances continues to represent a significant challenge for Customs and other law enforcement agencies. Globalization and new technologies have made criminal organizations more connected than ever before, diversifying and increasing their consumer base, as well as the expedited dissemination of their illicit goods on a global scale. They are also increasingly resorting to sophisticated and complex methods of concealing their products to circumvent Customs controls.

This chapter outlines global drug trends for the 2023–2024 period within the field of Customs, giving a detailed overview of quantities, routes and methods of transport and concealment by drug type. In addition, several case studies highlighting exceptional seizures and particular *modi operandi* are featured.

In 2024, the number of seizures increased slightly, with cannabis now the most trafficked drug, followed by psychotropic substances, placing cocaine in third place, which was the most trafficked narcotic in the previous two years. This was followed by new psychoactive substances (NPS), opiates and khat.

North America and Western Europe ranked as the regions most involved in drug trafficking, having been cited as a source, transit or destination point in numerous instances.

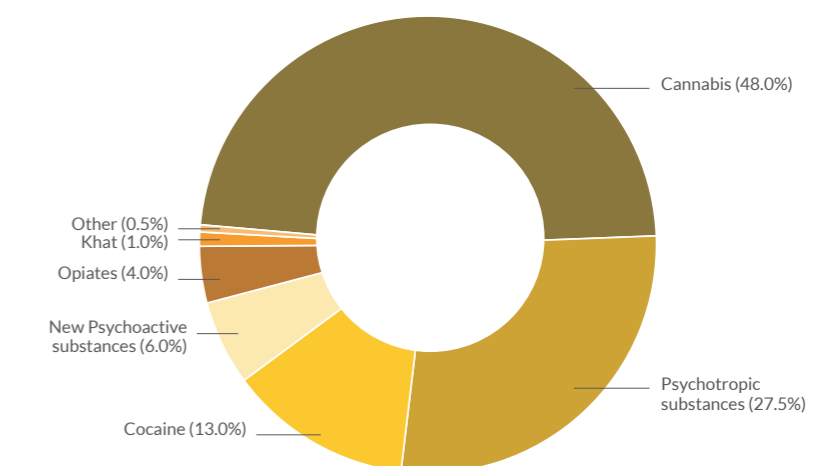
Furthermore, more than half of the seizures that took place during 2024 were the result of risk profiling, emphasizing the importance of further

increasing the capacity of Customs officers in this domain to reduce random examinations and target the goods most likely to be in violation of the law.

In the face of such challenges and issues, the WCO has implemented comprehensive and innovative initiatives that equip Members with the tools to effectively combat drug trafficking and strengthen international cooperation to better protect our societies. These programmes and projects are mentioned at the end of this chapter.

1. Overall trends in narcotics trafficking

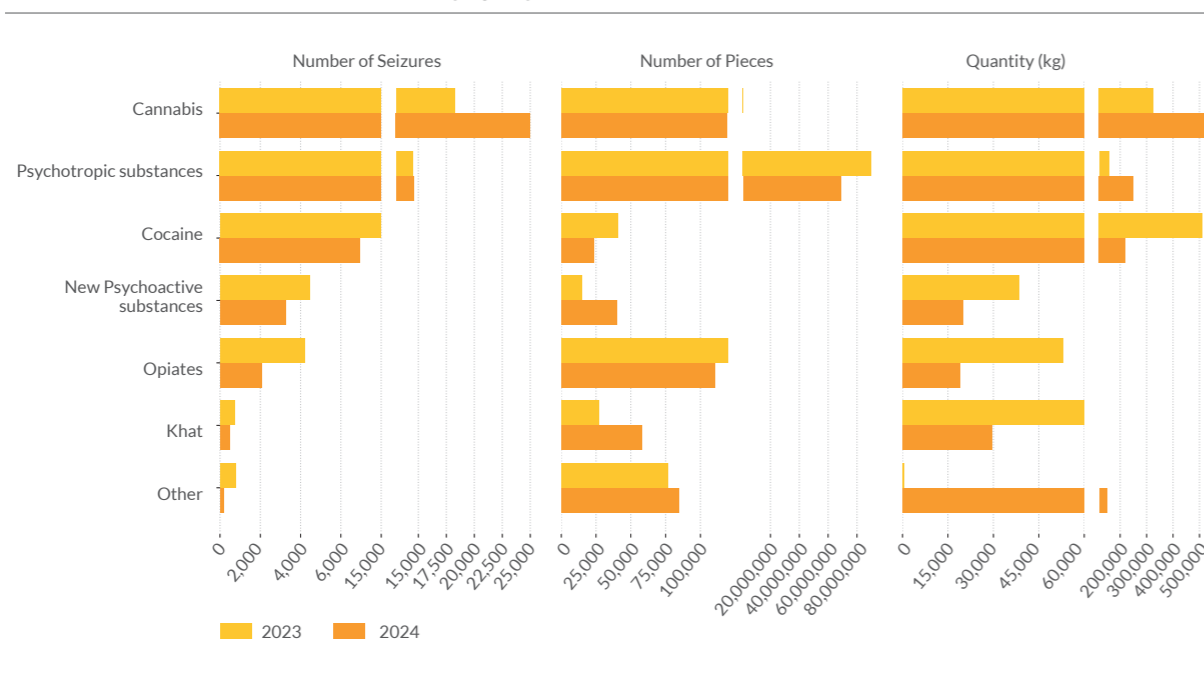
Figure 1: Percentage of seizures by category, 2024



In 2024, 52,630 recorded narcotics trafficking seizures were reported by 133 countries in the Customs Enforcement Network (CEN) database.

Cannabis was the most frequently seized substance, accounting for 48% of the total, followed by psychotropic substances at 27.5%. Cocaine, new psychoactive substances (NPS), and opiates were less common, representing 13%, 6%, and 4% of the seizures respectively. Khat accounted for 1%, while other substances made up the remaining 0.5%.

Figure 2: Drugs categories by number of seizures and quantity, 2023–2024



A total of 52,630 drug seizures were reported in 2024, marking a 3.5% increase compared to 2023.

This rise was driven primarily by a significant 38% increase in cannabis seizures. Seizures of psychotropic substances also rose slightly, with an increase of less than 1%. The sharp rise in cannabis seizures offset reductions across all other drug categories.

Opiate seizures declined by 50%, followed by khat (34%), new psychoactive substances (27%), and cocaine (13%). Drugs classified under “other” – such as synthetic cannabinoids, stimulants, and sedatives – saw a substantial 75% decrease in seizures in 2024 compared to the previous year.

In terms of quantity, a total of 1,257.8 tonnes and 69.2 million pieces of drugs were seized in 2024, representing a 7% increase in weight and a 29% decrease in the number of pieces compared to 2023.

In 2024, 570 tonnes and 119,320 pieces of cannabis were seized, marking a 76% increase in weight and an 88% decrease in the number of pieces compared to the previous year.

Psychotropic substances accounted for 250.4 tonnes and 68.8 million pieces, reflecting a 60% increase in quantity reported in weight and a 28% decrease in the number of pieces compared to 2023.

Cocaine seizures totalled 219 tonnes and 23,438 pieces, showing a decrease of 57% in weight and 42% in the number of pieces.

New psychoactive substances (NPS) amounted to 20 tonnes and 39,783 pieces, with the weight decreasing by 47% while the number of pieces increased significantly, by 164%.

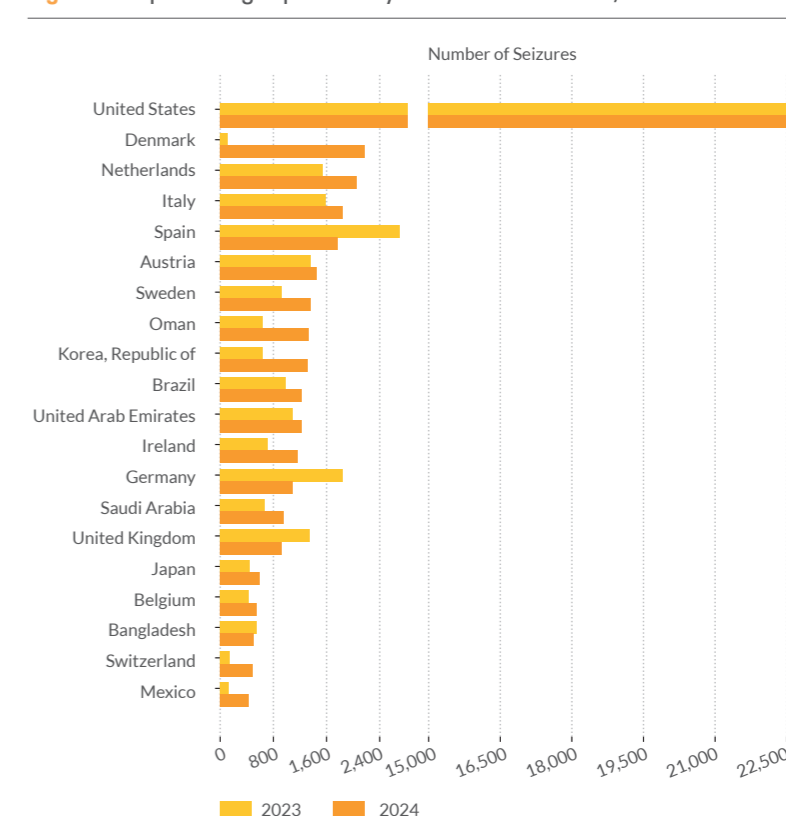
The top drug-reporting countries in 2024 – shown in detail in Figure 3 – collectively accounted for the vast majority of both the number of seizures and the quantity seized, representing 87% and 77% respectively.

Opiates recorded 19.1 tonnes and 110,186 pieces seized in 2024, representing a 64% decrease in weight and a 78% decrease in pieces compared to 2023.

Khat seizures totalled 29.6 tonnes and 57,851 pieces, with a 47% reduction in weight but a 116% increase in the number of pieces.

Drugs categorized as “other” – including synthetic cannabinoids, stimulants, and sedatives – amounted to 149.6 tonnes and 84,236 pieces, showing a notable increase in weight and a slight increase in the number of pieces compared to 2023.

Figure 3: Top 20 drug reporters by number of seizures, 2023–2024



The United States remained the leading reporter of drug seizures in both 2023 and 2024, accounting for 46% and 44% of total seizures respectively, reflecting a slight decrease of 2.3% in 2024 compared to the previous year.

Denmark was the second most frequent reporter in 2024, accounting for 4% of total seizures, marking a significant increase of 1,840% compared to the previous year. The Netherlands reported approximately the same number of seizures as Denmark in 2024, marking a 33% increase in 2024.

Mexico and Switzerland also reported substantial increases in 2024, with the number of drug seizures rising by 257% and 227% respectively.

compared to 2023. Similarly, Oman, South Korea, Japan, Belgium, Saudi Arabia, Sweden, and Ireland recorded notable increases, although to a lesser extent than the aforementioned countries. In contrast, Germany, Spain, and the United Kingdom reported fewer seizures in 2024 than in 2023, with decreases of 40%, 34%, and 31% respectively.

Figure 4: Heat map of trafficking instances by country, 2024

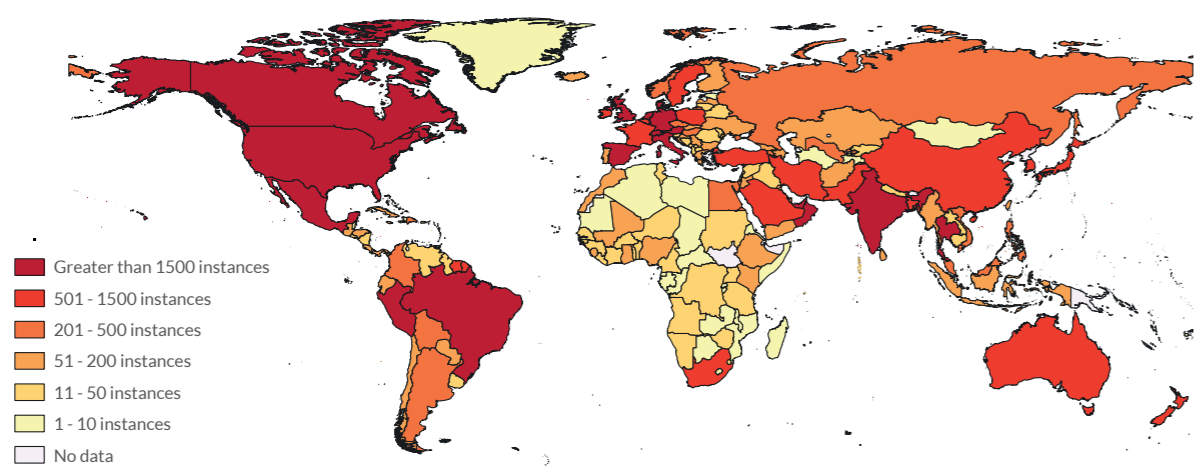


Figure 4 is a heat map illustrating instances of drug trafficking by country and frequency in 2024.

Each country shown was identified as either an origin, destination, or transit point for one or more seized narcotic shipments, regardless of where the seizure occurred or which country reported it. By disaggregating individual seizures in this manner, Figure 4 captures all countries through which drugs were known to have been trafficked or intended to be trafficked in 2024.

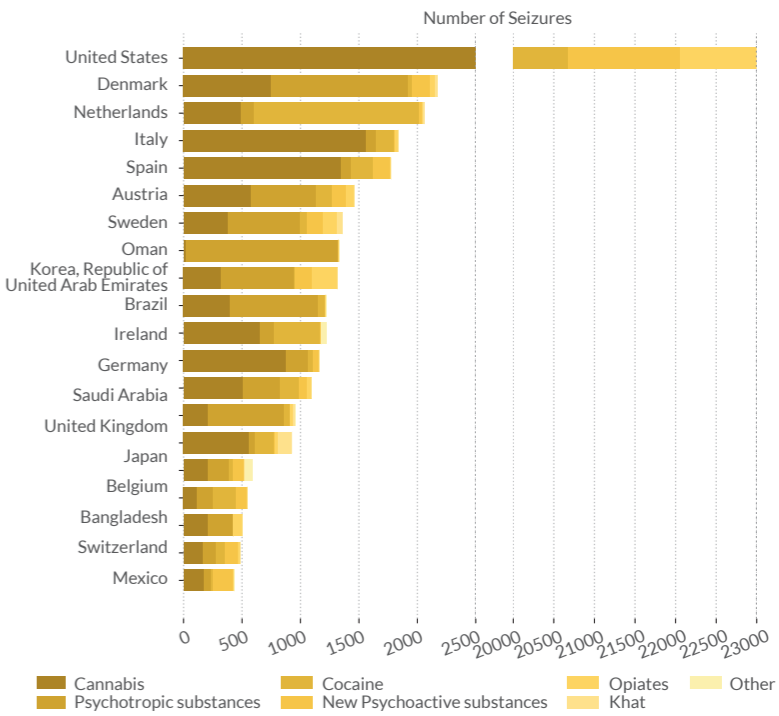
A total of 208 countries were implicated in drug trafficking cases during the year. As in previous years, the United States was the most frequently involved country, cited as an origin, destination, or transit point in 26,077 instances of drug trafficking.

In Western Europe, the United Kingdom, Netherlands, Spain, and Germany were involved in between 2,900 and 6,500 cases. In addition to these countries, several others appeared in over 1,000 instances. These included India (2,831), Denmark (2,235), Italy (2,152), Mexico (2,053), Peru (1,875), Brazil (1,826), United Arab Emirates (1,596), Canada (1,561), Austria (1,547), Switzerland (1,542), Oman (1,508), Thailand (1,505), Ireland (1,476), South Korea (1,462), Sweden (1,460), China (1,320), Saudi Arabia (1,243), and France (1,206).

In contrast, 80 countries were involved in only one (1) to 20 seizures, most of them located in Africa and the Caribbean. Additionally, 56 countries were involved in 21 to 100 seizures, 40 countries in 101 to 500 seizures, and 12 countries in 501 to 1,000 seizures.

Cannabis accounted for the majority of drug seizures (over 50%) in 52 countries globally in 2024, while cocaine was the most frequently interdicted substance in 27 countries. Psychotropic substances were the most frequently seized drugs in 23 countries, out of the 133 countries that reported data in 2024.

Figure 5: Top 20 reporters by category, 2024



Cannabis – as shown in Figure 5 – was the primary drug substance seized in Italy, Spain, Ireland, the United Kingdom, the United States, Brazil, Japan, Germany, and Austria. Psychotropic substances represented the majority of seizures in Middle Eastern countries such as Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, as well as in Denmark, Sweden, and South Korea. In Bangladesh, the frequency of cannabis and psychotropic substances was nearly equal, each accounting for 42% of the country's total drug seizures.

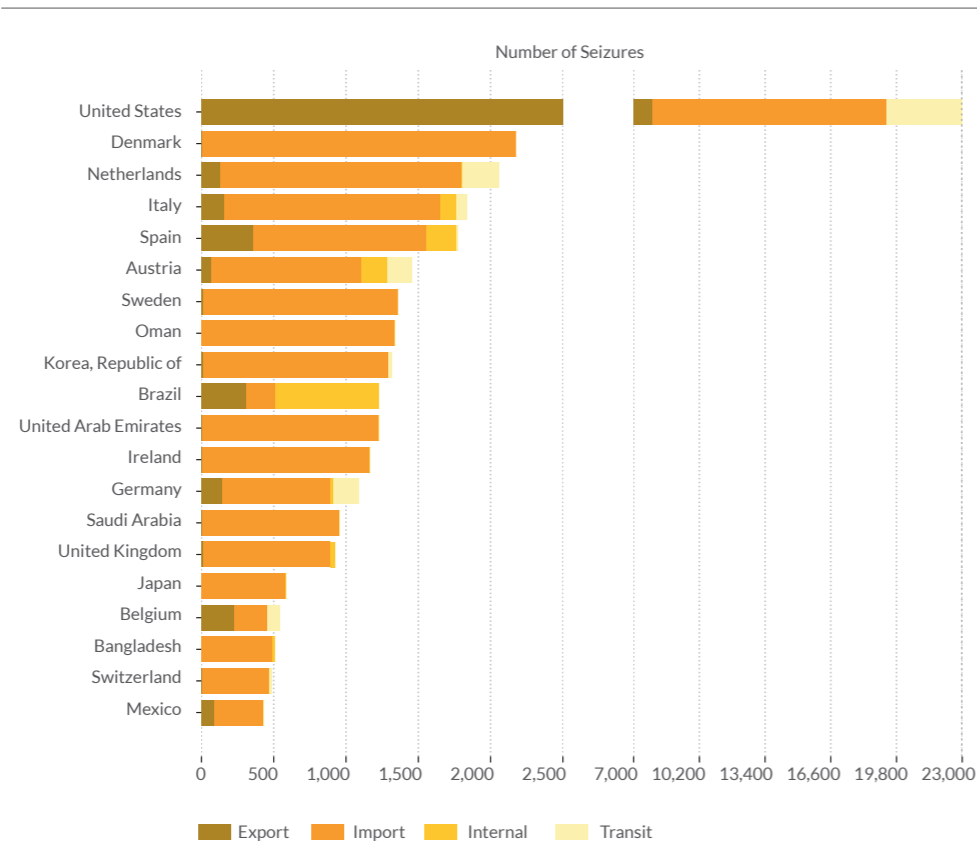
Cocaine was the predominant substance seized in transit and consumer countries such as the Netherlands and Belgium. In Brazil, cocaine was also a prevailing drug seized. Additionally, several countries outside the top 20 reporting list – including Argentina, Cuba, India, Chile, Peru, and Portugal – also reported cocaine as the most frequently seized drug.

New psychoactive substances, opiates, khat, and other drug types were generally less frequently reported than cannabis, psychotropic substances, and cocaine. However, Mexico was an exception, where psychoactive substances were as common as cannabis, with each accounting for 41% of the country's drug seizures.



Courtesy of Spanish Tax Agency (AEAT).

Figure 6: Top 20 reporters by number of seizures and direction, 2024



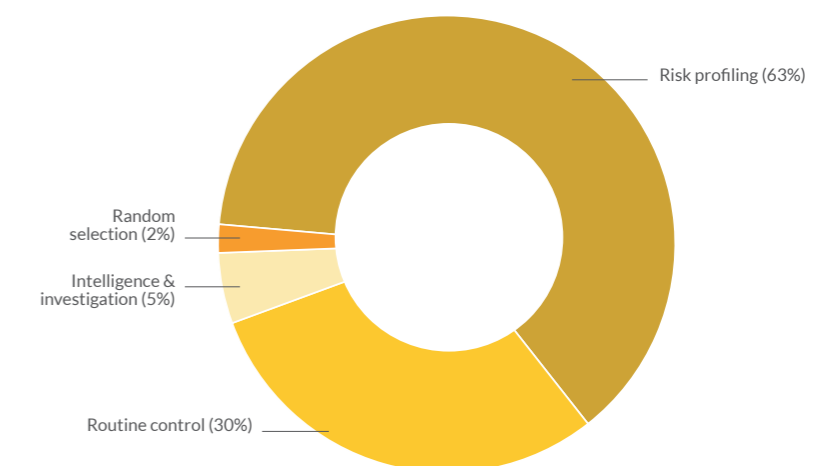
The vast majority of drug seizures in 2024 occurred at import, accounting for 67% of the total drug seizures, making a 2.5% increase compared to 2023.

Export-related seizures were the second most common, making up 20% of the total in 2024, reflecting a 1.2% decrease from the previous year. Transit seizures represented 9% of the total, while internal seizures accounted for 4%, showing 20% and 15% increases respectively compared to 2023.

Drug seizures at import accounted for over 50% of drug seizures in all the top 20 reporting countries, except for the United States, where import and export seizures accounted for 49% and 34% respectively, while transit seizures made up 16%. Similarly, import and export seizures occurred at the same frequency in Belgium, while internal seizures were the most common in Brazil.

Apart from the United States, which was the most frequent transit point for drugs in 2024 with 3,763 recorded seizures, several European countries were also identified as key transit locations, particularly the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Belgium, Italy, and Türkiye.

Figure 7: Percentage of seizures by detection method, 2024

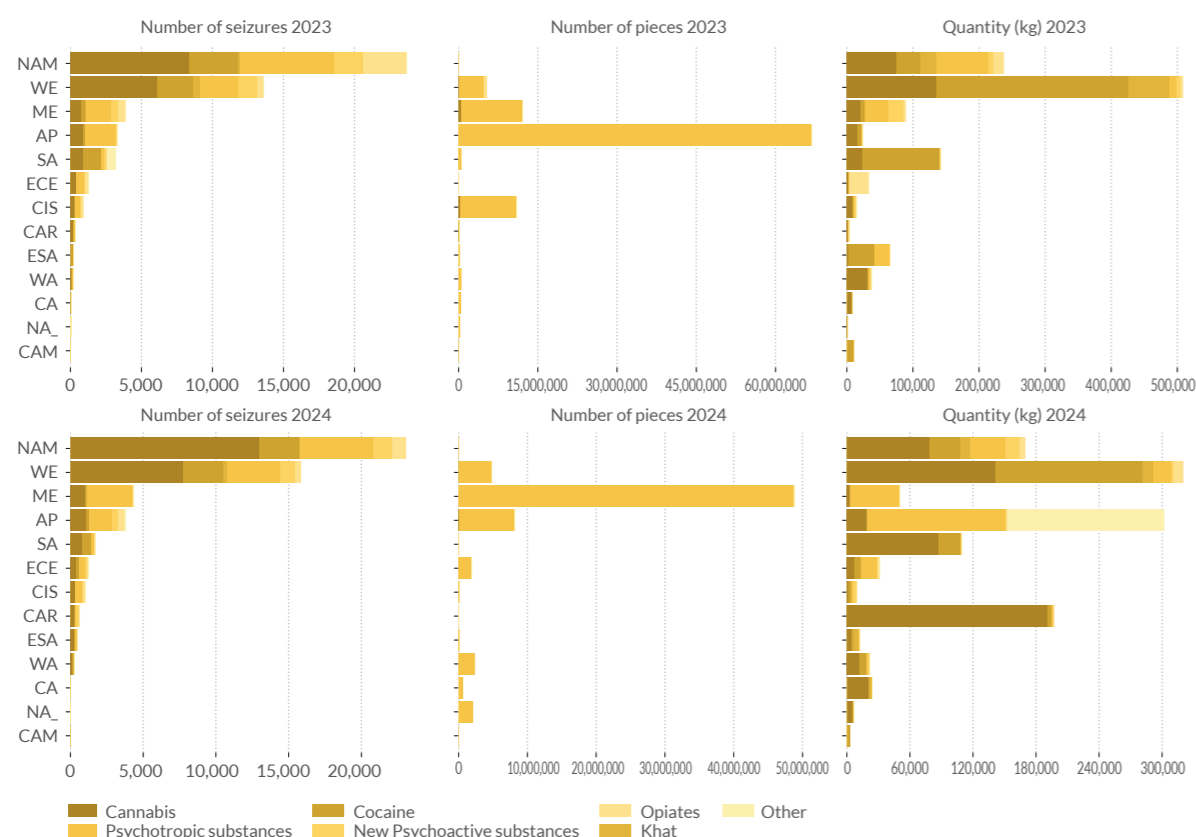


Drug seizures in 2024 were detected using a variety of methods, as shown in Figure 7.

Risk profiling was the most frequently used method, accounting for 63% of all intercepted seizures, followed by routine controls at 30%. Intelligence and investigation accounted for 5%, while random selection was the least used method at 2%.

However, in terms of quantity, the results differed considerably. Although intelligence and investigation were employed less frequently, they successfully detected 37% of the total quantity seized in 2024 – second only to routine controls, which accounted for 56%. In contrast, risk profiling, despite being the most commonly used method, detected only 5% of the total quantity seized.

Figure 8: Number of seizures and quantity by category and region, 2023–2024



Cannabis was the most frequently seized drug in the North America region in both 2023 and 2024, accounting for 35% and 56% of total drug seizures respectively, representing a 55% increase in 2024 compared to the previous year.

In terms of quantity, cannabis was the second-largest drug substance seized in 2023 but became the largest in 2024. It accounted for 32% of the total drug quantity seized in the region in 2023 and 46% in 2024, reflecting a 5% increase compared to the previous year.

Similar to the North America region, cannabis was the primary drug substance seized in Western Europe in both 2023 and 2024, accounting for 45% and 49% of total drug seizures respectively. This represents a 26% increase in 2024 compared to the previous year. Cannabis was followed by psychotropic substances, which accounted for 19% of seizures in 2023 and 23% in 2024 – a 38% increase year-over-year. In terms of quantity, cannabis and psychotropic substances together represented 65% of the total drug quantity seized in Western Europe in 2023 and 66% in 2024.

In contrast to North America and Western Europe, psychotropic substances made up the vast majority of drug seizures in the Middle East region in both 2023 and 2024, accounting for 66% and 72% of total drug seizures respectively. Cannabis was the second most frequently seized drug in both years. Psychotropic substances were not only the

most frequently seized drugs but also accounted for the largest quantity seized, representing 99.9% of the total drug quantity in 2023 and 99.8% in 2024. This reflects a remarkable 8,962% increase in quantity in 2024 compared to the previous year.

Similar to the Middle East region, psychotropic substances were the most frequently seized drugs in the Asia-Pacific region in both 2023 and 2024, accounting for 45% and 41% of the region's total drug seizures respectively. This reflects a 13% decrease in 2024 compared to the previous year. Cannabis was the second most frequently seized substance in both years, followed by opiates and new psychoactive substances. In terms of quantity, psychotropic substances also represented the largest share, accounting for 95% of the total drug quantity seized in 2023 and 97% in 2024.

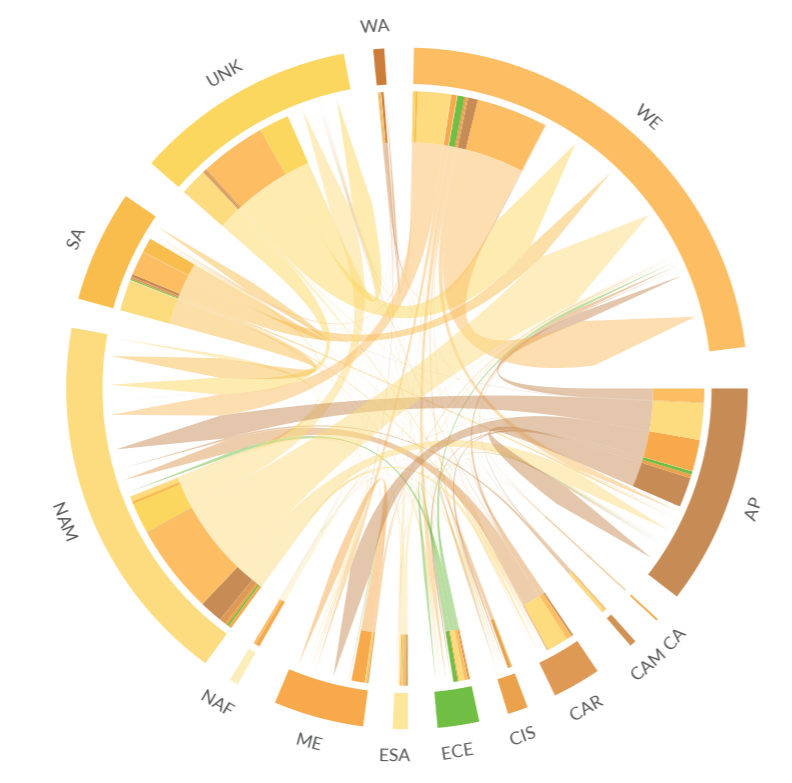
In the South America region, cannabis, which was the second most frequently seized drug in 2023, became the most frequent in 2024, accounting for 28% and 45% of the total drug seizures in each year respectively. In contrast, cocaine held the top position in 2023, before becoming the second most frequent in 2024, accounting for 39% of the seizures in both years. However, in terms of quantity, cannabis was the largest drug type seized in 2024, representing 64% of the region's total. In 2023, psychotropic substances accounted for the largest volume, making up 80% of the total volume of drugs seized that year.

To a large extent, the conclusions drawn for the South America region are also applicable to the Caribbean region. In 2023, cocaine was the most frequently seized substance, followed by cannabis. However, this trend shifted in 2024, with cannabis becoming the most frequently seized drug, while cocaine dropped to third place, after new psychoactive substances.

In terms of quantity, cannabis accounted for 80% of the total drug volume seized in 2024. In contrast, psychotropic substances represented the vast majority of the seized quantity in 2023, accounting for 78%.

At the regional level, North America was the most frequent departure region for drug seizures in 2024, accounting for 23% of the total, followed by Western Europe (18%), Asia-Pacific (16%), and South America (11%).

Figure 9: Trafficking flow by region, 2024



On the other hand, Western Europe was the most common destination, accounting for 39% of total drug seizures in 2024. It was followed by North America (22%), Asia-Pacific (10%), and the Middle East (8.5%).

Western Europe was the main destination for drug shipments departing from North America, accounting for 54% of all seizures originating from the region in 2024. Unknown destinations were also frequent, representing 18% of North America's outbound seizures. Other notable destinations included the Asia-Pacific region (14%), followed by the Caribbean and the Middle East.

For Western Europe, the majority of outbound drug seizures (52%) were destined for countries within the same region. North America was the second most frequent destination, receiving 24% of seizures originating from Western Europe. Other common destinations included the Asia-Pacific region and Eastern and Central Europe.

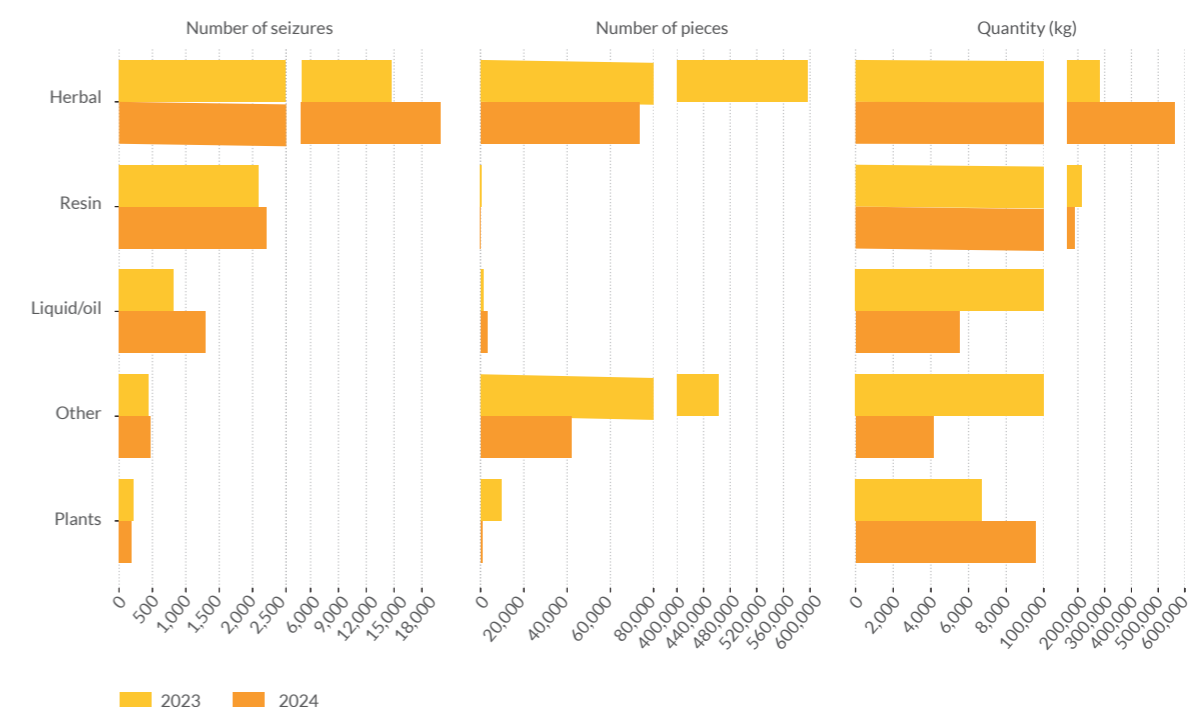
From the Asia-Pacific region, the main destinations for seized drug shipments in 2024 were North America (30%), the Middle East (26%), and Asia-Pacific countries themselves (24%).

Lastly, North America and Western Europe were the principal destinations for drug shipments originating from South America, accounting for 40% and 31% respectively. Intraregional trafficking within South America was also commonly recorded.

2. Drugs trafficking by category

2.1 Cannabis

Figure 10: Number of cannabis seizures and quantity by type, 2023–2024



Cannabis trafficking – across all types, as shown in Figure 10 – recorded 25,107 seizures in 2024, representing a 38% increase compared to 2023.

In terms of quantity, 570 tonnes and 119,320 pieces of cannabis were seized in 2024, marking a 50% decrease compared to 2023. This decline was driven by reductions in the quantities of all cannabis types, particularly herbal cannabis, cannabis plants, and other cannabis forms.

Herbal cannabis was the most frequently seized category, accounting for 83% of total cannabis seizures in 2024 and 80% in 2023, reflecting a 43% increase in 2024 compared to the previous year. In terms of quantity, herbal cannabis also represented the vast majority of cannabis seized, making up 78% of the total cannabis quantity in 2024 and 56% in 2023. Despite its dominance, the quantity of herbal cannabis seized dropped by 31% compared to the previous year.

Cannabis resin was the second most frequently seized cannabis type in 2024, accounting for 9% of total cannabis seizures – a 6% increase compared to the previous year. In terms of quantity, it was also the second-largest cannabis category, representing 13% of the total cannabis quantity seized in 2024. However, the quantity decreased by 22% compared to the previous year.

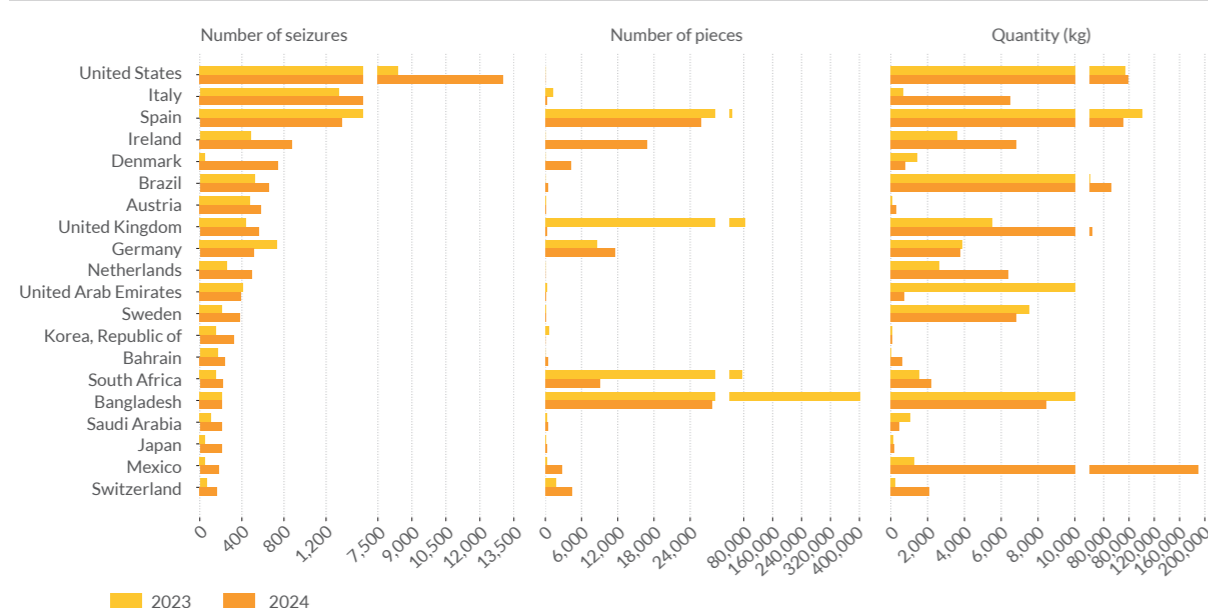
Cannabis liquid/oil was less frequently seized than herbal cannabis and cannabis resin, accounting for 5% of total cannabis seizures in 2024.

However, it recorded the largest increase among all cannabis types, rising by 60% compared to the previous year. In terms of quantity, it represented the smallest share, accounting for only 1% of the total cannabis quantity seized in 2024, reflecting a 26% decrease compared to the previous year.

Cannabis plants were the least frequently seized cannabis type, accounting for only 1% of total cannabis seizures in 2024, with a 17% decrease in the number of seizures compared to the previous year. In terms of quantity, they also represented a small share, making up just 1% of the total cannabis quantity seized in 2024, reflecting a 36% decrease compared to the previous year.

Other forms of cannabis accounted for 2% of total seizures in 2024, reflecting an 8% increase in the number of seizures compared to 2023. They were the third largest cannabis type in terms of quantity, representing 7% of the total cannabis quantity seized. However, they recorded the largest decrease in quantity, dropping by 90% compared to the previous year.

Figure 11: Cannabis seizures and quantity by country, 2023–2024



The top 20 cannabis-reporting countries – shown in Figure 11 – accounted for 91% of total cannabis seizures and 82% of the total cannabis quantity in 2024.

The United States reported the highest number of cannabis seizures, accounting for 52% of the total, marking a 55% increase compared to 2023. This significant rise in seizure numbers was accompanied by a modest 5% increase in the quantity intercepted.

Italy and Spain ranked as the second- and third-highest cannabis-reporting countries, though their seizure numbers were substantially lower than those of the United States, representing 6% and 5% of total seizures respectively. Italy recorded an 18% increase in the number of seizures, which was accompanied by a remarkable 249% increase

in seized quantity. In contrast, Spain experienced a 23% decline in the number of seizures, alongside a 35% decrease in the quantity seized.

Notably, despite recording far fewer cannabis seizures than the United States, Spain accounted for a larger share of the total cannabis quantity seized in 2024 – 14%, compared to 11% reported by the United States.

Similarly, despite Mexico accounting for less than 1% of the total cannabis seizures in 2024, it intercepted the largest quantity, representing 28% of the total cannabis volume seized that year. This was accompanied by a remarkable increase in both the number of seizures and the quantity intercepted – rising by 242% and 12,348% respectively.

In addition, remarkable increases – exceeding 100% in both cannabis seizures and quantities – were recorded in Denmark, the Netherlands, Japan, and Switzerland. Brazil and Austria recorded a modest increase in seizures but a significant increase in quantity. Paraguay, Gabon, Belgium, and India were among the countries that, despite not being on the list of top reporters, seized large quantities of cannabis.

Overall, the data shown above shows established supply networks to North America and Europe.

Figure 12: Number of cannabis seizures and quantity seized by type and conveyance method, 2024



Cannabis was transported through various modes of conveyance – as shown in Figure 12 – with express courier and regular mail being the most frequently used methods, accounting for 34% and 31% of total cannabis seizures in 2024 respectively.

Air ranked third in terms of frequency, accounting for 17% of cannabis seizures, followed by vehicles, which accounted for 11%.

In terms of quantity, although vessels were the least frequently used conveyance method, they transported the largest share of cannabis seized, representing 37% of the total quantity. This was followed by vehicles, which accounted for 25%.

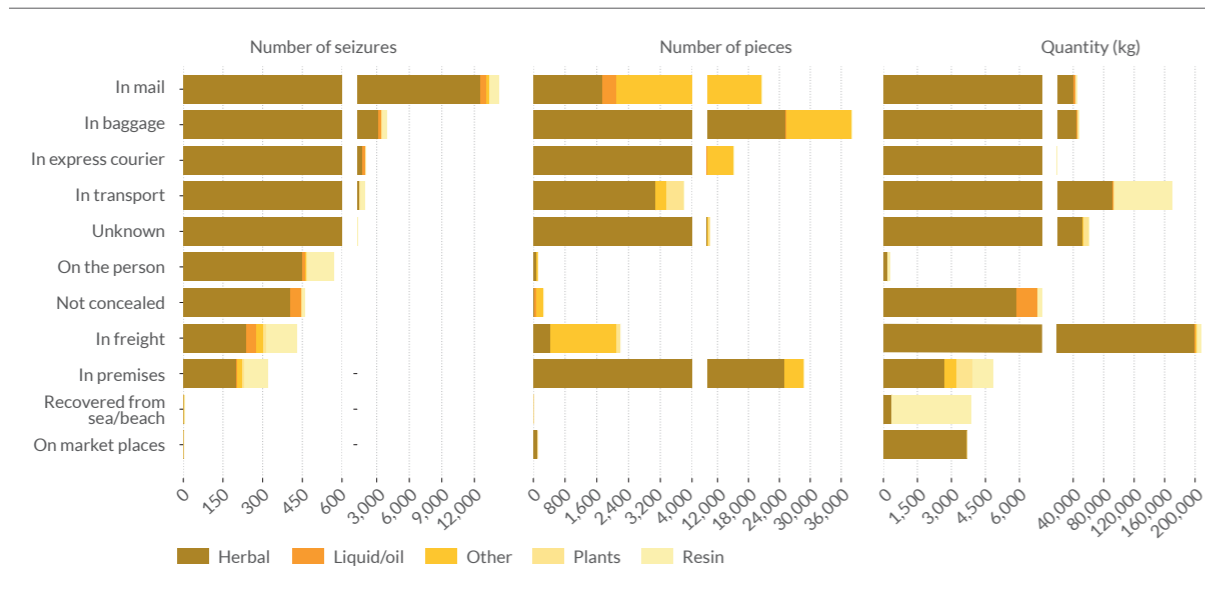
Express courier and regular mail – despite being the most frequently used methods – accounted for 11% and 4% of the total quantity respectively. Air transport accounted for 7%, while pedestrians, though rarely used, were responsible for 6% of the total quantity seized.

Express courier and regular mail were the main conveyance method for herbal cannabis, accounting collectively for 70% of its total seizures, followed by air and vehicles, accounting for 15% and 10% of the seizures respectively. The other conveyance methods were also used but in much less frequency. In terms of quantity, the majority of herbal cannabis was transported by vessels and vehicles, accounting for 41% and 21% of the total quantity respectively. For cannabis liquid/oil, express courier, regular mail, and air were the most common modes of transportation. In terms of quantity, 52% was transported via express courier and 20% by air, while regular mail accounted for just 10% of the total quantity seized.

Cannabis plants were most frequently transported by vehicles and air, which together accounted for 61% of the total seizures, while regular mail was used in 18% of cases. In terms of quantity, the vast majority (84%) of the seized cannabis plants were transported by vehicles.

Regular mail was the most frequently used conveyance method for cannabis resin, accounting for 36% of total seizures, followed by air and vehicles, which accounted for 24% and 20% respectively. In terms of quantity, vehicles transported more than half of the total seized cannabis resin. Although vessels were among the least frequently used methods, they accounted for 38% of the total quantity seized.

Figure 13: Number of cannabis seizures and quantity seized by type and concealment method, 2024



Cannabis was concealed using various methods – as shown in Figure 13 – with mail being the most frequently used concealment method across all cannabis types, except for cannabis plants, which were most commonly hidden in baggage and transport vehicles.

In contrast, when considering the quantity seized, cannabis concealed in freight and in transport accounted for 56% of the total quantity, while mail represented just 9%.

Herbal cannabis was most frequently concealed in mail; however, the largest quantities were intercepted in freight and in transport. Baggage was a less common concealment method for herbal cannabis, accounting for 15% of seizures and 13% of the total quantity seized in 2024. For cannabis liquid/oil, mail, baggage, and express courier were the most commonly used concealment methods, collectively accounting for 80% of both the total seizures and the total quantity. Cannabis plants were mainly concealed in transport and baggage. For cannabis resin, concealment in mail, transport, and baggage was also common, with 85% of the total quantity hidden in transport.

Figure 14: Heat map of cannabis trafficking instances by country, 2024

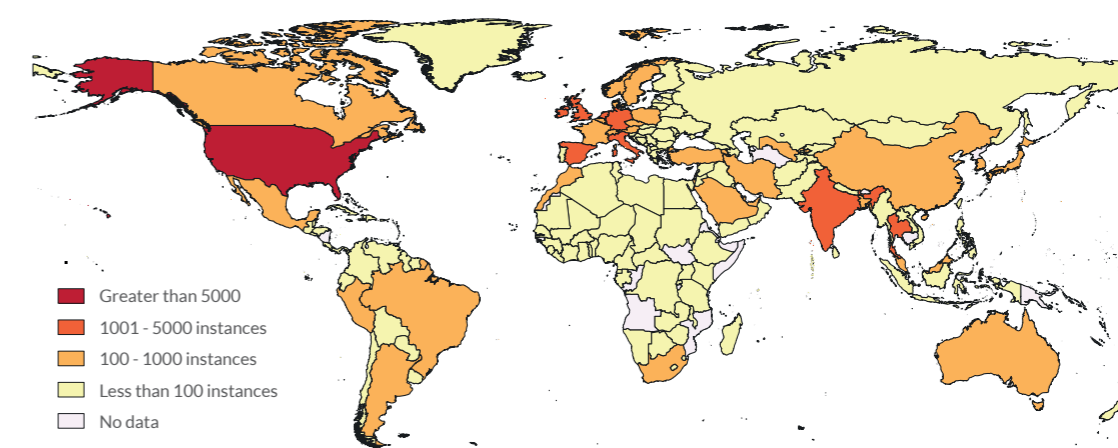


Figure 14 is a heat map of cannabis trafficking instances by country and frequency in 2024. Each country indicated was either the origin, destination, or a transit point for one or more seized cannabis shipments, regardless of where the seizure took place or which country reported it.

By disaggregating individual seizures in this way, Figure 14 indicates all countries through which cannabis is known to have been trafficked, or was intended to be trafficked, in 2024.

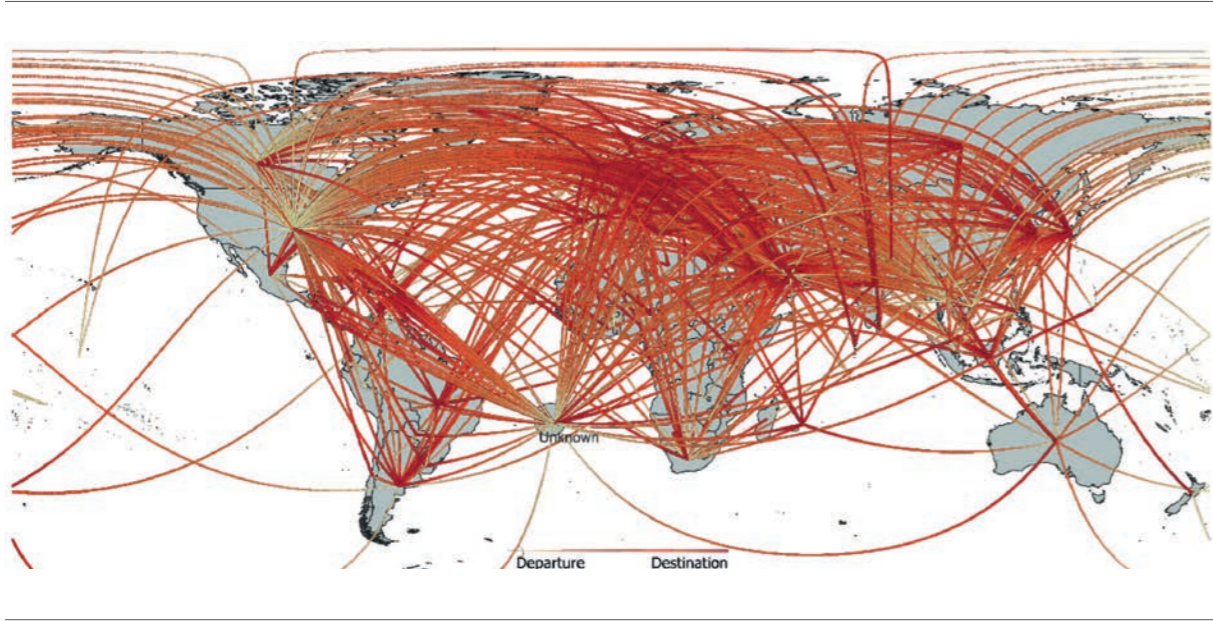
A total of 186 countries were involved in cannabis trafficking cases during 2024, showing global supply chains and demand for cannabis. The United States was the most frequently involved country, identified as an origin, destination, or transit point in 15,191 instances of cannabis trafficking. Unidentified locations – including unknown origins, destinations, or transit points – ranked second, accounting for 8,561 seizures in 2024. The United Kingdom followed, ranking third with 4,965 instances of cannabis trafficking.

In addition to the United States and the United Kingdom, several other countries were cited in over 1,000 instances of cannabis trafficking. These included Spain (2,175), Italy (1,735), Thailand (1,201), the Netherlands (1,183), India (1,151), Ireland (1,129), and Germany (1,082).

A further eight countries were involved in between 500 and 1,000 instances of cannabis trafficking. These were Switzerland, Canada, Brazil, Denmark, Austria, France, the United Arab Emirates, and China.

The vast majority of countries involved in cannabis trafficking in 2024 were cited in one (1) to 10 instances and 10 to 50 instances, representing 36% and 34% respectively of all countries implicated. This indicates that 70% of the countries had relatively low levels of involvement, highlighting the widespread but uneven nature of cannabis trafficking globally.

Figure 15: Cannabis trafficking routes, 2024



In 2024, cannabis trafficking routes involved 155 different departure countries and 160 destination countries. The United States emerged as the most frequent point of departure, accounting for 35% of all cannabis seizures. It served as the origin for shipments to 111 destinations worldwide. The United Kingdom was the primary recipient, receiving 43% of the cannabis shipments that originated from the United States. Ireland, the Netherlands, and Germany were also frequent destinations, though to a significantly lesser extent. Within the Americas, Mexico and Brazil were also common destinations. Seizures involving unknown departure locations were also significant, accounting for 18% of total cannabis seizures.



Courtesy of Customs Administration of the Czech Republic.

The most frequent destinations for these unknown departures included Denmark, the United States, Sweden, Spain, and Germany. Spain and Thailand each accounted for 5% of total cannabis seizures as departure countries. European countries were the most common destinations for seizures departing from Spain. Similarly, most cannabis shipments departing from Thailand were also destined for Europe. India was another notable point of departure, with the United States being the main destination. Additional shipments were directed to countries in the Middle East and Bangladesh. Canada accounted for 3.5% of total cannabis seizures as a departure country, with European nations being the primary destinations.

Case study 1.

CANNABIS RESIN EMBEDDED INSIDE INDUCTION OVENS

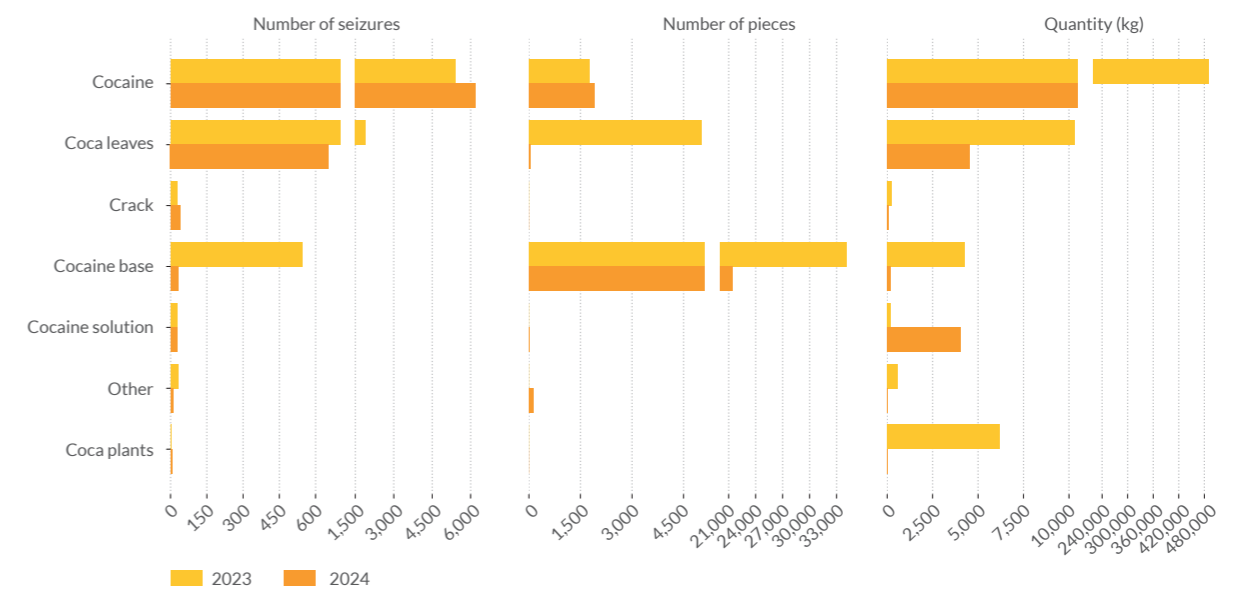
On 6 June 2024, Maltese Customs at Marsaxlokk Port stopped a sea container coming from Morocco and heading for Libya. The cargo carried six induction ovens and scan images showed that there was irregular material hidden in them. The process of extracting the drugs was highly complex, taking over two days and involving several teams, from canine and narcotics units to civil protection members. Once the panels were disassembled, 5,002 cannabis resin blocks, weighing a total of 4,299 kg, were found.



Cannabis induction ovens.

2.2 Cocaine

Figure 16: Number of cocaine seizures and quantity by type, 2023–2024



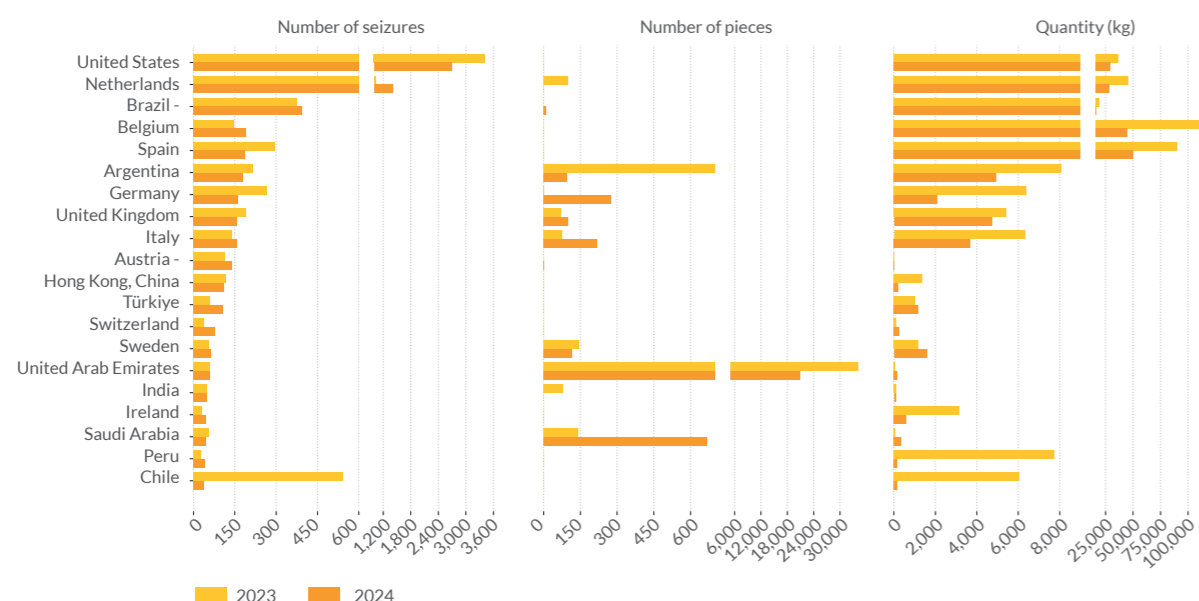
As shown in Figure 16, cocaine trafficking recorded 6,954 seizures in 2024 across all types, marking a 13% decrease compared to the previous year.

In terms of quantity, 218.9 tonnes and 23,438 pieces of cocaine were seized, representing a significant reduction of 56% from 2023. The decline in the number of seizures was primarily driven by decreases in cocaine base and coca leaves seizures. The drop in overall quantity was observed across all cocaine types, with the exception of cocaine solution, which recorded a remarkable 2,219% increase compared to the previous year.

Cocaine was the most frequently seized type in both 2023 and 2024, accounting for 68% and 89% of total seizures respectively. It not only dominated in terms of the number of seizures but also in quantity, representing 89% of the total seized quantity in 2023 and 87% in 2024. Despite this continued dominance, the overall quantity of cocaine seized saw a notable 57% reduction in 2024 compared to the previous year.

Coca leaves were the second most frequently seized type in both 2023 and 2024; however, the number of seizures dropped significantly by 65% in 2024 compared to the previous year. In terms of quantity, coca leaves accounted for only 2% of the total cocaine-related seizures in 2024, marking a sharp 70% decline from 2023.

Although cocaine base represented less than 1% of cocaine-related seizures in 2024, it accounted for the second-largest quantity seized after cocaine itself – comprising 9% of the total cocaine-related quantity. However, similar to other cocaine types, the quantity of cocaine base seized declined, dropping by 43% compared to 2023. All the other types of cocaine were not frequent and represent a small proportion of the total quantity.

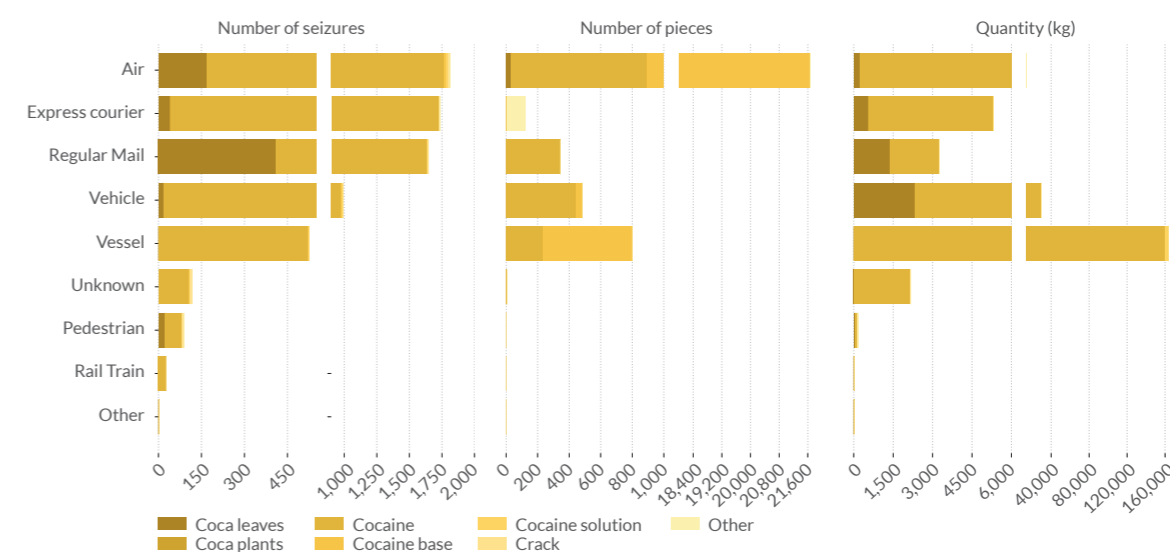
Figure 17: Cocaine seizures and quantity by country, 2023–2024

A total of 97 countries reported 6,954 cocaine-related seizures in 2024. The top 20 reporting countries – as shown in Figure 17 – accounted for 91% of all reported seizures and 87% of the total quantity of cocaine seized that year.

The United States recorded the highest number of cocaine seizures, representing 39% of the total in 2024, despite a 21% decrease compared to 2023. This decline in seizure frequency was accompanied by a 19% reduction in quantity, placing the United States third in terms of cocaine quantity seized, after Spain and Belgium.

The Netherlands was the second most frequent reporting country for cocaine-related seizures in 2024, accounting for 20% of the total seizures – a 35% increase compared to 2023. Despite this rise in the number of seizures, the quantity of cocaine seized in the Netherlands declined by 38% compared to the previous year. Cocaine seizures in Brazil were also frequent, though significantly lower than those reported by the United States and the Netherlands, accounting for only 5.6% of the total seizures in 2024. This represented a modest 5% increase compared to the previous year. However, the quantity seized in Brazil declined by 15% during the same period.

Despite the relatively low frequency of cocaine seizures in Belgium and the United Arab Emirates, the quantity seized in each country was significant. As a result, Belgium ranked second, and the United Arab Emirates ranked fifth among the countries reporting the largest quantities of cocaine seized in 2024. Despite Saudi Arabia recording fewer cocaine seizures in 2024 compared to 2023, the quantity seized saw a remarkable 382% increase compared to the previous year.

Figure 18: Number of cocaine seizures and quantity seized by type and conveyance method, 2024

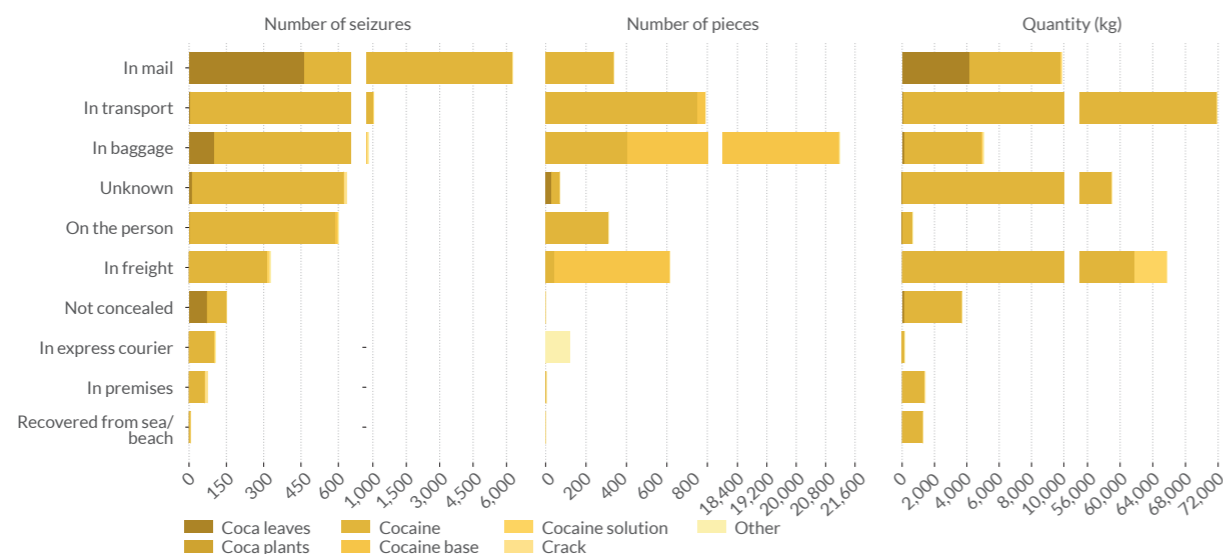
Cocaine was transported by various means of transport – shown in detail in Figure 18 – with air, express courier and regular mail representing the main conveyance methods with roughly similar shares: 26%, 25% and 24% of the total cocaine seizures in 2024 respectively.

In terms of quantity, express courier and regular mail accounted for only 4% of the total seized cocaine, while air accounted for 15%. On the other hand, despite vessels being much less frequent, accounting for 7% of the total seizures, they accounted for 68% of the total seized quantity of cocaine. Vehicles, which also had a lower frequency, accounted for 13% of the quantity seized.

Coca leaves were primarily transported via regular mail, which accounted for 62% of the category's seizures. In contrast, air and express courier were the main conveyance methods for coca plants. Cocaine was trafficked through a variety of channels, with express courier, air, regular mail, and vehicles serving as the main methods of transportation.

Cocaine base was primarily transported by vehicles and air, accounting for 43% and 36% of the category's total seizures respectively. Air was the dominant mode of transport for cocaine solution, responsible for 67% of the category's total seizures.

Figure 19: Number of cocaine seizures and quantity seized by type and concealment method, 2024



As shown in Figure 19, cocaine seizures involved various concealment methods, with mail being the most frequently used, accounting for 45% of total cocaine seizures.

Concealment in transport and baggage was also common, though far less frequent than mail. In terms of quantity, 60% of all cocaine types were concealed in transport and in freight. Baggage accounted for 10% of the total quantity, while mail – despite being the most frequent concealment method – was used to conceal only 4% of the total seized quantity.

Coca leaves, coca plants, and cocaine were most frequently concealed in mail. Specifically, 70% of coca leaf seizures, 40% of coca plant seizures, and 42% of cocaine seizures involved mail as the concealment method. Cocaine base, on the other hand, was more commonly concealed in baggage and on the person, while cocaine solution was often hidden in baggage, freight, mail, and on the person. Crack cocaine was primarily concealed in premises.

In terms of quantity, the vast majority of coca leaves (92%) were seized from mail shipments. Similarly, 60% of coca plant quantities were concealed in mail, and 33% in baggage. Most of the cocaine quantity was hidden in freight and transportation. A striking 96% of cocaine base was concealed in baggage, while 98% of cocaine solution was intercepted from freight shipments.

Figure 20: Heat map of cocaine trafficking instances by country, 2024

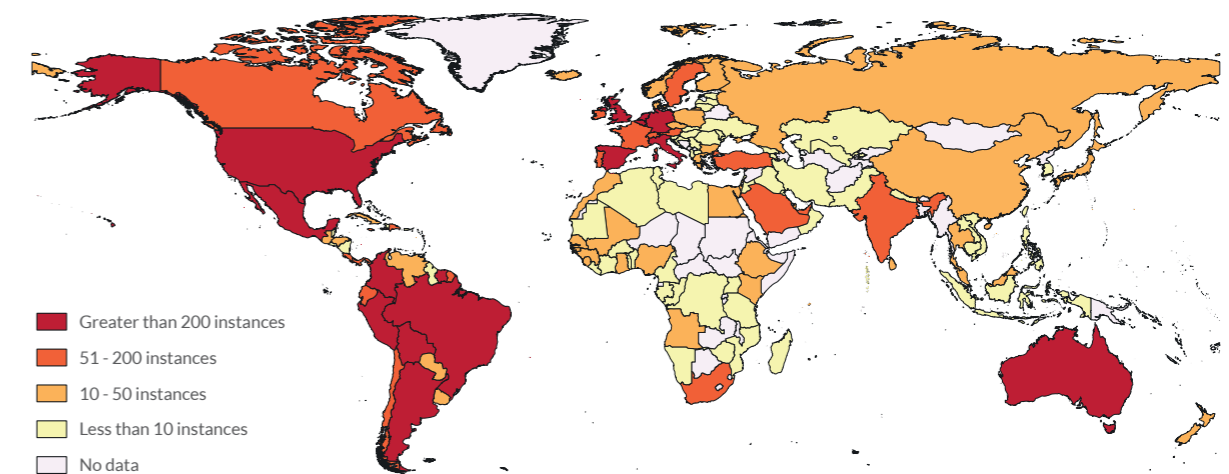


Figure 20 is a heat map of cocaine trafficking instances by country and frequency in 2024. Each country indicated was either the origin, destination, or a transit point for one or more seized cocaine shipments, regardless of where the seizure took place or which country reported it.

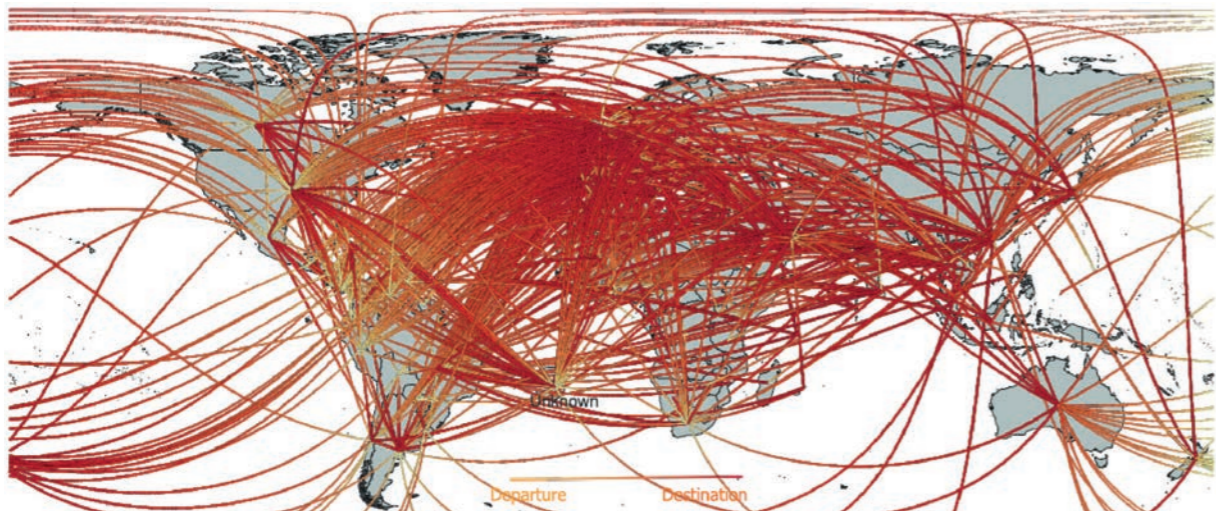
By disaggregating individual seizures in this way, Figure 20 indicates all countries through which cocaine is known to have been trafficked, or was intended to be trafficked, in 2024.

A total of 158 countries were implicated in cocaine trafficking cases during 2024, again showing global supply and demand for cocaine. The United States was the most frequently involved, cited as an origin, destination, or transit point in 2,781 instances. The Netherlands ranked second, involved in 1,573 instances, while unidentified locations – including unknown origins, destinations, or transit points – ranked third, accounting for 1,111 instances. Peru was also prominently implicated, with over 1,000 instances recorded, while Suriname was similarly involved, registering 935 instances – placing both countries among the most frequently cited source, destination, or transit points for cocaine in 2024. Brazil also joined the top five, being identified in 617 instances of cocaine trafficking.

In addition to the previously mentioned countries, 20 other countries were each cited in over 100 instances of cocaine trafficking. Leading this group were the United Kingdom (395), Mexico (352), Spain (351), and Germany (301). In contrast, more than half of the countries implicated in cocaine trafficking were cited in only 1 to 10 instances, while a further 25% were involved in between 10 and 50 instances.

In 2024, South America and the Caribbean accounted for 65% of global cocaine seizures and 60% of the total quantity seized, with Western Europe and North America being the main destinations.

Figure 21: Cocaine trafficking routes, 2024



A total of 6,954 recorded cocaine seizures in 2024 originated from 131 departure points and were destined for 114 countries worldwide, as illustrated in Figure 21.

Peru was identified as the most frequent point of departure, accounting for 15% of all cocaine seizures. This was followed by two other countries also in South America, namely Suriname and Brazil, which accounted for 13% and 9% of the total seizures respectively. Other notable South American departure countries included Colombia, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Argentina, although they were less frequent compared to Peru, Brazil, and Suriname. Overall, the majority of the top 20 cocaine departure countries were located in South America. Mexico and United States were among the main departures for cocaine seizures, collectively accounting for 9% of the total seizures.

In addition to being among the top 10 cocaine departure points, the United States was the most frequent destination for cocaine in 2024, receiving 30% of the total recorded seizures. The majority of the cocaine shipments destined for the United States (64%) originated from South American countries, with Peru standing out as the primary source. An additional 14% of the shipments departed from Mexico.

European countries were also frequent destinations for cocaine in 2024, accounting for a notable share of the total seizures. The Netherlands received the largest share among them, with 20% of total seizures, followed by the United Kingdom (5%), Spain (4%), Italy (2.4%), Belgium (2.3%), and Germany (2.1%).

In terms of quantity, Spain received the largest share of cocaine in 2024, accounting for 23% of the total quantity seized. The vast majority of the seized quantity originated from South American countries, particularly Ecuador, Panama, the Dominican Republic, Peru, Venezuela, and Costa Rica. Belgium and the Netherlands also received significant quantities, accounting for 13% and 11% of the total respectively.

Case study 2.

COCAINE CONCEALED IN A HIDEOUT IN THE FORM OF A FUEL TANK IN A REFRIGERATOR TRUCK

On 23 May 2024, during a roadside control, Senegal Customs selected a refrigerator truck with a foreign plate, coming from a neighbouring country. Upon inspection, 228 packages of cocaine, amounting to a total of 264 kg, were hidden in a hideout in the form of a fuel tank. Two people were arrested during the intervention.

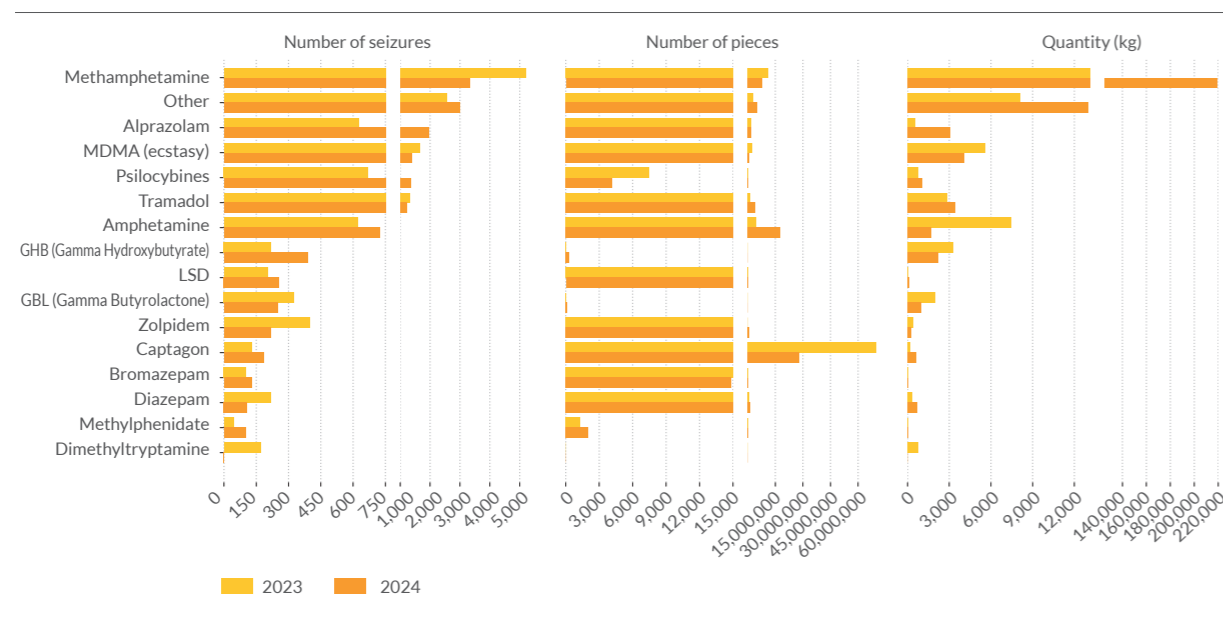
Packages of concealed cocaine



Packages of cocaine in front of the refrigerator truck

2.3 Psychotropic substances

Figure 22: Number of psychotropic substances seizures and quantity by type, 2023–2024



Illicit trafficking of psychotropic substances – across all types shown in Figure 22 – recorded 14,571 seizures in 2024, marking a slight 1% increase compared to 2023.

This number of seizures contained 250.4 tonnes and 68.7 million pieces of psychotropic substances. Methamphetamine was the most frequently seized psychotropic substance, accounting for 23% of total seizures. This was followed by substances categorized under “other”, such as Lyrica (pregabalin), tapentadol, clonazepam (Klonopin, Rivotril), and other benzodiazepines, which collectively accounted for 20% of the seizures.

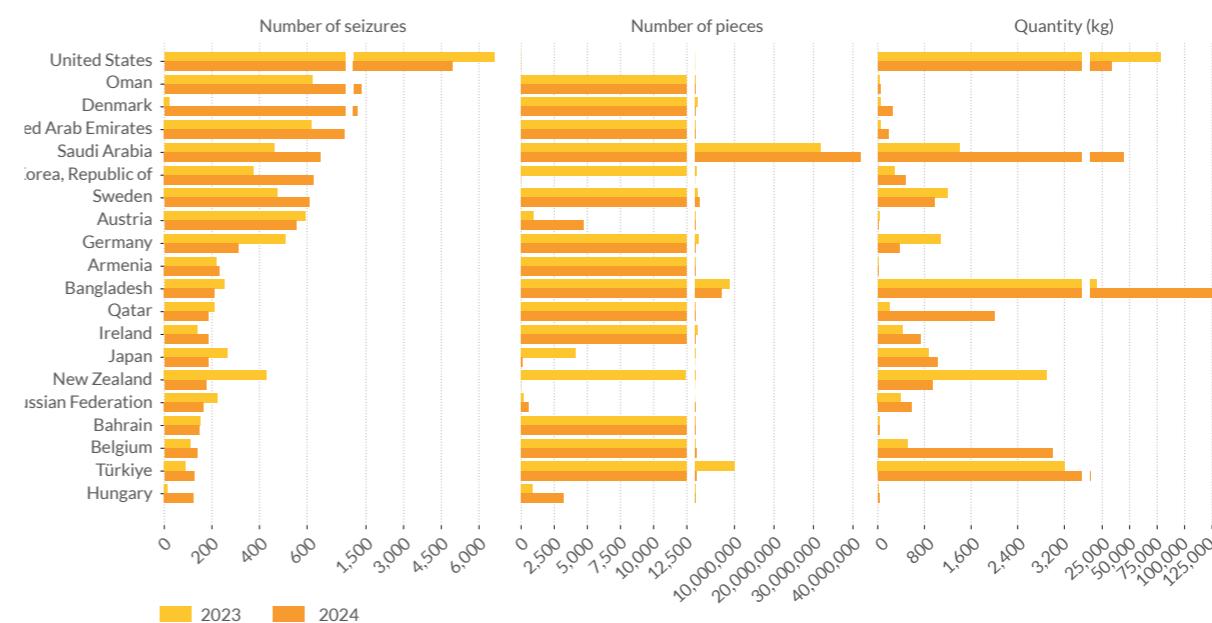
Alprazolam, MDMA (Ecstasy), psilocybin, tramadol, and amphetamine were also frequently seized, together representing 45% of the total seizures, with alprazolam being the most common among them.

Some types of psychotropic substances recorded remarkable increases in 2024, particularly alprazolam, which rose by 215%, and Captagon, which increased by 45%. In contrast, seizures of methamphetamine and tramadol declined by 36% and 8% respectively.

In terms of quantity, Captagon accounted for the largest volume of psychotropic substances, representing 41% of the total quantity seized, followed by amphetamine and methamphetamine, accounting for 26% and 12% of the total quantity seized respectively. Tramadol was also seized in large quantities, but less than the previously mentioned types, accounting for 6% of the total quantity.

Despite the dominance of Captagon, the quantity seized in 2024 dropped by 60% compared to the previous year. Similarly, methamphetamine saw a 28% decrease in quantity. In contrast, amphetamine and tramadol recorded significant increases, rising by 264% and 179% respectively.

Figure 23: Psychotropic Substances seizures and quantity by country, 2023–2024



A total of 110 countries reported 14,571 psychotropic substance seizures in 2024. The top 20 reporting countries – as shown in Figure 23 – accounted for 88% of all reported seizures and 75% of the total quantity of psychotropic substances in 2024.

The United States recorded the highest number of psychotropic substance seizures, representing 34% of the total in 2024, despite a 25% decrease compared to 2023. This decline in seizure frequency was accompanied by a 57% reduction in quantity.

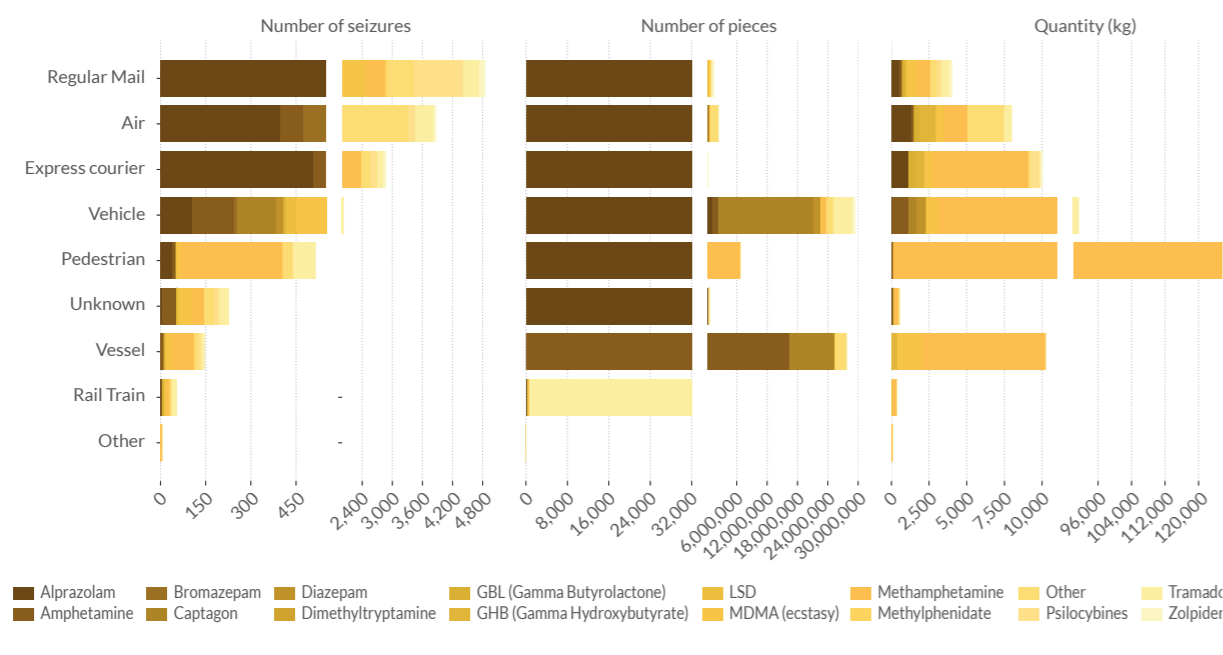
Oman was the second most frequent reporting country for psychotropic substance seizures in 2024, accounting for 9% of the total – a significant 35% increase compared to 2023. This increase in seizure frequency was accompanied by a remarkable 110% increase in the quantity seized. Seizures of psychotropic substances were also frequent, though significantly lower than those reported by the United States – in Denmark (8%), the United Arab Emirates (5%), and Saudi Arabia (4.5%). South Korea, Sweden, Austria, and Germany collectively accounted for 15% of the total seizures in 2024. While seizures increased in South Korea and Sweden, they declined in Austria and Germany compared to the previous year.

Despite the relatively low frequency of psychotropic substance seizures in Saudi Arabia, the quantity seized was significant, accounting for 61% of the total quantity seized in 2024. As a result, Saudi Arabia ranked first among the countries reporting the largest quantities of psychotropic substances that year, with a 42% increase in the number of seizures and a 32% increase in the quantity compared to 2023.

Bangladesh and Jordan also reported large volumes of psychotropic substances seized, despite recording a low frequency of seizures. Together, these two countries accounted for 20% of the total quantity seized in 2024, with Jordan showing a remarkable 441% increase in

seized quantity compared to the previous year. In contrast, despite the United Arab Emirates ranking among the top five countries in terms of seizure frequency, the quantity seized was very small, accounting for less than 1% of the total quantity reported in 2024.

Figure 24: Number of Psychotropic Substances seizures and quantity seized by type and conveyance method, 2024



Psychotropic substances were transported through various means in 2024, as illustrated in Figure 24.

Regular mail and air were the most common conveyance methods, accounting for 33% and 27% of total psychotropic substance seizures respectively. Express courier followed with 20%, while vehicles accounted for 14%. All other conveyance methods collectively represented only 7% of the total seizures.

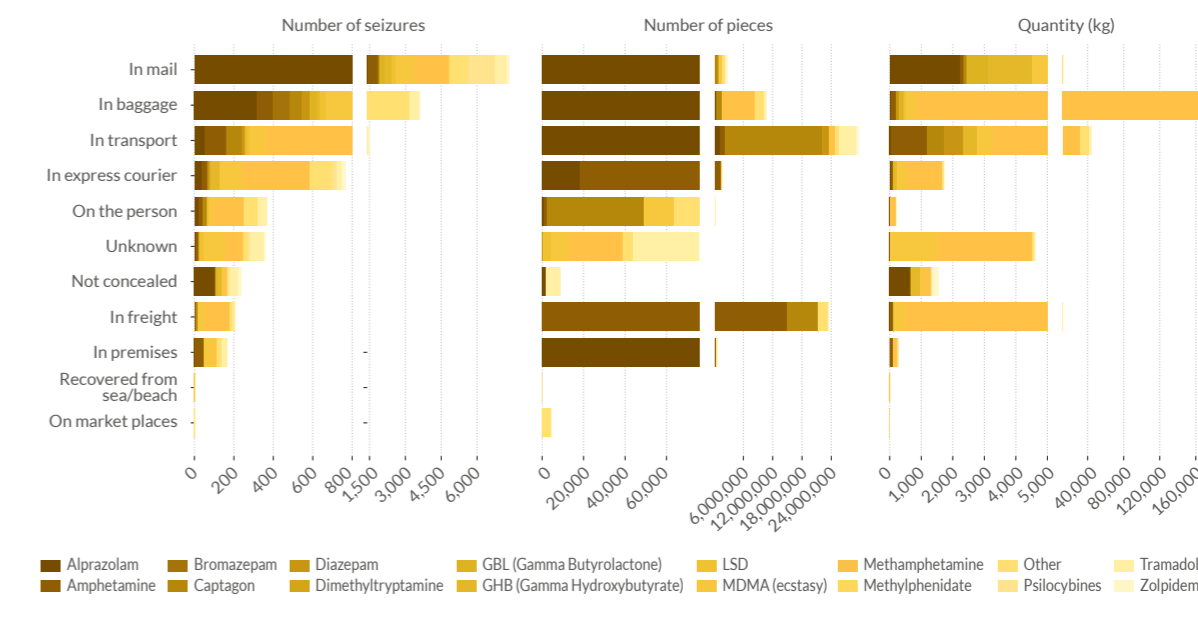
In terms of quantity, vehicles and vessels, though less frequently used, were responsible for the majority of the total seized quantity – contributing 43% and 40% respectively, totalling 83% combined. Interestingly, pedestrians were responsible for transporting a significant share as well, accounting for 10% of the total quantity. Despite being the most frequently used methods, regular mail and air together accounted for only 6% of the total volume of psychotropic substances seized in 2024.

Tramadol was frequently transported by air, regular mail, and vehicles, with vehicles accounting for the vast majority of the seized quantity.

For methamphetamine, express courier was a notably common mode of transportation in terms of seizure frequency; however, it carried less than 1% of the total seized quantity. The majority of the quantity was transported by pedestrians, with a smaller portion by vehicles.

Vehicles were the primary transportation mode for Captagon, both in terms of seizure frequency and total quantity seized. Vessels were used to transport almost all of the seized amphetamine quantity, as well as a large proportion of Captagon and other psychotropic substances such as Lyrica (pregabalin), tapentadol, clonazepam (Klonopin, Rivotril), and benzodiazepines.

Figure 25: Number of psychotropic substance seizures and quantity seized by type and concealment method, 2024



As shown in Figure 25, psychotropic substance seizures involved various concealment methods, with mail being the most frequently used, accounting for 50% of all reported seizures.

Concealment in baggage was also common, though less frequent than mail, representing 25% of the total. Psychotropic substances were also regularly concealed in transport, which accounted for 10% of the seizures. Express courier ranked lowest among the top five concealment methods, representing 5% of the total seizures.

In terms of quantity, 77% of all psychotropic substance types were concealed in transport and in freight. Baggage accounted for 16% of the total quantity, while mail – despite being the most frequent concealment method – was used to conceal only 4% of the total seized quantity, while express courier accounted for 2.3%.

The majority of seizures involving methamphetamine, tramadol, amphetamine, psilocybin, GBL (Gamma Butyrolactone), GHB (Gamma Hydroxybutyrate), MDMA (ecstasy), zolpidem, and alprazolam were concealed in mail. In contrast, Captagon was primarily hidden in transport and in baggage.

In terms of quantity, the vast majority of methamphetamine (84%) was concealed in baggage. Captagon was mainly trafficked in transport, a pattern also observed for diazepam (97%) and tramadol (81%). Most of the quantities seized of dimethyltryptamine, GBL, GHB, MDMA, and methylphenidate were concealed in mail.

Figure 26: Heat map of psychotropic substances trafficking instances by country, 2024

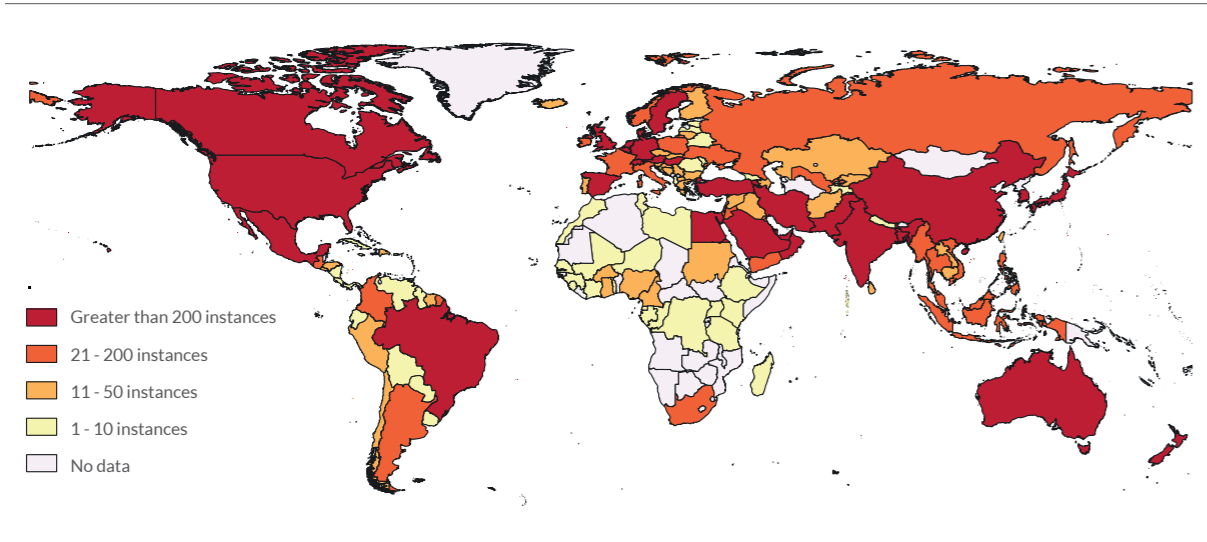


Figure 26 is a heat map of psychotropic substances trafficking instances by country and frequency in 2024. Each country indicated was either the origin, destination, or a transit point for one or more seized psychotropic substances shipments, regardless of where the seizure took place or which country reported it.

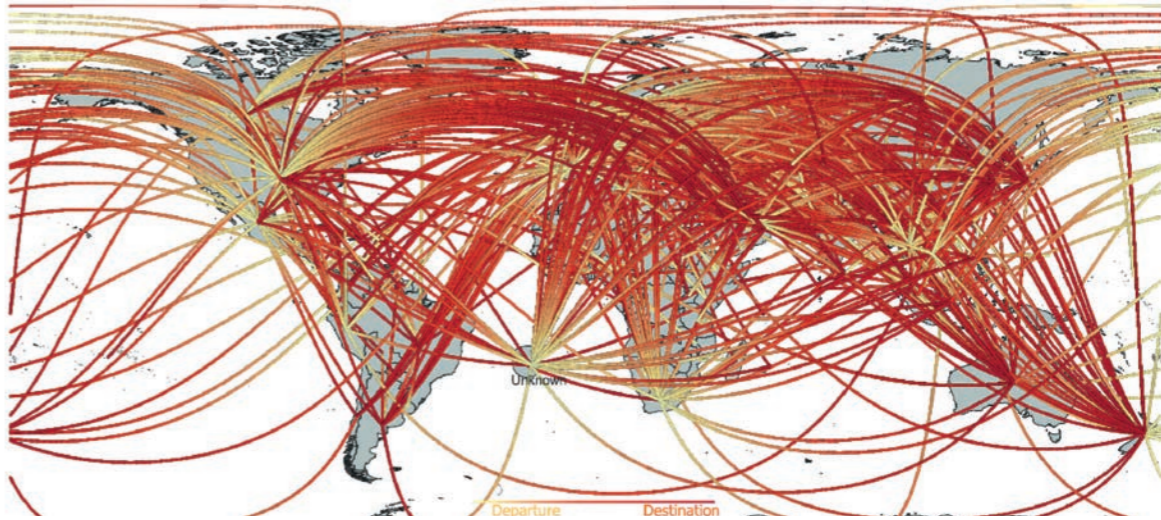
By disaggregating individual seizures in this way, Figure 26 indicates all countries through which psychotropic substances are known to have been trafficked, or were intended to be trafficked, in 2024.

A total of 173 countries were involved in psychotropic substance trafficking cases during 2024. The United States was the most frequently involved, cited as an origin, destination, or transit point in 5,428 instances. Unidentified locations – including unknown origins, destinations, or transit points – ranked second, accounting for 3,103 instances. Oman followed in third place with 1,436 instances. India and Denmark were also cited in over 1,000 instances, while the United Arab Emirates closely followed with 942 instances, placing it among the countries with the highest levels of involvement.

An additional 14 countries were involved in between 400 and 900 instances of psychotropic substance trafficking. Leading this group were Mexico (877), Germany (863), the Netherlands (853), Saudi Arabia (792), and South Korea (724).

Countries involved in one (1) to 10 instances of psychotropic substance trafficking accounted for nearly half of all countries involved in 2024. Additionally, 30% of the countries were cited in a range of between 11 and 100 instances. In simpler terms, a large proportion of countries were implicated in few cases, while a smaller group experienced a higher frequency of trafficking incidents.

Figure 27: Psychotropic substance trafficking routes, 2024



The 14,571 psychotropic substance seizures recorded in 2024 originated from 143 identified departure points, in addition to a number of unknown origins, and were destined for 152 countries worldwide.

Unidentified departure points were notably common, accounting for 19% of the total seizures. The main destinations for these seizures were Denmark, Sweden, and the United States. Among the identified departures, India and the United States were high-frequency points of origin, collectively accounting for 18% of the total seizures. Seizures originating from India were primarily destined for Oman, the United States, and the United Arab Emirates. Seizures from the United States were frequently destined for Austria, New Zealand, South Korea, and Armenia. Also among the top 10 most frequent departure countries for psychotropic substances in 2024 were Mexico, the Netherlands, Germany, China, Pakistan, the United Kingdom, and Bangladesh.

The United States was the most frequent destination for psychotropic substances in 2024, accounting for 25% of the total seizures, with shipments originating from 67 countries worldwide. Oman ranked second, receiving 9% of the total seizures, originating from 30 different countries. Other frequent destinations included Denmark, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Sweden, New Zealand, Austria, and Australia, which collectively accounted for 37% of all psychotropic substance seizures.

In terms of quantity, Saudi Arabia accounted for the largest share of psychotropic substances seized in 2024, representing 44% of the total quantity, with most shipments originating from Türkiye, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, and Egypt. Somalia also received a significant volume, making up 17% of the total quantity, almost entirely originating from Cambodia. Bangladesh and Jordan were also notable destinations, collectively accounting for 18% of the total seized quantity.

Case study 3.

METHAMPHETAMINE MIXED IN TALC POWDER

On 4 August 2024, Türkiye Customs selected a trailer truck coming from Iran for inspection based on risk profiling. Upon Customs examination of the freight, they found 2,202 kg of powered methamphetamine concealed in a mixture with 24,640 kg of talc powder.

Methamphetamine talc powder



Methamphetamine soaked carpet, Oman



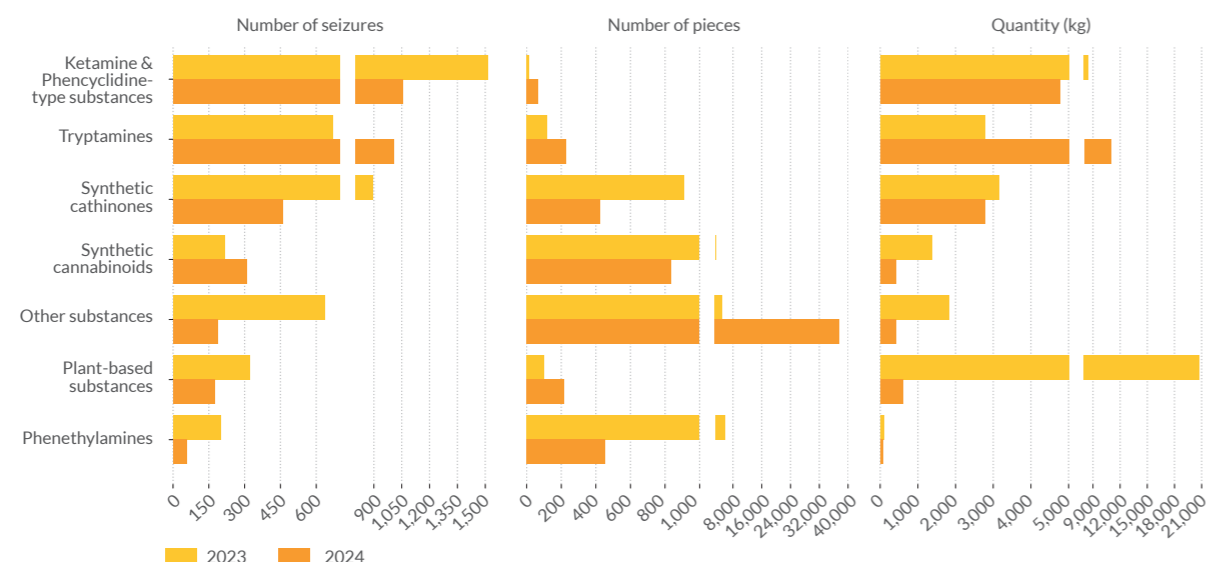
Methamphetamine soaked gloves, Oman



Methamphetamine soaked fabrics, Armenia

2.4 New psychoactive substances (NPS)

Figure 28: Number of new psychoactive substances seizures and quantity by type, 2023–2024



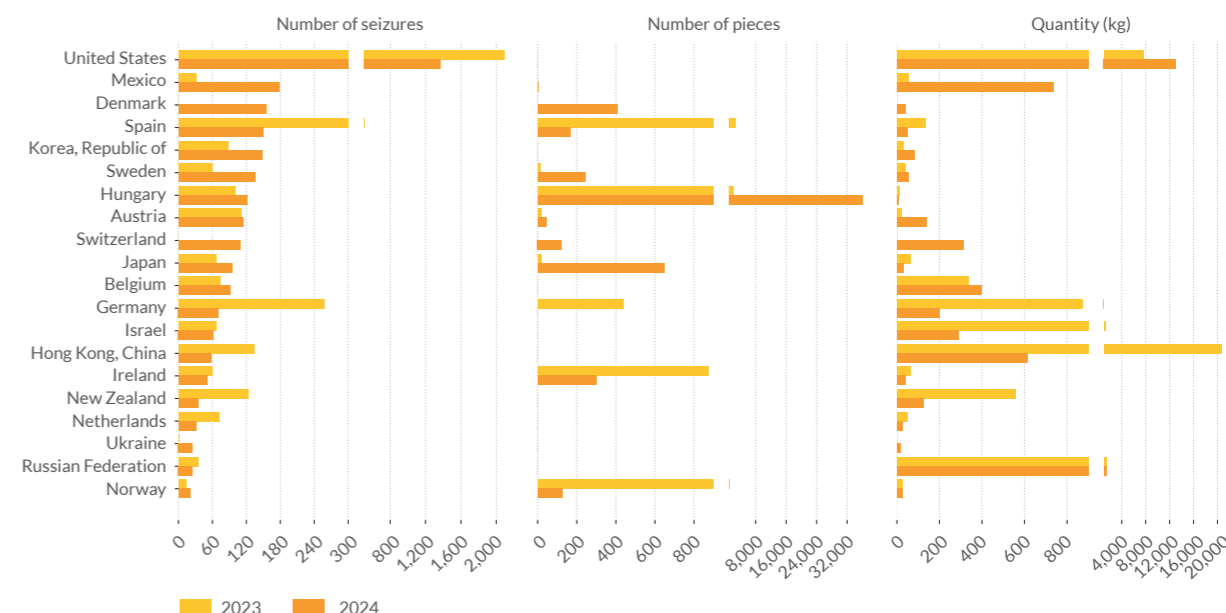
In 2024, a total of 3,254 new psychoactive substances (NPSs) seizures were reported by 50 countries, marking a 27% decrease compared to the previous year.

These seizures involved 20 tonnes and 39,783 pieces of NPSs. As shown in Figure 28, ketamine & phencyclidine-type substances and tryptamines were the most frequently seized NPS types, accounting for 32% and 31% of total seizures respectively. Notably, tryptamines recorded a remarkable 51% increase in seizures compared to 2023. In contrast, seizures of ketamine & phencyclidine-type substances declined by 30%.

Synthetic cathinones ranked third, representing 14% of total NPS seizures, and experiencing a notable 48% decrease from the previous year. Synthetic cannabinoids, plant-based substances, and other substances collectively accounted for 20% of NPS seizures in 2024. While most of these categories recorded significant reductions – ranging from 50% to 70% – synthetic cannabinoids were an exception, showing a 45% increase compared to 2023.

In terms of quantity, a total of 20 tonnes and 39,783 pieces of NPSs were intercepted in 2024, representing a 12% increase compared to the previous year, despite a reduction in the number of seizures. NPSs categorized under “other substances” – including dimethylpentylamine, melanotan, midazolam, bromazepam, etizolam, and tapentadol – accounted for the majority of the seized volume, making up 63% of the total quantity in 2024. This category experienced a significant 453% increase compared to 2023. Tryptamines ranked second in terms of quantity, accounting for 19% of the total, and recorded a remarkable 288% increase over the previous year. In contrast, although ketamine & phencyclidine-type substances remained among the most frequently seized NPS types, they represented only 8% of the total quantity, experiencing a sharp 91% decline compared to the previous year.

Figure 29: New psychoactive substance seizures and quantity by country, 2023–2024



A total of 50 countries reported 3,254 seizures concealing 20 tonnes and 39,783 pieces of new psychoactive substances (NPSs) in 2024. The top 20 reporting countries – as shown in Figure 29 – accounted for 94% of all reported seizures and 93% of the total quantity of NPSs seized in 2024.

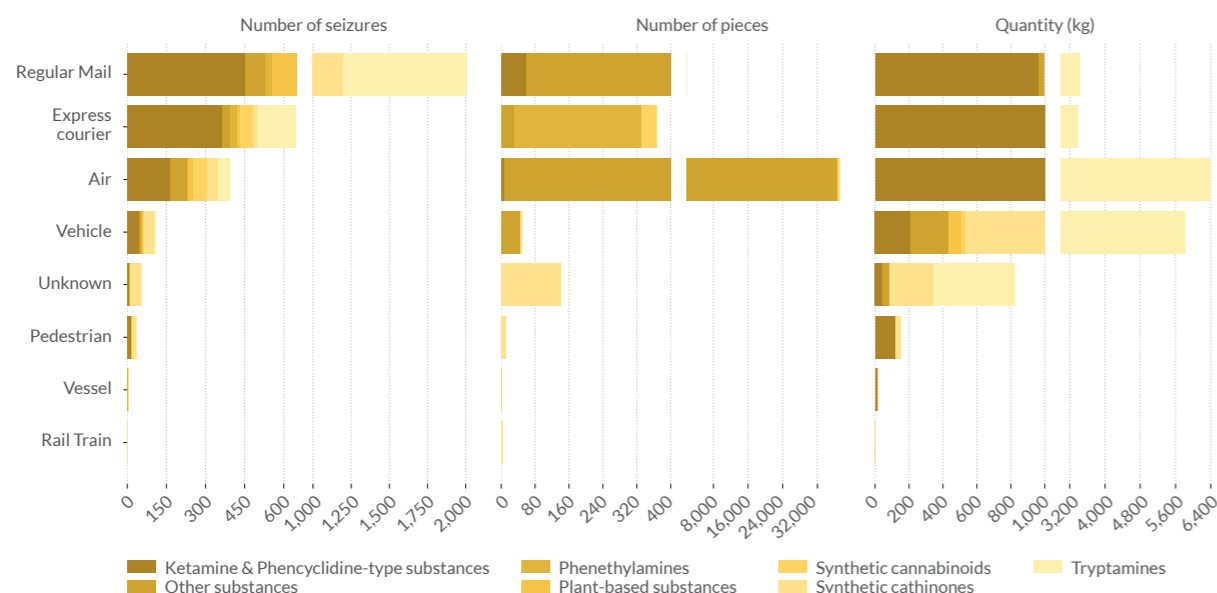
The United States recorded the highest number of NPS seizures, representing 42% of the total for the year. Although this marked a 35% decrease in seizure frequency compared to 2023, it was accompanied by a remarkable 72% increase in the quantity seized.

Mexico was the second most frequent reporting country for NPS seizures in 2024 – albeit significantly behind the United States, accounting for 5.4% of the total. This represented a notable 474% increase compared to 2023. The rise in seizure frequency was accompanied by a remarkable 1,240% increase in the quantity seized.

Denmark, Spain, South Korea, and Sweden reported approximately the same number of NPS seizures, collectively accounting for 18% of the total in 2024. Denmark ranked third despite not reporting any seizures in 2023, while Spain saw a notable decline in both seizure frequency and quantity. In contrast, South Korea and Sweden reported significant increases in both the number of seizures and the volume of substances seized.

In terms of quantity, although Hungary was not a frequent offence location for NPS seizures, it intercepted a large volume of these substances, accounting for 60% of the total quantity seized in 2024. This marked a significant 1,502% increase compared to the previous year. The United States followed, reporting the second-largest volume of NPSs, accounting for 22% of the total quantity seized and registering a notable 72% increase compared to 2023.

Figure 30: Number of new psychoactive substance seizures and quantity seized by type and conveyance method, 2024



The majority of NPS seizures in 2024 were transported via regular mail, which accounted for 62% of the total seizures.

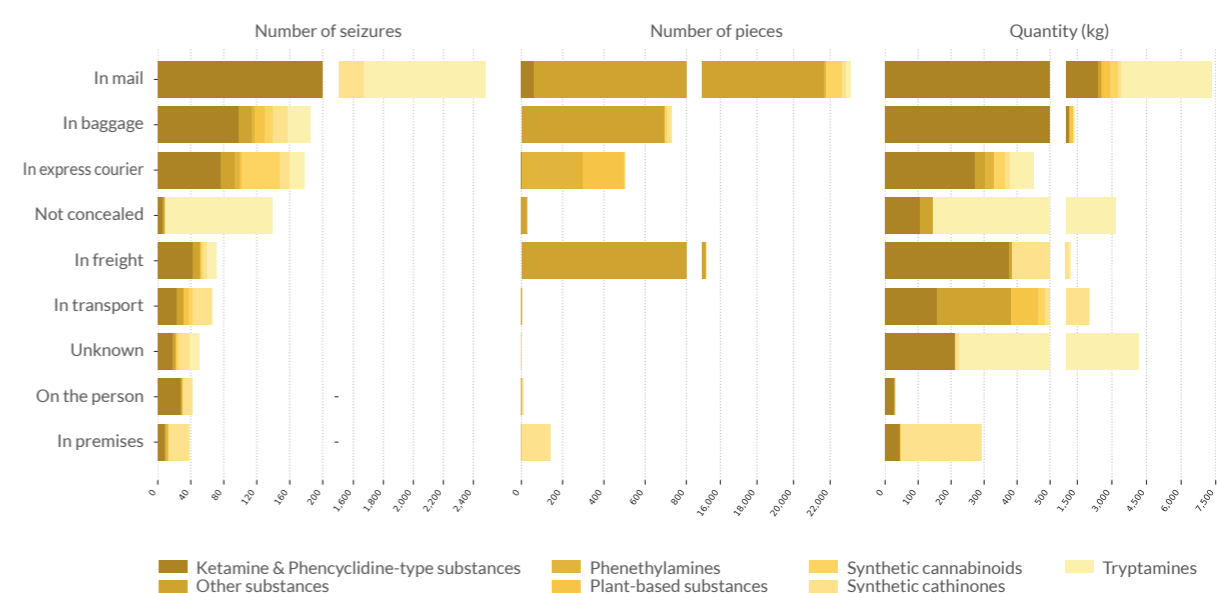
Express courier was the second most common method, representing 20%, followed by air transport, which accounted for 12%. Other conveyance methods were significantly less frequent, collectively making up just 6% of the seizures.

Despite air transport not being among the most frequently used methods, it carried the largest share of the total quantity seized (73%). This was followed by vehicles at 10%, regular mail at 9%, and express courier, which accounted for 6% of the total quantity seized.

Ketamine and phencyclidine-type substances were primarily transported by air and express courier, which together accounted for 71% of the total quantity seized. In contrast, the vast majority of substances categorized under “other” were transported by air, representing 96% of the total quantity.

Phenethylamines were mainly transported via express courier and regular mail, while synthetic cannabinoids were primarily moved through regular mail (61%), followed by air transport (31%). The vast majority of the quantity of synthetic cathinones was transported by vehicles.

Figure 31: Number of new psychoactive substance seizures and quantity seized by type and concealment method, 2024



Mail was the most frequently used concealment method for NPSs in 2024, accounting for 76% of total NPS seizures. Concealment in baggage and express courier was also observed, though far less common, representing a combined 11% of seizures.

In terms of quantity, mail concealment also dominated, accounting for 51% of the total quantity seized. Freight concealment followed, accounting for 27% of the total quantity. Despite being relatively frequent, baggage and express courier concealments made up only 5% of the seized quantity.

Mail was the most frequently used concealment method across all NPS types. In terms of quantity, it also dominated most categories – particularly synthetic cannabinoids, other substances, ketamine and phencyclidine-type substances, and plant-based substances.

In contrast, the majority of phenethylamine quantities were concealed in express courier packages. Baggage was also a notable concealment method for ketamine and phencyclidine-type substances. The largest proportion of synthetic cathinones was concealed in transport, while significant quantities of both other substances and synthetic cathinones were hidden in freight.

Figure 32: Heat map of new psychoactive substance trafficking instances by country, 2024

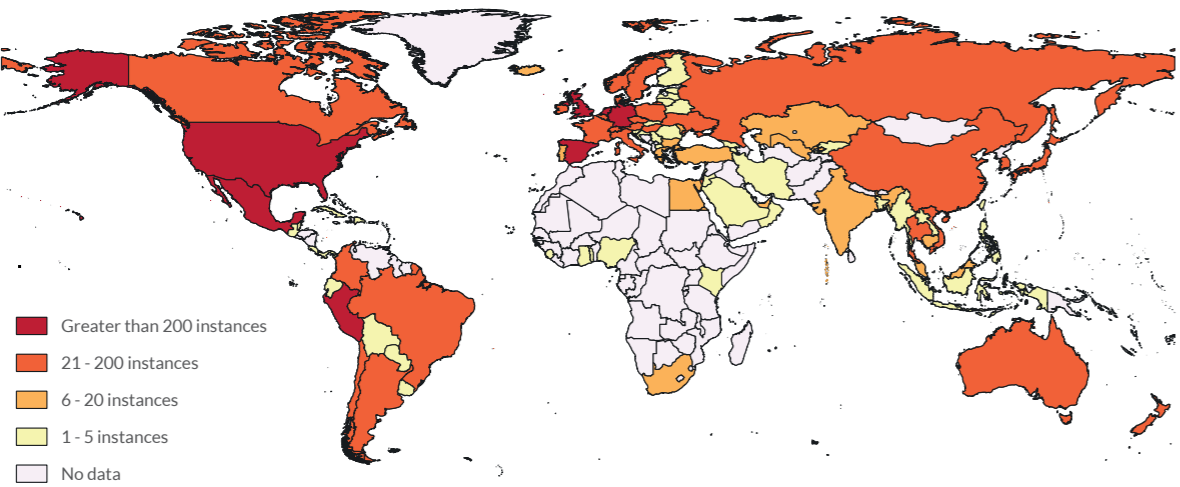


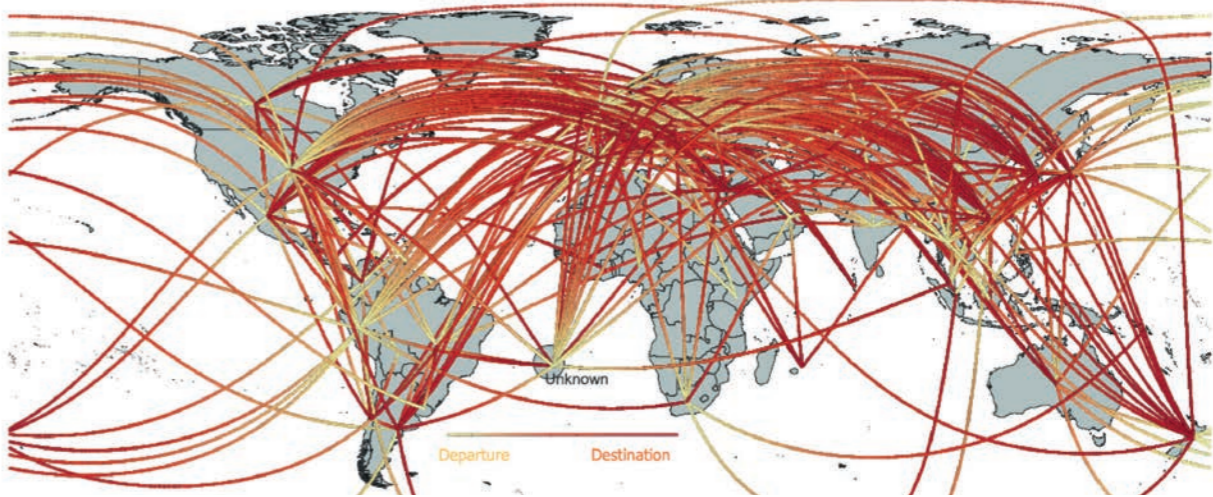
Figure 32 is a heat map of NPS trafficking instances by country and frequency in 2024. Each country indicated was either the origin, destination, or a transit point for one or more seized NPS shipments, regardless of where the seizure took place or which country reported it.

By disaggregating individual seizures in this way, Figure 32 indicates all countries through which NPSs are known to have been trafficked, or were intended to be trafficked, in 2024.

A total of 102 countries were implicated in NPS trafficking cases during 2024. The United States – as was the case in many other drug categories – was the most frequently involved country, cited as an origin, destination, or transit point in 1,561 instances. While Germany and the Netherlands were also frequently involved, their levels of involvement were significantly lower than the United States, accounting for 560 and 522 instances respectively. Additionally, unidentified departure, destination, or transit points were commonly recorded, contributing to 453 instances in total.

Four other countries were also highly involved in NPS trafficking, each cited in 200 to 400 instances: Peru, Mexico, the United Kingdom, and Spain. A number of other countries were moderately involved, with Denmark, South Korea, Sweden, Switzerland, Belgium, Hungary, Austria, France, China, and Japan each recorded in 100 to 200 instances. The majority of countries involved in NPS trafficking in 2024 – 60% of the total – recorded low levels of involvement, with the number of instances ranging from 1 to 10. Additionally, 25 countries were cited in between 11 and 100 instances, indicating that almost 20% of the countries were involved in more than 100 instances.

Figure 33: New psychoactive substance trafficking routes, 2024



A total of 3,254 NPS seizures were recorded in 2024, originating from 83 identified departure points and destined for 77 countries worldwide. Germany and the Netherlands were the most frequent departure countries, together accounting for 31% of all seizures.

Peru and the United Kingdom also ranked among the top five, contributing to 12% and 6% of total seizures respectively. Other notable – but less frequent – departure countries included Mexico, the United States, Belgium, China, and Spain. Unknown departures were also notable, accounting for 13% of the total seizures.

The United States was the primary destination for NPS seizures in 2024, accounting for 42% of the total seizures. Other destinations – though significantly less frequent – included Denmark, Spain, South Korea, Sweden, and Mexico, which collectively accounted for 22% of all reported seizures.

Germany, Peru, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and Mexico were the main departure points for NPS shipments destined for the United States. In contrast, 99% of the departures for shipments destined for Denmark were unidentified. The Netherlands was the primary departure point for NPSs destined for Spain, while Vietnam, China, and Thailand were the main departure countries for NPS shipments bound for South Korea.

Despite Hungary not being a frequent destination point for NPS seizures, it accounted for 52% of the total quantity seized, with most of this quantity originating from Bulgaria. The United States also received a large share, accounting for 22%, followed by the United Kingdom, which received 9% of the total quantity.

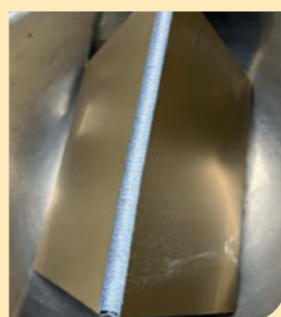
Case study 5.

KETAMINE CONCEALED IN CORFLUTE BOARDS

On 14 February 2024, New Zealand Customs inspected an express courier consignment coming from Slovakia based on risk profiling. Officers opened the package and found 20 covered gold paper corflute boards. Aided with canine units and x-rays, they discovered that eight of the boards had ketamine concealed in them, totalling almost 3 kg.



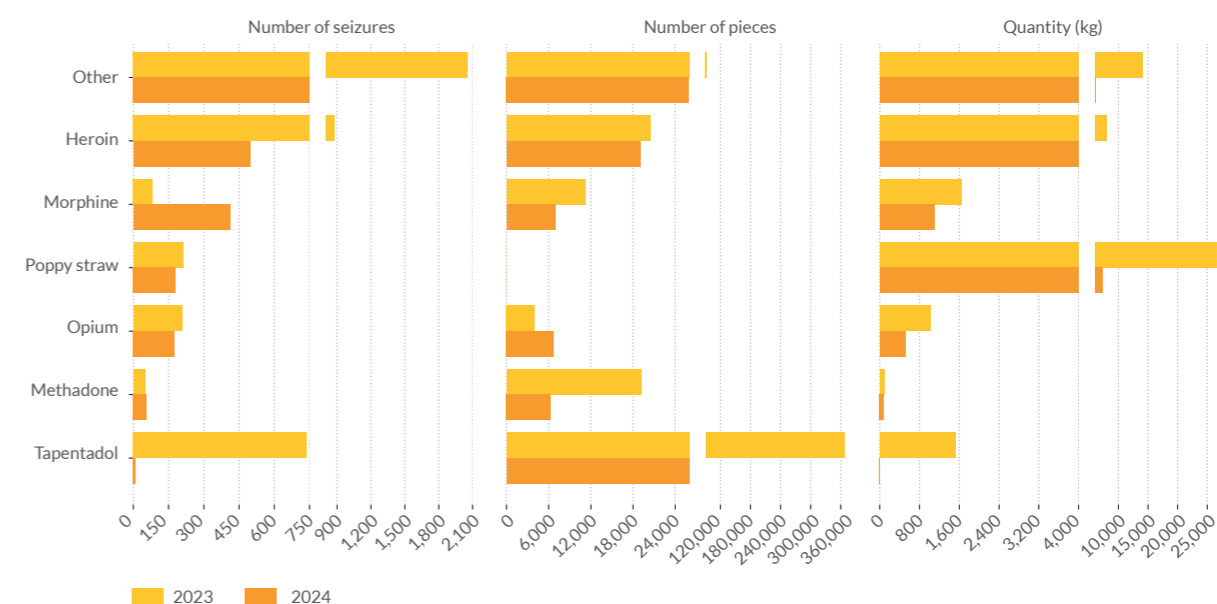
Ketamine corflute boards



Ketamine corflute board opened

2.5 Opiates

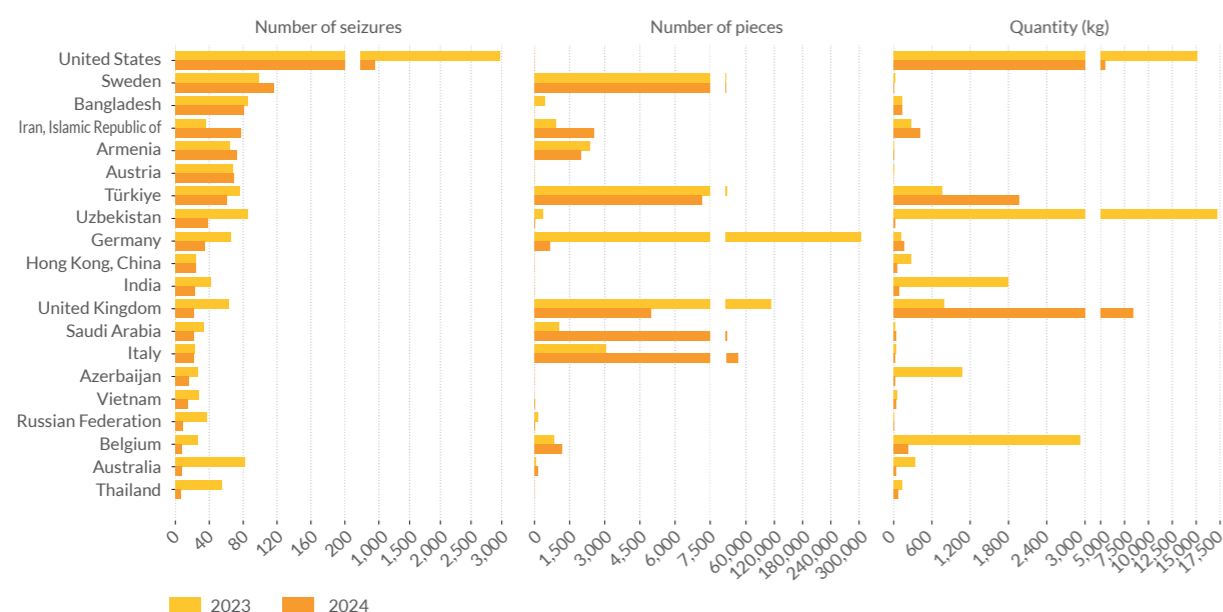
Figure 34: Number of opiate seizures and quantity by type, 2023–2024



A total of 2,084 opiate seizures were recorded in 2024, involving 19.1 tonnes and 110,186 pieces of various types of opiates, as shown in Figure 34. The number of seizures marked a significant 50% decrease, accompanied by a remarkable 77% drop in quantity compared to the previous year.

Opiate categories under “other” including oxycodone, fentanyl, codeine and dihydrocodeinone were the most frequent types of opiate both in 2023 and 2024, accounting for 49% and 36% of the total seizures of each year respectively. Despite its dominance in 2024, it made a significant 63% decrease in the number of seizures and a remarkable 70% reduction in quantity compared to the previous year. These types were followed by heroin, accounting for 24% of the total seizures, making a 43% reduction compared to 2023. Morphine was also common, accounting for 20% of the total opiate seizures. Poppy straw and opium were much less frequent than the previously mentioned categories, accounting collectively for 17% of the total seizures.

Despite tapentadol being the least frequent category among all opiate types, it constituted the largest proportion of the seized quantity, accounting for 35% of the total quantity in 2024, marking a significant 87% decrease compared to the previous year. Opiates categorized under “other” accounted for the second-largest proportion, with 25% of the total quantity, followed by heroin, which accounted for 18%. Opium accounted for 6% of the total quantity, marking the only increase among all opiate categories, with a 44% rise compared to 2023.

Figure 35: Opiate seizures and quantity by country, 2023–2024

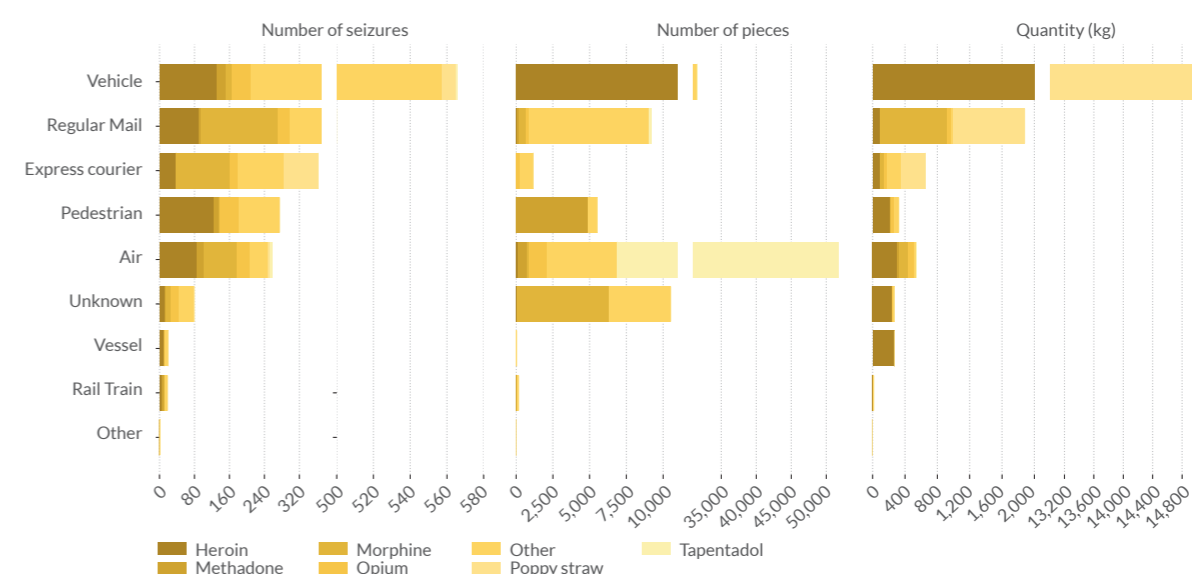
A total of 2,084 opiate seizures were reported by 65 countries worldwide in 2024. The top 20 reporting countries – as shown in Figure 35 – accounted for 92% of all seizures and 91% of the total quantity.

As with many other drug categories, the United States was the primary reporting country for opiates, accounting for 45% of total seizures in 2024. Despite this dominance, the United States recorded a significant 68% decrease in the number of seizures, accompanied by a notable 63% reduction in quantity compared to the previous year.

South Korea was the second most frequent reporter of opiate seizures in 2024 – though significantly lower than the United States – accounting for 10% of total seizures. The country recorded a substantial increase in both the number of seizures and the quantity seized, rising by 1,158% and 101% respectively compared to the previous year. Sweden, Bangladesh, Iran, Armenia, and Austria also reported notable seizure numbers, although far fewer than the top two countries. Among them, Iran registered a significant increase in both seizure frequency and quantity.

In terms of quantity, although opiate seizures were not frequent in Italy, the country ranked first, accounting for 33% of the total quantity seized. A similar pattern was observed in Saudi Arabia, which reported only 1% of the total seizures but accounted for 15% of the total seized quantity. Both countries recorded remarkable increases in seized quantities compared to the previous year: Italy by 1,262% and Saudi Arabia by 1,733%.

Sweden, the United Kingdom, and Türkiye were also among the top five reporting countries in terms of opiate quantities in 2024, despite significant reductions in both the number of seizures and the quantity seized compared to the previous year – except for Sweden, which recorded an increase in seizures alongside a slight decrease in quantity. Despite being the most frequent offence location for opiate seizures, the United States accounted only for 4% of the total quantity seized in 2024.

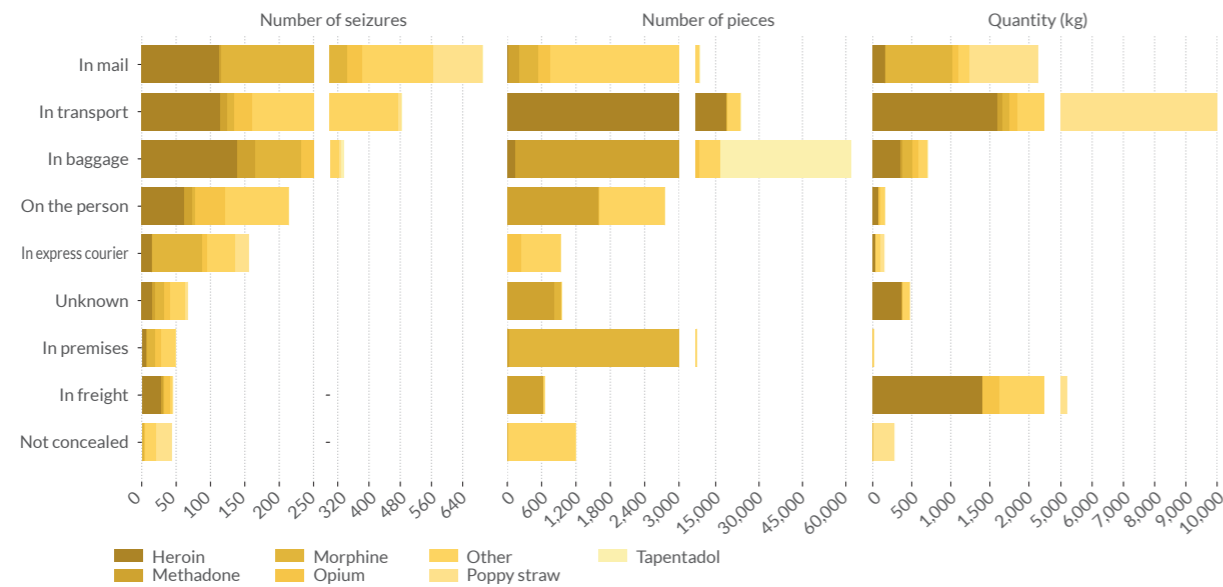
Figure 36: Number of opiate seizures and quantity seized by type and conveyance method, 2024

Vehicles represented one of the main conveyance methods for opiates in 2024, both in terms of frequency and quantity, accounting for 27% of the total seizures and 36% of the total quantity seized.

Regular mail was the second most frequent conveyance method, responsible for 24% of the total seizures, and ranking third in terms of quantity. Express courier and pedestrians were less common and accounted for relatively small quantities. Although air transport was less frequent than all the previously mentioned methods, it accounted for the largest share of the total seized quantity, representing 41% of the total.

Almost all the tapentadol seized in 2024 was transported by air. Methadone was predominantly carried by pedestrians, while most of the heroin, opium, poppy straw, and other opiates were transported by vehicles. In terms of frequency, heroin was commonly found in vehicles, with pedestrians, and transported via air and regular mail. Methadone appeared frequently in vehicles, air transport, and with pedestrians. Morphine was most commonly transported via regular mail and express courier. Opium was frequently intercepted from pedestrians and in vehicles. Poppy straw was most often transported through regular mail and express courier.

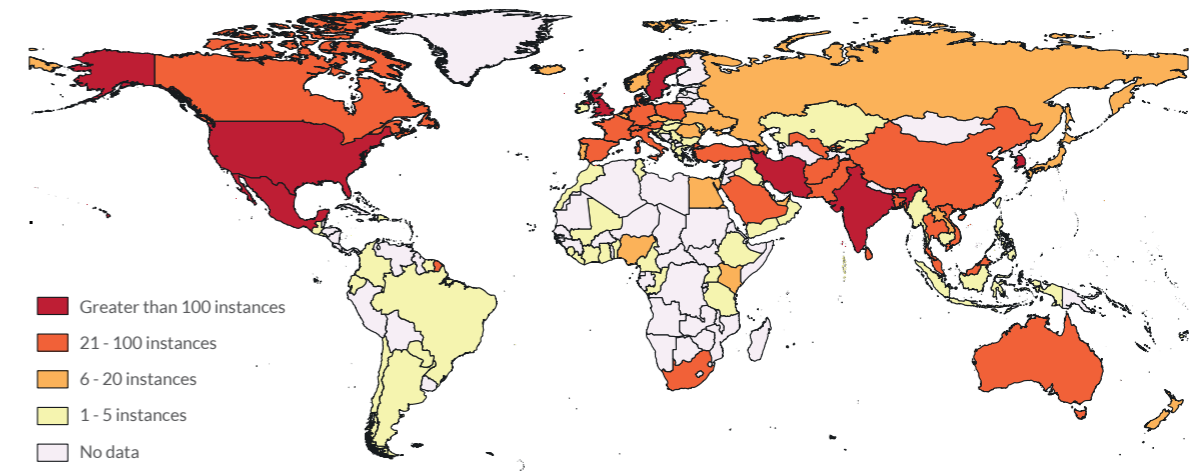
Figure 37: Number of opiate seizures and quantity seized by type and concealment method, 2024



Opiate seizures concealed in mail were very common in 2024, accounting for 33% of the total seizures. Concealment in transport was also notable, representing 23% of seizures. Express courier and on-person concealment were also observed, though were much less frequent than the previously mentioned methods.

In terms of quantity, baggage was the primary concealment method, accounting for nearly half of the total quantity seized. This was followed by transport, which was used to conceal 26% of the seized quantity. Despite being the most frequent concealment method, mail accounted for only 9% of the total quantity, while express couriers concealed less than 1%. Concealing opiates on the person was relatively common (10% of seizures) but contributed to only 2% of the total seized quantity. The vast majority of the seized quantity of tapentadol, opium, and methadone was concealed in baggage, while most of the heroin and poppy straw was hidden in transport. Additionally, the majority of morphine quantity was concealed in premises.

Figure 38: Heat map of opiate trafficking instances by country, 2024

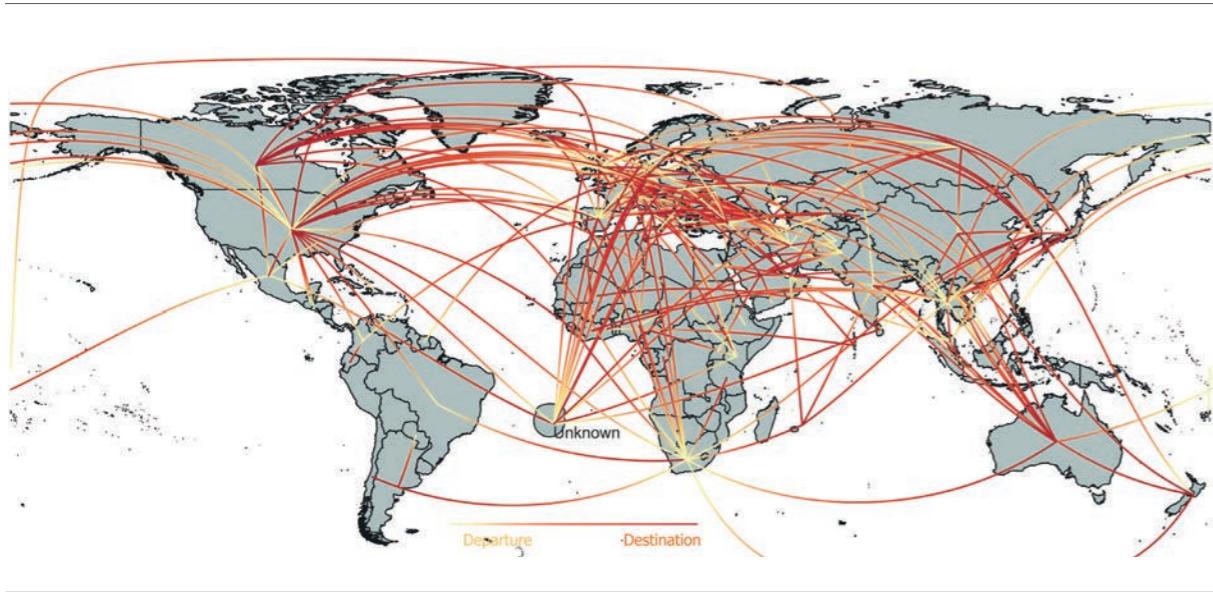


A total of 101 countries were implicated in opiate trafficking cases in 2024. The United States was the most frequently involved country, cited as an origin, destination, or transit point in 974 instances.

Unidentified departure, destination, or transit points were also commonly recorded, contributing to 600 instances in total. Countries like Mexico, India, South Korea, and the United Kingdom were each involved in 200 to 250 instances. Additionally, Iran, Sweden, Germany, Vietnam, and Bangladesh were cited in 80 to 160 instances.

The majority of countries (60%) were classified under the low involvement category, being cited in one (1) to 10 instances. Additionally, 22 countries were involved in 11 to 40 instances. Countries such as China, Türkiye, Austria, Armenia, and Afghanistan were categorized as moderate, with involvement ranging from 60 to 100 instances.

Figure 39: Opiate trafficking routes, 2024



Opiate seizures in 2024 originated from 81 departure points and were destined for 75 countries worldwide.

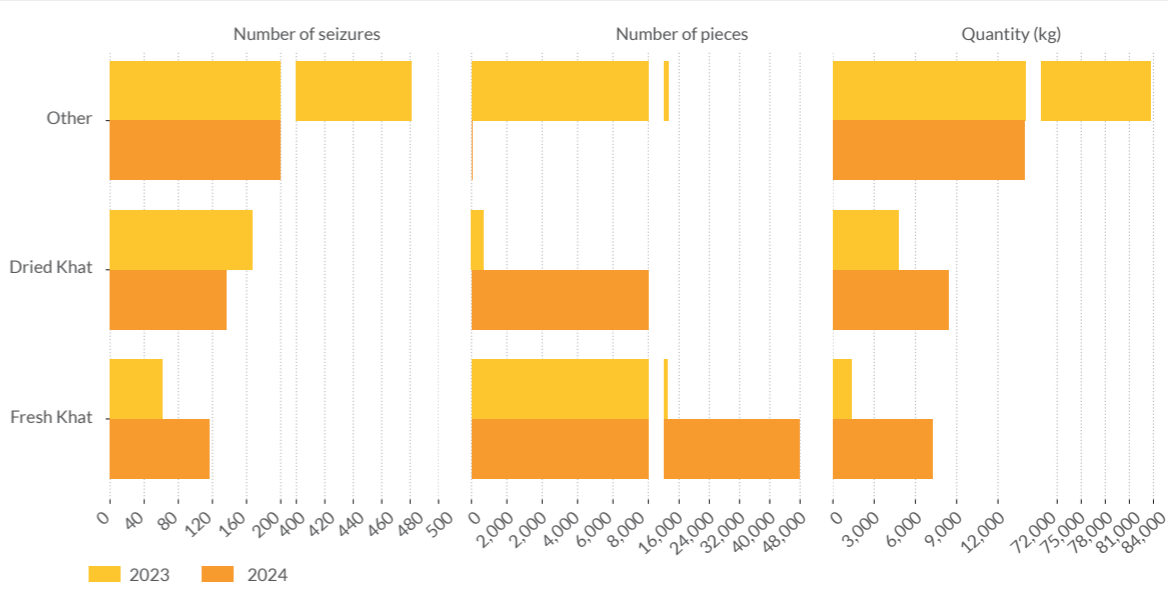
Aside from unidentified departure locations, which accounted for 25% of the seizures, Mexico and India were the most frequent sources, collectively representing 24% of the total seizures. The primary destination for both countries was the United States, with Bangladesh also being a key destination, particularly for shipments from India.

Other notable – though less frequent – departure countries included the United Kingdom, Iran, Vietnam, and China. The main destination for opiates departing from the United Kingdom was the United States, while Türkiye and Armenia were the primary destinations for opiates originating from Iran. South Korea received the majority of opiate shipments departing from Vietnam and China. In addition to the United States and South Korea, Sweden and Bangladesh were also among the most frequent destinations for opiates.

In terms of quantity, Nigeria, the United Arab Emirates, and France were the origin for the majority of the seized quantity of opiates, collectively accounting for 51% of the total. The vast majority of opiates originating from Nigeria were trafficked to Italy via Ethiopia as a transit point. Similarly, most opiates from the United Arab Emirates were sent to Saudi Arabia, while the United Kingdom was the main destination for opiates originating from France. The latter routings are explained by the close proximity and well-established trade routes.

2.6 Khat

Figure 40: Number of khat seizures and quantity by type, 2023–2024

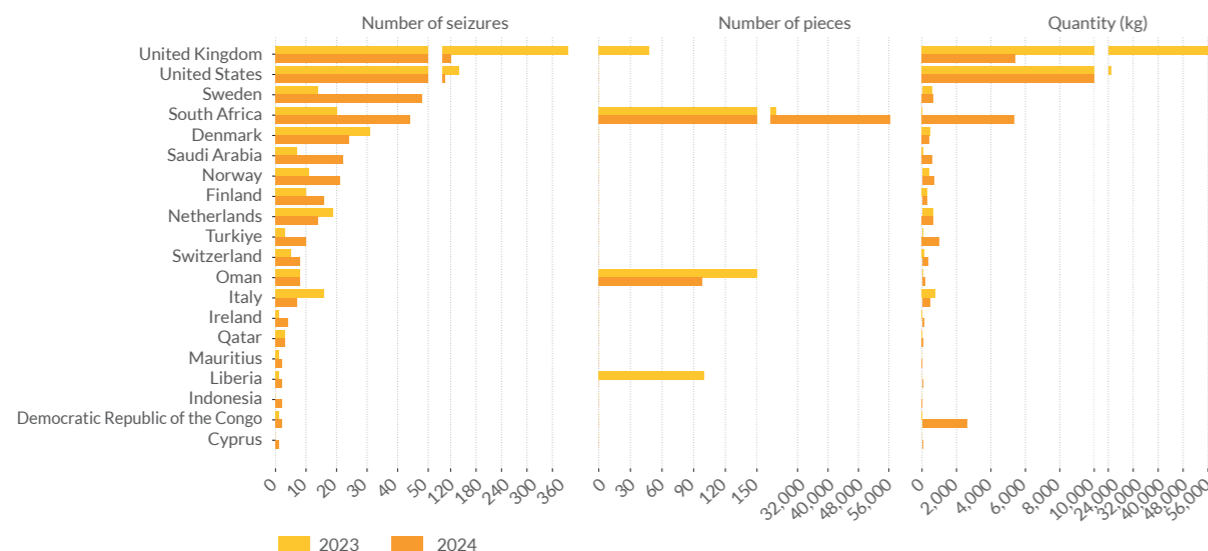


A total of 468 khat seizures – including dried, fresh, and other forms shown in Figure 40 – were recorded in 2024, involving 29.5 tonnes and 57,851 pieces.

This represents a 34% reduction in the number of seizures, accompanied by a notable 25% decrease in the quantity seized compared to the previous year.

Khat in forms other than dried and fresh accounted for 46% of the total seizures in 2024; however, it represented only 16% of the total quantity seized. In contrast, dried and fresh khat made up 54% of the total seizures and accounted for the vast majority of the seized quantity, representing 84%. Fresh khat saw an increase in both frequency and quantity, with rises of 89% and 63% respectively. While dried khat experienced an 18% decrease in the number of seizures, the quantity seized increased by 21% compared to the previous year.

Figure 41: Khat seizures and quantity by country, 2023–2024



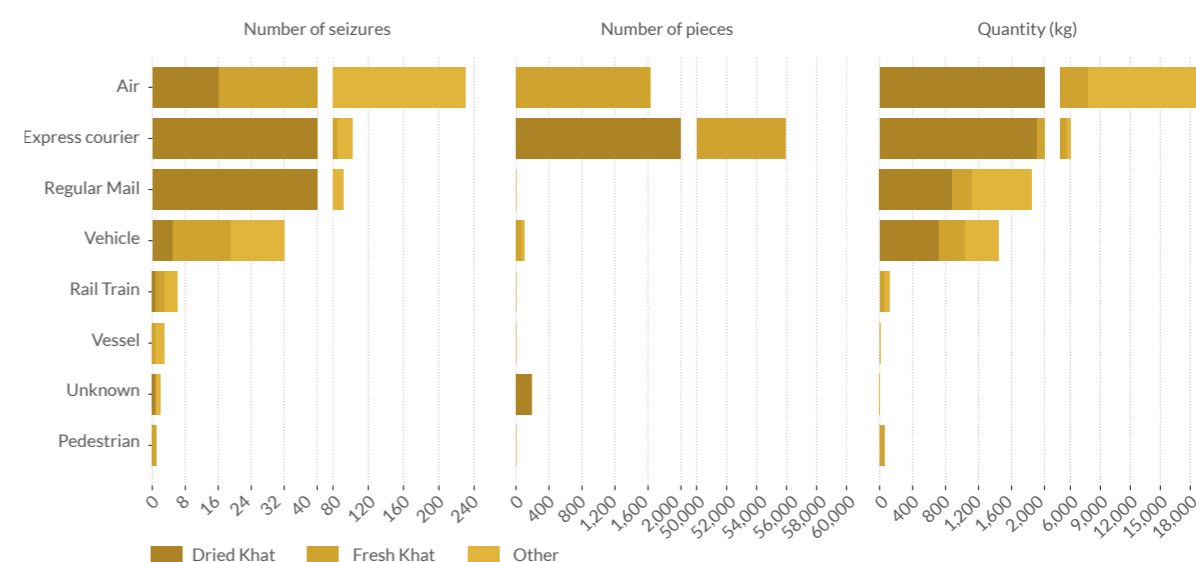
A total of 26 countries reported khat seizures in 2024, compared to 29 countries in 2023.

The United Kingdom and the United States together accounted for nearly half of the total seizures, despite both countries recording significant decreases. The number of seizures dropped by 70% in the United Kingdom and by 24% in the United States. This reduction in seizure frequency was accompanied by a substantial decline in quantity – 90% for the United Kingdom and 60% for the United States.

Sweden and South Africa were also frequent offence locations for khat – though to a much lesser extent than the United Kingdom and the United States – collectively accounting for 20% of the total seizures. Both countries recorded significant increases in the number of seizures, rising by 242% and 120% respectively. In South Africa, the increase was not limited to seizure frequency; the quantity seized also rose by 133% compared to the previous year, meaning that South Africa accounted for 70% of the total seized quantity of khat in 2024.

Denmark, Saudi Arabia, Norway, Finland, and the Netherlands were also frequent locations for khat seizures; however, each of these countries accounted for less than 1% of the total quantity seized. Notably, Saudi Arabia and Norway recorded a remarkable increase in both the frequency of seizures and the quantity seized.

Figure 42: Number of khat seizures and quantity seized by type and conveyance method, 2024

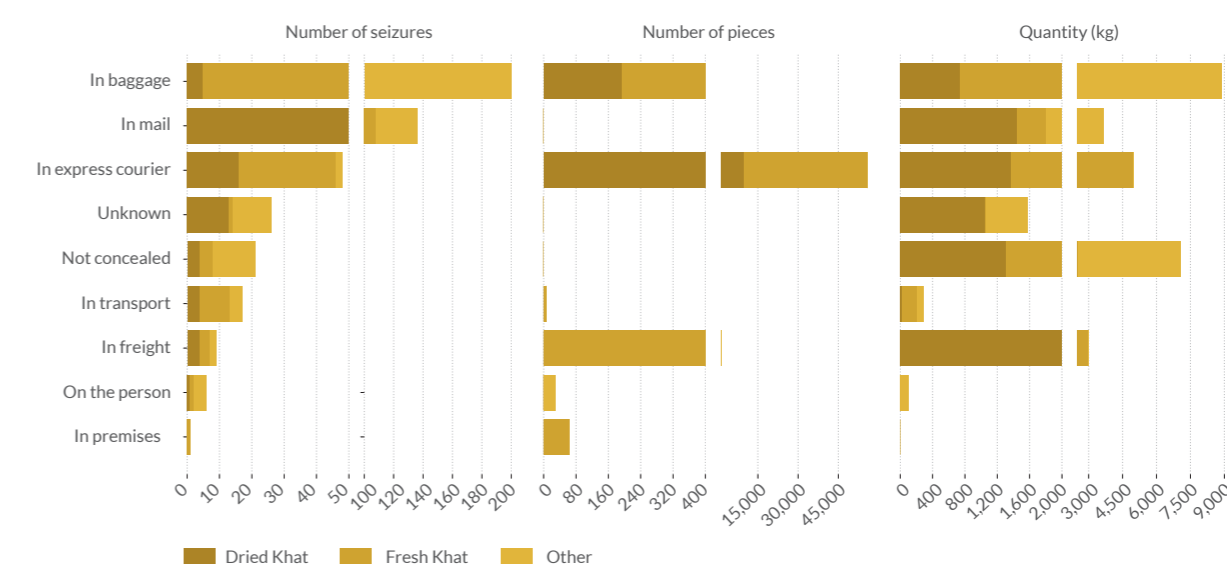


Air and express courier were the main conveyance methods for khat, both in terms of frequency and quantity, with air being the most frequently used, accounting for 50% of the total seizures.

Express courier accounted for the vast majority of the seized quantity, accounting for 71% of the total quantity of khat.

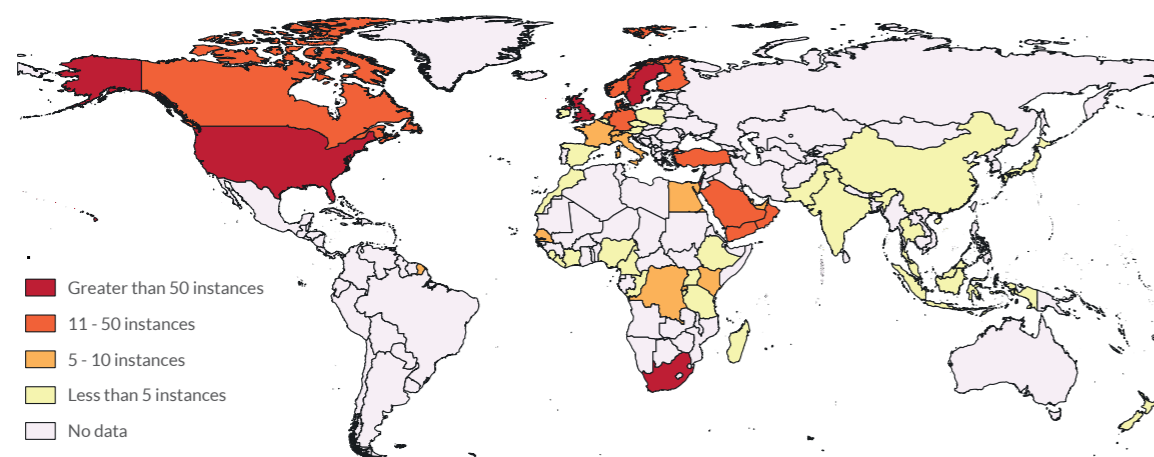
Regular mail and express courier were the main conveyance methods for dried khat, while fresh khat was most frequently transported by air and express courier. Other forms of khat were mainly transported by air.

Figure 43: Number of khat seizures and quantity seized by type and concealment method, 2024



While concealing khat in baggage and mail was the most common method – accounting for 44% and 29% of the total number of seizures respectively – the vast majority of the quantity seized (70%) was concealed in express courier packages, despite its lower frequency compared to baggage and mail. Most dried khat seizures were concealed in mail, whereas the majority of fresh khat was hidden in baggage and express courier packages. These faster means of transport are used because of the rapid deterioration of khat after harvesting, which does not affect the dried khat. Other forms of khat were most commonly concealed in baggage.

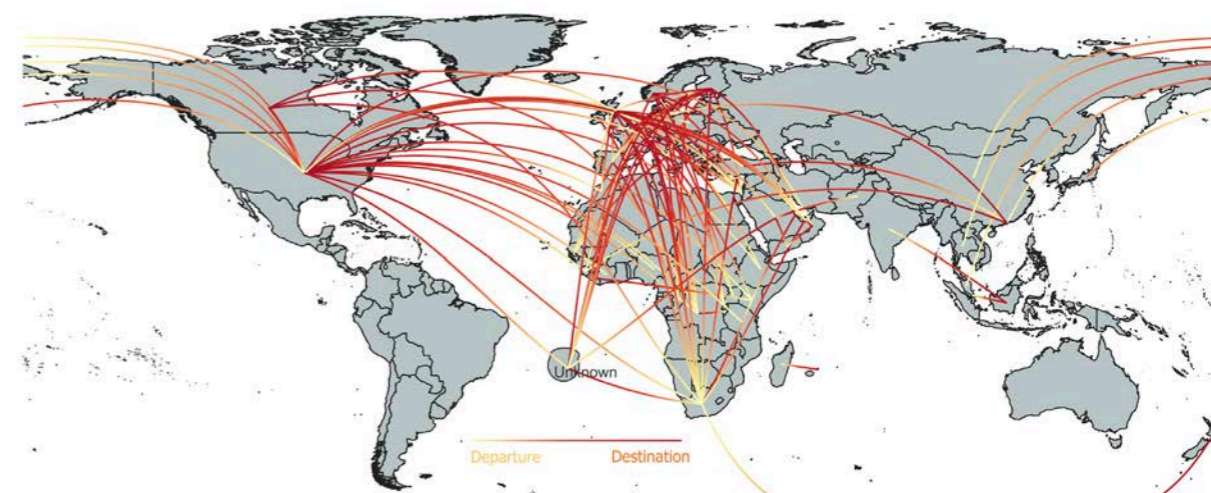
Figure 44: Heat map of khat trafficking instances by country, 2024



A total of 58 countries were implicated in khat trafficking cases in 2024.

The United Kingdom, United States, and Israel were the most frequently involved countries, cited as an origin, destination, or transit point in 143, 134, and 112 instances respectively. Unidentified departure, destination, or transit points were also commonly recorded, contributing to 90 instances in total. South Africa and Sweden were also highly involved, being recorded in 80 and 50 instances respectively. The vast majority of countries (72%) were involved in one (1) to 10 instances, while 11 countries were cited in the range of 11 to 30 instances.

Figure 45: Khat trafficking routes, 2024



In 2024, khat seizures originated from 47 departure points and were destined for 32 countries worldwide.

Israel was the most frequent departure point, accounting for 24% of the total seizures, with the United Kingdom being the main destination, followed by the United States. South Africa, Yemen, and the United States were also common departure points, though much less frequent than Israel, together accounting for 26% of the total seizures. The main destinations for seizures from South Africa were the United States, United Kingdom, and Norway, while Saudi Arabia was the primary destination for seizures from Yemen. Canada and the United Kingdom were the main destinations for seizures originating from the United States.

Despite South Africa being a less frequent departure point than Israel, it accounted for most of the seized quantity, some 67% of the total quantity, with most of this heading to the United States and United Kingdom. South Africa served as a source for many other countries, including Cyprus, New Zealand, Norway, and Canada. Israel accounted for 14% of the total seized quantity, with the United States and the United Kingdom as the primary destinations. Although Kenya was not a frequent departure point, it ranked third in terms of quantity, with most of the seized khat headed to South Africa.

A notable number of departures were unidentified, accounting for 17% of the total seizures. However, these seizures represented a small proportion of the total quantity, accounting for less than 2%.

2.7 WCO Drugs and Precursors Programme

Customs and other law enforcement agencies around the globe are facing more challenges than ever before when dealing with drug trafficking. The market has become highly complex, not only due to the constant emergence of new substances, but also due to the way in which they are trafficked, connecting and using all available means of transport, as well as adapting their routes. In addition, the criminal organizations behind the trafficking of drugs and precursors are becoming increasingly specialized and forging stronger ties with each other.

To combat these issues, the WCO Drugs and Precursors Programme has developed several initiatives to support its Members: the COLIBRI Project, focusing on illicit traffic through general aviation; and the Synthetic Drugs Detection Project (SDDP), seeking to disrupt the illegal trafficking of this specific type of drugs by working on three fronts (interdiction in the mail channel and general aviation, and through the development of canine forces). Finally, the Passenger and Cargo Control Programme (PCCP) targets illicit drugs movements through a comprehensive approach for passengers and cargo.

2.7.1 COLIBRI

The “COLIBRI Project: Monitoring and Controlling General Aviation” is an initiative of the WCO funded by the European Union (EU). The project aims to improve security in the general aviation (GA) sector by stepping up international coordination and cooperation between law enforcement agencies, competent authorities, and criminal justice institutions, and by targeting illicit trafficking perpetrated via the use of this sensitive means of transport.

COLIBRI is a unique, long-term project that addresses GA as a whole: private international business aviation, regional and national leisure aviation, and clandestine flights. Indeed, general aviation offers great advantages to organized crime groups (OCGs). It is a fast and effective mode of transport that can cover long distances and can use small airports where monitoring is limited. With a potential for clandestine activities and a high payload capacity, GA is an exclusive means of conveyance subject to less rigorous controls and inspection measures at international airports and secondary aerodromes. GA plays a critical role in global connectivity, and due to its characteristics, is increasingly exploited by OCGs, thus requiring vigilant monitoring.

With presence in 19 Members in Latin America and the Caribbean as well as West and Central Africa, COLIBRI supports them to more effectively monitor and control this sensitive vector. Four main objectives are at its core: 1) raise awareness about general aviation's role in illicit trafficking and promote relevant legislation and measures to fight organized crime activities; 2) foster data sharing and risk analysis to target high-risk flights, and promote secure real-time communication through the use of the Geoportal and CENcomm; 3) Strengthen coordination and facilitate international cooperation among Members by organizing coordinated international operations; 4) empower field officers by providing a

complete capacity-building programme to enhance officer's capabilities to monitor and control GA.

During 2024, the COLIBRI Project achieved outstanding progress in attaining all its objectives. Specialized training as well as mentoring and IT tutoring were carried out. The project consolidated its vast network of contacts across the regions, and two focal point meetings were organized.

The project also worked in close cooperation with other key partners and international organizations and initiatives. Among the milestones reached is the signing of the Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) between the project and the Maritime Analysis and Operations Centre Narcotics (MAOC-N), a key operational partner in tackling and disrupting illicit trade, especially drug trafficking. In addition, the project, in line with its strategy, promoted the use of the Geoportal and CENcomm, which stand out as pivotal tools for sharing intelligence and information and for real-time communication in a secure environment.

As the project moves forward, it will continue to assist WCO Members with the necessary tools to enhance their capabilities to control GA, to strengthen their strategic partnerships and to promote the use of technological tools.

2.7.1.1 The Geoportal: an innovative IT tool



In 2022, the COLIBRI Project launched the Geoportal, a mapping and geolocation tool that aids law enforcement agencies in collecting data, analysing information from different sources, and obtaining intelligence for more efficient risk assessment, planning and control in general aviation.

Overall, this IT tool is composed of two main items: a mobile application and a web portal. Through the former, information is collected in the field and data can be quickly consulted to direct control efforts. In the latter, all the data is centralized, allowing a global view of GA activity as well as analyses at different levels (national, regional and transregional). It should be noted that one of the advantages provided by the Geoportal is access to high-definition and up-to-date satellite images, which help to analyse the terrain without the need to use logistics and move human teams.

The Geoportal has become a fundamental tool for Members, being included in national data collection, verification and analysis processes, and has led to the achievement of important operational results: from significant seizures to the identification of clandestine runways operated by high-risk criminal networks.

The benefits and added value of the Geoportal has led other initiatives to join and use it, as is the case of the Synthetic Drugs Detection Project (SDDP). Due to the great versatility of the platform, it is expected that new Members will join in the years to come.

2.7.2 SDDP

The serious threat currently posed by synthetic drugs has prompted the WCO to implement the Synthetic Drugs Detection Project (SDDP). This project aims at providing Customs and other law enforcement authorities with the tools and expertise needed to effectively fight the illegal trafficking of synthetic drugs.

Three main components encompass this comprehensive initiative, which spans several regions, and achieved significant results during the year 2024:

- **Mail channel (MC):** this component arises from the collaboration between WCO with the Universal Postal Union (UPU) and the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) and focuses on improving the coordination between Customs and postal operators, stressing the importance on advanced electronic data (EAD) integration and compliance with UPU standards.
- **General aviation (GA):** this component addresses the exploitation of this means of transport by organized crime groups to illegally traffic synthetic drugs while fostering inter-agency and international cooperation. The GA component concentrates on the North and Central America and the Caribbean, engaging Barbados, Belize, Jamaica, Mexico, Saint Lucia and Trinidad & Tobago.
- **Canine forces:** this component reinforces canine detection capacities by carrying out specific training and sharing of knowledge and best practices by establishing a group of global canine experts.



Overall, these initiatives highlight the WCO's commitment to combat the pressing synthetic drug threat by enhancing risk management, strengthening operational capabilities and promoting inter-agency and international cooperation. The SDDP will build on its achievements to continue to address this critical and evolving danger to our societies.

2.7.3 Passenger and Cargo Control Program (PCCP)

Following the need of law enforcement agencies to ensure a comprehensive response to the continuing challenges in dealing with passengers and cargo, a merger of AIRCOP and CCP into the Passenger and Cargo Control Programme (PCCP) was completed in 2023 and is now operational.

The AIRCOP component of the PCCP is a multi-agency project implemented by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in partnership with INTERPOL and the WCO. It aims to strengthen the capacities of international airports to target and intercept high-risk passengers, cargo, and mail as a contribution to the fight against illicit drugs and other commodities (such as wildlife products or falsified medical products), terrorism-related threats (such as arms or potential foreign terrorist fighters), human trafficking and the smuggling of migrants. It also aims to facilitate communication and coordination between origin, transit, and destination countries to disrupt illicit cross-border flows and criminal networks.

The Container Control Programme (CCP) component of the PCCP is a robust 20-year collaboration between the WCO and UNODC, aiming to enhance capacity in participating nations. Since its inception in 2004, the initiative has focused on bolstering risk management, supply chain security, and border control across seaports, airports, dry ports, rail terminals and land border crossings. The overarching goals are to thwart the trafficking of illicit commodities, combat organized crime and terrorism, and simultaneously facilitate legitimate trade.

PCCP utilizes the WCO-facilitated secure real-time transmission and sharing of information between law enforcement services at national, regional and international levels by providing the CENcomm tool for the secure communication and exchange of operational details, such as warning and seizure messages, within a closed network of control units in international seaports, airports and at land borders. It also enables the collection of data seizures for analysis purposes, allowing decision makers to make informed decisions.

Throughout 2024, the PCCP continued to build on the previous success of AIRCOP and CCP in an increasingly challenging environment for law enforcement in ensuring security while facilitating the legitimate movement of goods and passengers. The number of countries participating in the PCCP increased to 89, as well as the number of specialized units to 192, including port control units (PCUs), air cargo control units (ACCUs), national targeting centres (NTCs) and joint airport interdiction task forces (JAITFs).

CONCLUSION

As this chapter has shown, drug trafficking is a worldwide problem that is constantly evolving. Criminal organizations are increasingly structured and prepared and are exploiting all means of transport to move their substances and adjust quickly and easily to any changes in the drug market and to law enforcement control actions.

In the face of such a threat, it is of utmost importance to adopt an integrated and interdisciplinary approach and to gather as much information as possible. The more data the Customs community has, the more comprehensive an analysis it can carry out, which will enable administrations to take appropriate measures to confront the problem. As a practical matter, it is of paramount importance that WCO Members upload drug seizures into the CEN, as doing so further improves the knowledge of the Customs community and enables the WCO and individual Member administrations to direct their efforts to the areas requiring focused attention to more effectively combat international drug trafficking.

The WCO, through its projects and partnerships, will continue to work on providing leadership, technical support and innovation to Member Customs administrations in their fight against drug trafficking; delivering training, promoting the exchange of information and best practices, and promoting the use of IT tools.





3 ENVIRONMENTAL CRIME

Environmental crime remains a significant component of global illicit trade, with criminal networks exploiting international supply chains to traffic Environmentally Sensitive Commodities (ESC). These illicit activities continue to affect a wide range of commodities and trade routes, reflecting the persistent and evolving nature of environmental crime.





Courtesy of Tax and Customs Administration of the Netherlands.

Illicit trade in environmentally sensitive commodities (ESC) remains a persistent challenge for Customs worldwide. In 2024, trafficking methods and volumes varied across wildlife, timber, hazardous chemicals, and waste, underscoring the need for adaptive enforcement.

INTRODUCTION

ESC are subject to various international frameworks, notably Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), as well as national laws, providing a basis for intervention. Differences in implementation, resource constraints, and evolving smuggling methods make Customs' role at the border particularly critical, where timely detection and targeted controls can prevent illicit shipments.

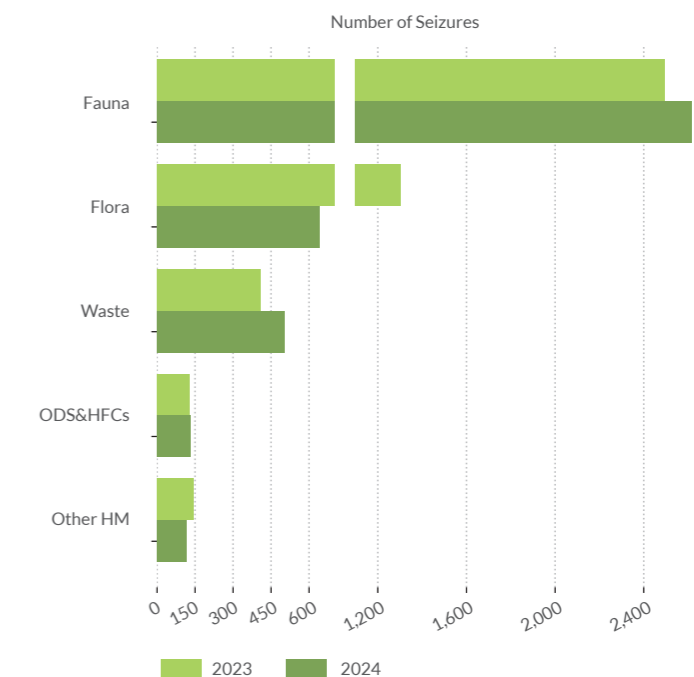
Building on these trends, the following sections of the Environment Chapter provide an overview of trafficking in wildlife and timber, waste, substances controlled under the Montreal Protocol, and other hazardous materials. The analysis draws on data submitted through the CEN database and the outcomes of WCO-coordinated operations THUNDER 2024, PRAESIDIO III, and DEMETER X. The 2024 reports reaffirm the critical role of Customs in combating environmental crime and emphasize that strategic risk assessment, inter-agency cooperation, and continuous capacity building remain fundamental to an effective enforcement response.

The illicit trade in fauna species – including marine species, mammals, reptiles, birds, arthropods, and amphibians – resulted in 2,618 recorded seizures in 2024, reflecting a 5% increase compared to 2023.

1. Overview of environmentally-sensitive commodity seizures, 2023–2024

In 2024, Customs administrations reported a total of 4,014 environmentally sensitive commodity (ESC) seizures, as shown in Figure 1. While the number of seizures varied across commodity categories between 2023 and 2024, significant increases were recorded in the quantities intercepted for fauna, flora, waste, and ozone-depleting substances (ODS) and hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), whereas other hazardous materials showed a mixed trend. The following overview provides a detailed summary of ESC seizures, highlighting trends across major categories.

Figure 1: Overview of environmentally-sensitive commodity seizures, 2023–2024



The rise in the number of seizures was accompanied by a significant increase in the total quantity of fauna specimens intercepted, which surged by 3,049%.

The illicit trade in flora species – including timber and plants – resulted in 641 recorded seizures in 2024, marking a 14% decrease compared to 2023. The number of seizures of both timber and plants declined by 50%. However, the total quantity intercepted increased by 25%.

Waste trafficking – including notably plastic, metal, e-waste, textiles, end-of-life machinery and vehicles, medical waste, glass, batteries, rubber, rubble, wood, mixed waste, and paper – reached 504 reported seizures in 2024, reflecting a 23% increase compared to 2023. While the volume

of waste seized (measured in kg) dropped by 38%, the number of seized pieces of waste increased by over 750%.

There were 134 incidents of trafficking ozone-depleting substances (ODS) and hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) recorded in 2024, marking a 5% increase compared to 2023. The increase in ODS and HFC seizures in 2024 was accompanied by a 96% rise in the total quantity seized compared to 2023.

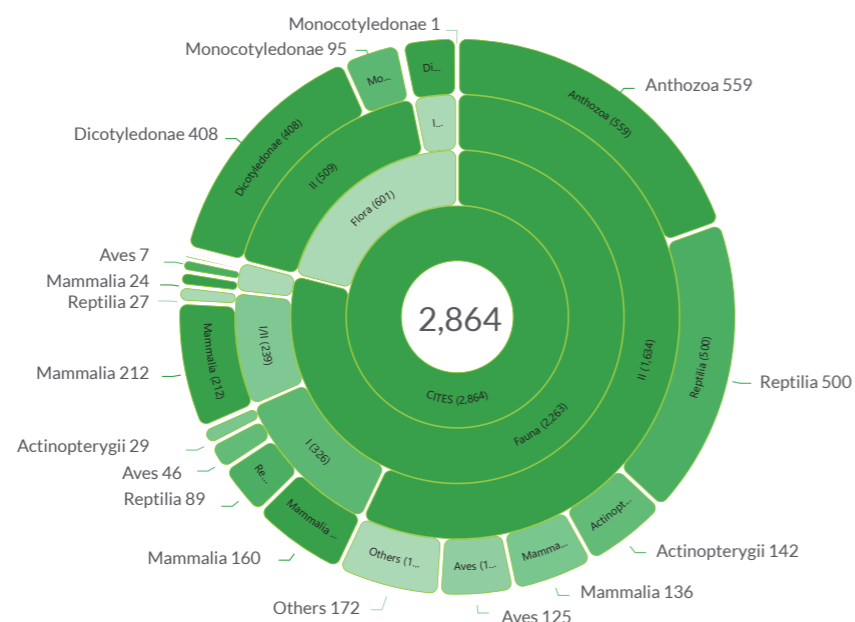
Other hazardous materials – including pesticides, hazardous chemicals, and mercury/products containing mercury – recorded 117 seizures in 2024, marking a 19% decrease compared to 2023. Seizures of pesticides declined by 45%. Seizures of mercury and mercury-containing products rose significantly, from four (4) in 2023 to 19 in 2024. Despite the overall decline in seizures, the total quantity of hazardous materials (HM) seized increased notably by 118%, driven primarily by hazardous chemicals and pesticides.

2. Fauna and Flora

The analysis of fauna and flora seizures is based on data reported to WCO through the Customs Enforcement Network (CEN) database and Operation THUNDER 2024 and PRAESIDIO III CENcomm groups, which included information on 3,259 seizures related to illegal trade in wildlife and timber of both CITES and non-CITES species: 2,864 seizures and 395 seizures respectively.

2.1 Fauna and flora by CITES Appendix, 2024

Figure 2: Fauna and flora by CITES Appendix, 2024



As shown in Figure 2, trafficking in CITES-listed species consisted of 80% fauna species and 20% flora species.

Appendix II species comprised 75% of the total number of seizures, while 15% were listed under Appendix I. Seizures involving species listed in both Appendix I & II and those in Appendix III were relatively small, at 8% and 2% respectively.

Among CITES-listed fauna species, Appendix II-related seizures accounted for 72% of total seizures, with marine species and reptiles being the most frequently trafficked. Most Appendix I-related seizures involved mammals and reptiles, while Appendix III-related seizures primarily included marine species, mammals, and birds.

CITES-listed flora specimens were predominantly Appendix II species, representing 85% of the total number of flora-related seizures, with plants making up the majority (80%), while timber accounted for 20% of the total number of seizures of Appendix II species. 15% of flora specimens were Appendix I species, all the seizures involved plants. Appendix III seizures constituted a small portion of seizures and involved timber species.

2.2 Fauna

Trafficking in fauna species – including marine species, mammals, reptiles, birds, insects and other invertebrates, and amphibians. resulted in 2,618 seizures in 2024, marking an average increase of 5% compared to 2023. Figures 3 and Table 1 present the distribution of these cases by major taxonomic category, associated commodities, and their proportional shares in the number and quantity of seizures. Marine species, mammals, and reptiles accounted for the majority of detected cases.

Figure 3: Fauna categories by number of seizures and quantity, 2023–2024

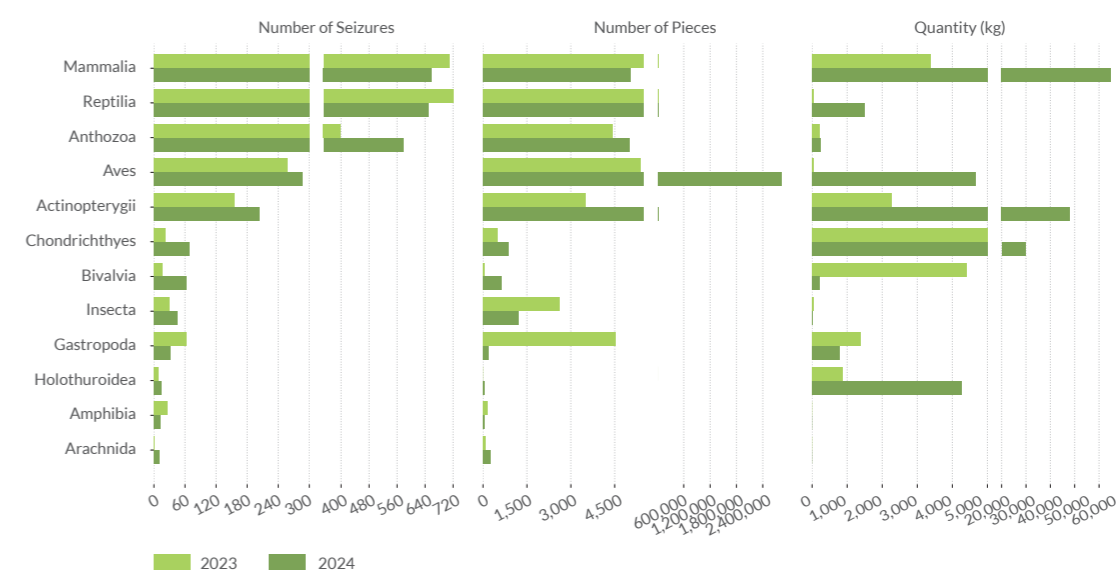


Table 1. Categories of trafficked fauna species (2024)

Category	Primarily traded commodities	Percentage share in the number of seizures	Percentage share in the quantity seized
Mammalia:	Elephants, Big Cats & Felines, Pangolins, Rhinoceros, Primates, and other mammals	25%	31%
Reptilia:	Snakes, lizards, turtles, crocodiles	25%	11%
Aves:	Eagles, parrots, penguins, and other birds	115%	86%
Marine species:	- <i>Holothuroidea</i> : Sea cucumbers - <i>Chondrichthyes</i> : Cartilaginous fishes (sharks, rays) - <i>Actinopterygii</i> : Ray-finned fishes (salmon, tuna, goldfish) - <i>Gastropoda</i> : Marine snails, sea slugs - <i>Bivalvia</i> : Clams, mussels - <i>Anthozoa</i> : Corals, sea anemones	37%	49%
Arthropods:	- <i>Insecta</i> : Beetles, butterflies, ants - <i>Arachnida</i> : Spiders, scorpions	2%	1%

Trafficking trends by fauna categories, 2023–2024

The highest increases in the number of seizures were observed in arthropods (83%), marine species (44%), and bird seizures (10%), while declines were recorded in amphibians (55%), reptiles (19%), and mammals (7%).

The rise in the number of seizures was accompanied by a significant increase in the total quantity of fauna specimens intercepted, which surged by 3,049%. This sharp rise was primarily driven by increases in the quantities of birds, mammals, and marine specimens. In contrast, the quantities of seized amphibians and arthropods decreased by 77% and 45% respectively.

2.2.1. Mammals (Mammalia)

Seizures of mammals were diverse, as shown in Figure 4, and primarily included the following categories of specimens: elephant-related items, pangolins and pangolin scales, primates, big cats and felines, rhinoceroses, whales, dolphins, and various other mammal species.

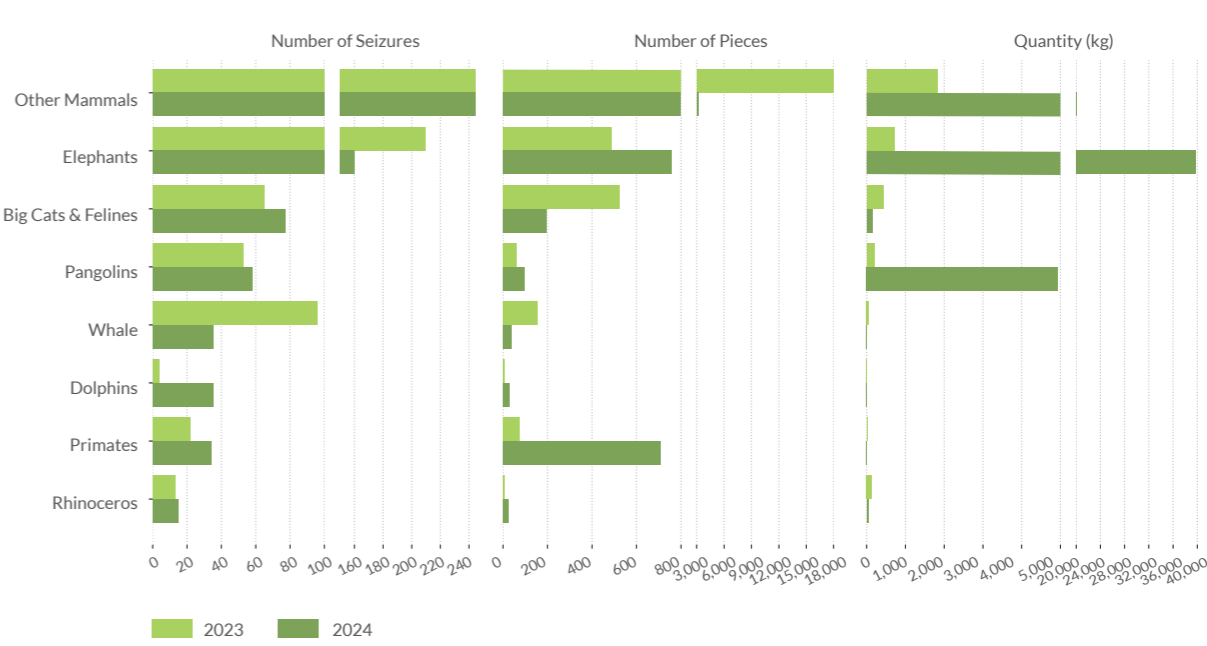
5 To avoid distortion, an exceptionally large seizure of feathers was excluded from calculations.

6 To avoid distortion, an exceptionally large seizure of feathers was excluded from calculations.



Courtesy of Angola Revenue Administration (AGT).

Figure 4: Category of mammals by number of seizures and quantity seized, 2023–2024



In 2024, there were 414 seizures of mammals – excluding the “Other Mammals” category, which was not analysed individually. The number of seizures declined by 11% compared to 2023, primarily due to a 23% decrease in elephant-related seizures and a 63% drop in whale seizures.

Despite this decline, the total quantity seized surged by 1,538%, driven mainly by a significant increase in the number of seizures of elephant-related items, pangolins, and primates. Elephant-related items, big cats and felines, and pangolins were the primary components, accounting for 70% of such seizures.

Half of all mammal seizures in 2024 were reported by four Customs administrations, namely Germany (with ivory accounting for 15% of their seizures), Botswana, the United Kingdom (with ivory making up 70% of their seizures), and Namibia.

In terms of quantity seized, seizures reported by Botswana accounted for 58%, driven primarily by seizures of meat – notably, elephant meat. The additional 34% of the total quantity was reported by four other African Customs administrations: Angola, Mozambique, Nigeria, and Namibia. Among the items seized in these jurisdictions, ivory accounted for 14%, pangolin scales for 11%, and rhino horns for 5% of the total quantity seized.

While the majority of seizures involving mammals were reported by Western Europe, East and Central Africa accounted for the largest quantities in 2024, representing 85% of the total. This marks a significant shift from 2023, when Eastern and Central Europe made up 50% of the total seizures.

In terms of modus operandi, mammals – particularly elephant-related items, big cats, primates, and rhinoceros – were commonly transported by air and vehicles. Most illegally traded mammals were concealed in baggage (35%), followed by mail and courier, freight, and in premises, with 12% each.

FINDINGS RELATED TO ILLEGAL SHIPMENTS OF MAMMAL SPECIES

Elephants

- There was a 23% decrease in the number of seizures of elephant-related items, but a 3,278 % increase in the quantity seized.
- Ivory was the most frequently seized elephant-related item, accounting for 92% of all such seizures. Despite a 27% decline in the number of seizures in 2024 compared to 2023, the total quantity of ivory seized surged by 471%.
- Elephant meat represented the largest quantity seized within the category of elephant-related products, making up 74% of the total.
- Export, import, and internal seizures were at similar levels in terms of the number of seizures (31%, 30%, and 33% respectively), while transit accounted for 9% of seizures. In terms of quantity, internal seizures resulted in the largest quantities seized (86%).

An ivory carving seized by Sri Lanka Customs.



Elephant tusks seized by Indonesia Customs officials in November 2024 during WCO-INTERPOL Operation THUNDER 2024.



Based on risk profiling, eight (8) suitcases of a passenger travelling from Saudi Arabia to Indonesia were x-rayed. The examination revealed 41 pieces of elephant tusks, which were concealed in the effects carried in the baggage.

Pangolins

- The number of pangolin-related seizures remained constant in 2023 and 2024 (57 and 58 seizures respectively).
- Pangolin-related seizures involved dead and live animals, scales, skin and skin products.
- Internal seizures of pangolins accounted for the largest number of seizures (59%). Illegal shipments were detected mainly based on intelligence and investigation.
- Pangolin scales accounted for the largest quantity and number of seizures, making up 52% of all pangolin-related seizures and 99% of the total quantity seized. This represented a remarkable increase compared to 2023, with the number of seizures rising by 223% and the total quantity seized surging by 2,740%.



Pangolin scales seized by Nigeria Customs.

In December 2024, two seizures of over four (4) metric tonnes of pangolin scales (2,179 kg and 2,293 kg respectively) were made in separate warehouses. The pangolin scales were being stockpiled for export. The seizures took place during the joint WCO-INTERPOL Operation THUNDER 2024.



Two live pangolins detected and seized by India Customs in March 2024.

Acting on specific information, officers of the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) posed as prospective buyers and intercepted three (3) people in a vehicle carrying two live pangolins concealed in a jute bag.

Big cats and felines

- Skin, leather products, and parts of animals were the most commonly trafficked items in big cat and feline seizures in 2024, collectively accounting for 73% of all seizures, while live big cats represented 14%. In 2024, the number of seizures in this category increased by 18 % and the quantity rose by 355%, compared to 2023.
- In terms of quantity seized, meat was the largest category, making up 43%, followed by parts (19%) and cosmetic and pharmaceutical products (17%).
- Leather product seizures increased significantly in 2024 compared to 2023, rising by 250% in number and 240% in quantity.
- The number of seizures involving skins increased by 35%, while the total quantity seized decreased by the same percentage.
- Import seizures were the most frequent, accounting for 36% of the total number of seizures, followed by internal seizures (32%). The highest quantities were seized in internal seizures, which represented 59% of the total quantity seized.



A live serval (*Leptailurus serval*) seized by the National Revenue Administration of Poland (NRA).

In June 2024, during a routine control of a vehicle entering Poland from Ukraine at the Korczowa border crossing, the driver was prosecuted for illegally transporting the serval without the required CITES permit. (Regional Intelligence Liaison Office for Eastern and Central Europe (RILO ECE) ALERT 18-2024)

Rhinoceros

- Compared to 2023, the number of rhinoceros-related seizures remained at the same level (13 in 2023, 15 in 2024), while the quantity seized decreased by 50% in 2024.
- Most of the rhinoceros-related seizures in 2024 involved horns, which represented 67% of all rhinoceros seizures and 84% of the total quantity seized. Rhino horn-related seizures declined in 2024 compared to 2023, with a 17% decrease in the number of seizures and a 58% drop in the total quantity seized.
- Rhino-related seizures were mainly detected at import and inland.



In February 2024, a transit passenger travelling from Mozambique to Thailand via Doha, Qatar, was stopped at Hamad International Airport during a routine luggage inspection and X-ray screening before her departure, due to suspicions of prohibited items in her personal baggage. Following a physical inspection of her baggage, Qatar Customs found eight (8) pieces of rhino horn, weighing a total of 15.1 kg.

Rhino horns seized by Qatar Customs.

2.2.2. Primates

In 2024, the number of primate-related seizures increased by 54% and the quantity seized rose by 692%, compared to 2023. The main components of primate-related seizures in 2024 were cosmetic, dietary, or pharmaceutical products (CDP), accounting for 44% of all primate seizures and 92% of the total quantity seized. Seizures of live primates accounted for 35% of seizures.

The majority of illegal shipments were detected at import, concealed in freight.

2.2.3. Reptiles (Reptilia)

In 2024, there were 650 seizures of reptiles, comprising turtles and tortoises, crocodiles, snakes and lizards, as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Reptiles by number of seizures and quantity seized, 2023–2024



Crocodiles accounted for 35% of the total number of seizures.

Despite a decline of 19% in the number of seizures in 2024 compared to 2023 – driven by a decrease in crocodile and lizard seizures – the total quantity seized increased by 6%, due to a remarkable rise in the quantities seized of snakes and lizards, which increased by 171% and 107% respectively. Most reptile seizures involved skin products, which made up 44% of the total, while live reptiles constituted 31%. Most reptile seizures involved skin products, which made up 44% of the total, while live reptiles constituted 31%.

As reported, 60% of reptile seizures occurred in Germany, the United Kingdom, and Spain. However, in terms of quantity, India accounted for 47% of all reptile-related seizures, despite contributing to only 6% of the

total number of incidents. Additionally, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, and Hong Kong-China collectively intercepted 24% of the total reptile quantity.

Regarding modus operandi, reptiles were primarily trafficked via air, followed by mail, frequently hidden in mail parcels and baggage. Land freight was also used but less frequently than baggage. The majority of reptile seizures were detected using intelligence supported by investigations. Most reptile seizures were made during import (60%), while export and internal seizures accounted for 18% and 12% respectively.

FINDINGS RELATED TO ILLEGAL SHIPMENTS OF REPTILE SPECIES

Snakes

- Skin products represented half of the seizures in 2024, while live snakes made up 19% of the seizures.
- Snakeskin was the largest item seized by quantity, representing 70% of the total quantity seized in 2024.
- The majority of seizures occurred at export (57%) with illegal snake products, transported by air (39%), and concealed in baggage and in freight.



Forty-one snakes seized by India Customs in November 2024.

Specific intelligence indicated that a smuggling gang would attempt to smuggle wildlife through Rajiv Gandhi International Airport, Hyderabad. Two passengers travelling from Bangkok were intercepted. Examination of the checked-in baggage resulted in the recovery of three (3) Asian forest tortoises (native of Southeast Asia), four (4) Cuvier's dwarf caimans (native to Central and South America), 17 ball pythons (native to West and South Africa), ten (10) rattlesnakes (native to North and South America), and five (5) shingleback skink or bobtail lizards (native of Australia). The animals were concealed with plastic toys and clothes. The two passengers were apprehended, and further investigation is in progress.

Crocodiles

- Within the category of crocodiles, skin products accounted for the majority of crocodile seizures in 2024, both in terms of the number of seizures (76%) and the quantity seized (80%).
- Illegal shipments of crocodiles were mostly detected during routine checks.



Snake products seized by Agenzia delle Dogane e dei Monopoli and Guardia di Finanza.

In December 2024, Italian Customs authorities risk profiled a container arriving from the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Following control, 52 pieces of various products made from snake products were detected.

Lizards

- Live lizard specimens were the most commonly seized, representing 52% of total lizard seizures, followed by skin products at 39%.
- Illegal shipments of lizards were detected mainly at export controls, based on risk profiling and investigation.

Tortoises and turtles

- Turtles and tortoises witnessed an increase in both frequency and quantity by 20% and 6% respectively.
- Live specimens were the most commonly seized items, accounting for 70% of seizures and 80% of quantity seized.
- The majority of illegal shipments of tortoises and turtles were seized inland, following investigations.



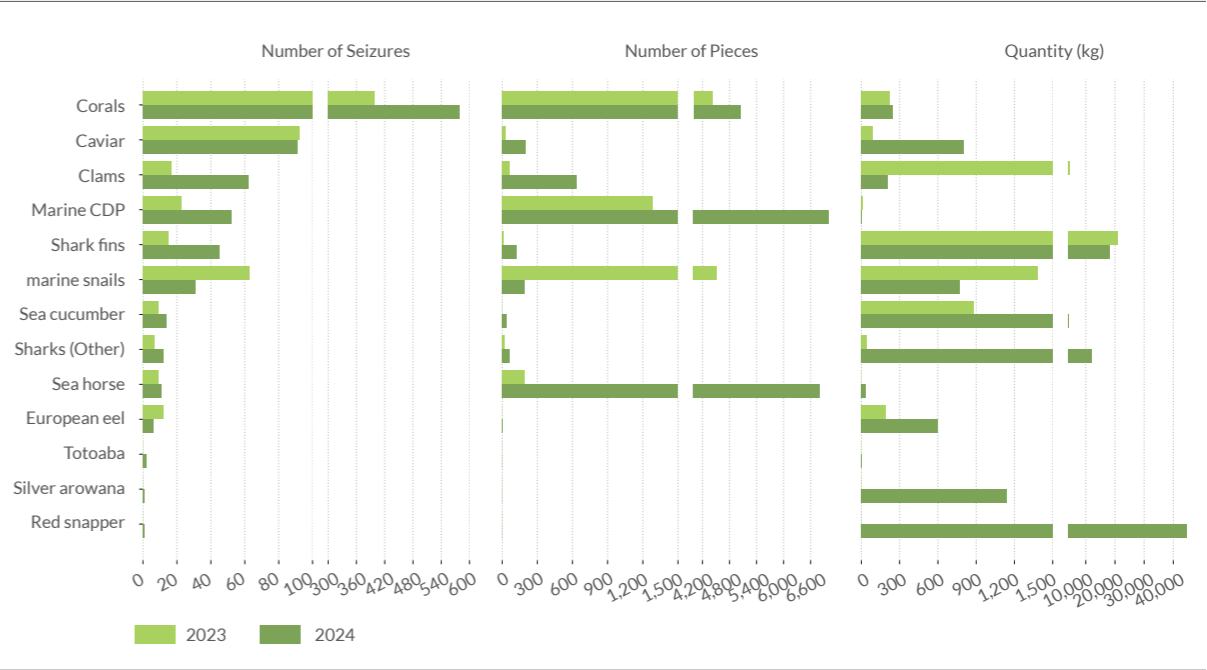
179 live turtles seized by India Customs in August 2024.

Officers from the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) and the State Forest Department conducted searches at a hotel near the Charbagh railway station, rescuing 14 live spotted pond turtles and 165 live Indian roofed turtles from an individual preparing to board a train to Kolkata, where the turtles were intended for sale on the illegal pet market. The rescued turtle species are protected under the Wildlife Protection Act (1972).

2.2.4. Marine species

In 2024, 957 seizures related to the trafficking of marine species were reported, marking a 44% increase compared to 2023.

Figure 6: Marine species by number of seizures and quantity seized, 2023–2024



This rise in the number of seizures of marine species was accompanied by a significant increase in quantity seized, which surged by 173%. Marine seizures involved thirteen main categories, as detailed in Figure 6.

The increase in seizures in 2024 was primarily driven by a rise in shark-related seizures, particularly shark fins (200%), marine cosmetics, dietary and pharmaceutical products (126%), corals (45%), and clams (264%).

In terms of modus operandi, marine specimens were primarily concealed in baggage. Half of all illegal shipments of marine species were identified through risk profiling. Marine species seizures were dominated by import seizures (76%), with export and transit making up the remaining 14% and 10% respectively.

FINDINGS RELATED TO ILLEGAL SHIPMENTS OF MARINE SPECIES

Corals

- Corals were the second most frequently seized fauna species in 2024, with 580 recorded incidents. Of these, 53% occurred in Germany, which also accounted for 55% of the total quantity of corals seized. An additional 40% of incidents took place in other European countries, including Hungary, Denmark, the United Kingdom, Spain, Austria, Italy, Poland, and France.
- Corals were the most frequently seized marine species in 2024, accounting for 64% of all marine seizures.
- Coral seizures increased by 43% in number and 13% in quantity, compared to 2023.

Shark fins

- Despite a 200% increase in the number of shark fin seizures in 2024 compared to 2023, the total quantity seized declined by 12%.
- Half of all shark fin illegal shipments were transported by vessels, while air was used in 33% of these cases.
- The biggest number of seizures and quantities were detected during routine controls.



Dried shark fins seized by Sri Lanka Customs.

In July 2024, Sri Lanka Customs seized a total of 1.55 tonnes of dried shark fins through two interventions at the Colombo Seaport. One shipment originated in Manila, Philippines, and the other in Jebel Ali, UAE. Both seizures were intelligence-driven and based on risk management.

Sea cucumbers

- In 2024, sea cucumber seizures saw significant growth, with both the number of seizures and quantity increasing by 55% and 389%, respectively.
- Seizures of sea cucumbers mainly occurred during export routine controls while being transported by air.

Dried sea cucumbers seized by Sri Lanka Customs in November 2024.



The seizure took place at Bandaranaike International Airport and involved 826.5 kg of the commodity. It was made at export through random selection. The shipment was destined to Hong Kong-China.

Caviar

- Although caviar seizures declined by 2% in number, the quantity seized increased remarkably by 741% in 2024 compared to 2023.
- All but one seizure of caviar occurred at import during air transport, with all illegal commodities found in baggage during routine controls.

Marine cosmetics, dietary, and pharmaceutical products (CDP)

- Marine CDP saw a notable increase in both the number of seizures (126%) and the quantity seized (1,026%) in 2024.
- The majority of seizures and quantities seized occurred at import.
- Most of the products seized were found in transport and baggage, detected mostly by risk profiling and routine controls.



In April 2024, as part of Stingray Smuggling Operation, Brazil Customs seized 12 stingrays (*Potamotrygon motoro*), a species listed under CITES Appendix III, during an investigation at an airport cargo area.

The operation began as a routine inspection using a sniffer dog to detect drugs concealed in frozen fish. Suspicion arose when a woman carrying three Styrofoam boxes began acting nervously upon noticing the Customs team and requested the boxes not be scanned, claiming they contained live cargo. Officers opened the boxes to discover that the contents did not match the declared invoices. The woman was

arrested on the spot. Further investigations revealed she had made 650 similar shipments over three years, totalling nearly nine (9) tonnes of ornamental fish. Notably, the intended buyer had advertised the stingrays on Instagram, planning to sell them each one on the black market.



Seizure of pirarucu shipments (*Arapaima gigas*, freshwater fish native to the Amazon River basin).

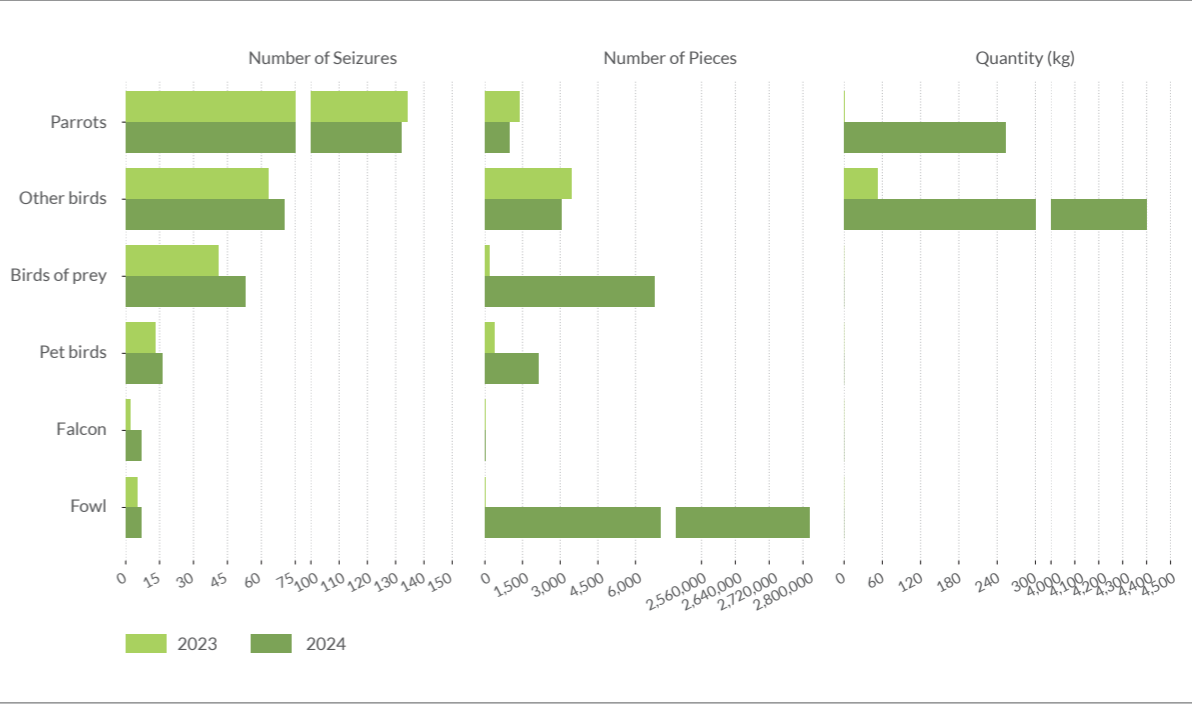
In June 2024, Customs seized two containers containing 15 tonnes of *arapaima gigas*, a species protected under CITES Appendix II. The cargo, flagged for high risk, was found to lack the required CITES permit. While one container was intercepted before leaving the port, the other had already departed. Customs imposed penalties, including forfeiture and a 20% fine on the cargo value. These shipments were bound for Hong Kong-China and the Philippines.

2.2.5. Birds

There were 285 seizures of birds and related products reported in 2024, comprising six categories (as detailed in Figure 7), marking a 10% increase compared to 2023.



Figure 7: Birds by number of seizures and quantity seized, 2023–2024



Live birds made up 77% of the number of seizures, while feathers accounted for 99% of the total quantity seized. Parrots and birds of prey were the most frequently intercepted categories among bird species. Parrots accounted for approximately half of all bird seizures, despite experiencing a 2% decline in the number of seizures and an 8% decrease in quantity, compared to 2023. Birds of prey saw a 23% increase in

seizures, while the quantity seized surged by 3,590%. Seizures of bird feathers increased by 40% compared to 2023. One of the most significant seizures of this commodity, involving 2.82 million feathers, was made by India Customs.

67% of seizures occurred in Spain, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom, Indonesia, Germany, and Peru. In terms of quantity, 99.6% of the quantity was reported by India and Türkiye.

In terms of modus operandi, vehicles and air were the predominant transportation methods for bird-related seizures. Seizures of birds were most frequent in both the import and export directions.



Parrots seized by Peru Customs as part of Operation THUNDER 2024.

The seizure, which involved four (4) live parrots (canary-winged parakeets and white-winged parakeets), took place during control operations conducted in Iquitos to combat Customs violations and illegal trade. The birds were found abandoned upon the arrival of Customs officers.

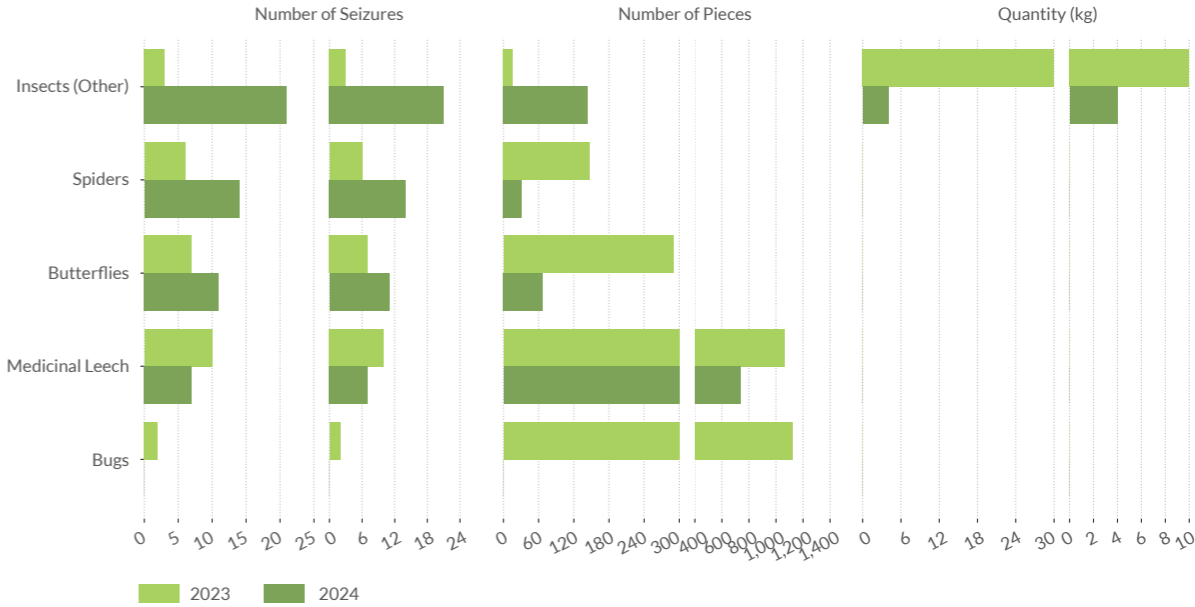


Peacock feathers and peacock feather stems seized by India Customs in February 2024.

At M/s Conex Terminal Pvt. Ltd. CFS, the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) followed specific intelligence to intercept an export consignment destined to China declaring the cargo as a “door mat made up of coir (coconut fibre)”. Upon examination of the cargo, 2.82 million peacock feathers/peacock feather stems weighing around 2,522.50 kg were found concealed, with a market value of 20 million rupees. The seizure was made under the provisions of the Wildlife Protection Act (1972).

2.2.6 Arthropods and annelids (Insecta, Arachnida, and Clitellata)

Figure 8: Arthropods by number of seizures and quantity seized, 2023–2024



There were 55 seizures of arthropods in 2024, as detailed in Figure 8.

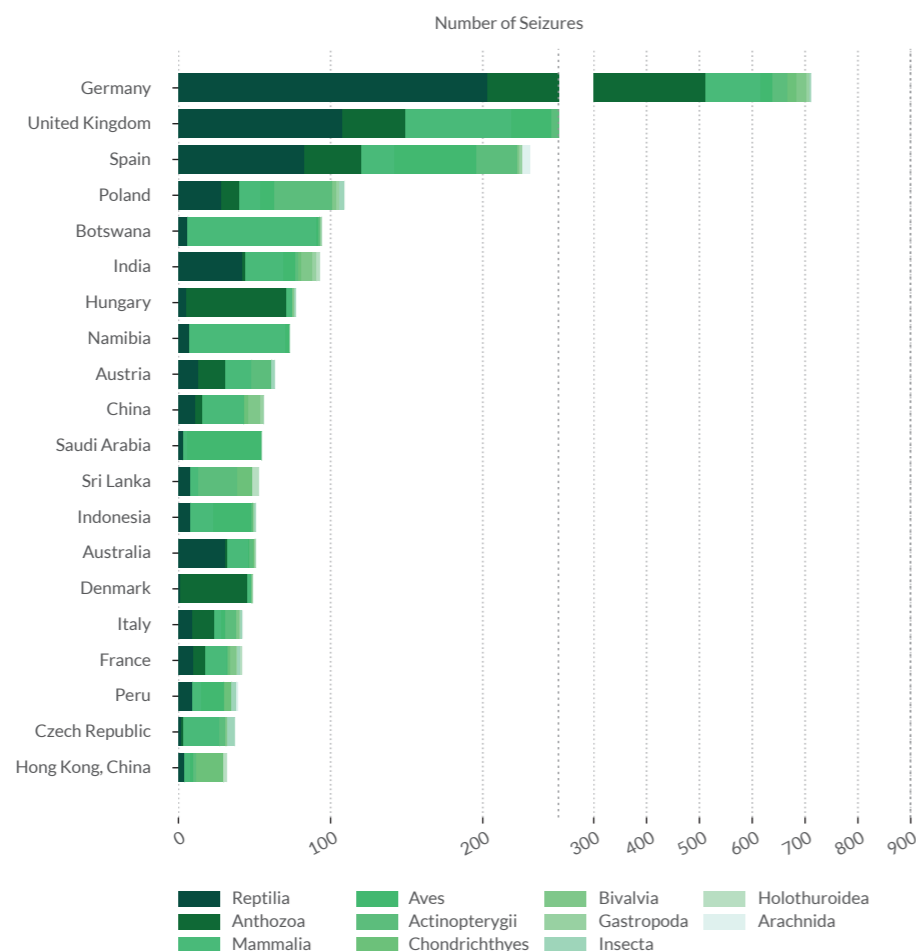
The main types of annelids and arthropods seized included medicinal leeches, spiders, and butterflies. The number of annelid and arthropod interceptions increased by 83% in 2024 compared to 2023; however, the total quantity seized declined by 45%.

Spider seizures saw a 133% increase, while the quantity seized rose by 162%. Despite a 30% decrease in the quantity of medicinal leeches seized in 2024, they still accounted for 50% of the total arthropod quantity seized.

Regarding modus operandi, 44% of illegal shipments were detected during internal movements, while 31% were detected at import. Medicinal leeches were mainly trafficked by air, whereas butterflies were more frequently moved through mail.

2.2.1.7. Top 20 reporters of fauna seizures by category

Figure 9: Top 20 reporters of fauna seizures by category, 2024



Germany, the United Kingdom and Spain accounted for 60% of all reptile seizure incidents, making them the countries with the highest number of reported cases out of the total 650. India, despite representing only 6% of the total incidents, was responsible for 47% of the overall quantity of reptiles seized. Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, and Hong Kong-China together intercepted 24% of the total reptile quantity. Most of these seizures involved skin products, which comprised 44% of the total, while live reptiles made up 31%.

In 2024, Germany reported 53% of all coral (*Anthozoa*) seizure incidents and accounted for 55% of the total coral quantity seized. Other European countries – including Hungary, Denmark, the United Kingdom, Spain, Austria, Italy, Poland, and France – collectively contributed to an additional 40% of the recorded incidents, out of a total of 580.

Germany, Botswana, the United Kingdom, and Namibia reported half of all Mammalia seizures in 2024. In Germany, ivory represented 15% of mammal-related seizures, while in the United Kingdom, ivory accounted for 70%. Botswana was responsible for 58% of the total quantity seized, largely due to elephant meat interceptions. In addition, Angola, Mozambique, Nigeria, and Namibia together further contributed to 34% of the total quantity.

In 2024, Spain, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom, Indonesia, Germany, and Peru together accounted for 67% of all bird (*Aves*) trafficking seizures, out of a total of 285 incidents. India and Türkiye reported 99.6% of the total quantity seized. Most seizures involved live birds, which represented 77% of the incidents, while feathers made up 99% of the total quantity. Among the bird species intercepted, parrots and birds of prey were the most frequently seized.

1.3 Flora

The illicit trade in flora species – including timber and plants – resulted in 641 recorded seizures in 2024, marking a 14% decrease compared to 2023. Figures 10 and 11 and Table 2 present the distribution of these cases by major taxonomic category, associated commodities, and their proportional shares in the number and quantity of seizures. The number of seizures of both timber and plants declined by 50%. However, the total quantity intercepted increased by 25%, driven by a 30% rise in plants and a 24% increase in timber.

Figure 10: Flora categories by number of seizures and quantity seized, 2023–2024

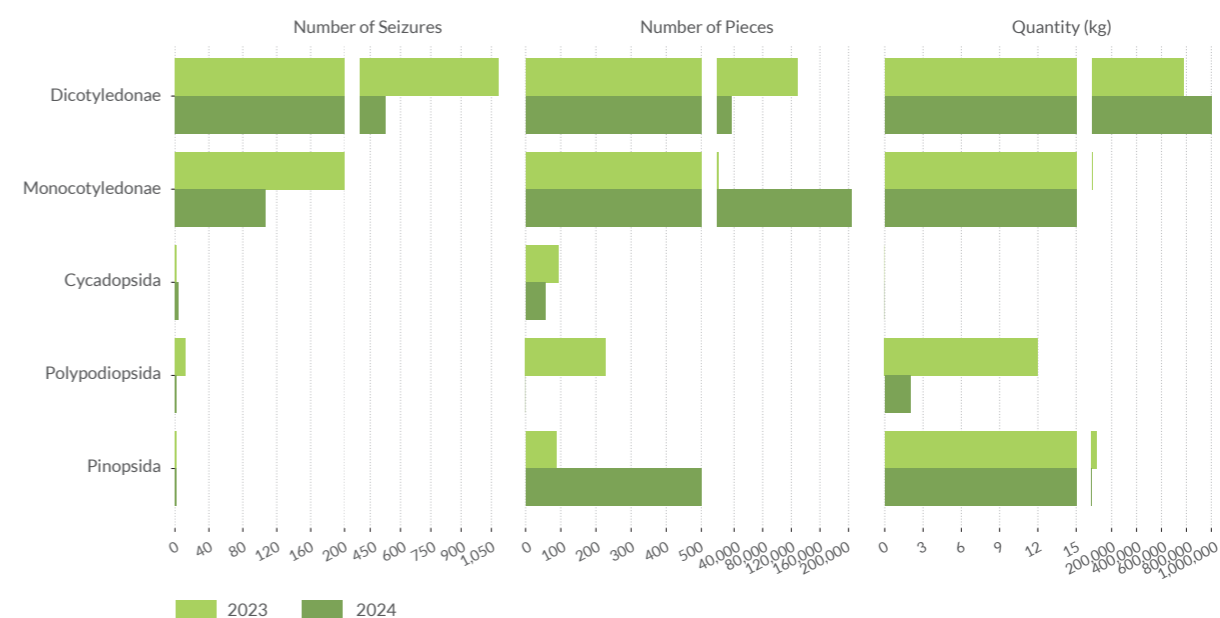


Figure 11: Flora subcategories by number and quantity of seizures, 2023–2024

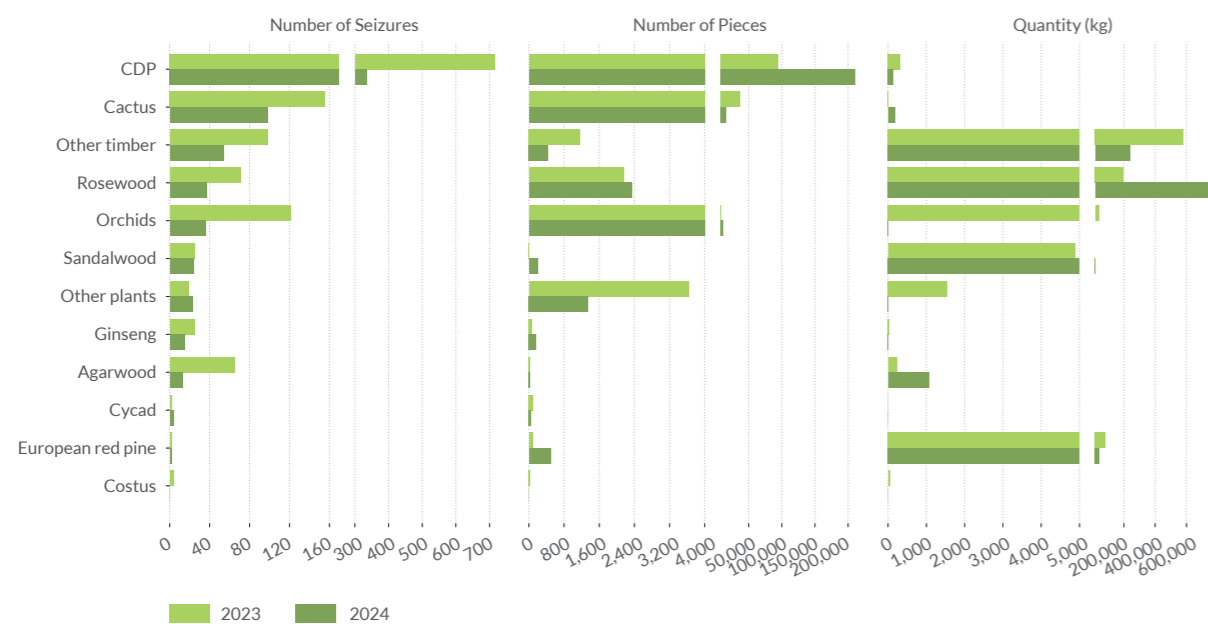


Table 2: Flora seizures by category, 2024

Category and primarily traded commodities	Percentage share in the number of seizures	Percentage share in the quantity seized
<i>Dicotyledonae</i> – including rosewood (<i>Dalbergia spp.</i>), sandalwood (<i>Santalum spp.</i>), agarwood (<i>Aquilaria spp.</i> , <i>Gyrinops spp.</i>), cactus (<i>Cactaceae spp.</i>), and ginseng (<i>Panax ginseng</i> , <i>Panax quinquefolius</i>)	82%	80%
<i>Monocotyledonae</i> – comprising orchids (<i>Orchidaceae</i>) and costus (<i>Costus spp.</i>)	17%	17%
Other flora species <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Pinopsida</i> – represented by Scots pine, Scotch pine, European red pine, and Baltic pine. <i>Polypodiopsida</i> – represented by fern species. <i>Cycadopsida</i> – including cycad, sago palm, and cardboard palm 	1%	3%

Overall, flora-related seizures decreased by 50% compared to 2023, primarily due to a decline in the number of *Dicotyledonae* (51%) and *Monocotyledonae* (46%) seizures. Despite the decrease in seizure numbers, the total quantity seized increased by 25%, driven largely by a significant rise in *Monocotyledonae* quantities (up 245%).

Approximately half of the *Dicotyledonae* and *Monocotyledonae* seizures in 2024 involved cosmetic, dietary, and pharmaceutical products. Cacti and orchids were among the most frequently seized species; however, both experienced significant declines compared to 2023. Cactus seizures dropped by 37% in number and 59% in quantity, while orchid seizures decreased by 70% in number and 76% in quantity. In flora trafficking, cosmetics, dietary and pharmaceutical (CDP) derivatives, cacti and orchids were mainly moved through air and mail.

Regarding modus operandi, flora species were mainly trafficked through mail parcels and sea and land freight. Flora seizures were primarily discovered through routine control. Almost all plant seizures occurred during import.

Cacti

- Cacti were the second most frequently trafficked flora family in 2024, accounting for 15% of all flora seizures.
- Illegal shipments were seized mainly based on risk profiling. Most of them involved live specimens.
- Together, the United Kingdom and Germany accounted for 75% of these seizures.

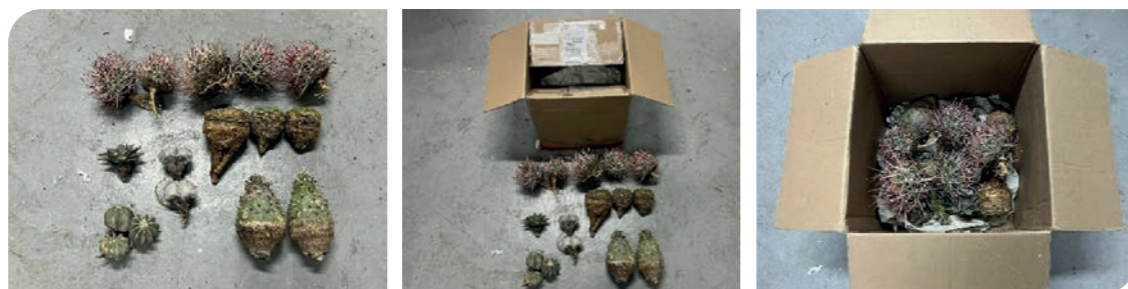
Flora-extracted cosmetics, dietary and pharmaceutical products (CDP)

- Flora-extracted CDP accounted for 52% of flora seizures, with half of these seizures occurring in Germany. This type of flora seizure was also common in the United Kingdom, Czech Republic and Austria.
- The shipments were mostly detected based on risk profiling.
- The majority of seizures were made at import.



Live Appendix II pitcher plants seized by Peru Customs.

The specimens were found in a parcel sent from the Czech Republic to Peru, declared as documents. It contained 79 units of *Sarraceniaceae* plants (hooded pitcher-plant, rainbow trumpet pitcher-plant) and 20 units of *Sarracenia minor* (seeds).



16 plants seized by Malaysia Customs in June 2024.

The shipment was on the route from the United States of America via South Korea and China to Malaysia and was intercepted at Kuala Lumpur International Airport. The commodities were wrapped in white paper and concealed in a brown box. The seizure was reported within Operation PRAESIDIO III.

1.4. Timber

In 2024, a total of 1,071 tonnes and 3,505 pieces of timber were seized in 130 seizures, which constituted a 50% decrease in the number of seizures compared to 2023. Rosewood accounted for the largest share, with 775 tonnes and 2,300 pieces. This was followed by 42 tonnes of European red pine, 15 tonnes of sandalwood, and one (1) tonne of agarwood. Other types of timber made up 237.6 tonnes of the total.

Despite a 50% decline in the number of rosewood seizures, the quantity seized increased remarkably by 288% compared to 2023. A similar trend was observed for sandalwood and agarwood, both of which recorded fewer seizures but higher overall quantities.

Rosewood and sandalwood were primarily reported by India, while agarwood was mainly reported by the United Kingdom, Germany, Indonesia, and Hong Kong-China.

In terms of modus operandi, timber was most commonly seized during both internal and import operations. Timber was mainly trafficked through sea and land freight.



5,984 kg of Red Sanders Logs Seized by India Customs.

25,000 kg of Ipê wood (*Tabebuia serratifolia*), listed under CITES Appendix II, intercepted by Brazil Customs in January 2024.



Customs officials prevented an attempted illegal export of timber at the Port of Pecém. Discrepancies in documentation prompted a review by IBAMA (Brazilian Institute of the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources), which confirmed the absence of a valid licence for the export of this native and protected species. The shipment, originating in Pará and destined for the United States, was confiscated.



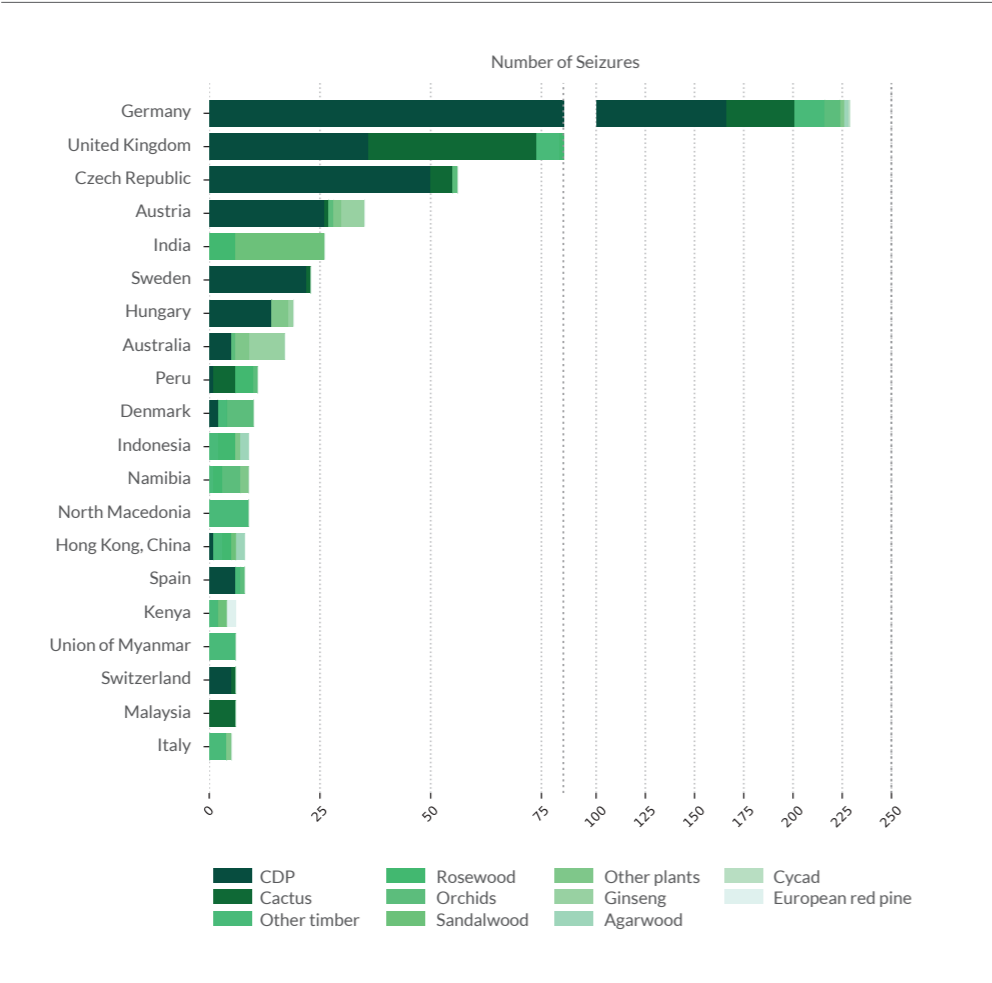
51,000 kg of Ipê wood intercepted in April 2024 at the Port of Pecém.

The shipment consisted of the same type of timber originating from the same region. Once again, the exporter had falsely declared the cargo as exotic wood when it was actually native Ipê. This seizure was driven by red flags, including the false declaration, the exporter's environmental violation history, and the unusual shipping route.

1.5. Top 20 reporters of flora seizures by category

The top 20 flora reporters – shown in Figure 12 – accounted for 92% of all flora seizures and 66% of the total quantity seized in 2024.

Figure 12: Top 20 flora reporters by category, 2024



Of the 641 total seizures, 36% occurred in Germany, 15% in the United Kingdom, and 20% were reported by four other European countries: the Czech Republic, Austria, Sweden, and Hungary.

In terms of quantity, China seizures – primarily rosewood –accounted for 33%, while Indonesia and Hong Kong-China, mainly reporting rosewood, cosmetics, dietary and pharmaceutical products, and agarwood, collectively contributed to 30% of the total quantity seized. Orchid seizures occurred predominantly in Germany, the United Kingdom, and Denmark.



Courtesy of United Kingdom Border Force.

Figure 13: Flora trafficking routes, 2024

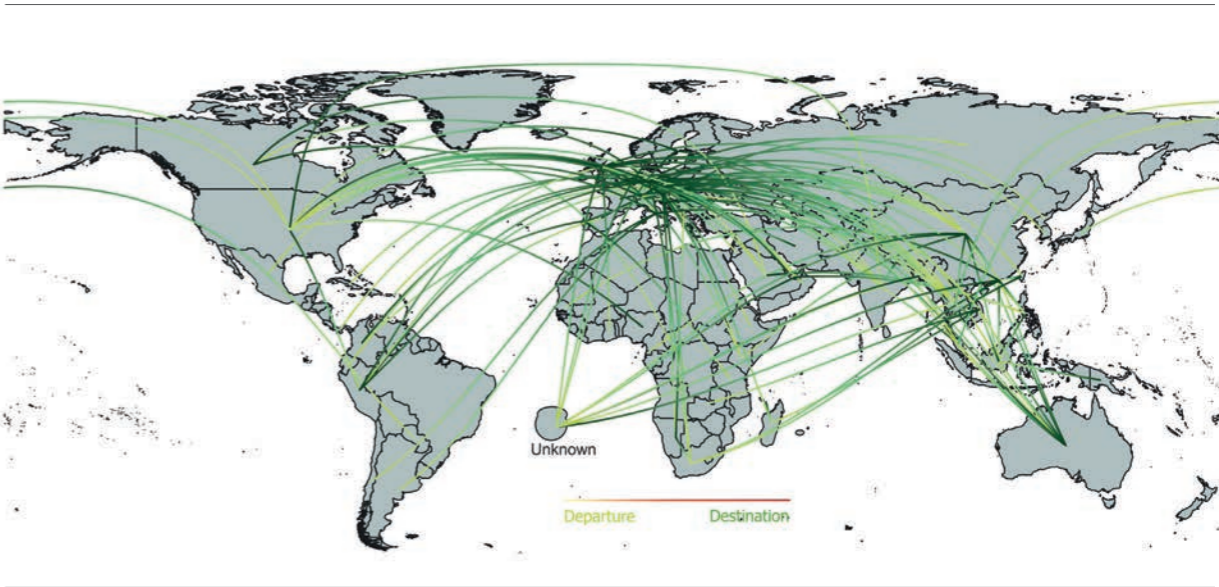


Figure 13 shows flora trafficking routes in 2024, with cross-border movements originating from 56 identified departure points worldwide and directed to 42 destinations.

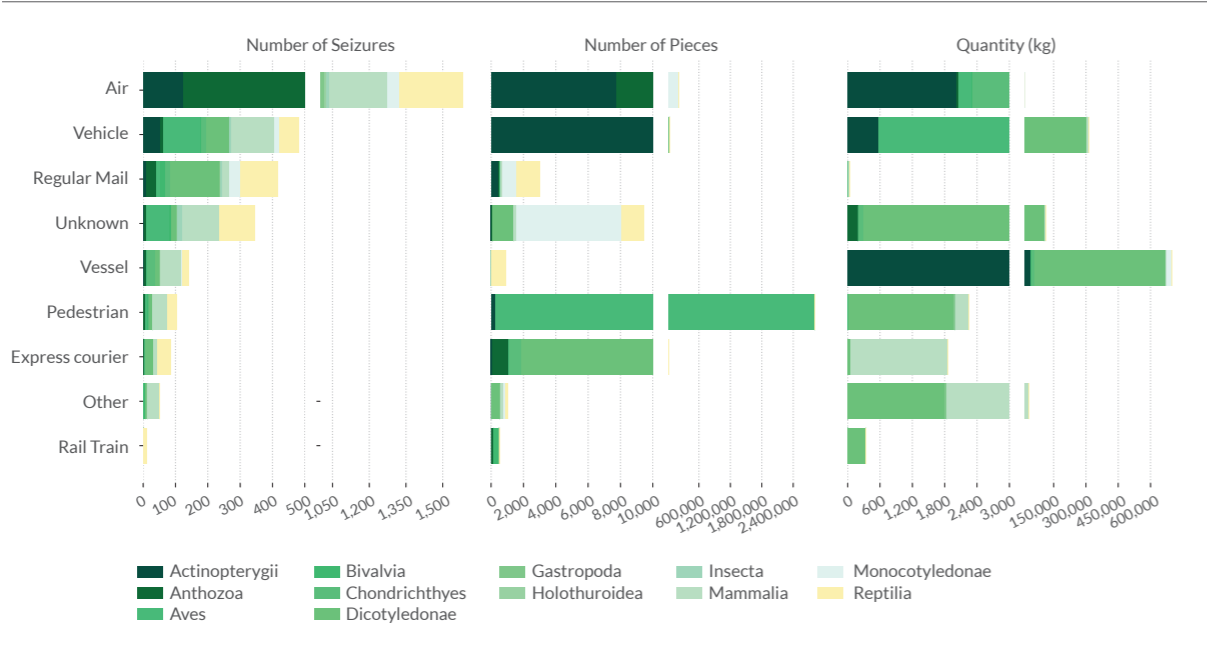
Thailand dominated as a departure point, with 140 seizures, accounting for 24% of the total cross-border seizures. China, Vietnam, the United States, and India were also frequent departure points, though to a lesser extent, collectively accounting for 33% of the seizures.

Germany was the most frequent destination for flora seizures, accounting for 35% of the total cross-border seizures, followed by the United Kingdom with 17%. The Czech Republic, Austria, Sweden, Australia, China, and Hungary were also frequent destinations, though to a lesser extent, collectively accounting for 27% of the seizures.

1.6. Conveyance, concealment, detection and direction of Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT) cases

1.6.1. Conveyance

Figure 14: Fauna and flora categories by conveyance method, 2024



Air transport was the most commonly used means for illicit fauna and flora trafficking in 2024, accounting for 50% of the total number of illegal shipments seized. Vehicles and mail were also frequently used, though to a lesser extent, representing 15% and 12% of seizures respectively. However, there was a notable spike in illegal consignments where the mode of transport was reported as “unknown” in 2024.

Illegal shipments transported by air and in vehicles increased by 21% and 15% respectively in 2024 compared to 2023, whereas illicit fauna and flora shipments transported by mail and express courier declined by 44% and 88% respectively. The use of vessels remained relatively consistent across both years.

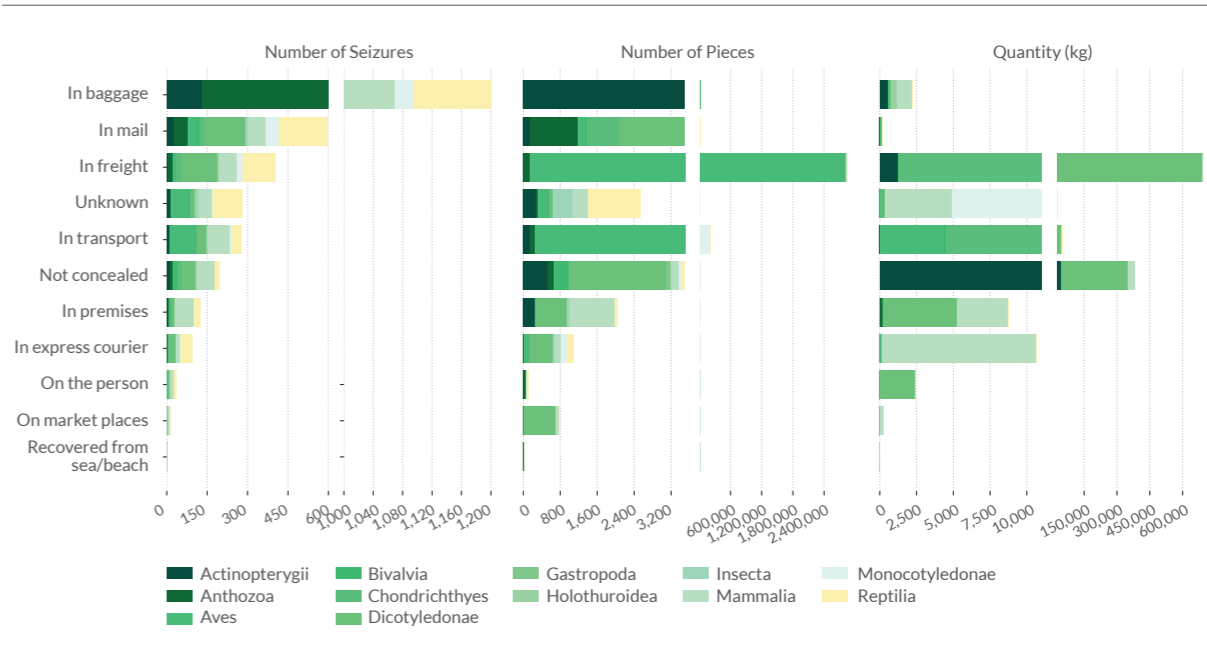
Although vessels were used in only 4% of the incidents, they were responsible for transporting half of the total quantity seized – excluding cases where the mode of transport was unknown – followed by vehicles and air.

Air transport saw the highest increase in quantity, rising by 262% in 2024 compared to 2023. Quantities transported by vehicles and vessels also increased, though at lower rates: 25% and 38% respectively.

1.6.2. Concealment

As shown in Figure 15, various methods were used in 2024 to conceal illegal traffic of fauna and flora specimens. Notably, the specimens were concealed in baggage – most commonly at airports – as well as in mail and express courier parcels. Land and sea freight, as well as in-transport concealments, were also used.

Figure 15: Fauna and flora categories by concealment methods, 2024



Concealing specimens in passenger baggage, especially via air travel, remained the most frequently used method, accounting for 37% of all seizures, followed by mail parcels (18%).

In terms of quantity, 82% of the total seized volume was concealed in sea and land freight, particularly for flora species and birds. Express courier, which accounted for 20% of total seizures and was the third most reported method in 2023, dropped significantly to just 3% in 2024, a decrease of 87%. Table 3 summarizes the most frequently trafficked specimen categories by mode of transport in 2024, highlighting common concealment methods.

Table 3 : Concealment by the most frequent categories of specimens, 2024	
In baggage	Corals, mammals, marine species
Mail parcels	Reptiles, flora
Land freight	Reptiles, flora
Sea freight	Flora

A *Cycas cupida* live plant of the family Cycadaceae, seized by Slovakia Customs in March 2024.

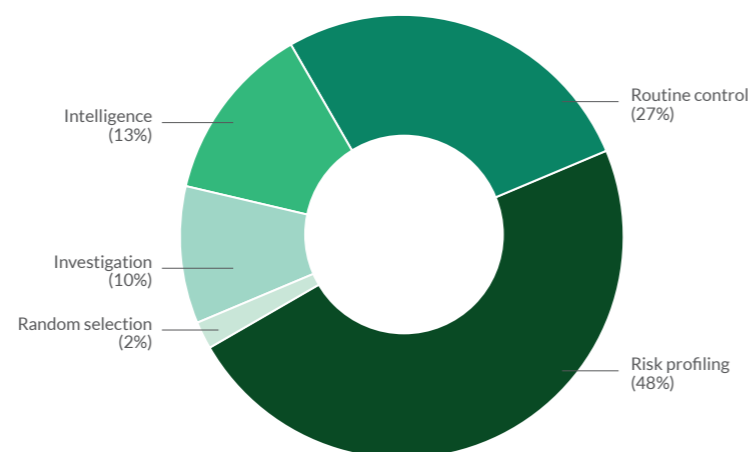


The departure point was Palmwoods, Australia. During a routine control at the Zilina mail centre, Slovak Customs officers discovered a single living specimen of *Cycas cupida*, 33 cm long and weighing 0.16 kg, concealed in a parcel. The parcel had been declared by the sender as a decorative statue. The consignee did not have a CITES permit to import the plant. After discovering that *Cycas cupida* is on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species, Slovak Customs officers seized the plant and handed it over for professional care. (RILO ECE ALERT 15-2024)

1.6.3. Detection method

Fauna and flora seizures were detected through various methods – some used individually, others in combination – particularly alongside such methods as intelligence gathering, investigations, and risk profiling (Figure 16).

Figure 16: Fauna and flora categories by detection method, 2024



In 2024, the role of routine control represented 30% of the total seizures, while in 2023 it constituted 57%. In contrast, 52% of the seizures were detected through risk profiling in 2024, compared to 33% in 2023. Overall, the use of risk profiling increased by 36% in 2024 compared to 2023, while routine control saw a decline of 56%. Both stand-alone intelligence and intelligence supported by investigations were used more frequently in 2024 than in 2023.

In terms of quantity seized, intelligence supported by investigations and risk profiling was the most effective method, responsible for 75% of the total volume of fauna and flora intercepted in 2024. Routine control was the second most effective in terms of quantity seized. Risk profiling was the third most reported detection method in both years. Table 4 presents the primary detection methods used in 2024 and the specimen categories most frequently identified through each approach.

Table 4 : Detection methods by most frequent categories of specimens, 2024

Investigations	Mammals
Intelligence	Mammals, reptiles
Risk profiling	Marine species
Routine control	Mammals, flora

1.6.4. Direction

Figures 17.1 and 17.2 illustrate the movement of fauna and flora cases in 2024, categorized by import, export, transit, and inland movements, and highlighting the top reporting Customs administrations. Seizures at import dominated all other types, accounting for 64% of the total number of fauna and flora seizures in 2024.

Figure 17.1: Fauna and flora seizures by direction, 2024

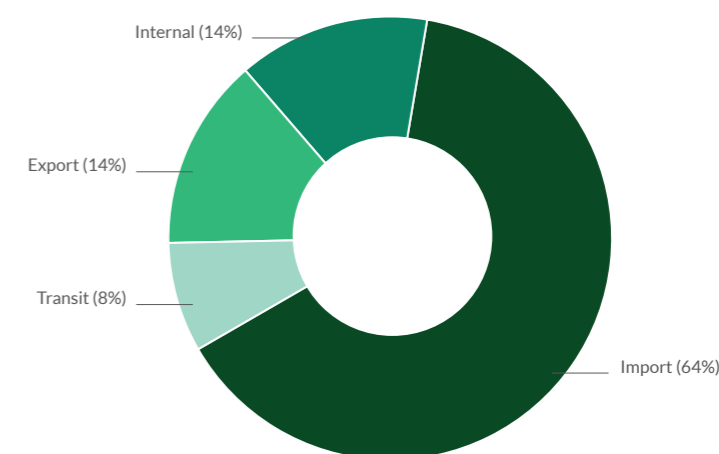
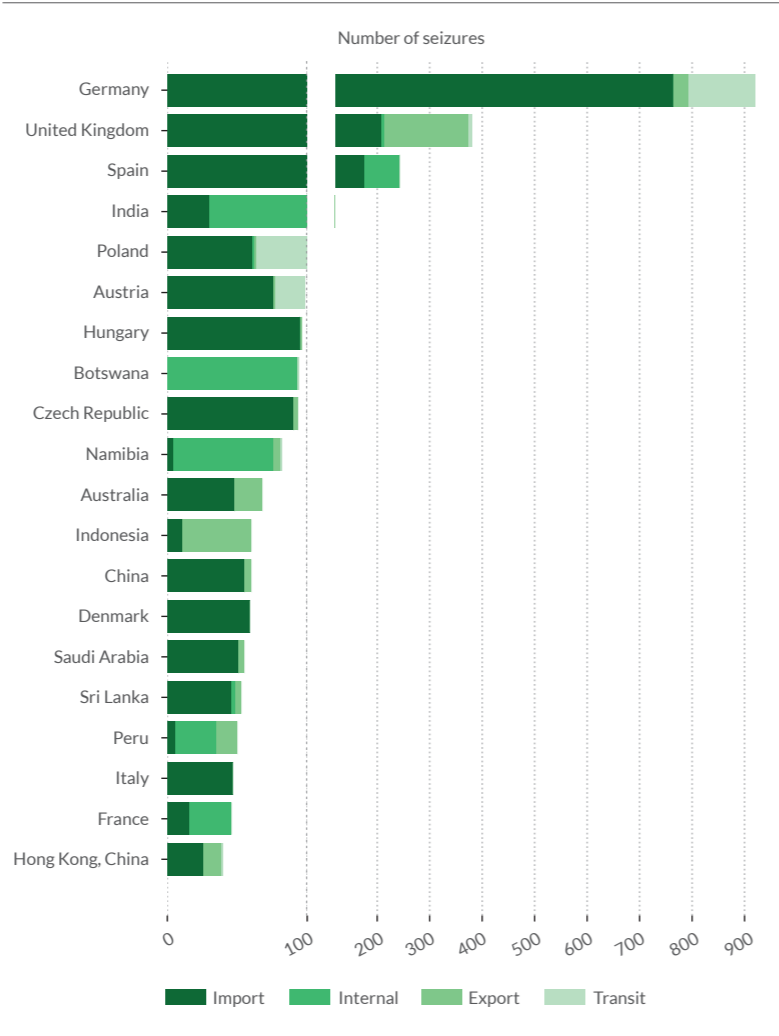


Figure 17.2: Top 20 fauna and flora reporters by direction, 2024



Illicit fauna and flora shipments in the import direction were more frequent than in other directions in both 2023 and 2024. However, shipments in the export direction were more frequent in 2024 than in 2023. The same trend was observed for internal seizures, which were more frequent in 2024 than in 2023. In contrast, transit seizures were more frequent in 2023 than in 2024.

The highest number of import seizures occurred in Germany, which accounted for 37% of all import-related seizures, followed by the United Kingdom (10%) and Spain (9%). For export seizures, the United Kingdom was the most frequently reported location (36%), followed by Indonesia and Germany. Inland seizures were primarily reported in Botswana, India, Namibia, and Spain.

In 2024, 18 transit points were recorded, with Germany being the most common, accounting for 60% of all transit seizures. This was followed by Poland (20%), Austria (9%), and Serbia (3%).

In terms of quantity, the majority of the seized quantity was found in export shipments in both years, accounting for 44% in 2023 and 75% in 2024. Import shipments accounted for 23% in 2023 and 17% in 2024. Table 5 shows the direction of movement for 2024 and the specimen categories most frequently involved in each trade flow.

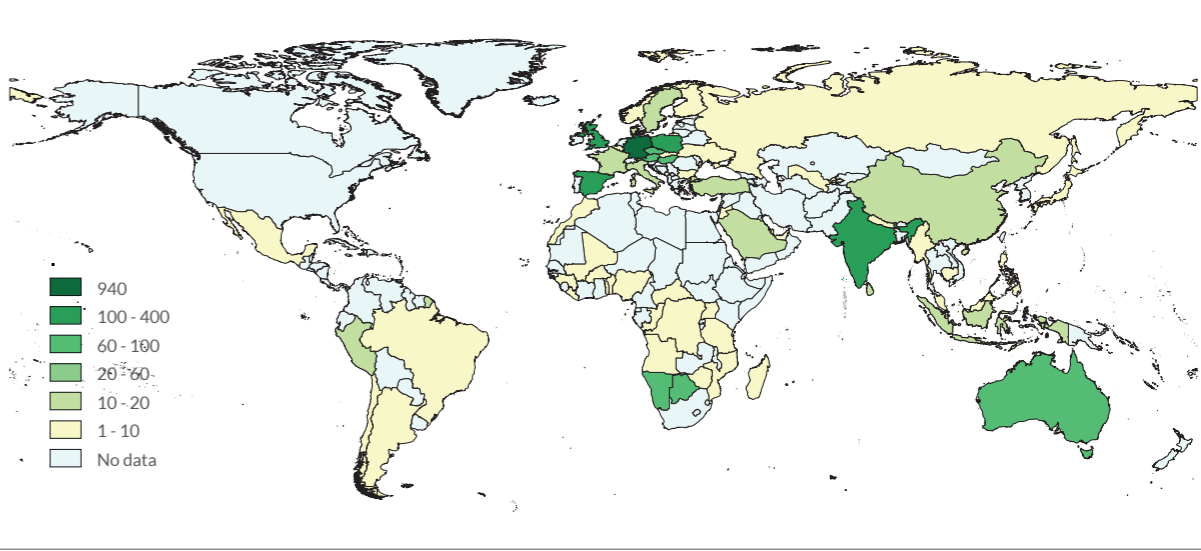
Table 5: Direction by the most frequent categories of specimens, 2024

Import	Mammals, reptiles, marine species, flora, timber, birds
Export	Mammals, birds
Inland	Mammals, timber
Transit	Marine species

1.7. Global and regional flows of illegal wildlife trade

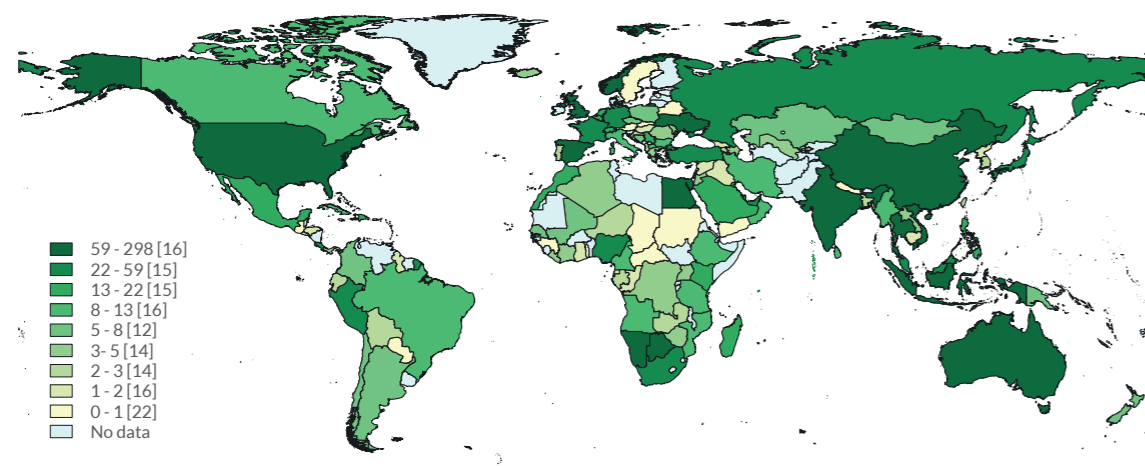
Globally, 78 countries reported a total of 3,259 fauna and flora seizures in 2024. The following figures provide insights into global and regional flows of illegal fauna and flora.

Figure 18: Global fauna and flora reporters by number of seizures, 2024



The number of reported seizures varied significantly across Customs administrations, with the most common range being one (1) to ten (10) seizures – a category that included nearly 60% of the reporting administrations (42 Customs administrations). An additional 16 administrations reported between ten (10) and 30 seizures. North America, North Africa (except for Morocco) and Central Asia fell under the ‘No data’ category.

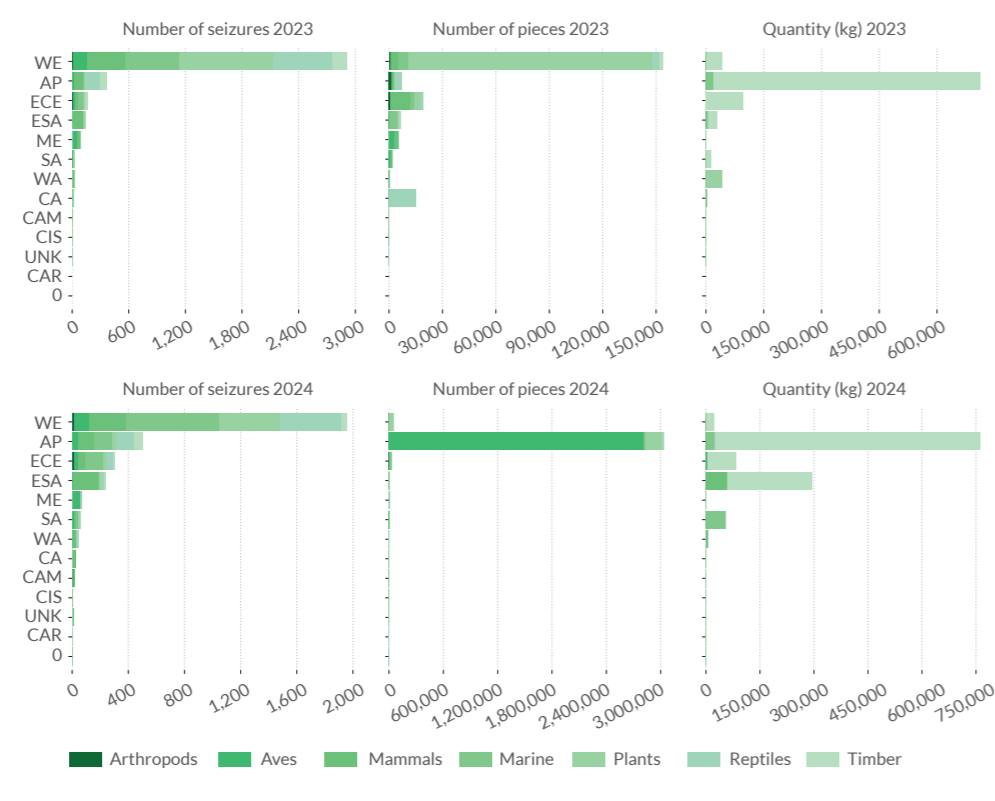
Figure 19: Global fauna and flora departures by number of seizures, 2024



In 2024, a total of 143 locations, shown in Figure 19, were identified as departure points for illegal movements of fauna and flora.

The frequency of departures varied significantly among jurisdictions: 63% of them recorded between one (1) and ten (10) seizures, twenty Customs administrations reported between ten (10) and 20 seizures, while thirteen Customs administrations fell within the 20 to 40 range.

Figure 20: Fauna and flora by category and region, 2024



Western Europe, Asia-Pacific, Eastern and Central Europe, and East and Southern Africa remained the main reporting regions for fauna and flora seizures in both 2023 and 2024. Western Europe accounted for the highest share of seizures: 77% in 2023 and 60% in 2024.

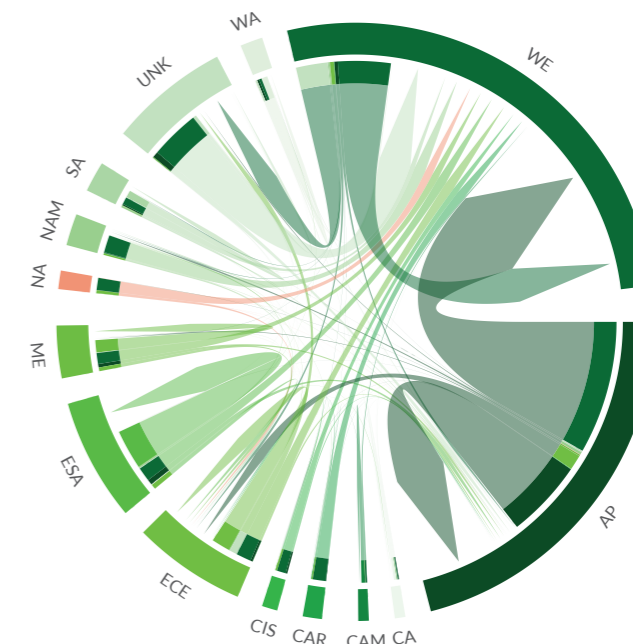
The Asia-Pacific region increased its share in the reported seizures from 10% in 2023 to 15% in 2024. A similar trend was observed in Eastern and Central Europe and East and Southern Africa, both of which reported more seizures in 2024 compared to the previous year.

Although Western Europe remained the leading region for reported seizures in 2024, the total number of seizures dropped by 33% compared to 2023, with decreases observed across all fauna and flora categories – except for marine species and arthropods. This decline in the number of seizures was accompanied by a 63% reduction in the quantity seized.

The Asia-Pacific region maintained the highest reported quantities in both 2023 and 2024, accounting for 63% and 87% of the total respectively, and reflecting a remarkable 426% year-on-year increase.

All regions reported an increase in seizures in 2024 compared to 2023, with the exception of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Western Europe, and the Middle East.

Figure 21: Fauna and flora flow by region, 2024



The Asia-Pacific region was the primary departure point for fauna and flora seizures in 2024, accounting for 37% of all recorded seizures. Other frequently reported departure regions included Western Europe (15%), East and Southern Africa (10%), and Eastern and Central Europe (7%). The remaining regions accounted for between 1% and 5% of the total recorded seizures.

The majority of the illegally traded specimens originated from the Asia-Pacific region. Specifically, 57% of the illegal shipments that departed from this region were destined for Western Europe, while 34% remained within the Asia-Pacific region.

Western Europe was the primary destination for fauna and flora specimens in 2024, accounting for 53% of all recorded seizures. It was followed by the Asia-Pacific region with 17%, Eastern and Central Europe with 9%, and East and Southern Africa with 6%. Western Europe was also the main destination for illegal shipments originating within the region itself, accounting for 56% of all seizures from that origin. However, a significant share (33%) of these outbound shipments had unknown destinations.

Regarding illegal shipments from East and Southern Africa, 60% of them were destined for jurisdictions within the same region, while 20% were bound for Western Europe. A similar pattern was observed for Eastern and Central Europe, where most seizures remained within the region, and 33% were destined for Western Europe.

1.8. Global and regional IWT enforcement operations

In 2024, the WCO Environment Programme organized and coordinated two enforcement operations focusing on wildlife - global enforcement Operation THUNDER 2024 and multi-regional regional enforcement Operation PRAESIDIO III.

Operation THUNDER 2024

Operation THUNDER 2024 was a global enforcement initiative jointly organized by the World Customs Organization (WCO) and the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), with strong support from the Secretariat of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), and other partners from the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC). Its primary focus was to disrupt illicit wildlife and timber trade networks, involving species protected under the CITES Convention.

It was supported by a total of 138 participants, including 119 Customs administrations. The 12 WCO Regional Intelligence Liaison Offices (RILOs) also participated in the operation. During the operation, Customs and police agencies worked collaboratively to intercept illegal wildlife shipments, and exchanged data, information and intelligence to identify and target criminal networks involved in environmental crimes. The operation identified key elements of various criminal *modi operandi* and facilitated the compilation of intelligence reports to support future enforcement efforts.

The operation resulted in 2,213 seizures, involving:

- 256.5 tonnes,
- 13,342 cubic metres, and
- 122,624 individual pieces of multiple fauna and flora categories.

Fauna seizures accounted for 1,717 seizures. Land mammals, marine species, reptiles, and birds accounted for the biggest number of seizures and quantities seized.

Flora seizures totalled 446 seizures of timber and plants, with timber constituting 57% of flora seizures and 96% of the total quantity seized. Timber trafficking resulted in 253 seizures, with rosewood representing the largest volume. Plant seizures totalled 193 seizures, with 10,916 pieces intercepted.

Key findings

- Seizures occurred most frequently in inland locations (39% of the seizures) and at airports (37% of the seizures), accounting for 76% of total seizures; however, seaports accounted for 60% of the total seized quantity. Air transport, passenger vehicles, and small boats were commonly used for smuggling.
- In terms of the number of seizures, the concealment methods notably involved baggage (32%), mail (26%), and air freight (21%). In terms of quantities, sea freight (57%), in transport (10%), and inland freight (10%) constituted the most frequently used concealment method.
- Routine controls and risk profiling were the primary detection methods (in 58% and 27% of the seizures respectively). Although used less frequently, intelligence resulted in detection of 48% of the total quantity seized.
- Most offences occurred at import (43% of seizures) followed by internal seizures (37% of seizures). However, the largest quantities of illegal wildlife were detected at export (48% of the seized quantity).

Operation PRAESIDIO III

Operation PRAESIDIO III focused on combating illegal wildlife trade in Africa and South Asia.⁷ A total of 20 Customs administrations participated in Operation PRAESIDIO III. The Customs administrations whose participation was supported by the INAMA Projects were:

- In Africa: Cameroon, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Madagascar, Namibia, Nigeria, Togo
- In Asia: India, Malaysia, Nepal, Sri Lanka.

In total, 224 seizures were reported, involving approximately 176 tonnes and 8,000 pieces of various wildlife specimens. Operation PRAESIDIO III recorded seizures for CITES-listed and non-CITES-listed species. CITES-listed seizures accounted for 53% of the total seizures and 91% of the total quantity seized.

⁷ As an INAMA Global beneficiary country, Malaysia also participated the operation.

Key findings

- Land mammal seizures were the most frequent and involved the largest quantities of seized specimens (56% and 61% respectively). This category was followed by marine species (24% and 4% respectively), reptiles (11% and 7% respectively), timber (4% and 28% respectively), plants (3% and 1% respectively), and birds (2% and 1% respectively).
- Among land mammals, elephants, pangolins, big cats, and rhinos were particularly targeted by traffickers.
- Elephant-related seizures predominantly involved tusks, while pangolin-related seizures included five (5) live pangolins and 76 kg of pangolin scales.
- Big cats were intercepted in different forms, including skins, live animals, and meat. Rhinos and rhino horns remained highly lucrative targets for poachers.
- Marine species were also heavily trafficked, with 53 seizures reported. These included corals, sea cucumbers and 1.5 tonnes of shark fins.
- Reptiles, particularly turtles and tortoises, were primarily targeted for transnational trafficking. Small crocodiles were also among the reptiles intercepted in transnational trafficking cases.
- The cross-border trafficking routes included 22 departure jurisdictions and 15 destinations, involving 64 cross-border seizures. The seized land mammals originated from Africa, while Asia was the primary departure for reported seizures of timber, marine species, and reptiles.

Botswana cases in Operation PRAESIDIO III

During Operation PRAESIDIO III, targeting illegal wildlife trade, the Botswana Unified Revenue Service (BURS) reported the highest number of seizures. In total, BURS reported 72 seizures, involving 40,280 kg and 57 pieces of wildlife specimens. There were 30,167 kg and 48 pieces of CITES-listed commodities such as ground pangolins (*Manis temminckii*), elephants (*Loxodonta Africana*), lions (*Panthera leo*), ball pythons (*Python regius*), and African civets (*Civettictis civetta*). Additionally, BURS, together with other law enforcement agencies, seized non-CITES specimens – most notably 2,615 kg and 14 pieces of huntable game meat.

Among the CITES-listed species, the largest quantity of seized specimens involved elephant bush meat, found inland – one case by the army and the other by the police. In one instance, the seizure resulted from intelligence obtained by army officials. Most seizures occurred inland and were carried out by the army and police, with a significant share resulting from joint Customs and police efforts.

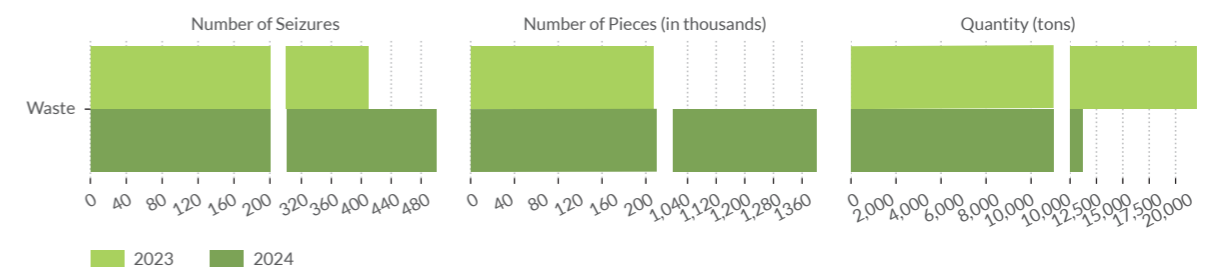


Courtesy of General Administration of China Customs (GACC).

2. Waste

In 2024, 504 seizures related to waste trafficking were reported, marking a 23% increase compared to 2023. This rise was primarily driven by increased numbers of seizures of e-waste (by 76%), textiles (by 60%), plastics, and metals (by 22%).

Figure 22: Waste trafficking by number of seizures and quantity seized, 2023–2024



Despite the rise in the number of seizures, the total quantity of waste seized decreased by 43% (10,744 tonnes) in 2024 compared to 2023, largely due to a significant decrease in the volumes of textiles, “other waste”, rubber, and end-of-life vehicles. However, quantities reported in the number of pieces (not weighted) increased from 166,782 in 2023 to 1,429,950 pieces in 2024.

2.1 Waste categories

Illicitly trafficked waste was categorized into fourteen types, as detailed in Figure 23. Among these categories, textiles, plastic, metal, e-waste, and end-of-life vehicles were the most frequently trafficked types of waste both in 2023 and 2024.

Figure 23: Waste categories by number of seizures and quantity seized, 2023–2024



In terms of quantity, plastic and metal waste dominated in 2024, together accounting for approximately 60% of the total volume seized. Notably, plastic waste rose by 106%, while metal waste increased by 11% compared to 2023.

Although paper waste was intercepted less frequently, the quantity seized was significant – 870 tonnes in 2023, and 990.6 tonnes and 386,000 pieces in 2024. Similarly, although medical waste was reported in fewer seizures, the volume seized was remarkably high - 632,324 pieces in 2024, representing a sharp rise from 10,000 pieces in 2023.

Findings related to illegal shipments of waste

Plastic waste

- A total of 3,806 tonnes and 41,655 pieces of plastic waste were recorded in 61 seizures in 2024, reflecting an 11% decrease in the number of seizures compared to 2023. Almost 50% of plastic waste was intercepted by China in four (4) seizures (6.5% of the number of seizures). The United Kingdom followed, accounting for 25% of the total quantity seized. Belgium was also among the main reporters of plastic waste, despite intercepting a relatively smaller share – 9% of the total quantity.

- In terms of the number of seizures, the majority of illegal plastic waste shipments (51%) were detected during routine controls or random selection. However, the largest quantity of plastic waste was detected following risk analysis (67%).
- The conveyance methods for illegal plastic waste shipments involved vessels (56%) and vehicles (44%). In terms of seized quantities, vessels carried 94% of the illegal plastic waste.

Metal waste

- Metal waste was the second-largest waste category in 2024. In terms of quantity, a total of 3,344 tonnes and 49,354 pieces were seized. There was an 11% increase in the number of seizures, totalling 61 in 2024.
- China intercepted the largest share of metal waste, accounting for 22% of the total quantity, followed by Iran (18%) and Belgium (13%). Canada and the Netherlands also reported metal waste, but in comparatively lower quantities.
- In 2024, vessels and vehicles accounted for the largest number of seizures and seized quantities of metal waste.
- Routine controls and random selection contributed to the detection of 41% of seizures and 42% of the quantity seized. Similarly, risk profiling accounted for 49% of seizures and 39% of the quantity seized. Intelligence played a role in 10% of seizures and 19% of the quantities seized.

8,000 kg of metal waste uncovered by Namibia Customs and Police in May 2024.



The shipment was an illegal import via the Kavango River, detected by a patrol of Customs and police officers at an ungazetted entry point. Following the detention, a penalty was paid, and the scrap metals were exported to Zambia in September 2024, with duties collected.

Paper waste

- In 2024, 13 seizures of illegal trade in paper waste were recorded, reflecting a 35% decrease from 2023. The quantity seized totalled 1,376,809 kg, marking a 58% increase compared to 2023.
- The major contributors to the quantity seized were the following jurisdictions: the UK (24%), Belgium (15%), Poland (10%), Canada (9%), and France (9%).
- In terms of the number of seizures, paper waste was intercepted primarily by The Gambia (28%), the United Kingdom (25%), and Belgium (16%), together accounting for the majority of the total paper waste reported in 2024.
- The largest quantity of paper waste was detected following routine controls (67%).
- 98% of paper waste was shipped via vessels.

End-of-life-vehicles

- In 2024, the number of illegal shipments totalled 50 seizures, unchanged from 2023.
- End-of-life vehicles and machinery ranked fourth in terms of quantity of total waste seizures.
- The main reporters were the United Kingdom (25%), Sweden (17%), Saudi Arabia (17%), and The Gambia (8%).
- Random selection and routine controls contributed to the detection of 52% of the quantity seized, and risk profiling accounted for 46%.
- The most common conveyance methods for illegal shipments were vessels (64%) and vehicles (30%).



15,595 kg of waste tyres and end-of-life vehicles intercepted by Belgium Customs.

In August 2024, at the port of Antwerp, Belgium Customs cooperated with environmental authorities to intercept a waste shipment en route to Nigeria from another European Union Member State. The waste was returned to the waste generator.

E-waste

- 60 seizures of illegal trade in e-waste were reported in 2024. This represented a 75% increase in the number of seizures, compared to the previous year.
- E-waste seizures were reported mainly by the United Kingdom and Malaysia, which collectively accounted for 52% of the total quantity. China, Belgium, and The Gambia were also among the main reporters, although they intercepted comparatively lower quantities.
- The most frequent conveyance methods used for transporting illegal e-waste were vessels and vehicles, accounting for 82% and 18% of the total quantity seized respectively.
- 39% of the quantity seized was detected by routine controls and random selection, 35% following risk profiling, and 26% based on intelligence.

Textile waste

- In 2024, there were 160 textile waste seizures, reflecting a 61% increase in the number of seizures compared to 2023.
- The largest quantities of textiles were reported by Belgium (66%) and Italy (27%), together accounting for the vast majority of textile waste seizures in 2024.
- 88% of the quantity seized – corresponding to 4% of the total number of seizures – was transported by vessel, while 77% of seizures involved shipments by vehicle.
- Illegal shipments were detected by routine controls or random selection (78%). However, in terms of the quantity seized, 86% was uncovered by risk profiling.

Medical waste

- In 2024, eight (8) seizures of medical waste were reported, totalling 632,324 pieces of medical waste intercepted.
- Although the number of seizures was similar to that of 2023, the quantity of medical waste seized increased from 9,997 pieces in 2023 to 632,324 in 2024.
- Four (4) Customs administrations reported seizures of medical waste. The Gambia alone accounted for a remarkable 95% of the quantity seized, with Ghana intercepting the remaining 5% of the quantity.
- In 2024, the conveyance method for all seizures was by vessel. The commodities were mainly found inland (on the market) following random and routine controls.

Waste batteries

- The number of seizures of waste batteries in 2023 and 2024 did not change significantly, amounting to ten (10) in 2023 and 12 in 2024. However, in 2024 the quantity of seized waste batteries increased by 213% in weight (484,040 kg) and 129% in number (4,017 pieces).
- Argentina, Iran, Mexico, The Gambia, the Netherlands, Peru, India and Namibia reported seizures of waste batteries.

- In 2024, import seizures contributed the most to the number of seizures and the quantities seized, constituting 62% of the number of seizures and 60% of the quantity seized.

2.2 Global and regional flows of illegal waste

The top 20 waste-reporting Customs administrations, detailed in Figures 24 and 25, accounted for 85% of total waste seizures and 92% of the total quantity seized in 2024.

Figure 24: Top 20 waste reporters by number of seizures and quantity, 2024

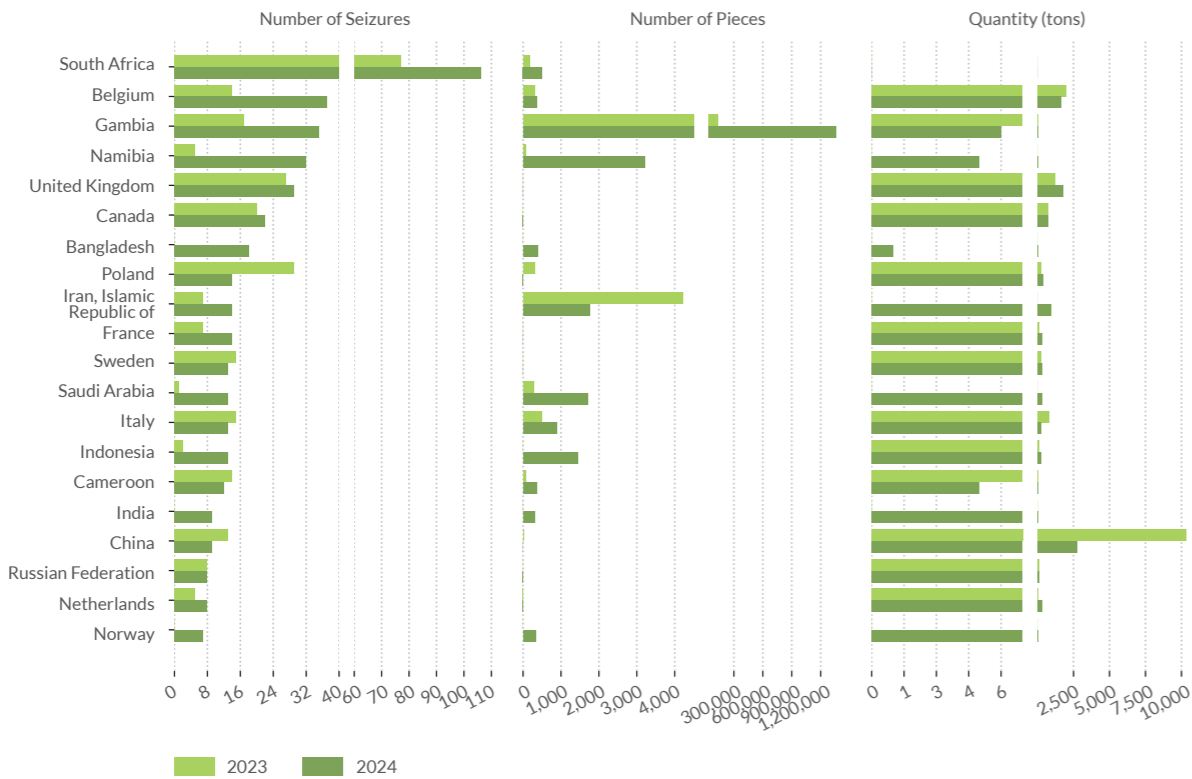
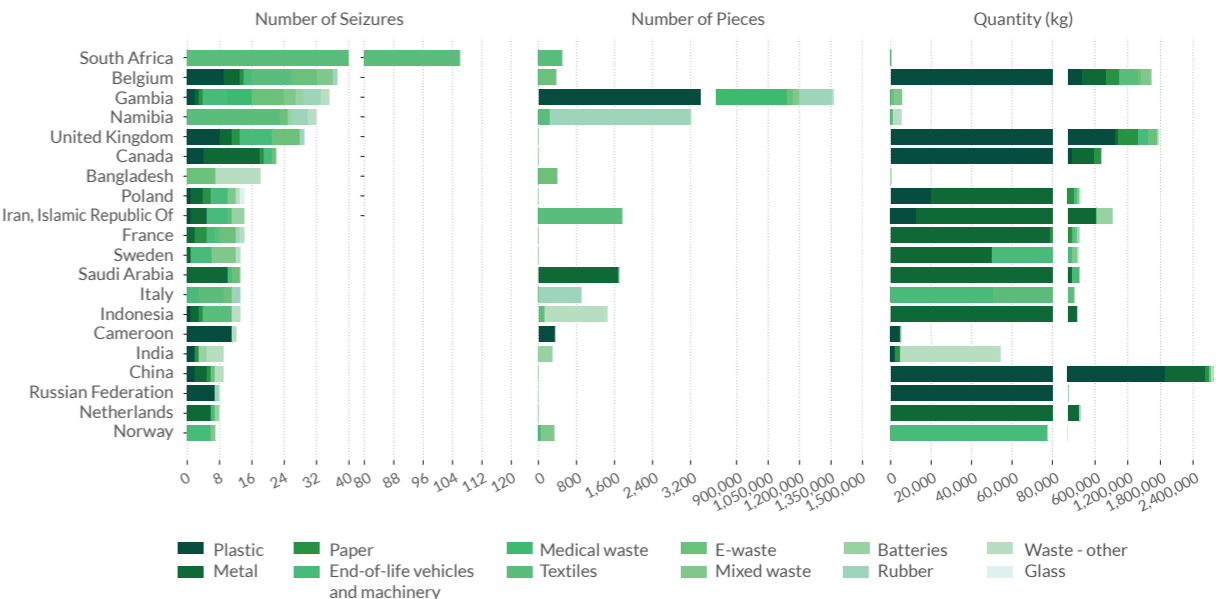


Figure 25: Top 20 reporters of waste seizures by waste categories, number of seizures and quantity seized, 2024



The Netherlands, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Norway, India, and Bangladesh joined the top 20 in 2024 despite not being there in 2023, while Luxembourg, Switzerland, Senegal, Slovenia, and Cyprus dropped off the 2023 list.

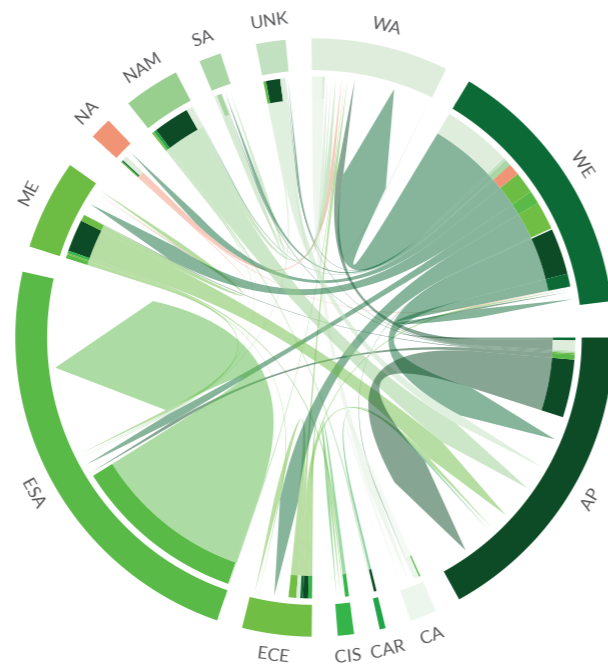
As shown in Figure 25, fifteen Customs administrations ranked among the top 20 both in terms of number of seizures and of quantity seized. Notably, South Africa – despite ranking first in seizure frequency – reported among the lowest quantities, as their seizures were recorded by the number of bales or bags rather than in kilograms. Similarly, although Bangladesh reported a significant number of waste seizures, the total quantity seized was relatively low.

China reported the highest quantity of waste in both 2023 and 2024, accounting for 47% and 22% of the total quantity seized respectively. The United Kingdom, Belgium, The Gambia, Iran, and Canada also reported significant quantities, collectively accounting for 50% of the total waste seized in 2024. Poland, the Netherlands, Saudi Arabia, France, Sweden, Indonesia, and Italy reported quantities within a similar range.

Although the Maldives, Malaysia, Peru, and Portugal were not among the most frequent reporters, they recorded large quantities of waste, ranging from 170 tonnes in the Maldives to 95 tonnes in Portugal.

Figure 26: Waste flow by region, 2024

Figure 26 shows waste flows by region. Western Europe, East and Southern Africa, Asia-Pacific, and North America were the main regions of origin of illegal waste reported in 504 waste-related seizures in 2024, accounting for 33%, 27%, 12%, and 7% respectively.



From a destination perspective, East and Southern Africa and Asia-Pacific were the most frequent destination regions, accounting for 31% and 30% of the total number of seizures respectively.

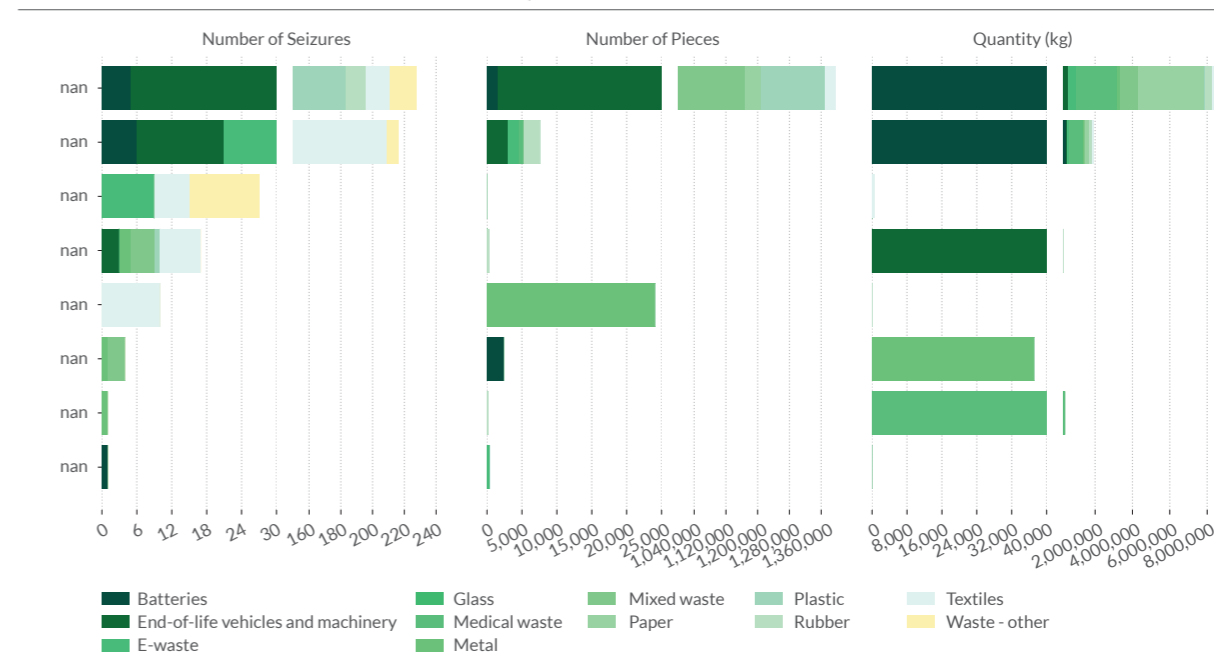
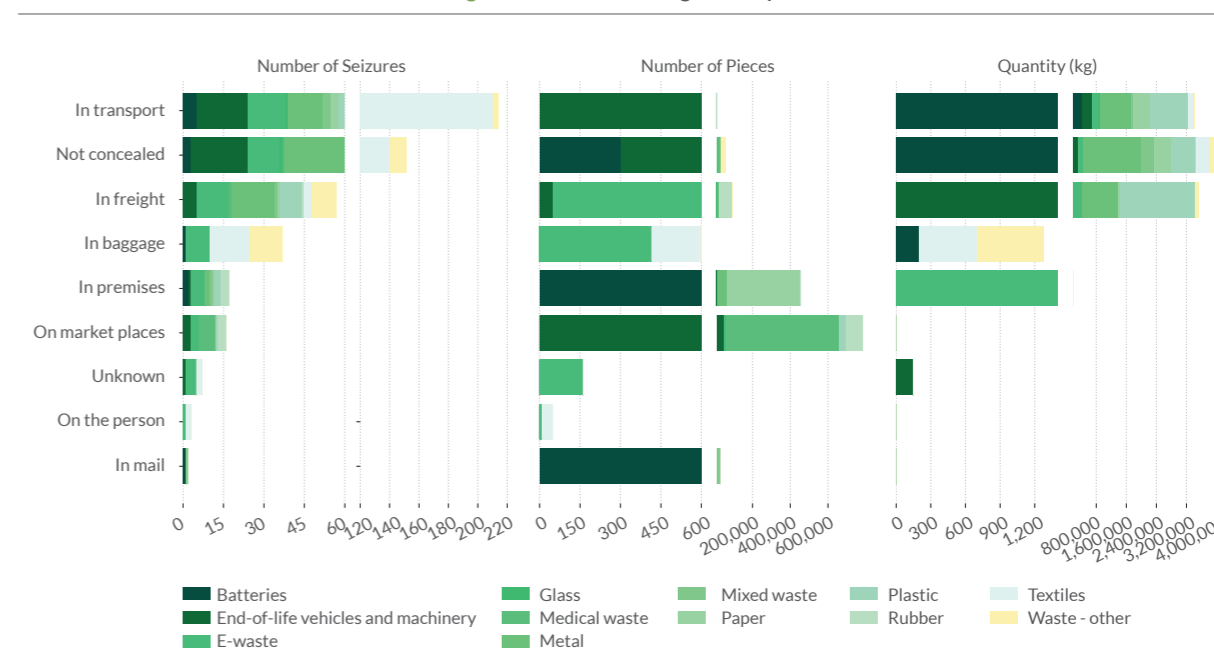
The Asia-Pacific region was more often a destination than a point of departure for waste shipments, in contrast to Western Europe, which was more frequently used as a departure region than a destination. Similarly, West Africa was primarily a destination region, while North America was more commonly a departure region than a destination.

In terms of quantity, Western Europe and the Asia-Pacific regions were the primary points of departure, collectively accounting for 75% of the total waste quantity seized. The main destination was the Asia-Pacific region, receiving 65%, followed by West Africa with 15%.

2.3 Conveyance, concealment, detection and direction of illegal waste cases

2.3.1 Conveyance and concealment

Various modes of transportation and concealment – detailed in Figures 27 and 28 – were used for waste trafficking in 2024.

Figure 27: Seizures and quantities of waste categories by conveyance method, 2024**Figure 28:** Waste categories by concealment method, 2024

Vessels and vehicles were the most frequently used conveyance methods, collectively accounting for 90% of the total seizures. Air transport was much less frequently used, representing only 5% of the total.

In terms of quantity, vessels accounted for approximately 90% of the total illegal waste transported in 2024. It was the primary mode of transport for most categories, including rubber, paper, plastic, metal, end-of-life vehicles and machinery, e-waste, textiles, and miscellaneous waste.

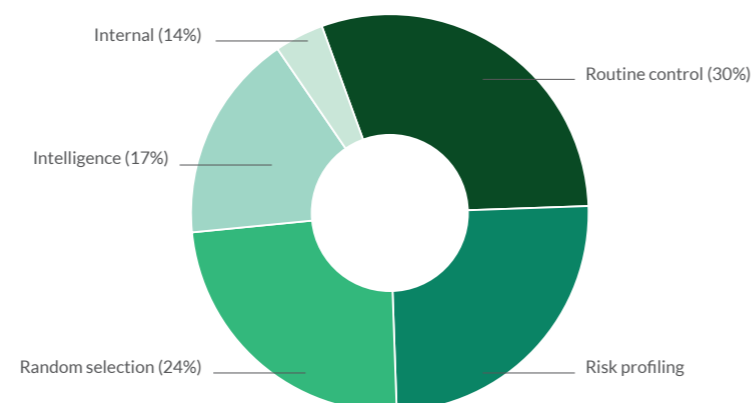
Vehicles were used for 15% of the total quantity of seized waste, primarily transporting glass, batteries, mixed waste, textiles, metal, and e-waste. Air transport was more commonly used for e-waste and textiles, while express courier services were used mainly for batteries. Pedestrians frequently carried textiles.

The biggest quantity of illegal waste was detected in vessels and vehicles. Almost all of the medical waste – 95% – was found in marketplaces. A significant quantity of rubber was also discovered in marketplaces. Mail was used to conceal batteries and mixed waste, while baggage was used to conceal batteries, e-waste, and textiles.

2.3.2 Detection methods

In 2024, cases of illegal waste trade were detected using the methods shown in Figure 29.

Figure 29: Waste seizures by detection method, 2024



Routine controls and random selection contributed to 54% of seizures,

risk profiling accounted for 25%, and intelligence and investigation for 21% of the detections. However, in terms of quantity, risk profiling proved to be the most effective method, accounting for 45% of the total quantity seized, followed by routine control at 38%. Intelligence-led detections were less frequent, accounting for 9% of the total quantity seized – surpassing random selection, which was used more often but yielded less in terms of quantity.

The use of combined intelligence and investigation methods to detect illicit waste shipments recorded the highest increase in 2024, rising by 62% compared to 2023. The second highest increase was seen in routine control, which grew by 52% over the same period. To a lesser extent, risk profiling and stand-alone intelligence methods also increased in 2024.

Maldives Customs preventing illegal shipments of waste following risk profiling

Within Operation DEMETER X, Maldives Customs reported having prevented the illegal export of three waste shipments that lacked permits from the Environment Protection Agency (EPA) of Maldives. In these cases, the shipments were required to comply with the Basel Convention Prior Informed Consent (PIC) procedure; however, exporters initially declared waste materials (used oil, lead acid battery scrap, and used engine oil) as fuel oil or lead scrap in order to avoid permit requirements. In total, the shipments contained 145,200 litres of waste mineral oils and 25,000 kg of lead compounds. The cases were identified based on risk profiling.

2.3.3 Direction

Illegal waste movements were intercepted while being transported in various directions, as shown in Figure 30. Seizures at import were the most common, accounting for 62% of the total, followed by export seizures at 32%.

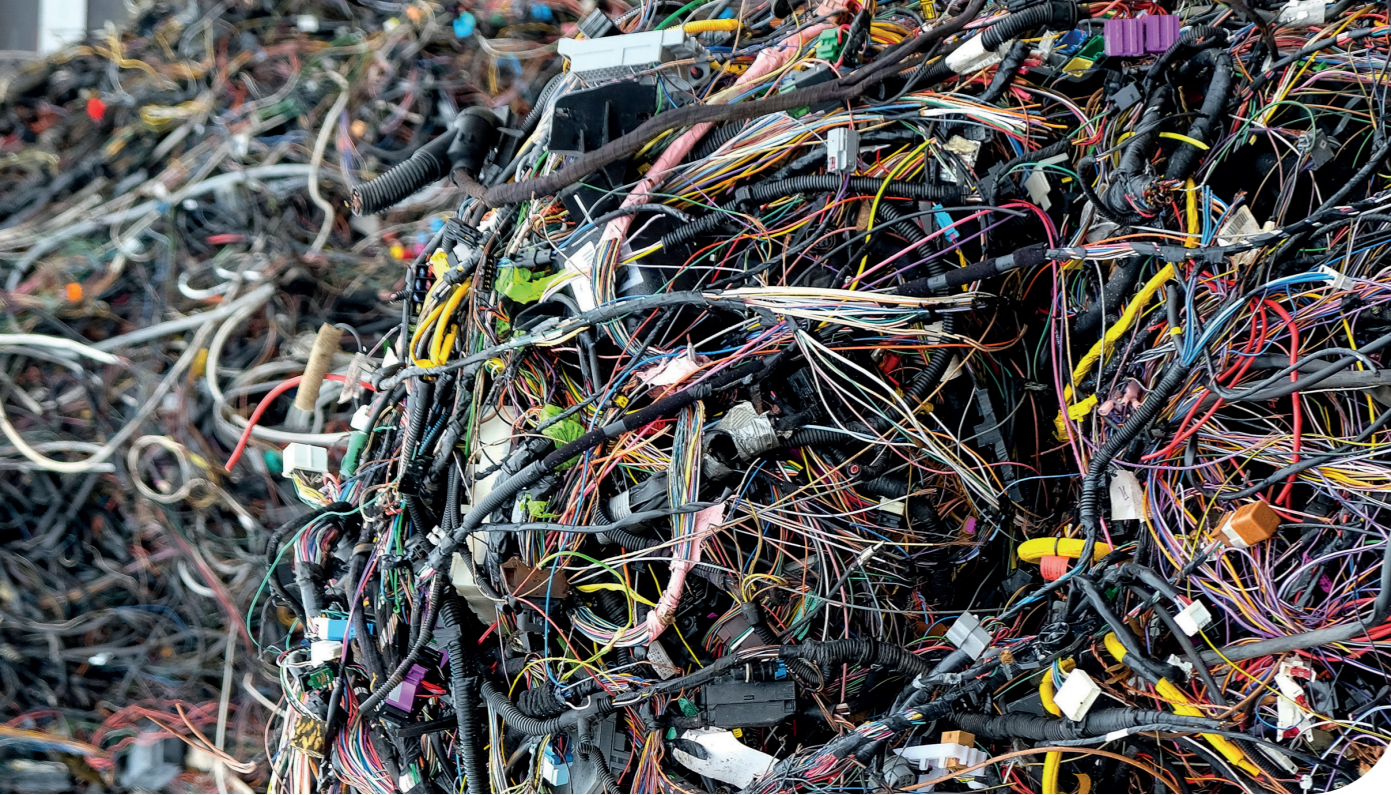
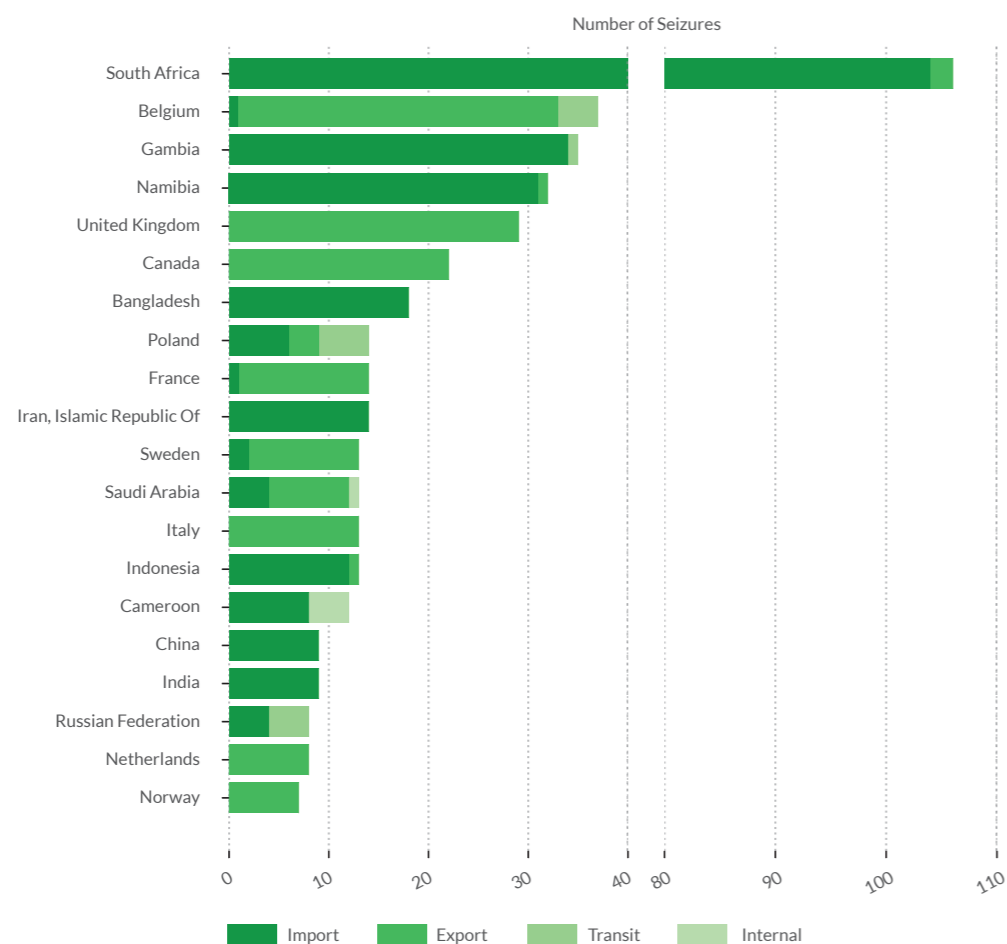


Figure 30: Top 20 waste reporters by direction, 2024



In 2024, seizures in the import direction increased by 40% compared to 2023, while export-related seizures rose by 15%. In contrast, transit and inland seizures declined by 36% and 46%, respectively, compared to the previous year.

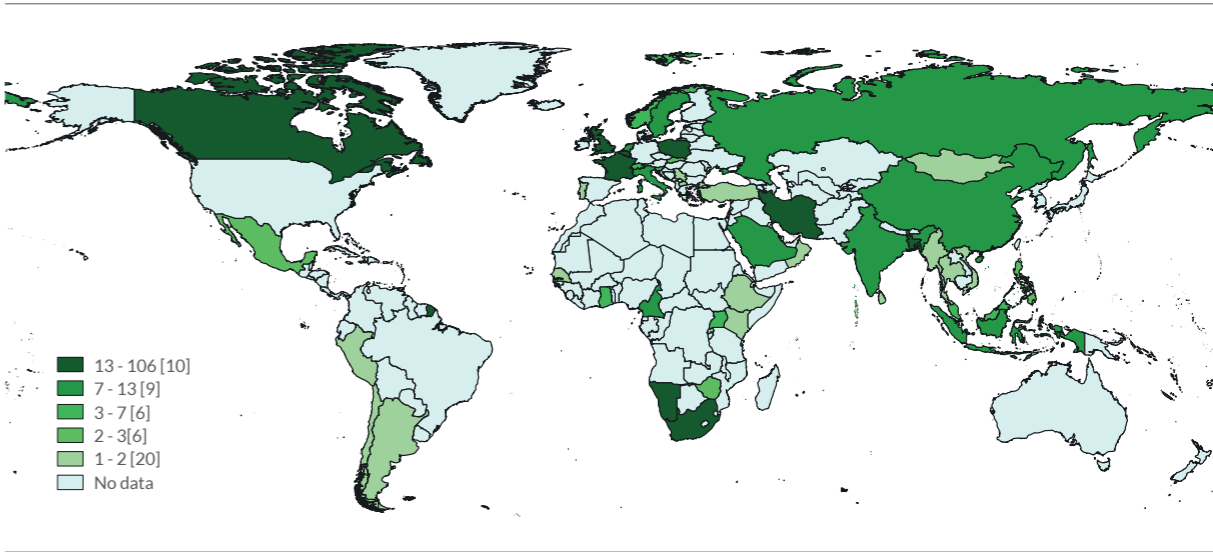
In terms of quantity, although export seizures were less frequent than import, they accounted for 45% of the total quantity seized, while import accounted for 48%.

Import was the primary direction for illegal waste movements reported by South Africa, The Gambia, Namibia, Bangladesh, Iran, Indonesia, China, and India. In contrast, export was the main direction for seizures reported by Belgium, United Kingdom, Canada, France, Sweden, Saudi Arabia, Italy, Netherlands, and Norway. Additionally, Belgium, Poland, Russia, and The Gambia served as key transit points.

2.4 Global and regional flows of illegal waste

Globally, 51 countries – as shown in Figure 31 – reported 504 waste seizures in 2024, totalling approximately 1.5 million pieces and 11,226 tonnes of various types of waste. The following figures provide insights into global and regional flows of illegal waste.

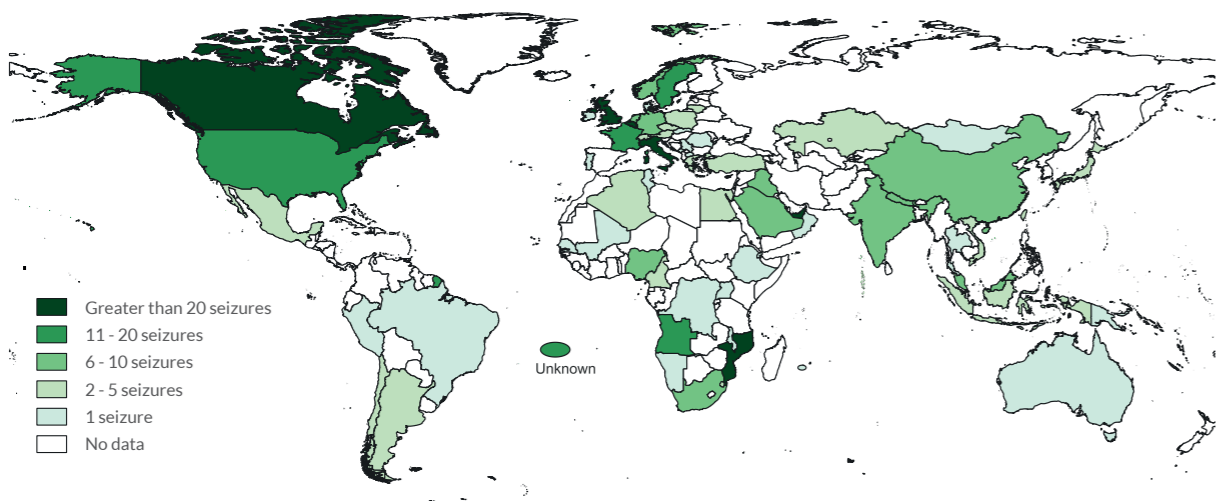
Figure 31: Global waste reporters by number of seizures, 2024



The number of intercepted seizures varied across countries: 36 countries reported between one (1) and ten (10) seizures, nine (9) countries reported ten (10) to 20 seizures, five (5) countries reported between 20 and 40 seizures, and one (1) country reported 106 seizures.

Most of the countries with high seizure frequencies were also among the top reporters of large waste quantities – except for South Africa, Bangladesh, Cameroon, and Namibia. In contrast, although China and the Netherlands reported relatively few waste seizures, they accounted for substantial quantities: 2,789 tonnes and 339 tonnes respectively.

Figure 32: Global waste departures by number of seizures

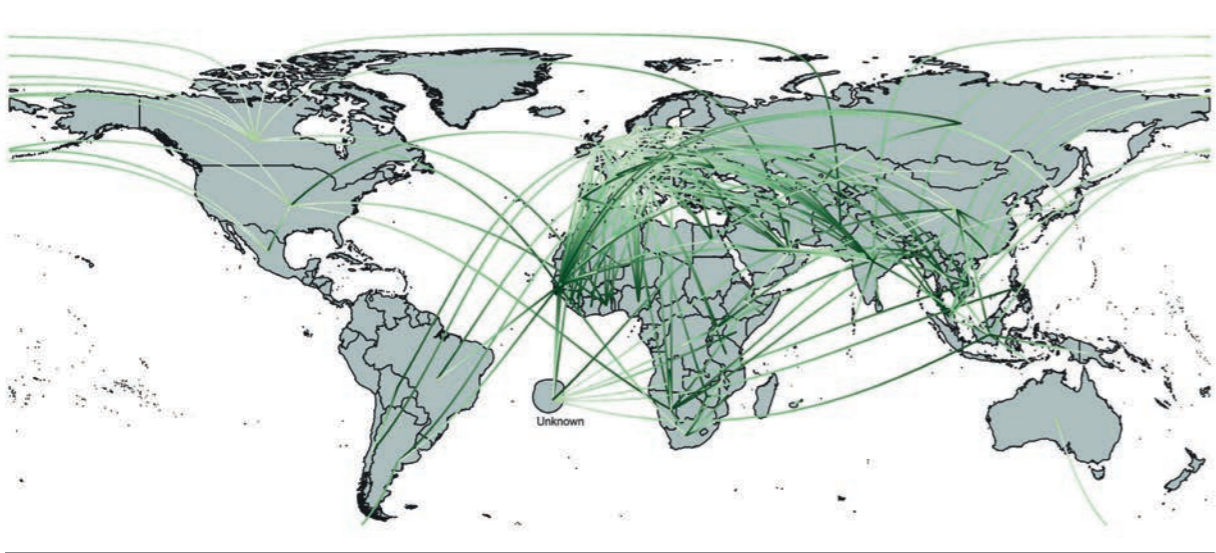


Illicit waste shipments originated from 68 departure points, as shown in Figure 32.

The frequency of shipments varied significantly across these locations: 70% of departure points were associated with one (1) to five (5) seizures, 20% were linked to between six (6) and 20 seizures, and five (5) countries were linked to 25 to 40 seizures. Mozambique was the most frequent departure point, serving as the origin for 100 illegal shipments, though the quantities involved were not significant.

In terms of quantity, most European departure points were not only frequent in the number of seizures but also significant in the volume of waste they originated. The United Kingdom reported the highest volume, serving as the departure point for 1,936 tonnes, while Slovakia reported the lowest among them, with 23 tonnes of waste.

Figure 33: Waste trafficking routes, 2024



As depicted in Figure 33, cross-border trafficking of waste – across all types – originated from 66 departure points worldwide and was bound for 72 destinations.

Mozambique was the most frequent waste departure point, with 100 seizures accounting for 20% of the total cross-border waste seizures. The United Kingdom, Belgium, United Arab Emirates, Canada, and Italy were also common departure points, collectively accounting for 30% of the total seizures. In terms of quantity, 50% of the total volume of waste departed from the United Kingdom, Canada, and Belgium.

South Africa was the most frequent destination for waste, receiving 20% of the total seizures. To a lesser extent, The Gambia, Malaysia, India, and Namibia were also frequent destinations, collectively accounting for 28% of the total seizures. In terms of quantity, China and India were the top destinations, accounting collectively for 39% of the total volume (22% and 17%, respectively). The Gambia and Malaysia were also among the top five destinations by quantity, collectively accounting for 21% of the total volume.

3. Substances controlled under the Montreal Protocol

There were 134 seizures of substances controlled under the Montreal Protocol - ozone depleting substances (ODS) and Hydrofluorocarbon (HFCs) and related equipment - reported in 2024 (figure 34), marking a 5% increase compared to 2023. This rise was primarily driven by a 145% increase in seizures of equipment using ODS or HFCs.

Figure 34: Substances controlled under the Montreal Protocol by number of seizures and quantity, 2023–2024



HFCs were the most frequently intercepted substances, accounting for 40% of total seizures, followed by unspecified controlled substances at 31%. ODS comprised 8% of the total number of seizures.

The increase in total seizures in 2024 was also accompanied by a significant rise in quantity, which surged by 96% compared to 2023. This was primarily driven by a remarkable 688% increase in the quantity of equipment using ODS/HFCs, followed by a 123% increase in unspecified controlled substances and mixtures, and a 71% increase in HFCs. In contrast, ODS saw a decline not only in the number of seizures but also in quantity, with a 50% drop in the volume seized in 2024 compared to 2023.

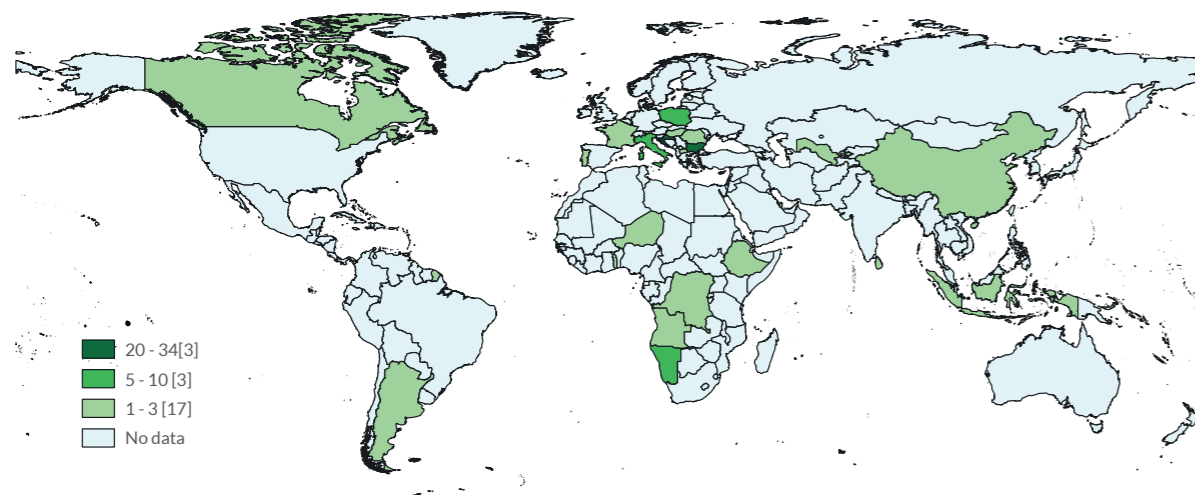
In 2024, the most frequent locations for seizures of substances and products containing ODS/HFCs were land boundaries (48% of total seizures), followed by inland sites (24%) and seaports (21%). In terms of quantities, the largest volumes were seized inland (55%), followed by seaports (36%) and land boundaries (6%). By comparison, in 2023, land boundaries also accounted for the majority of seizures (62%), followed by seaports (17%) and inland sites (13%). In terms of quantities, seizures at seaports dominated (47%), followed by inland (29%) and land boundaries (21%).

In 2024, routine and random checks accounted for 72% in terms of the number of seizures and 67% of the quantity. Investigation and intelligence contributed to 16% of the total number of seizures and 20% of the quantity seized. Risk profiling contributed to 12% in terms of the number of seizures and 13% of the quantity seized.

In terms of modus operandi, in 2024 the largest quantities were detected in premises (50% of the quantity), in transport (22% of the quantity), and not concealed (19% of the quantity).

3.1. Global and regional flows of illegal ODS, HFCs and related products

Figure 35: Reporters of the substances controlled under the Montreal Protocol by number of seizures, 2024

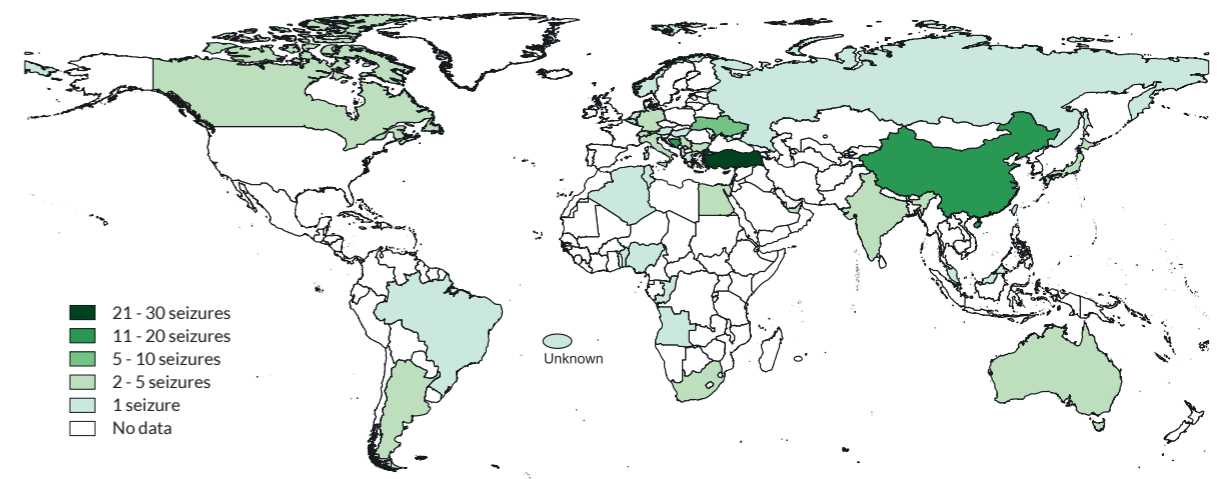


ODS and HFCs seizures were reported by 23 Customs administrations, as shown in Figure 35.

Almost half of the reporting Customs administrations recorded only one seizure, while six (6) reported between two (2) and six (6) seizures. The most frequent reporters were The Gambia, along with four European countries – Croatia, Bulgaria, Poland, and Italy – each reporting between 10 and 34 seizures.

The Gambia was not only the most frequent offence location for ODS/HFCs seizures, but also accounted for the largest share of the total quantity, representing 50% of the total. Italy followed, accounting for 17% of the seized quantity. Although Niger reported only two seizures, it ranked third in terms of quantity, contributing to 11% of the total. Poland and France were also notable offence locations for large volumes of ODS/HFCs. In contrast, despite being among the most frequent reporters, Croatia and Bulgaria reported relatively small quantities, together accounting for only 2% of the total quantity seized.

Figure 36: Departures of the substances controlled under the Montreal Protocol by number of seizures, 2024



Globally, ODS/HFCs originated from 40 departure points in 2024 (Figure 36).

Türkiye, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and China were the most frequent departure points, collectively accounting for 40% of the total seizures, while 50% of the departure points reported only a single seizure each.

Figure 37: Trafficking routes for substances controlled under the Montreal Protocol, 2024

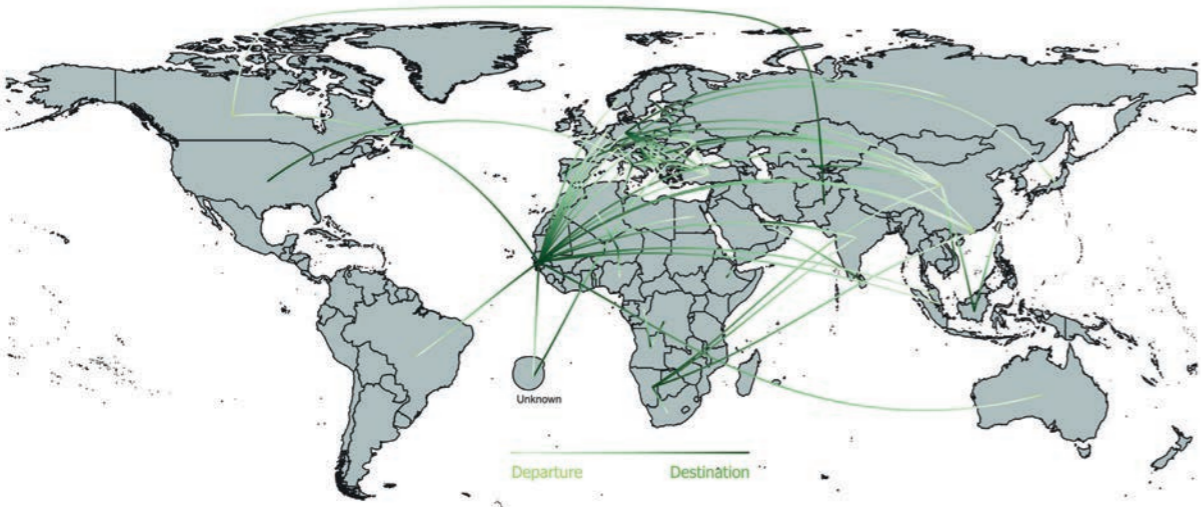


Figure 37 shows cross-border trafficking of substances controlled under the Montreal Protocol originated from 78 departure points worldwide and was bound for 31 destinations.

Türkiye was the most frequent departure point for ODS/HFCs, with 26 seizures, accounting for 20% of the total number of cross-border ODS/HFCs seizures. Likewise, Bosnia and Herzegovina and China were common departure points, collectively accounting for 23% of the total seizures. Ukraine and Serbia were also among the top five departure points. In terms of quantity seized, 77% of the total volume of ODS/HFCs departed from Australia, China, Albania, Luxembourg, Algeria, and Türkiye.

The Gambia was the most frequent destination for ODS/HFCs, accounting for 26% of the total number of seizures. Croatia, Bulgaria, and Italy were also frequent destinations – ranking among the top five – and collectively accounted for 37% of the total seizures. In terms of quantity, The Gambia was the destination for 51% of the total volume of ODS/HFCs seized in 2024. Italy, Niger, Ukraine, and France were also significant destinations, collectively accounting for 43% of the total quantity.



24,200 kg of HFC-134a seized by France Customs at the Port of Sete.

In July 2024, as part of operation DEMETER X, France Customs seized a shipment of 24,200 kg of HFC-134a that were declared as “accessoires de climatiseurs” (air-conditioning accessories). The seizure followed a routine control. The shipment departed from Turkey destined to France.

3.2. Global enforcement operation on waste and substances controlled under the Montreal Protocol

Operation DEMETER X

Launched in 2009, Operation DEMETER was established to combat the illegal cross-border movement of hazardous waste. In 2019, the scope of the operation expanded to address new environmental challenges, including substances regulated by the Montreal Protocol, such as ozone-depleting substances (ODS) and hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs).

The tenth iteration of WCO Operation DEMETER, which targets illicit waste, ozone-depleting substances (ODS) and potent greenhouse gases, took place over eight weeks in the second semester of 2024. It saw the participation of a record 110 Customs administrations and led to 450 seizures.

Collaboration was central to Operation DEMETER X, which was supported by eight partner international organizations and the WCO global RILO network. Customs administrations worked alongside national enforcement agencies, environmental authorities, border police, and other relevant actors. Strategic partnerships with civil society and trade organizations further reinforced enforcement efforts at critical points.

Over the course of Operation DEMETER X, 450 seizures related to the targeted commodities were reported by 47 Customs administrations via CENcomm, the WCO’s secure and encrypted communication tool.

Key findings

- Seizures included 324 seizures of waste, 99 seizures of ODS, HFCs and equipment containing or relying on controlled substances under the Montreal Protocol, and 27 seizures of other commodities, including restricted or prohibited commodities such as hazardous chemicals.
- In terms of quantities, cumulatively, 10,285,338.48 kg and 1,441,843 pieces (not weighed) were seized, including:
 - 9,839,184.93 kg of waste and an additional non-weighed 1,422,981 pieces of waste;
 - 344,625.9 kg of ODS & HFCs, and 24,198.9 kg and 11,620 pieces of equipment containing or relying on controlled substances; and
 - 77,328.75 kg and 7,242 pieces of other restricted or prohibited goods.
- Operation DEMETER X also highlighted convergence of the Basel Convention and the Montreal Protocol regarding end-of-life equipment containing or relying on substances controlled by the Montreal Protocol. Twenty-seven cases involving refrigerant-using equipment (refrigerators, compressors, ACs, chillers) were reported. They involved 10,124 pieces (unweighed).and 66,848 kg

129 air conditioners and 33 fridges were seized by Ghana Customs within Operation DEMETER X.



Ghana Customs reported four (4) seizures of e-waste involving used refrigeration equipment such as air conditioners and fridges. The seizures were characterized by similar modi operandi: the same country of origin in the European Union, different seaports of departure, the same destination port in Ghana, and a failure to declare the commodities.



Participation of The Gambia Customs in Operation DEMETER X

The Gambia Customs topped the list of participating Members of Operation DEMETER X in terms of the number of seizures. The success of the operation at the national level in The Gambia relied on effective communication, coordination, consultation, and information sharing with the National Environment Agency, the Registrar of Chemicals and Pesticides, the Ministry of Petroleum and Energy, the police Department, and other relevant agencies.

As a result, The Gambia Customs reported 75 seizures:

- 35 seizures of 5,574 kg of waste and 1,364,056 pieces of waste (not weighed),
- 18 seizures of 194,619 kg of ODS and HFCs
- 16 seizures of 23,018.90 kg and 10,035 pieces of equipment containing controlled substances.
- Six (6) seizures containing 21,051 kg and 4,556 pieces of other prohibited or banned commodities.

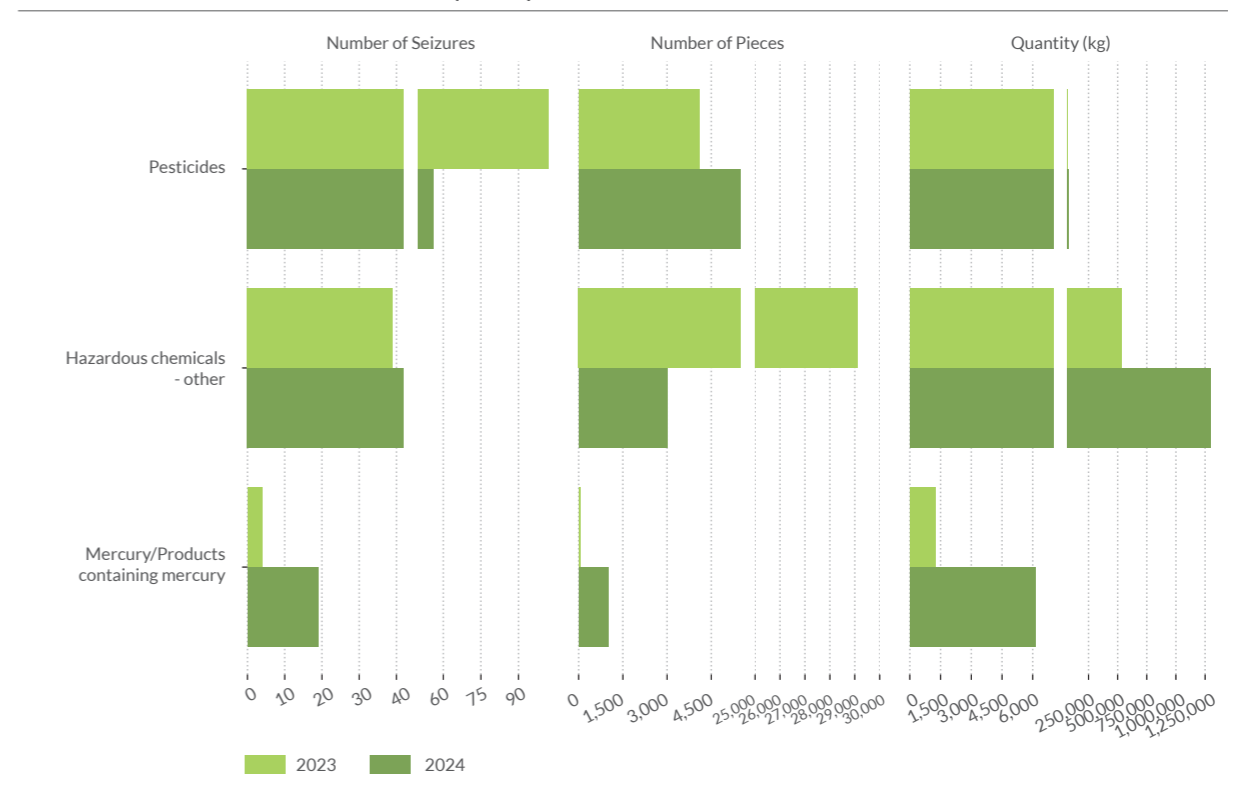


Courtesy of Sri Lanka Customs.

4. Other hazardous materials

As shown in Figure 38, 117 seizures of other hazardous materials, such as pesticides, mercury and mercury-added products, and hazardous chemicals were recorded in 2024, reflecting a 19% decrease compared to 2023.

Figure 38: Other hazardous materials by number of seizures and quantity seized, 2023–2024



The decline in the number of hazardous materials seizures was primarily driven by a 45% drop in the number of pesticide seizures. Pesticides and hazardous chemicals were the most frequently seized materials, collectively accounting for 85% of the total seizures. Despite the drop in the number of seizures, the total quantity seized increased significantly by 117%, mainly due to a 130% increase in hazardous chemicals.

4.1. Findings related to illegal shipments of hazardous materials

Pesticides

- In 2024, there were 44 pesticide seizures, compared to 77 in 2023. The quantity of seized pesticides amounted to 84,614 kg, reflecting a 15% increase compared to 2023.
- Ukraine, Ghana and Türkiye were the major departure points for illegal pesticides.
- The largest quantities of seized pesticides were reported by Burkina Faso (66%), The Gambia (24%), and Myanmar (6%). Poland and Bulgaria reported the largest number of seizures, with 15 and eight (8) seizures respectively.
- 69% of illegal pesticides were transported by vehicles and 30% by vessels.
- Illegal shipments of pesticides were primarily detected through intelligence, accounting for 67% of the total quantity seized, while routine controls accounted for 27%.

Mercury and mercury-added products

- There were 19 seizures of mercury/mercury-added products in 2024, compared to four (4) seizures in 2023. In total, 5,931 kg, 200 litres and 993 pieces were seized, compared to 1231 kg and 45 pieces in 2023.
- There were seven reporters of these commodities: Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Mali, Mauritius, Niger, Senegal, and Zimbabwe.
- 79% of seizures were made at import.
- The majority of illegal trade was transported by vehicles, with a significant amount also shipped by vessel.
- 58% of seizures were detected based on intelligence and investigation.



One kg of mercury discovered in baggage by Ethiopia Customs.

The consignment was seized at import at the Moyala land border coming from Kenya in July 2024, following intelligence received by Ethiopia Customs and Police.

4.2. Global and regional flows of hazardous materials

Figure 39: Reporters of other hazardous materials by number of seizures, 2024

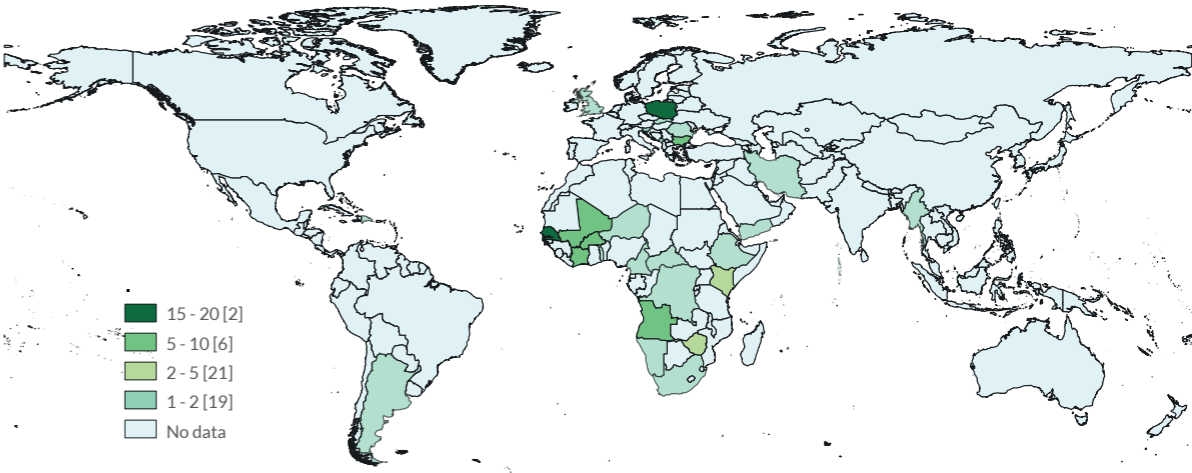


Figure 39 shows that, in 2024, 29 Customs administrations reported seizures of hazardous chemicals, pesticides, and mercury or products containing mercury..

Poland (pesticides) and Senegal (hazardous chemicals and mercury/mercury products) were the most frequent offence locations for these types of hazardous materials, collectively accounting for 33% of the total seizures.

Several other African Customs administrations – including Burkina Faso (hazardous chemicals), Côte d'Ivoire (hazardous chemicals), Angola (hazardous chemicals), Mali (hazardous chemicals), The Gambia (pesticides), and Zimbabwe (mercury/mercury products) also reported frequent seizures, though at lower levels than Poland and Senegal. Overall, African Customs administrations accounted for 66% of the total seizures, while Customs administrations in Eastern and Central Europe contributed 27%.

In terms of quantity, Africa (specifically West and Central Africa, and East and Southern Africa) accounted for 99% of the total quantity of hazardous chemicals, pesticides, and mercury-containing products seized in 2024.

Figure 40: Departure points of other hazardous materials by number of seizures, 2024

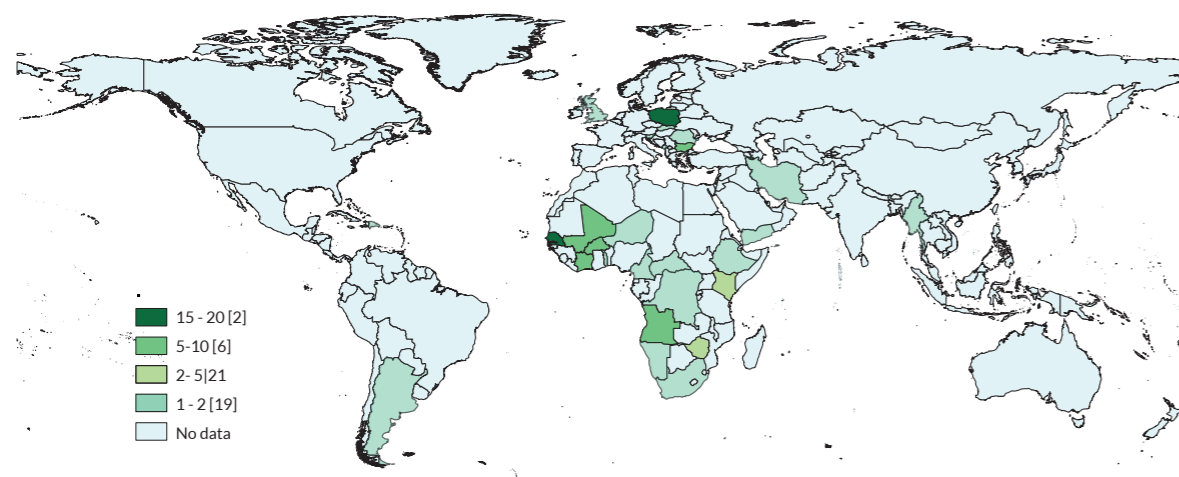
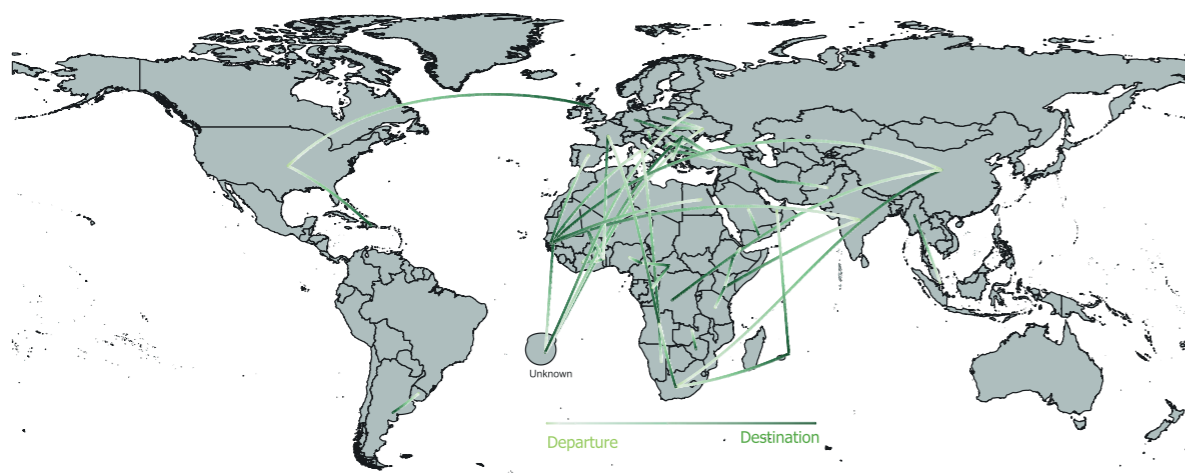


Figure 40 shows the departure points of illegal shipments of hazardous chemicals, pesticides, and mercury-containing products in 2024, with movements reported from 37 locations worldwide.

Ukraine, Mali, Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Türkiye were the most frequent departure points, collectively accounting for 45% of the total number of seizures. African countries – particularly those in West and Central Africa, and East and Southern Africa – were the origin for approximately 50% of the total seizures, while Eastern and Central European countries – including Ukraine, Türkiye, Greece, and Serbia – accounted for 25%.

In terms of quantity, Burkina Faso was the origin of 75% of the total volume of hazardous chemicals, pesticides, and mercury-containing products seized in 2024, followed by Senegal with 10%. Although Ukraine was the most frequent departure point, it accounted for less than 1% of the total quantity seized, a trend also observed with Mali and Zambia.

Figure 41: Trafficking routes for other hazardous materials, 2024



Ukraine was the most frequent departure point, with 19 seizures accounting for 20% of the total cross-border seizures of other hazardous materials. Likewise, Mali, Ghana, and Türkiye were common departure points, collectively accounting for 25% of the total number of seizures. To a lesser extent, South Africa, Zambia, and China were also frequent departures.

In terms of quantity, Côte d'Ivoire and India were the main departure points, accounting for 21% and 20% of the total volume of other hazardous materials respectively. Türkiye, Ghana, Cameroon, China, and Austria also contributed significant quantities, collectively accounting for 45% of the total volume seized.

Senegal was the most frequent destination for other hazardous materials, accounting for 15% of the total number of seizures, followed by Angola, The Gambia, Mali, and Zimbabwe, which collectively accounted for 24% of the total seizures. In terms of quantity, Burkina Faso was the destination for 28% of the total volume of other hazardous materials seized in 2024. Kenya and The Gambia were also significant destinations, together accounting for 32% of the total quantity. The Central African Republic, Iran, and Croatia were also among the top five destinations by quantity.



Illicit trade in goods infringing intellectual property rights (IPR), including counterfeit and illicit medical products, continues to pose serious risks to public health, consumer safety, and legitimate trade. Analysis in the ITR 2024 highlights the growing scale and sophistication of these activities, particularly through e-commerce and small-parcel channels, which increasingly challenge Customs administrations worldwide. It underscores the critical role of Customs in protecting health and safety, dismantling counterfeiting networks, and adapting enforcement strategies to evolving trade and distribution models.



4 IPR, HEALTH AND SAFETY



The ever-growing issue of counterfeiting via e-commerce: insight from Customs data

The IPR, Health and Safety section of the Illicit Trade Report 2023 attracted significant interest from a number of stakeholders, particularly from academia, who place great value on the work of the WCO in this area. An analysis of the Illicit Trade Report data from 2019 to the present reveals an upward trend in counterfeit trade, with a marked increase in offences related to e-commerce.

INTRODUCTION

The WCO IPR, Health and Safety Programme is currently focused on the fight against counterfeiting through e-commerce. The implementation of WCO STOP (III and IV) operations is of paramount importance to more effectively combating counterfeiting in e-commerce and to protecting consumers from criminal networks that exploit the proliferation of social media and the Internet to sell fake goods. In addition, the WCO Secretariat is organizing a series of symposiums on *“Removing counterfeits from e-commerce”*, with the objective of raising awareness among Customs officers and the public of the threats involved.

The IPR, Health and Safety section of this report examines the global illicit trade in counterfeit and medical goods in 2024. This section is divided into two main categories. The first, IPR products, refers to counterfeit non-medical goods such as clothing and accessories, cosmetics, and electronic appliances. The second, medical products, includes illicitly traded or smuggled goods such as medicines, pharmaceutical products and medical devices. These may be counterfeit, genuine products lacking appropriate authorization, or undeclared items.

In 2024, WCO Members reported 30,842 IPR-related cases and 97,806 seizures, leading to the confiscation of about 48,645,797 pieces of counterfeit goods. For medical products, 8,188 cases and 10,312 seizures were reported, totalling 148,567,046 pieces of illicit medicines. A total of 103 WCO Members reported seizures involving IPR or medical products in 2024. Notably, 18 WCO Members submitted data this year after not reporting in 2023, whereas 14 WCO Members that had contributed in 2023 did not report any cases in 2024.

E-commerce continues to play a prominent role in the trafficking of illicit goods. In 2024, 72.1% of IPR seizures and 64.7% of medical seizures were linked to e-commerce transactions, highlighting the challenges posed by small parcels and online sales channels. Compared to 2023, the number of IPR-related and medical product cases slightly decreased by 0.8% and by 8.1% respectively, while the number of quantities seized significantly decreased by 55.1% and by 30.9 %.

This section is organized in the following manner:

- Overall trends in trafficking of IPR products
- Overall trends in trafficking of medical products

Each subsection covers an overview of general patterns concerning the cases, including Members that reported them, the detection methods used to identify illicit goods, the trafficking routes, and the conveyance methods employed by organized trafficking groups. The analysis then narrows its focus to the most frequently seized product types, with particular attention given to e-commerce.

The analysis of the trends requires a few caveats. First, the conclusions below rely on case-and-seizure data voluntarily submitted at the discretion of WCO Members. There are many reasons why Customs administrations might not report or might underreport their data, including the need to maintain discretion in the context of ongoing investigations. As a result, the figures in this section might not present a comprehensive view of IPR or medical product trafficking. Secondly, apparent increases in seizures of certain goods could reveal the increasing efficacy of Customs officers rather than a genuinely upward trend in IPR or medical products trafficking. Third, year-on-year variations may reflect improved detection capabilities or targeted enforcement actions, rather than actual shifts in trafficking patterns.

1. Overall trends in trafficking of IPR products

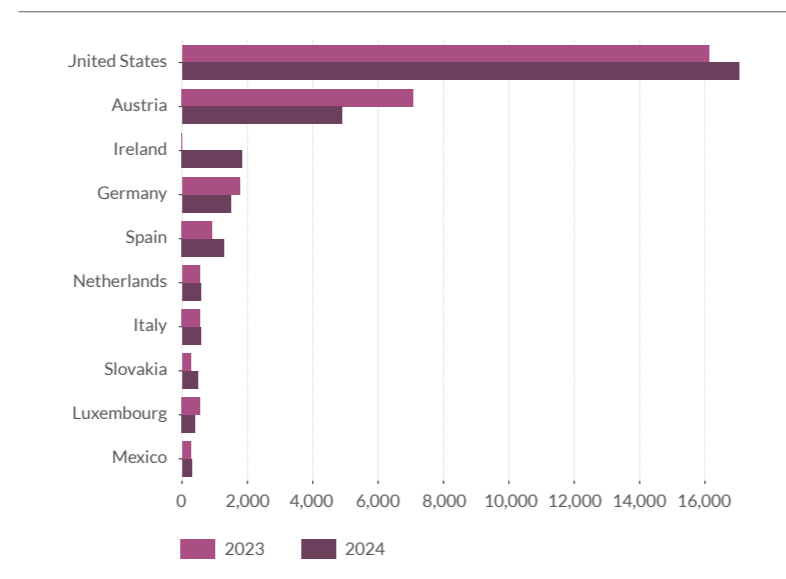
This chapter examines IPR seizures reported by the WCO Members in the CEN database in 2024 when 65 WCO Members recorded 30,842 cases involving 97,806 seizures and 48,645,797 items of IPR-infringing goods. Eighteen new WCO Members reported IPR seizures in 2024: Bangladesh, Belgium, Bolivia, Cameroon, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Finland, Greece, Indonesia, Kenya, Republic of Korea, Lebanon, Madagascar, Papua New Guinea, Tanzania, the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, the United Kingdom, and Vietnam.

Conversely, 17 WCO Members that reported IPR seizures in 2023 did not report any in 2024: Albania, Belarus, Benin, Botswana, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Guinea, Israel, Latvia, Libya, Macao-China, Mali, Oman, Slovenia, Switzerland, and the United Arab Emirates. While most cases were reported by Members in North America, Western Europe, and Eastern and Central Europe, 2024 also saw an increase in reports from other regions, highlighting the global nature of this trafficking trend.

1 Substandard and falsified medical products (who.int)

Figure 1 presents the top 10 reporting countries out of 65, accounting for 28,903 cases, or 93.7% of all reports.

Figure 1: Number of cases by country, 2023–2024



The United States remained the leading contributor, increasing its reporting from 16,114 to 17,042 cases. Austria ranks second with 4,891 cases, despite a negative difference of -30.8% compared to 2023, while Ireland recorded a sharp rise from just 1 case in 2023 to 1,847 in 2024. Reports from Germany decreased slightly from 1,772 to 1,496, whereas Spain saw a moderate increase from 919 to 1,294 cases. Notably, Hungary reported the same number of cases as Mexico in 2024, just below the threshold for inclusion in the top 10.

Figure 2: Number of IPR seizures and number of pieces seized by category, 2024

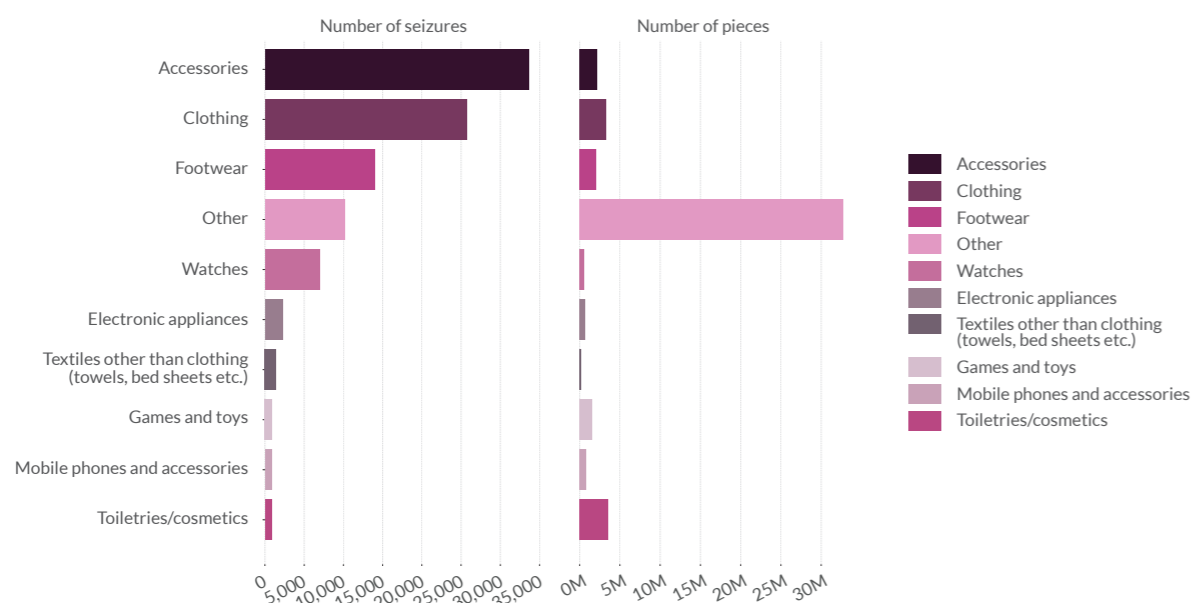
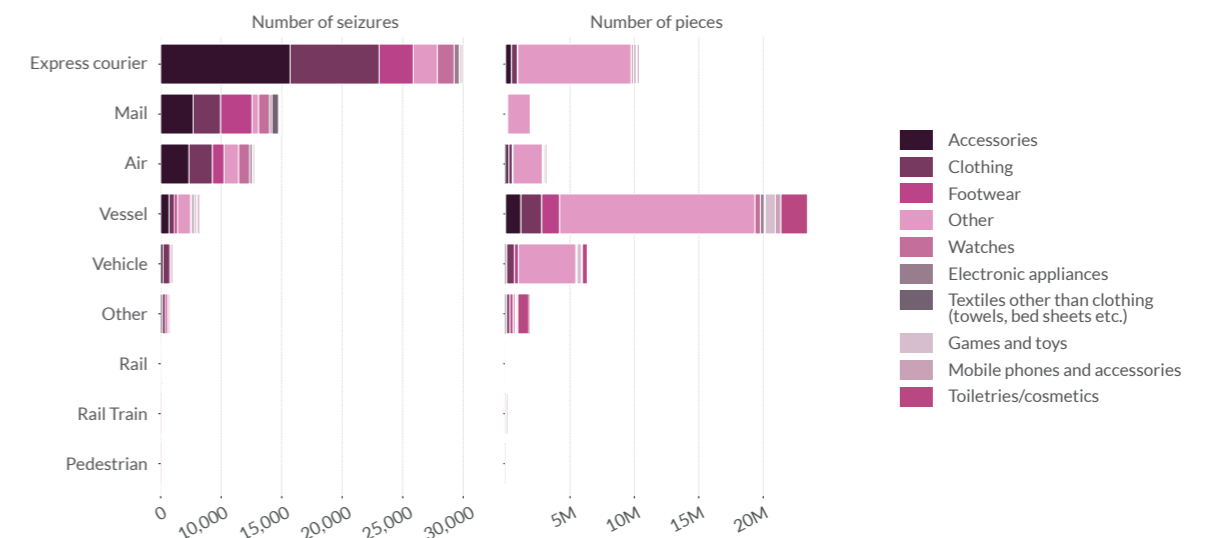


Figure 2 highlights the top 10 product types reported in 2024, based on the number of seizures and quantity of pieces.

The most frequently seized product type was accessories, with 33,613 seizures and 2,149,017 pieces reported, followed by clothing with 25,731 seizures and 3,241,610 pieces, and footwear with 13,942 seizures and 2,105,228 pieces. Despite a downward trend in the total number of reports, seizures concerning watches recorded an increase of 29.1% compared to the previous year. In terms of the number of seizures, accessories, clothing, and footwear remain the top 3 categories, accounting for 74.9% of the total seizures. Overall, the top 10 product types accounted for more than 98% of all seizures and of all pieces reported in 2024. Furthermore, 70,290 seizures of the top 10 IPR products (72.7%) were linked to e-commerce, illustrating the growing importance of online platforms in the trafficking of IPR-violative goods.

In the remainder of this section, the analysis will focus on these ten product types to further examine their role in the illicit trade of IPR-violative goods in 2024.

Figure 3: Number of IPR products seizures and number of pieces seized by type and conveyance method, 2024

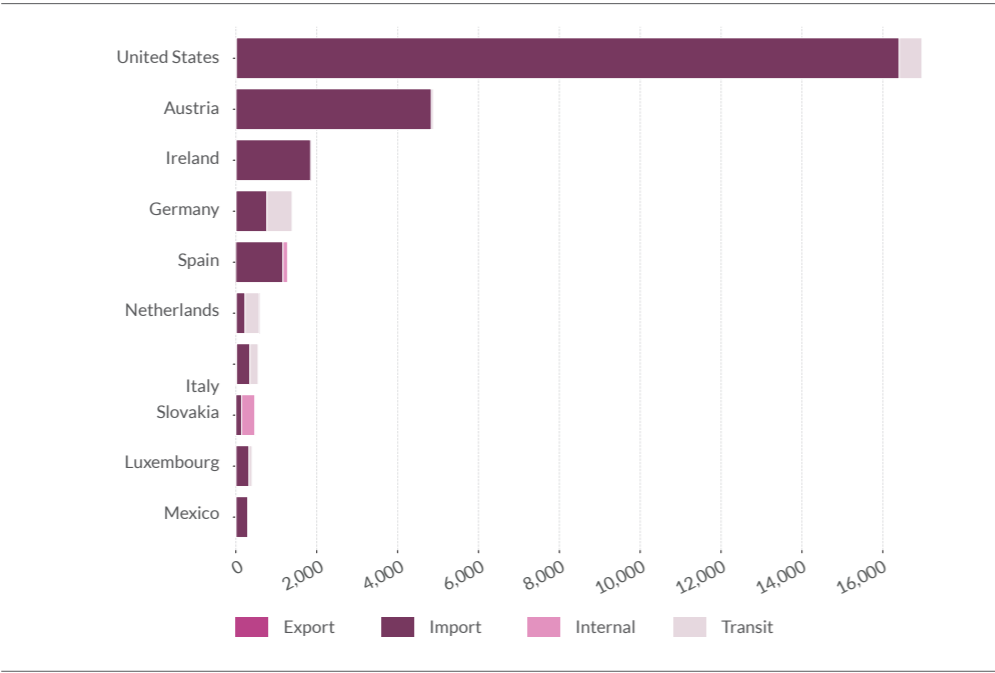


In 2024, a total of 96,714 seizures involving the top 10 IPR product types were reported across all modes of transport, as shown in Figure 3.

Express courier was by far the most frequently used channel, with 49,895 seizures (51.6%), although it accounted for only 21.8% of the total quantity seized. Mail was the second most common method, with 19,850 seizures (20.5%) and 4.3% of the total volume, followed by air transport, which represented 15,650 seizures (16.2%) and 6.9% of the quantity.

In contrast, vessels, while responsible for only 6,322 seizures (6.5%), were associated with the largest share of the total quantity seized, nearly half (49.4%), indicating the use of maritime freight for transporting large volumes. Vehicles accounted for a modest number of cases (2,560 seizures or 2.6%) but represented a substantial 13.4% of the quantity. Other methods, such as rail (327 seizures), train (150 seizures), and pedestrian (85 seizures), played a marginal role in both the number of seizures and quantities intercepted.

Figure 4: Number of IPR products cases by Customs procedure and country, 2024



Across these countries, the vast majority of cases were reported at import (91.7%, or 26,322 out of 28,690 cases), followed by transit (6.5%), internal procedures (1.6%), and a negligible share at export (0.1%).

The United States, the top reporting country overall, recorded 96.6% of its 16,396 cases as import-related, along with transit cases (3.3%) and export cases (0.1%). Germany displayed a more diversified distribution, with 54.7% of cases reported at import, 44.9% in transit, and small shares in export and internal procedures. Alongside Germany, Spain, the Netherlands, Italy, Austria, Slovakia, and the United States were the countries to report seizures under at least three different Customs directions. In contrast, Ireland was the only country among the top 10 to report seizures exclusively upon import.

Figure 5: Number of IPR products cases by detection method, 2024

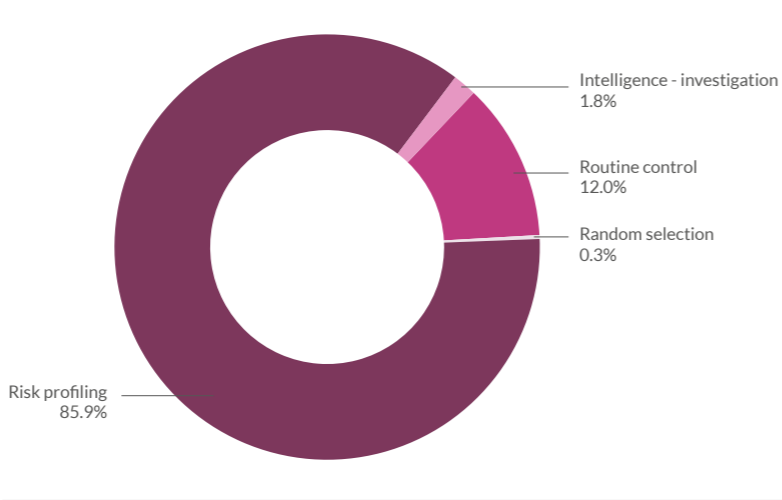


Figure 5 categorizes the reported cases involving the top 10 IPR product types by the detection method employed by Customs administrations in 2024.

The vast majority of cases (85.9%) were detected using risk profiling, confirming its dominant role in targeting IPR-related shipments. Other methods were used far less frequently: intelligence-led investigations accounted for 1.8% of the cases, while the remainder were identified through routine controls, random selection, and other detection techniques.

As with all seizure-based analyses, the distribution of detection methods reflects not only the nature of the illicit trade but also national operational priorities, and the availability of risk assessment and intelligence tools.

Figure 6: Proportion of IPR products seizures by type and country, 2024

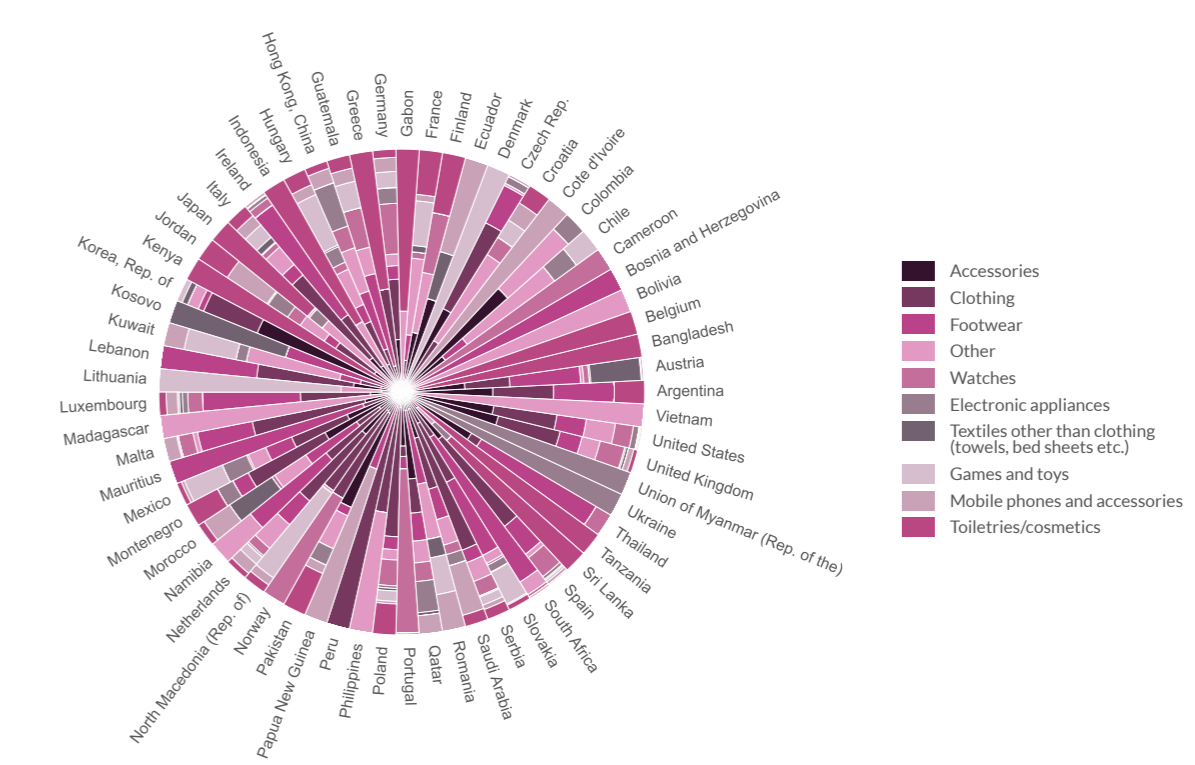


Figure 6 shows the proportion of seizures by top 10 IPR product type as reported by each country in 2024. Of 65 reporting countries, 41 countries recorded ten or more seizures, offering a more comprehensive view of product-type interdiction patterns.

The product category most widely reported was “other”, which appeared in the seizure data of 43 countries, followed by accessories and footwear, which were reported from 41 countries.

Nine countries – Austria, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Spain, and the United States – reported seizures across all ten product categories, highlighting the breadth of their enforcement efforts. In contrast, 12 countries recorded seizures involving only a single product category.

Figure 7: Number of seizures and pieces by category and region, 2024

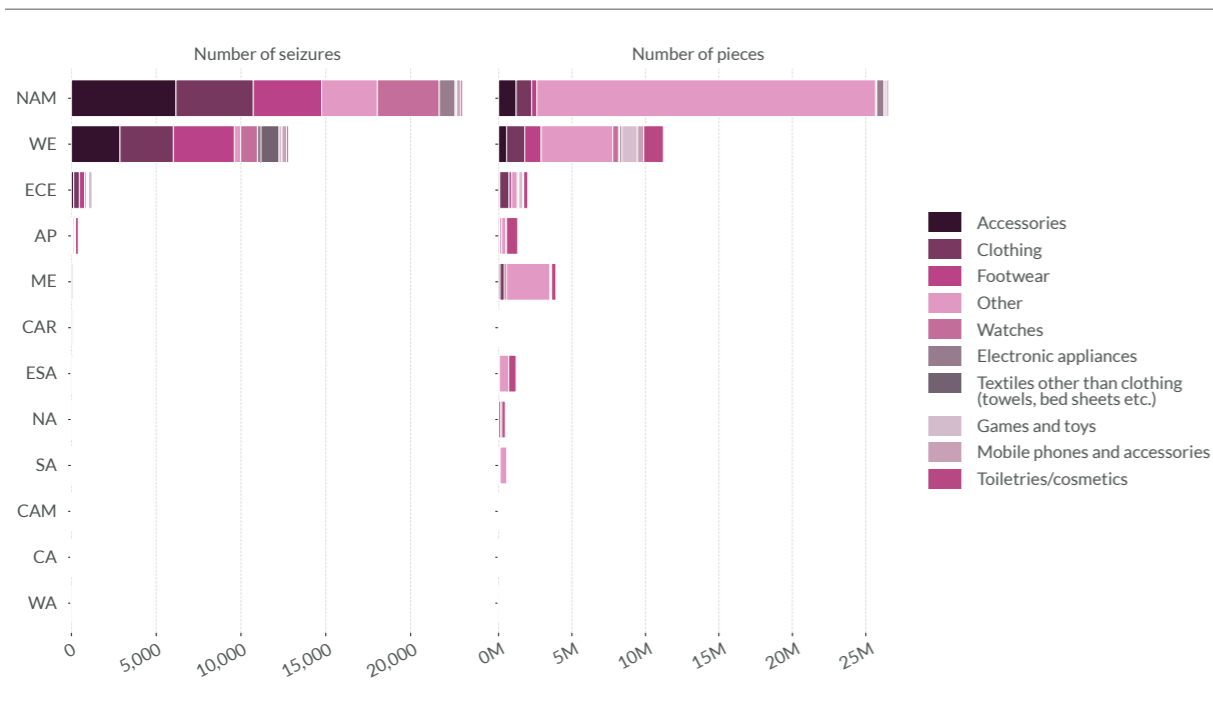


Figure 7 presents the regional distribution of seizures and quantities for the top 10 types of IPR-infringing products reported in 2024.

The majority of seizure cases were concentrated in North America, Western Europe, and Eastern and Central Europe, which together accounted for 98.5% of all reported seizures. In terms of intercepted volumes, North America, Western Europe, and the Middle East dominated, representing 87.9% of the total quantity seized.

A closer look at product types reveals regional specialization: accessories were the most frequently seized items in North America, while footwear and clothing topped the lists in Western Europe and Eastern and Central Europe respectively.

Figure 8: Products trafficking flows by region, 2024

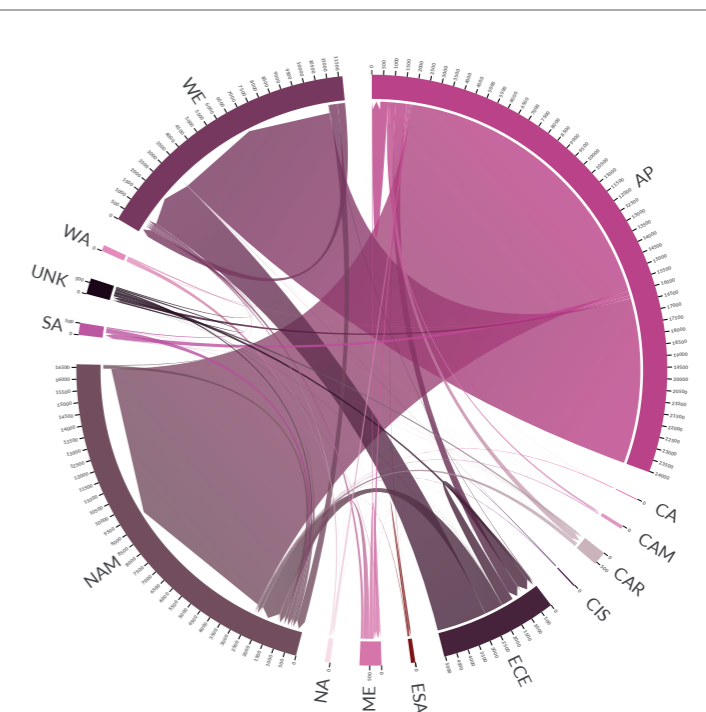


Figure 8 illustrates the directional flows of IPR-related trafficking between departure regions and destination regions. The most frequently identified departure regions were Asia-Pacific, Eastern and Central Europe, and Western Europe, together accounting for 28,224 flows.

On the receiving side, the most common destination regions were North America, Western Europe, and Eastern and Central Europe, with a total of 28,579 flows. Combined, flows either departing from or arriving in one of these regions represented about 98.1% of all reported cases.

The most frequently reported route was from Asia-Pacific to North America, involving 14,040 flows. Other major routes included Asia-Pacific to Western Europe (7,777 flows), Eastern and Central Europe to Western Europe (2,344 flows), Eastern and Central Europe to North America (878 flows), and intra-regional flows within Eastern and Central Europe (548 flows).

These IPR trafficking patterns reveal clear regional asymmetries, with Asia-Pacific and Eastern and Central Europe primarily acting as departure regions, while North America and Western Europe appear mostly as destination markets. The presence of intra-regional flows, particularly within Eastern and Central Europe, indicates a continued circulation of counterfeit goods through local hubs. These trends emphasize the need for targeted interdiction along dominant routes and strengthened cross-regional intelligence-sharing mechanisms to combat high-volume trafficking more effectively.

Figure 9: Heat map of instances of IPR trafficking by country, 2024

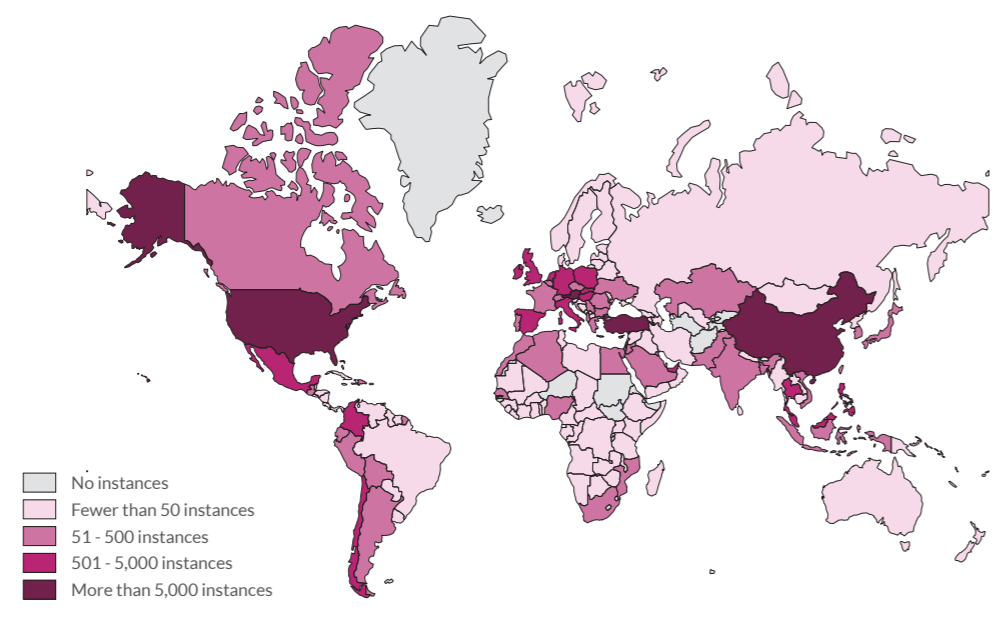


Figure 9 is a heat map showing the geographical distribution of countries involved in IPR-related trafficking instances in 2024. Each country highlighted acted as a departure, destination, or transit point, regardless of which country reported the case. In total, 177 countries appeared in the data, underscoring the global reach of IPR trafficking networks.

The five most frequently involved countries were the United States, China, Austria, Hong Kong China, and Türkiye, which together accounted for 93,570 trafficking instances. While 65 countries officially reported at least one case during the year, 177 countries were implicated as part of trafficking routes, reflecting the broader landscape captured when considering all known or intended movements of goods.

At the lower end of the spectrum, 26 countries were associated with only one or two instances, which may reflect limited exposure to IPR trafficking, narrowly focused interdiction efforts, or constraints in national reporting capacity. In contrast, 134 countries appeared in five or more instances, indicating persistent trafficking activity across a wide range of regions and highlighting the complexity and transnational character of IPR-related crime.

2. Overall trends in trafficking of medicine and pharmaceutical products

The following section presents an analysis of trafficking in medicines and pharmaceutical products. In 2024, the WCO CEN database recorded 8,188 cases involving such products, resulting in 10,312 seizures reported by 74 Members. This represents a decline of 8.1% in the number of cases compared to 2023 (8,909 cases), and a slight decrease in the number of reporting Members (down from 79 to 74).

Thirteen Members that had not reported any medical product seizures in 2023 submitted reports in 2024, including Bahrain, Barbados, Belarus, Belgium, Botswana, Brazil, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Japan, Lebanon, the



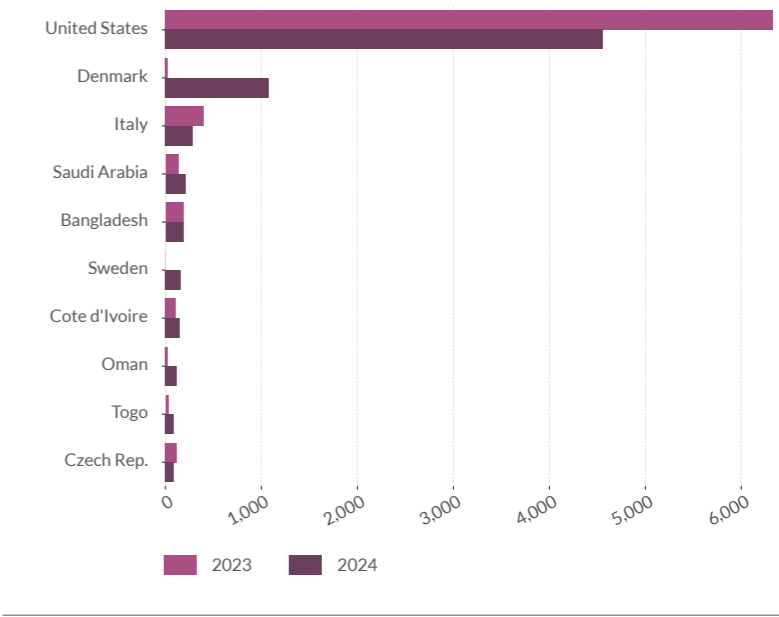
Courtesy of National Customs Service of Ecuador (SENAE).

Republic of Moldova, and Sweden. Conversely, 18 Members that had reported seizures in 2023 did not report any in 2024.

While the majority of cases were reported by Members in North America, Western Europe, the Middle East, and West Africa, 2024 also saw a modest increase in contributions from other regions, highlighting the increasingly global scope of this trafficking trend.

Figure 10: Number of medical product cases by country, 2023–2024

Figure 10 illustrates reporting trends for medicine in 2024, with the top 10 reporting countries accounting for 6,909 cases, or 84.4% of the global total.



The United States recorded the highest number of cases, with a 28 % decline in reported cases compared to 2023, followed by Denmark, which showed a sharp increase of 5014.3% in 2024. Two countries each from Middle East and Western Africa regions, namely Saudi Arabia, Oman, Côte d'Ivoire and Togo, ranked among the top 10, with all showing an increase in reporting. Bangladesh is the only country in A/P among the top 10 which reported cases and maintained stable reporting levels in both years. Notably, Sweden appeared in the top 10 for the first time in 2024.

Figure 11: Number of medical product seizures and quantity seized, 2024

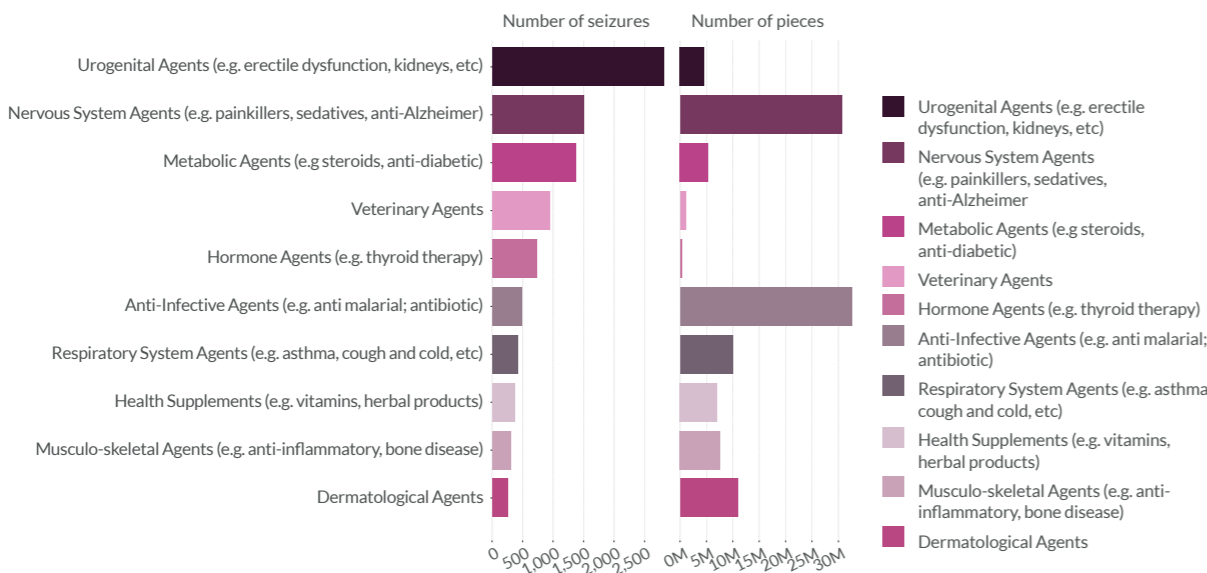


Figure 11 presents the top 10 types of medical products seized in 2024, based on the number of seizures. The most frequently seized product type was Urogenital Agents (e.g. treatments for erectile dysfunction or kidney-related conditions), with 2,811 seizures and 4.6 million pieces reported.

Marked year-on-year shifts were observed across several categories. Musculo-skeletal agents (e.g. anti-inflammatory drugs, treatments for bone disease) experienced a sharp decline, falling from 1,811 to 305 seizures, and from 34.7 million to 7.6 million pieces. Metabolic agents (e.g. steroids, anti-diabetic medicines) also decreased in terms of seizures, from 2,497 to 1,371, while the volume intercepted increased from 2.5 million to 5.3 million pieces, suggesting a shift towards fewer but larger shipments. In contrast, veterinary agents recorded a steep increase, rising from 58 to 945 seizures, and from 34,704 to 1.08 million pieces.

Notably, 6,330 seizures (68.7%) among the top 10 product types were linked to e-commerce, highlighting the growing significance of online platforms as a channel for trafficking illicit medicines.

In the remainder of this section, the analysis will focus on these ten product types to further examine their role in the illicit trade of medical products in 2024.

Figure 12: Number of medical product seizures and quantity seized by type and conveyance method, 2024

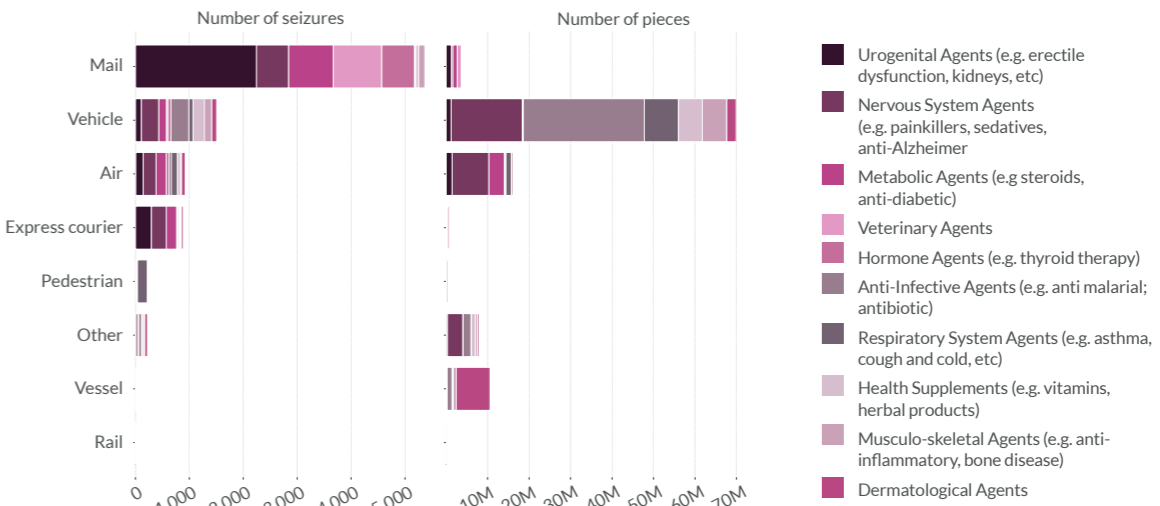
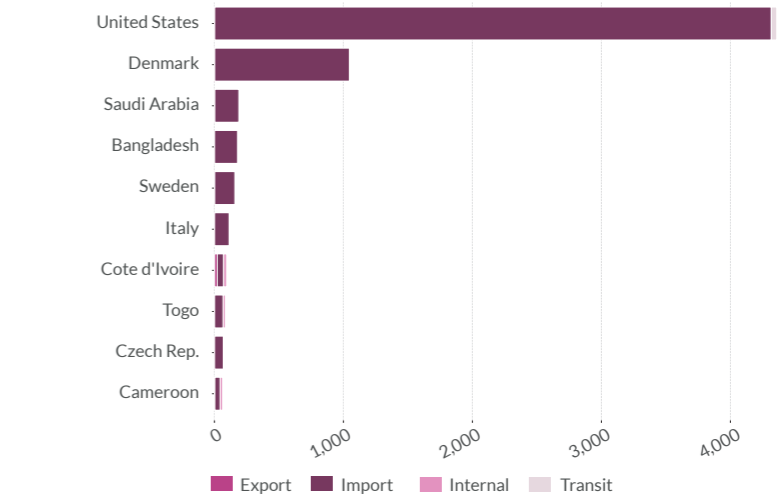


Figure 12 illustrates how the top 10 medical products were transported in 2024, based on reported seizures. A total of 9,219 seizures were recorded across all conveyance methods.

Mail was the most frequently used mode, accounting for 5,379 seizures (58.3%), although it represented only 3.4% of the total quantity seized. Vehicles were involved in 1,507 seizures (16.3%), but accounted for the largest volume, with 63.5% of the total quantity. Air transport represented 922 seizures (10%) and 14.8% of the quantity seized, while express couriers were involved in 881 seizures (9.6%), but contributed to only 1% of the intercepted volume. Other conveyance types included pedestrians with 238 seizures (2.6%), vessels with 67 seizures (0.7%), and rail transport, with just 3 seizures reported. Notably, the "other" category comprised 222 seizures (2.4%), accounting for 7.2% of the total quantity.

Figure 13: Number of medical product cases by Customs procedure and country, 2024

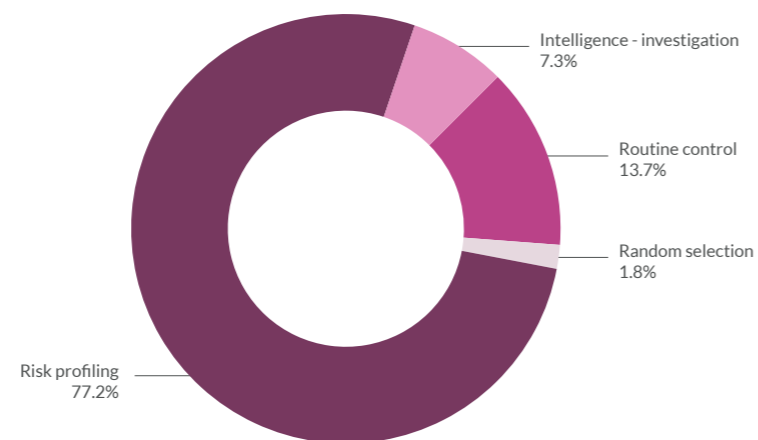
Figure 13 presents the Customs procedures associated with medical product seizures in 2024. Among the top 10 reporting countries for the top 10 medical categories, a total of 6,370 cases were recorded. Most of these involved import procedures (6,230 cases, 97.8%), followed by internal (63 cases, 1.0%), transit (50 cases, 0.8%), and export (27 cases, 0.4%).



Country-level breakdowns illustrate similar trends. The United States, Côte d'Ivoire, and Cameroon were the only three countries among the top 10 to report seizures across three or more Customs directions. The United States reported 4,316 import, 42 transit, and 1 export cases, indicating activity across three directions. Denmark reported exclusively import cases (1,046), while Saudi Arabia recorded 188 import and 1 export case. Bangladesh reported 181 import and 3 internal cases.

Figure 14: Number of medical product cases by detection method, 2024

Figure 14 illustrates the detection methods employed by Customs authorities in 2024 for medical product seizures.



The leading method was risk profiling, accounting for 5,702 out of 7,390 cases (77.2%), underscoring its pivotal role in targeting and enforcement efforts. Routine control ranked second, with 1,016 cases (13.7%), followed by intelligence and investigation, which contributed 539 cases (7.3%).

Combined, risk profiling and intelligence-led approaches accounted for more than 83% of all reported seizures, highlighting the strategic reliance on targeted, proactive enforcement mechanisms to combat the illicit trade in medicines.

Figure 15: Proportion of medical product seizures by type and country, 2024

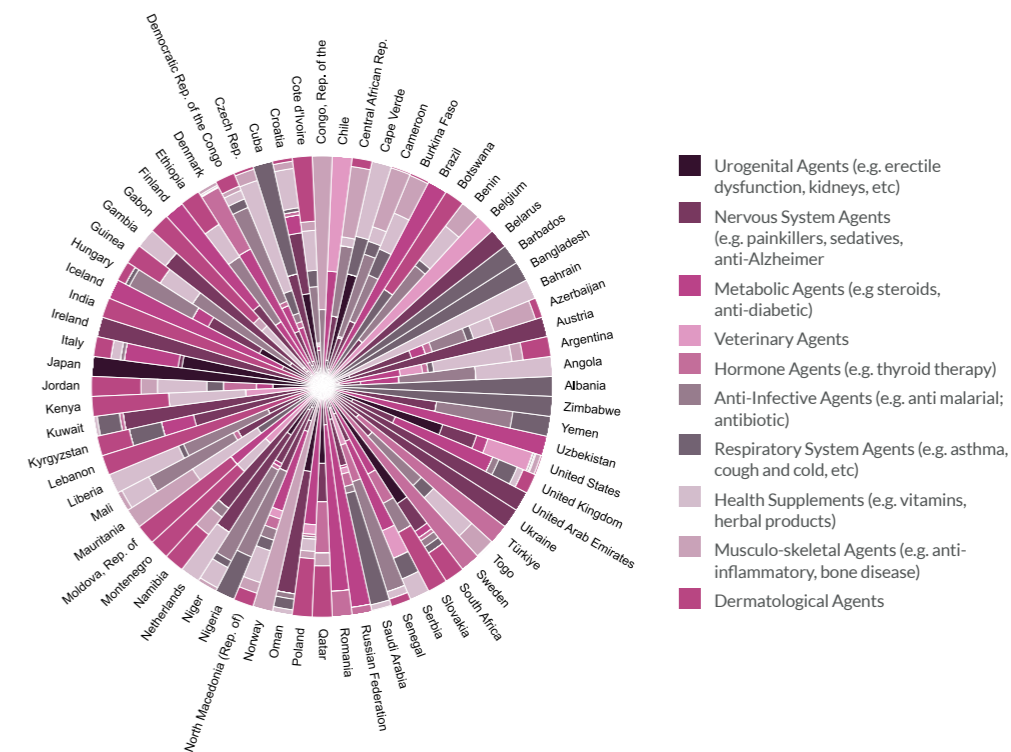


Figure 15 illustrates the proportion of reported seizures by the top 10 medical product types for each country in 2024.

Of 72 reporting countries, 41 countries recorded ten or more seizures, allowing for a more robust analysis of interdiction patterns across product categories.

The most frequently reported category was nervous system agents (e.g. painkillers, sedatives, anti-Alzheimer medicines), seized in 47 countries, underscoring their widespread circulation and enforcement significance. Notably, Côte d'Ivoire, the Republic of North Macedonia, and the United States were the only three countries to report seizures across all 10 product categories. In contrast, 16 countries reported seizures involving only a single product category.

Figure 16: Number of seizures and pieces by category and region, 2024

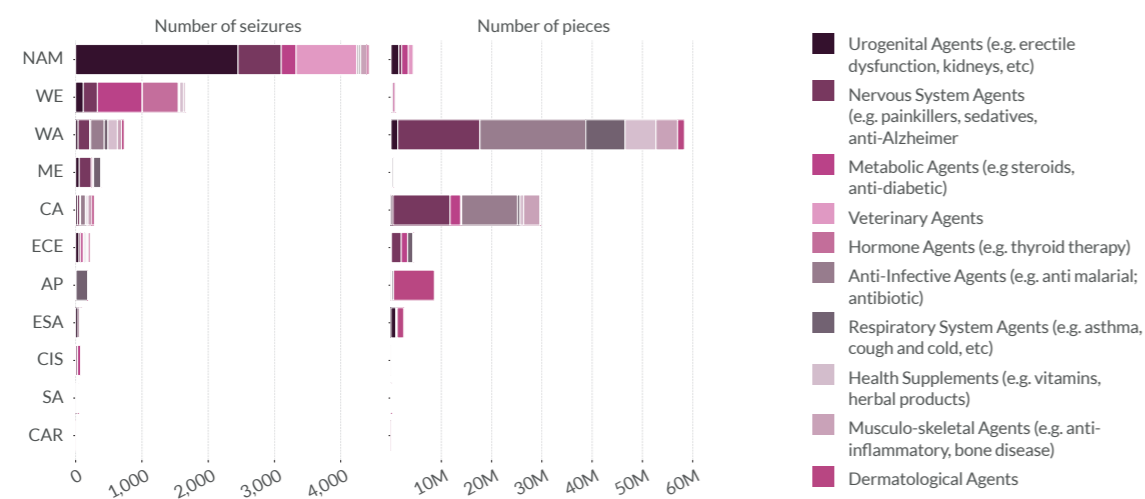


Figure 16 focuses on the regional distribution of seizures and quantities for the top 10 types of medical products seized in 2024.

The regions reporting the highest number of seizures were North America, Western Europe, and West Africa, which together accounted for 84.5% of all reported cases. In terms of quantities intercepted, the largest volumes were recorded in West Africa, Central Africa, and Asia-Pacific, representing 87.9% of the total.

The most frequently seized product types varied significantly across regions. In North America, seizures primarily involved urogenital agents (e.g. erectile dysfunction treatments, kidney-related medicines). In Western Europe, metabolic agents (e.g., steroids, anti-diabetic products) were the most common, while in West Africa, seizures were dominated by anti-infective agents (e.g., antimalarials, antibiotics).

Figure 17: Medical product trafficking flows by region, 2024

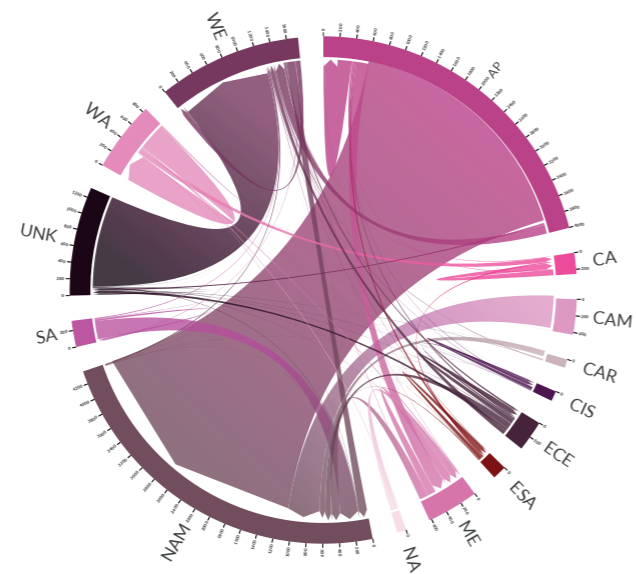


Figure 17 illustrates the directional trafficking flows of medical products between departure and destination regions in 2024.

The most frequently reported departure regions were Asia-Pacific, West Africa, and unknown locations, which together accounted for 5,523 reported flows. On the receiving end, the most common destination regions were North America, Western Europe, and the Middle East, which collectively received 6,243 flows. Altogether, flows either departing from or destined to one of these six key regions represented about 94.4% of all reported trafficking movements.

The most frequently reported individual route was from Asia-Pacific to North America, with 3,261 flows, followed by unknown locations to Western Europe (1,204 flows), Central America to North America (425 flows), West Africa to West Africa (364 flows), and South America to North America (239 flows).

These patterns underscore the dominance of transregional routes. At the same time, they also reflect the persistence of intra-regional flows, especially in West Africa, where regional demand and distribution networks appear to sustain localized trafficking.

Figure 18: Heat map of trafficking instances of medical products by country, 2024

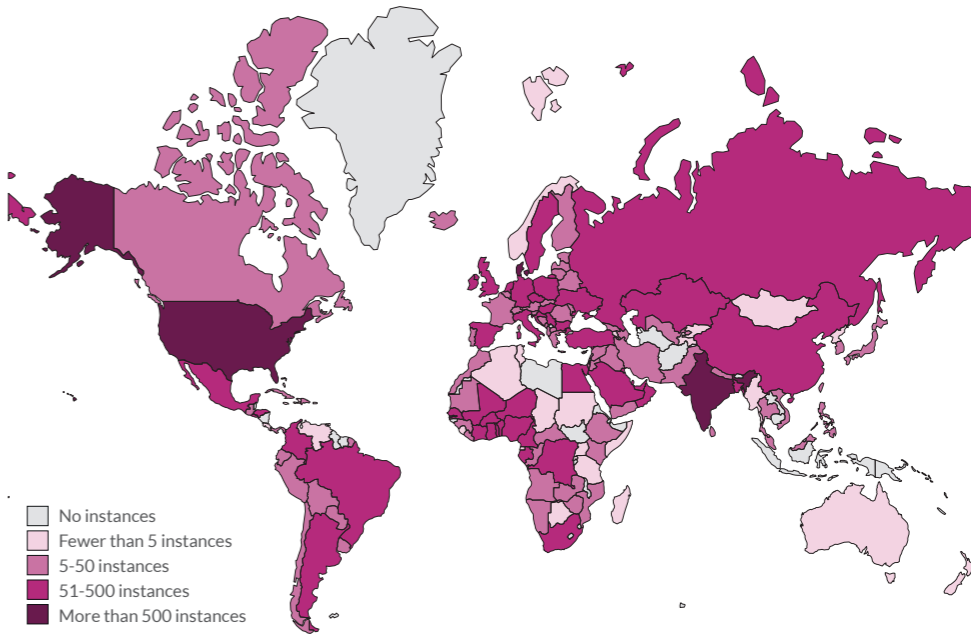


Figure 18 presents the geographical distribution of countries involved in reported trafficking cases during 2024, irrespective of whether they acted as departure, destination, or transit locations.

In total, 158 countries appeared in the data set, reflecting the broad global footprint of medical product trafficking. The countries most frequently involved were the United States, India, Denmark, and Italy, which together accounted for 22,900 recorded involvements. When compared to the number of reporting countries, a notable contrast emerges. While 74 countries submitted at least one report, 158 countries were identified in seizure records, highlighting the

broader picture that emerges from enforcement data, beyond the subset of active reporters.

A significant number of countries (30) appeared only once or twice in the data set. In contrast, 119 countries were involved in five (5) or more cases.

CONCLUSION

In 2024, Customs administrations continued to act as a front-line defence against the trafficking of counterfeit and illicit medical goods. Seizure data submitted by 65 Members for IPR-infringing products and 74 for medical goods shows that enforcement efforts remain strong, despite shifts in reporting patterns from year to year.

A key finding this year is the persistent role of e-commerce. Over 70% of IPR seizures and nearly 65% of medical product seizures were linked to e-commerce, implying the increasing reliance of traffickers and consumers on fast parcel delivery. These small and frequent shipments are harder to detect, requiring more targeted and data-driven enforcement strategies.

Looking forward, adapting enforcement to the digital age through stronger partnerships, smarter risk profiling, and better oversight of e-commerce flows will be essential to protecting health, safety, and legitimate trade.

Case study 1.
NAMIBIA CUSTOMS : NAMIBIA CUSTOMS SEIZED
GOODS RELATED TO IPR HEALTH AND SAFETY

A. IPR-related case

While conducting inspections at a local Customs bonded warehouse, Customs officials at Oshakati found 15 bags weighing 150 kg each (2,250 kg), said to contain counterfeit shoes of 176 pieces. After consultation with a legal representative of the rights holder, the shoes were confiscated.



B. Medicine

A passenger was stopped by Customs officials at Windhoek International Airport while travelling from Johannesburg, South Africa to Namibia. After her bags were searched, Customs found 7 boxes said to contain 266 sachets of Grand-PA, which is a nervous system agent said to control pain.



Case study 2.

NORTH MACEDONIA CUSTOMS: SKOPJE INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT AS A TRANSIT POINT FOR ILLEGAL TRAFFICKING OF BANNED ANABOLIC AGENTS

The Customs Administration of North Macedonia at Skopje International Airport prevented two attempts to transit larger quantities of anabolic agents that are on the World Anti-Doping Agency's list of prohibited substances.

In the first case from August 2024, a total of 120,000 tablets and 4,000 vials of anabolic agents, declared as supplements, were seized.

According to the documents accompanying the transit, the route was Singapore - North Macedonia (by air) - Czech Republic (by vehicle), but according to the statements of the driver and co-driver, they were hired by a Serbian company to carry out the transport from Skopje International Airport to an unknown location in Belgrade, with a cargo van owned by the driver.



In the second case from November 2024, a total of 100,750 tablets, ampoules and vials of anabolic agents, 9,600 health supplement capsules and 9,180 erectile dysfunction tablets were seized.

The route was India - Turkey - North Macedonia - United Arab Emirates (all by air). Criminal charges were filed against the re-export company from North Macedonia, as well as its director.



Photos courtesy of Bangladesh's National Board of Revenue (NBR).

3. Operations Action IPR A/P III

The regional IPR operation in the Asia-Pacific (A/P), Action IPR A/P III, was conducted in cooperation with the Regional Intelligence Liaison Office (RILO) from 20 to 31 May 2024, under the sponsorship of the Japan Customs Cooperation Fund (CCF Japan). The operation aimed at intercepting illegal and counterfeit products that could affect the health and safety of citizens. A total of 26 Customs administrations from the region showed support for the operation, and participating Members reported their seizures on the WCO's secure communication tool, CENcomm.

To give a general overview: during the operational phase, 399 seizures, comprising some 600,000 pieces and more than 42,000 kg of counterfeit products, were reported.

Among the different categories of illicit goods that were seized, toiletries/ cosmetics accounted for nearly 40% of total. The regular mail service was the most used conveyance method, accounting for nearly 60% of all cases, followed by air transport (23.8%). This may reflect the ongoing challenge that Customs administrations face of goods being traded via e-commerce and shipped in small packages. The WCO IPR Health and Safety Programme will continue to support Members in this domain.

This operation underscores the importance of risk management dedicated to IPR, international and regional cooperation, and vigilant enforcement in combating violations of IPR. During the operation, using risk profiling techniques, Bangladesh Customs flagged a suspicious shipment imported from Ningbo, China. Upon physical inspection, the consignment contained 1,150 refrigerant gas cylinders, weighing a total of 14,220 kg. A thorough examination of the consignment revealed discrepancies in the Customs declaration, product labelling, and trademark. Following an in-depth investigation, it was confirmed that the shipment contained counterfeit refrigerant gas. Counterfeit refrigerant gas poses significant environmental risks and can be a major public health and safety threat.





Customs administrations worldwide continue to play a pivotal role in monitoring international cross-border movements, ensuring all due taxes are collected. The ever-evolving landscape of global trade presents numerous challenges, particularly from transnational criminal organizations seeking to exploit weaknesses in Customs, revenue, and border controls to amass profits. Through regional and inter-regional collaboration Customs administrations continue to combat the activities of individuals and groups engaging in non-compliance.

5

REVENUE FRAUD AND SMUGGLING





Courtesy of Royal Customs and Excise Department (RCED) of Brunei Darussalam.

Revenue risks in this context involve the smuggling of highly taxed goods, and various forms of commercial fraud such as undervaluation, misclassification, misuse of origin and preferential duties, and drawback fraud.

INTRODUCTION

The primary goods subject to these taxes include alcohol and tobacco products. The illicit trade of excise goods poses significant challenges to governments' efforts to secure global supply chains and deprives them of essential revenues needed for public services. Increasingly sophisticated smuggling techniques and well-networked traffickers' complicate enforcement efforts.

In 2024, a total of 109 WCO Members reported approximately 85,000 cases involving the illicit trade of alcohol and tobacco products to the CEN database—an increase from over 38,000 to more than 46,000 tobacco-related cases and from 2,000 to nearly 2,900 alcohol-related cases reported by 90 Members in 2023. This reflects a 21% rise in tobacco cases and a 28% increase in alcohol cases, an overall year-on-year increase of 21% in total reported cases. Additionally, more than 55,000 individual seizure records were entered into the system in 2024, up from 48,000 in 2023.

Figure 1: Composition of cases by product type in beverages and tobacco

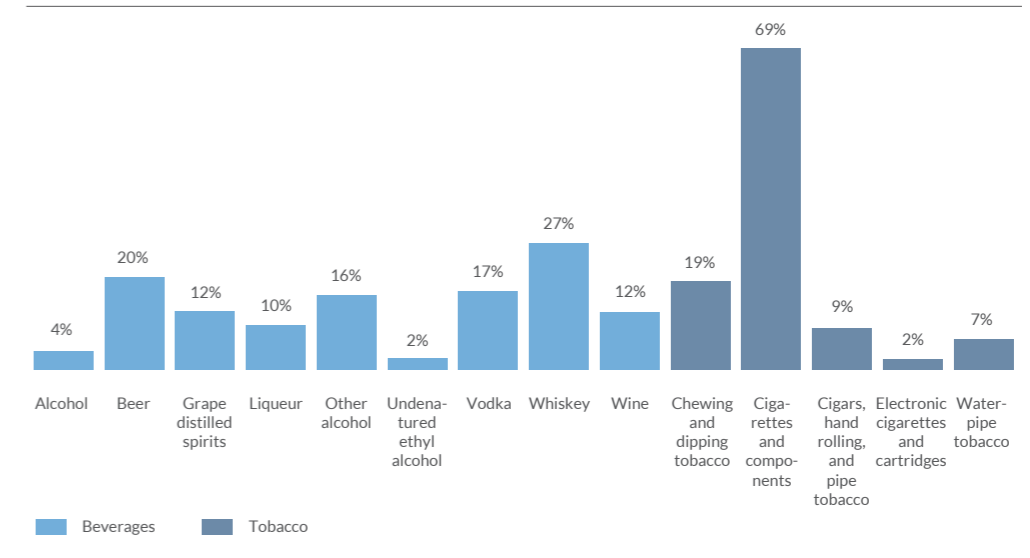


Figure 1 illustrates the breakdown of product types within each commodity category, offering a snapshot of the nature of the most frequently reported illicit goods, setting up the context for the subsequent chapters – Beverages and Tobacco – which delve deeper into the specific CEN data.

The data indicate a sharp escalation in illicit tobacco activity, with smuggling increasingly characterized by product diversification (e.g., cigarettes, chewing tobacco, e-cigarettes, water-pipe tobacco), component trafficking (e.g., paper, filters), and transregional flows. Alcohol seizures continued to expose fraud involving counterfeit labelling, undeclared brands, and concealment within mixed consignments – particularly spirits and high-duty beverages.

This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of these trends based on the CEN data, drawing comparisons between 2023 and 2024 to identify evolving patterns in trafficking methods, conveyance, concealment, and regional movements. The findings reinforce the need for continued operational vigilance, adaptation in enforcement strategies, and strengthened data sharing, both within the CEN as well as among other Customs administrations, to counter the increasingly agile and persistent nature of illicit trade in excise goods.

1. Beverages

1.1 Methodology: harmonization of quantities for analysis

To enable a consistent analysis and accurate comparison across beverage-related seizures, all reported quantities were harmonized into a single unit of measurement: **Litres**.

This process involved the following steps:

1.1.1 Standardization of units

Reported units were first standardized by correcting spelling and format variations (e.g., “carton”, “package”, “bottles,” “bouteilles,” “litres”, “pieces”) into two primary units:

- Bottles
- Litres

1.1.2 Category-based conversion from bottles to litres

For records reported in bottles, conversions were applied based on typical industry packaging sizes associated with the product category:

Alcohol Category	Assumed Volume per Bottle
Grape distilled spirits	0.75 litres
Liqueur	0.75 litres
Whisky	0.75 litres
Vodka	0.75 litres
Wine	0.75 litres
Beer	0.33 litres
Undenatured ethyl alcohol	1.00 litre
Alcohol	1.00 litre
Other alcohol*	0.75 litres (default)

* The “other alcohol” category includes a wide range of spirits and beverages that are either home-made, unlabelled, or uncommon in commercial trade, such as fruit brandies, absinthe, grappa, and local or unspecified spirits with varying alcohol content.



Courtesy of Singapore Customs.

1.2 Global overview of beverage seizures (2023–2024)

Figure 2: Heat map of alcohol products in 2023 and 2024

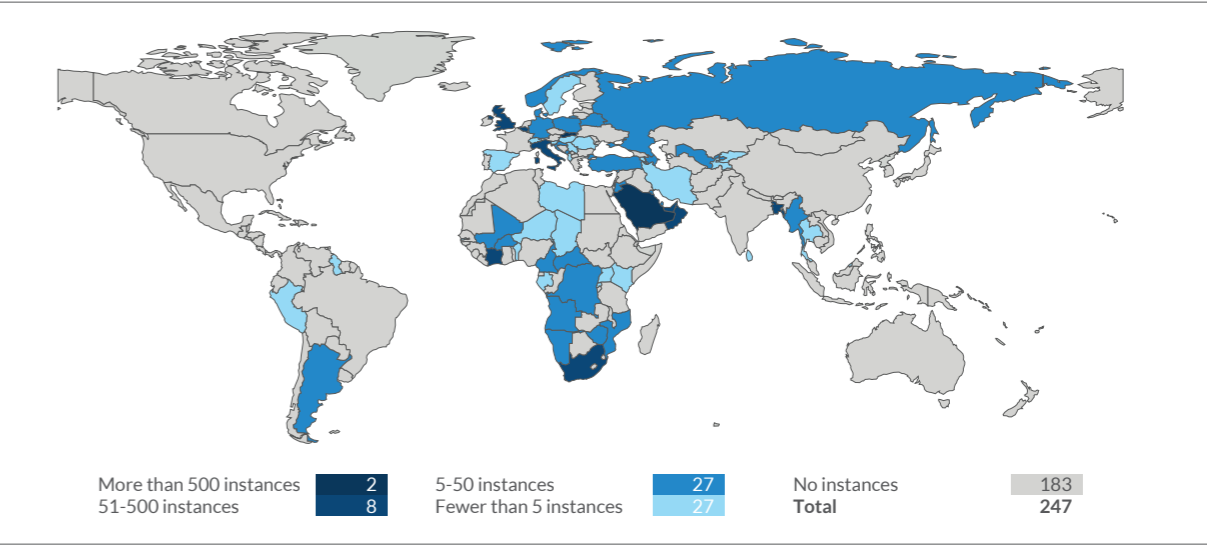


Figure 2 visualizes the global distribution of reported beverage-related seizure cases across WCO Members during the 2023–2024 period. A total of 4,747 cases were reported by 63 WCO Members.

Two WCO Members reported exceptionally high activity, each contributing over 500 instances, accounting for a staggering 2,696 cases combined – over half of the global total. Eight (8) Members reported between 51 and 500 cases, together contributing 1,453 seizures.

The remaining contributions came from:

- 27 Members with five (5) to 50 cases (545 seizures),
- 29 Members with fewer than five cases (53 seizures).

Despite global connectivity and the potential for cross-border flows, a large majority of countries reported no seizures involving alcoholic beverages during this period. While this may reflect limited illicit activity in some regions, it may also suggest challenges in detection, reporting mechanisms, or prioritization of enforcement resources.

Figure 3: Seizures by region and product category

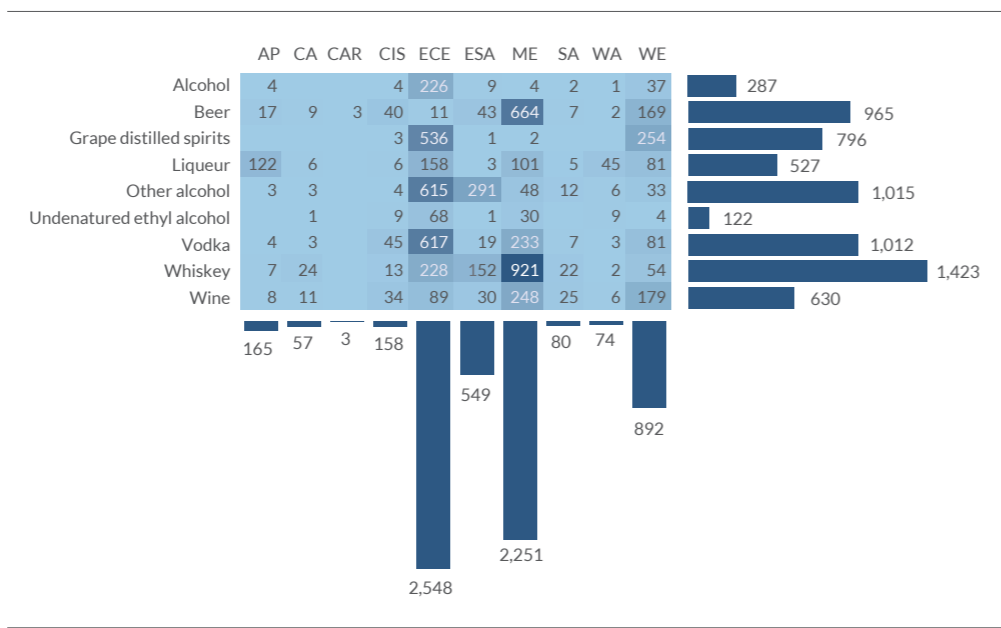


Figure 3 offers a regional insight into alcohol-related seizures, showing the relevance of geographic and product-specific patterns that shaped enforcement activity during 2023–2024.

Several regions stood out:

- Eastern and Central Europe (ECE) recorded the highest number of seizures overall (2,548), with significant contributions across multiple product types: whisky (228 cases), vodka (617 cases), and other alcohol (615 cases). This suggests diversified trafficking patterns and active enforcement across a wide range of alcoholic products.
- The Middle East (ME) followed with 2,251 cases, driven heavily by whisky (921 cases) and beer (664 cases). These numbers indicate either high consumer demand for these products, or a strong Customs detection capacity at key border points.
- West Africa (WA) posted 892 seizures, primarily of wine (179 cases) and whisky (164 cases), pointing to the region's exposure to illicit flows of bottled spirits and potentially repackaged wines.
- South America (SA) reported 880 cases, with a mix including wine (179 cases), whisky (164 cases), and vodka (233 cases). This region stands out for its diverse product seizures, reflecting a broad market demand and multi-directional flows.
- East and Southern Africa (ESA), although lower in total count (549 cases), showed a sharp focus on whisky (152 cases), beer (43 cases), and other alcohol (291 cases).
- Other regions such as the Asia-Pacific (AP), Central America (CA), and the Caribbean (CAR) reported fewer cases, but displayed consistent interception of beer, liqueur, and wine.

Case study 1. ILLEGAL PRODUCTION OF ALCOHOL PRODUCTS

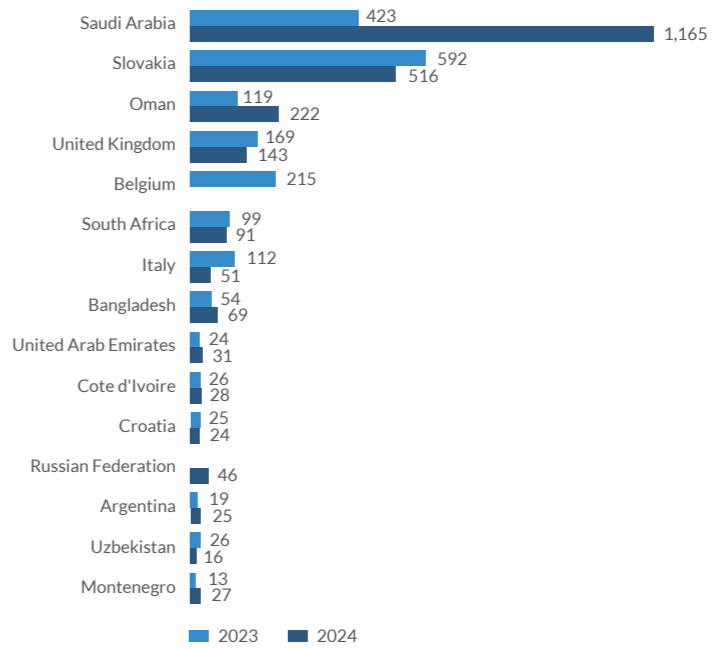
On 23 January 2024, officers of Uzbekistan Customs detained a citizen in whose warehouse 6,255 litres of illegally produced alcoholic beverages with counterfeit excise stamps were stored, as well as 848 packs of tobacco products (CEN ID1760631).



Courtesy of State Customs Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

Figure 4: 15 countries with high seizures in 2023 and 2024

Figure 4 highlights the top 15 WCO Members reporting the highest number of alcoholic beverage seizures during 2023–2024. These Members collectively accounted for 4,370 cases, which represents an overwhelming 92% of the global total of 4,746 cases.



This level of concentration reveals a highly asymmetric enforcement landscape:

- A small group of Members is disproportionately driving global seizure statistics.
- The remaining 8% of cases were dispersed across over 40 other reporting Members.

Saudi Arabia and Slovakia emerged as the two most active enforcement zones. Saudi Arabia alone reported 1,165 cases, followed by Slovakia with 592 – making them pivotal in regional interdiction efforts.

The presence of countries from various regions – including the Middle East, Europe, Africa, and Asia – also suggests a globalized challenge, albeit with a few seizure hotspots.

Overall, the seizure data offers valuable insight into Customs’ efforts to combat the illicit trade in alcoholic beverages. However, the uneven distribution of reporting and indications of potential underreporting highlight the need to enhance the quality of data by encouraging WCO Members to provide their countries’ enforcement cases in the CEN database, increase Member participation, and promote integrated inter-agency reporting to enable more robust analysis and informed enforcement strategies.

1.3 Alcohol categories and conveyance methods

Figure 5: Number of seizures and quantity by category in 2023 and 2024

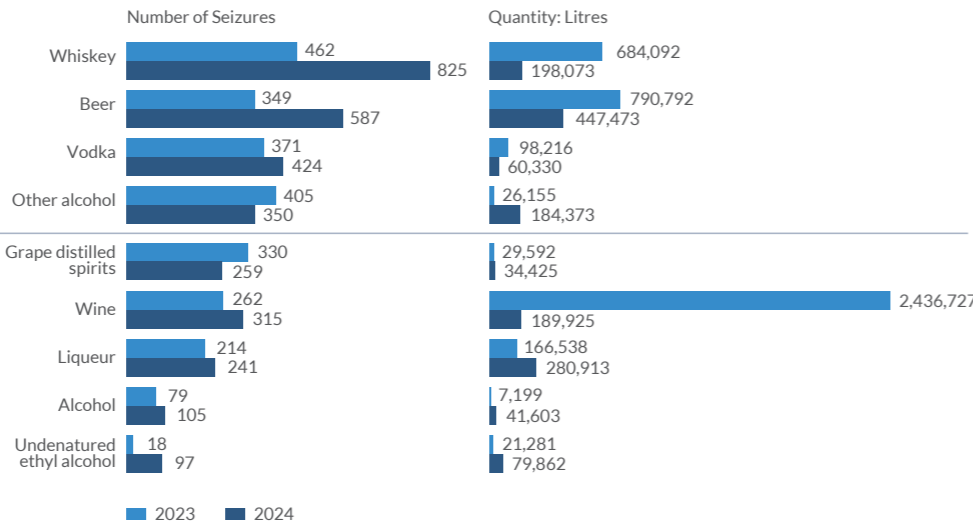


Figure 5 provides a comparative breakdown of the number of seizures and reported quantities, in litres, across major alcoholic beverage categories over 2023 and 2024.

Whisky and beer remain the most frequently intercepted commodities by case count, with whisky topping the list at 1,287 seizures over two years. However, in terms of volume, wine emerged as the most significant category in 2024, with a staggering 2.4 million litres seized in a single year.

A breakdown of other categories indicates:

- Vodka and other alcohol maintained consistent seizure numbers, while liqueur saw nearly equal activity across both years, totalling over 455,000 litres.
- Undenatured ethyl alcohol, though lower in case numbers, posted a notable spike in 2024, with nearly 80,000 litres seized – more than triple the 2023 quantity, while grape distilled spirits showed moderate activity.

Case study 2.
DISMANTLING AN ILLEGAL PRODUCTION WORKSHOP

An illegal workshop for producing counterfeit alcoholic beverages was identified, where 1,150.2 liters of alcoholic beverages, 920 liters of ethyl alcohol, 6,510 units of corks, 1,796 units of counterfeit excise stamps, 6,500 counterfeit labels, as well as other items for packaging, bottling, and applying labels to alcoholic beverages were also seized (CEN ID 1760625)



Courtesy of
State Customs
Committee of
the Republic of
Uzbekistan.

Figure 6: Alcohol seizure cases by conveyance

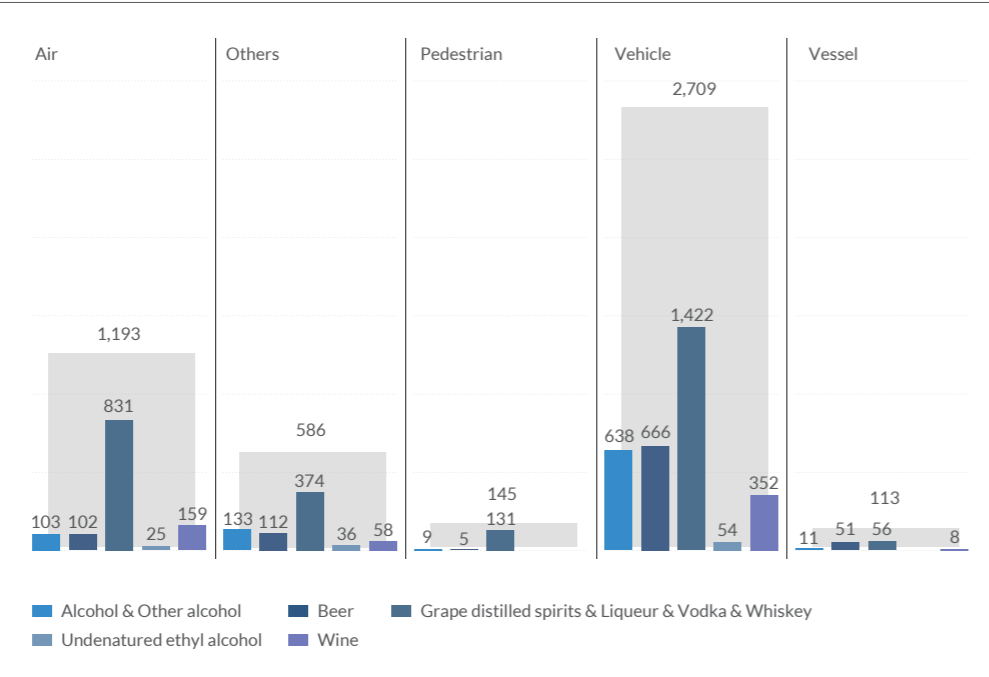


Figure 6 dissects seizure patterns by conveyance method and product category, revealing how different alcoholic beverages are trafficked across borders. It underscores that illicit flows are closely linked to the mode of transport – offering key intelligence for targeted enforcement.

Vehicles dominate the landscape, accounting for over 2,700 cases, with a large share linked to:

- Spirits, liqueurs, vodka, and whisky (1,422 cases),
- Beer (666 cases), and
- Other alcohol types (638 cases), indicating a consistent risk of unconventional alcohol product smuggling.

Air transport followed with 1,193 seizures, often involving higher-value or lower-volume goods such as spirits and wine.

The ‘other’ category – which includes express courier, regular mail, and rail transport – accounted for 586 cases. Notably, not many seizures were recorded via rail, which might suggest a lack of illicit alcohol flows through this method. This absence is particularly interesting given the logistical advantages that rail offers for larger consignments.

Vessels, while involved in fewer cases (113 total), were notable for wine seizures (56 cases), and finally, pedestrian crossings, although marginal (145 cases), were mainly associated with spirits.

This conveyance-level breakdown shows Customs administrations profiling and control strategies by aligning resources with risk-prone routes and products. The absence of rail seizures invites further investigation into potential gaps or untapped vulnerabilities in this domain.

Case study 3. OPERATION BY THE TREVISO GUARDIA DI FINANZA



Illicit ethanol trafficking and clandestine production of spirits dismantled – 85,000 litres of alcohol seized

In a complex investigation coordinated by the Public Prosecutor’s office of Udine, the Guardia di Finanza (GdF) dismantled a large criminal network involved in the illicit trafficking of ethanol, destined for the illegal production of spirits in clandestine laboratories located across Italy. The investigation, which unfolded between 2022 and 2024, revealed the smuggling of over one million litres of ethanol, mostly imported from Poland, Slovenia, and Serbia.

The criminal scheme was designed to circumvent Customs controls by misdeclaring the ethanol as disinfectant or cleaning liquid upon importation. This allowed the network to avoid paying excise duties (over €10 per litre) and VAT, resulting in an estimated tax evasion of €11.5 million.

The case began in January 2023, when a routine roadside check at the Venezia Est motorway toll gate uncovered a suspicious shipment of 26,000 litres of so-called disinfectant. This prompted further investigations and led to additional seizures and a broader operation, which involved surveillance, phone record analysis, property searches, and international cooperation – especially with Polish authorities.

Three clandestine laboratories were eventually discovered in Italy, all equipped with professional bottling and labelling machinery. In one location, officers caught five individuals in the act of bottling and packaging alcoholic products. In another, investigators found a chemical treatment process under way to purify and clarify the alcohol.

The smuggled ethanol was processed into various spirits – including grappa, gin, whisky, and limoncello – then distributed with counterfeit labels and fake excise stamps. Chemical analysis by the Customs Laboratory and the Italian National Institute of Health confirmed that the presence of harmful substances such as ethylene glycol, isopropyl alcohol, and methanol, exceeded legal limits and posed a significant public health risk.

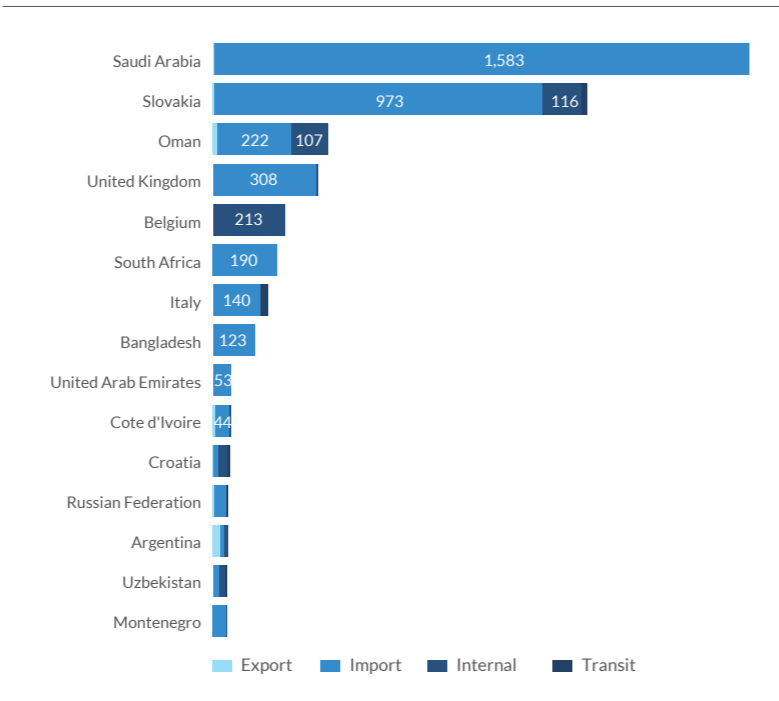
The operation resulted in the seizure of 85,000 litres of alcohol, two lorries, three illicit factories, and materials used for the production and distribution of the fake products. Twelve shell companies were also identified as part of the logistics and cover-up operations, with addresses spanning several Italian regions.

Through the close cooperation between Italy’s two Customs authorities – the Italian Customs Authority (Agenzia delle Dogane e dei Monopoli), which provided technical expertise, and the Guardia di Finanza, which led the investigative work – together with the support of the State Mint and Printing Institute and national health authorities, a lucrative and dangerous fraud scheme was successfully dismantled. This case not only highlights the significant fiscal and commercial impact of such criminal activities, but also draws attention to the serious health risks posed to consumers.

Photo Credit: courtesy of the Guardia di Finanza/Italian Customs Authority.

Figure 7 presents the top 15 WCO Members ranked by the direction of reported alcoholic beverage seizures – categorized as import, export, transit, or internal.

Figure 7: High-case countries by direction



It is evident that the majority of seizures were recorded upon import, underscoring Customs' front-line role in intercepting illicit flows as they cross into national territory.

Leading this trend:

- Saudi Arabia reported the highest number of import seizures (1,583 cases), suggesting a sustained and targeted enforcement effort at inbound entry points, likely driven by domestic restrictions on alcohol and high smuggling incentives.
- Slovakia recorded 973 import cases, with an additional 116 in transit, pointing to its geographical role as both a destination and corridor for alcohol smuggling within Europe.

Other key observations include:

- Belgium and Italy reported significant numbers of internal seizures (213 and 19 cases, respectively), indicating robust inland enforcement – perhaps reflecting operations targeting distribution networks or post-border movements.
- Oman, Bangladesh, and the United Arab Emirates reported only import cases, reinforcing their profile as destination markets.
- Smaller but notable activity across countries such as Côte d'Ivoire, Argentina, and Croatia shows a mix of directions, including transit and internal flows, suggesting the complexity of cross-border trafficking routes and enforcement detection at multiple levels.

1.4 Concealment and regional flow

Figure 8: Concealment and detection method

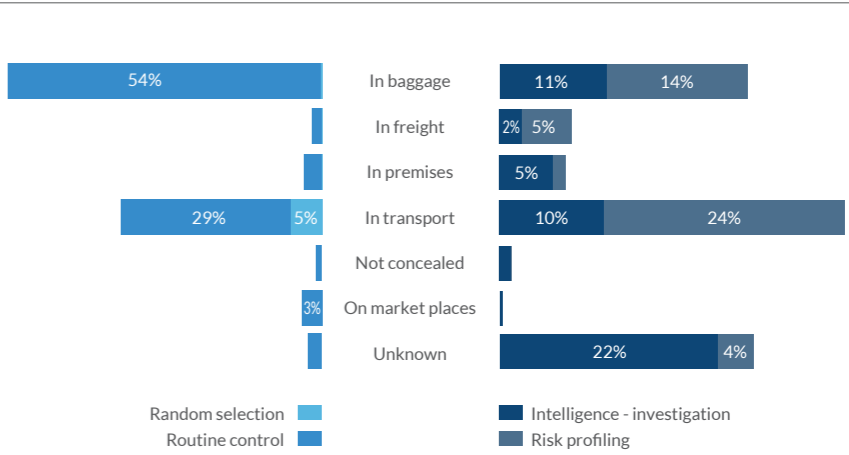


Figure 8 provides an overview of how alcoholic products were concealed during smuggling attempts, alongside the detection methods used by Customs and enforcement agencies. The data illustrates both the adaptability of traffickers and the tactical decisions made by front-line officers in uncovering these illicit flows.

Concealment patterns:

- In transport (e.g., in vehicles) was the most common concealment method, accounting for over one-third of all cases (34%), often making use of hidden compartments or disguised loads.
- In baggage made up 25% of the total, mostly linked to air travellers or pedestrian smuggling attempts.
- On market premises and freight consignments saw minimal concealment activity, suggesting that bulk alcohol flows are more likely moved via informal or unregulated routes than through commercial freight systems.
- A non-negligible share of cases (26%) fell into the 'Unknown' category – highlighting a gap in case-level reporting or the absence of detailed concealment records.

Detection methods:

- Routine control remains the most successful enforcement technique, contributing to 54% of all detections. This emphasizes the ongoing value of regular inspections and a Customs presence at entry points and checkpoints.
- Risk profiling (29%) and intelligence-led operations (5%) combined to form a critical secondary line of defence – indicating the importance of data-driven targeting, supported by inter-agency collaboration and international intelligence sharing.
- Methods like random selection, mail screening, and market surveillance were responsible for a negligible number of detections, reinforcing the need to prioritize strategic inspections over chance encounters.
- Interestingly, very few cases were recovered at sea, from marketplaces, or through express courier and mail channels. This may reflect either the limited use of these channels for alcohol smuggling or potential underdetection due to resource or jurisdictional constraints.

The analysis suggests that while concealment in vehicles and baggage remains prevalent, it is the systematic, routine, and risk-informed controls that consistently generate successful interdictions. Further investment in case detail reporting – particularly regarding concealment types – would significantly enhance analytical capacity and risk targeting in the future.

Figure 9: Regional flow of alcohol products

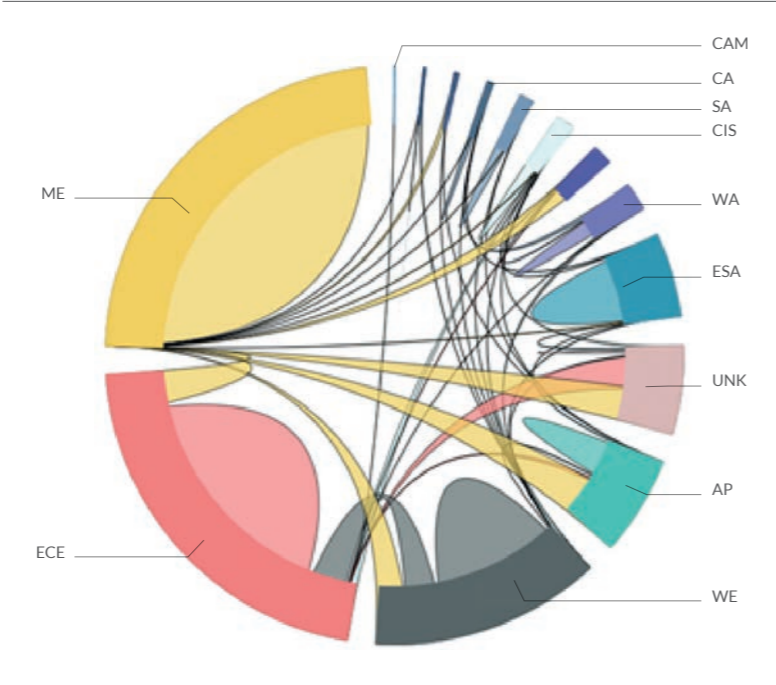


Figure 9 visualizes the global movement of seized alcoholic beverages, revealing both cross-regional trade flows and significant intraregional smuggling dynamics.

The data shows that the Middle East (ME) was not only a major destination but also a significant origin, with 1,393 cases involving flows within the region itself. This points to a persistent cycle of intraregional supply and redistribution – likely reflecting both strong local demand and deeply embedded trafficking networks.

Eastern and Central Europe (ECE) followed with 967 intraregional cases, highlighting the role of internal distribution routes and complex supply chains that do not necessarily cross national borders.

Western Europe (WE) reported 528 cases of internal movement, while East and Southern Africa (ESA) recorded 272 intraregional cases. Both regions showed that a substantial portion of illicit alcohol activity remains regionally contained.

The most prominent cross-regional flows included:

- 164 cases from the Asia-Pacific (AP) to the Middle East,
- 158 cases from ECE to WE, and
- multiple flows from the ME into ESA and WA, reinforcing the Middle East’s dual role as both consumer and supplier.

The global illicit trade in alcoholic beverages remains complex, adaptive, and unevenly distributed – driven by demand dynamics, enforcement disparities, and a variety of smuggling methods. From high-volume maritime wine shipments to concealed spirits in baggage or vehicles, the patterns observed underscore the need for Customs administrations to stay agile, data-informed, and strategically aligned. For front-line officers, the data reinforces the importance of routine control and risk profiling, especially along land borders and air travel corridors where most interceptions occurred.

The volume of intraregional trafficking serves as a reminder that illicit trade involves multiple layers, including deeply entrenched local patterns. This reality confirms the need for coordinated regional enforcement, stronger intraregional intelligence exchange, and enhanced visibility in the CEN system to effectively map and disrupt these flows.

2. Tobacco

2.1 Methodology: harmonization of tobacco seizure data

To ensure consistency and analytical clarity, all reported quantities related to tobacco seizures were harmonized into two standardized units of measurement: **pieces** and **kilograms (kg)**. This enabled direct comparison across diverse product types, packaging formats, and reporting practices.

2.1.1 Unit standardization

All reported units were cleaned and standardized by correcting variations in spelling, formatting, and language. Units were mapped into a limited set of logical categories:

- pieces (e.g., sticks, units, cartridges)
- packs (e.g., packets, cajetillas)
- carton (e.g., boxes, CTN, master cases)
- litres (e.g., ml, millilitres – for e-cigarette liquids)
- kg (e.g., kilograms, kilos)
- tonnes, pouch, gros, bag, lot, and pallet

2.1.2 Classification of tobacco goods

Each item was classified into one of the following product categories based on their respective description:

- Chewing and dipping tobacco
- Hand-rolling and pipe tobacco
- Water-pipe tobacco
- Electronic cigarettes and cartridges
- Cigars, cheroots
- Smoking tobacco
- Raw tobacco
- Tobacco components (e.g. papers, filters)
- Other

This allowed more precise assumptions during the conversion process.

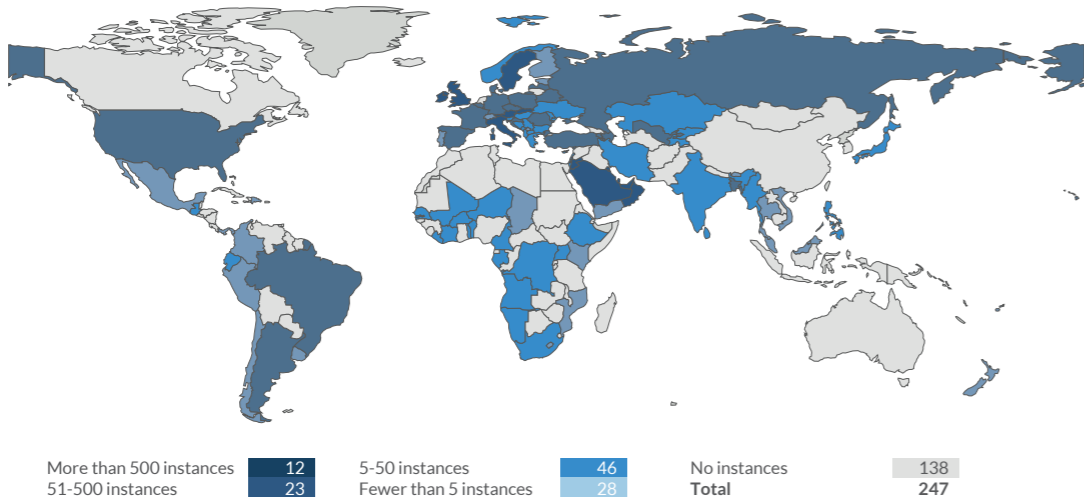
2.1.3 Standardized conversion to final units

Harmonized Unit	Converted To	Assumed Conversion
pieces	Pieces	1:1
packs	Pieces	1 pack = 20 pieces
cartons	Pieces	1 carton = 200 pieces
gros	Pieces	1 gros = 144 pieces
pouches	Kg	1 pouch = 0.05 kg
litres	Kg	1 litre = 1 kg
bags	Kg	1 bag = 1.5 kg
lots	Kg	1 lot = 10 kg
pallets	Kg	1 pallet = 300 kg
tonnes	Kg	1 tonne = 1,000 kg

2.2 Global overview of tobacco seizures (2023–2024)

In the reporting period from 2023 to 2024, 109 WCO Members submitted data on tobacco seizures, amounting to approximately 85,000 cases. These cases involved an estimated 7.6 billion individual cigarette sticks and over 26,880 tonnes (kg) of other tobacco products, highlighting the persistent scale of illicit tobacco trade globally.

Figure 10: Heat map of tobacco cases for 2023 and 2024



Courtesy of Burkina Faso Directorate General of Customs.

As illustrated in Figure 10, the geographical spread of tobacco-related seizures reflects a broad enforcement footprint, with reporting received from every WCO region.

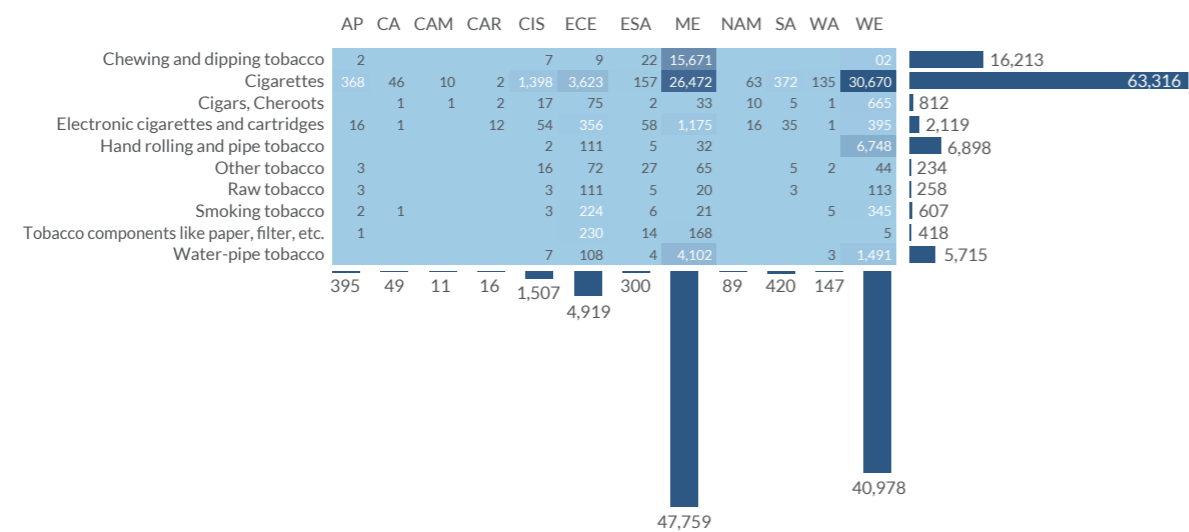
Notably, twelve WCO Members each reported over 500 seizure instances, collectively accounting for the vast majority of all reported cases (approximately 94%). These high-reporting Members are found in multiple regions, including the Americas, Europe, Asia, and Africa, underscoring the transregional nature of illicit tobacco flows.

A further 23 Members reported between 51 and 500 cases, while 46 Members submitted between five (5) and 50 cases. Twenty-eight Members reported fewer than five (5) cases, and 77 WCO Members did not report any tobacco-related seizures during the reporting period.

The concentration of cases in specific Members and regions suggests established smuggling corridors, enforcement focus areas, or a combination of both. For example, significant reporting from countries in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the Southern Cone of South America may point to regional production hubs or transit routes. In Africa, reports were more evenly spread, with notable contributions from Members in Southern and Western Africa.

This global footprint of enforcement activity demonstrates continued commitment by Customs administrations to combating the illicit tobacco trade. However, the disparity in reporting levels between Members also highlights the need for enhanced data sharing, capacity building, and operational coordination – particularly in regions currently underrepresented in seizure data. As tobacco continues to be a major source of revenue loss and a vector for organized criminal activity, sustained vigilance and targeted interventions remain essential.

Figure 11: Tobacco cases by region and product type



The Middle East stood out with the highest total number of cases (47,759), followed by Western Europe (40,978) and Eastern and Central Europe (4,919).

These regions collectively accounted for nearly 95% of all reported seizures, pointing to both sustained enforcement efforts and likely high trafficking volumes.

The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), South America (SA), and Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA) showed moderate level of reporting. By contrast, the Asia-Pacific (AP), Central America (CAM), and Caribbean (CAR) regions registered limited activity, despite consistent reporting from these regions.

Cigarettes remain the dominant product type involved in illicit trade, with over 63,000 cases. Significant cigarette seizures were recorded in nearly all regions, with particular spikes in the Middle East (26,472 cases), Western Europe (30,670), and Eastern and Central Europe (3,623). A secondary concentration of seizures appeared in chewing and dipping tobacco, almost exclusively due to a massive figure from the Middle East (15,671 cases). This could reflect both regional consumption patterns and the existence of dedicated supply chains distinct from cigarette trafficking. Other products such as electronic cigarettes and cartridges (2,119 total), hand-rolling and pipe tobacco (6,898), and water-pipe tobacco (5,715) showed smaller but consistent reporting across multiple regions.



Case study 4.
CONTRABAND CIGARETTES CONCEALED
UNDER GARDEN SOIL

The National Revenue Administration of Poland (NRA) and the Polish Border Guard seized 337,400 cigarettes concealed under garden soil in the floor of a lorry. The seizure took place in Olsztynek, Poland.

The departure point of the route was Salcininkai, Lithuania. The destination point of the route was Braniewo, Poland.

In April 2024, NRA Customs officers, in cooperation with officers from the Polish Border Guard, stopped a lorry with Lithuanian registration plates on an expressway. The vehicle was selected for inspection on the basis of risk profiling.

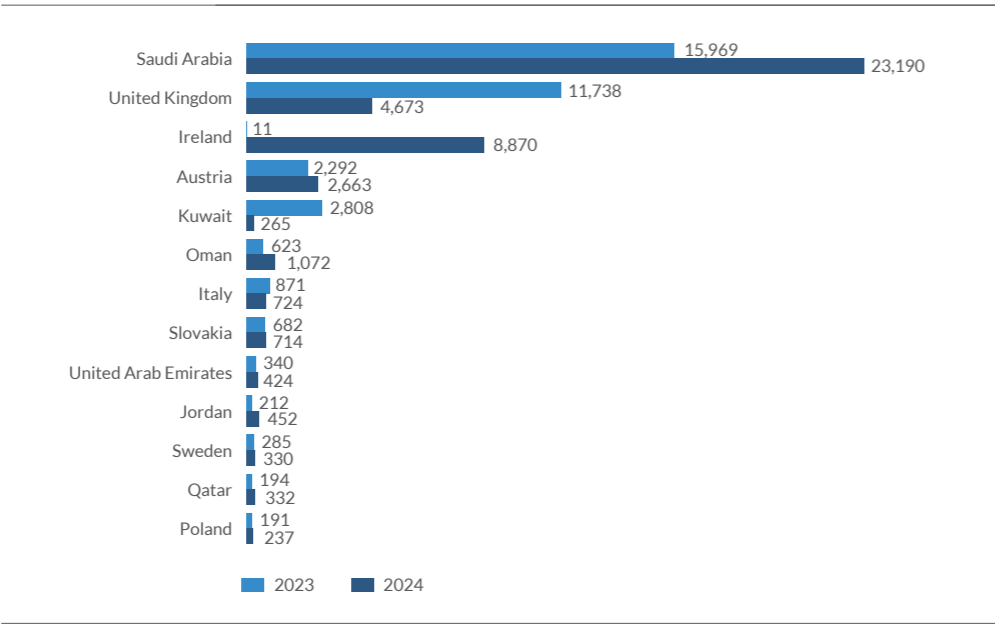
According to the transport documents, the vehicle was loaded with 22 tonnes of garden soil. After spotting irregularities in the mobile X-ray machine images of the lorry, the officers decided to conduct an additional meticulous search of the lorry's trailer and cargo at the Customs office.

During an extensive investigation carried out with the help of an X-ray scanner, a sniffer dog and a volunteer Fire Brigade, Customs officers discovered 337,000 cigarettes without Polish excise stamps hidden under garden soil in the floor of the lorry.

The loss to the state budget due to unpaid Customs and tax obligations was estimated at over 450,000 PLN (approx. 100,000 euro). (CEN ID: PL0024758)

Courtesy of The National Revenue Administration of Poland.

Figure 12: Ten WCO Members reporting high tobacco product cases in 2023 and 2024



In 2024, the number of reported tobacco-related cases rose markedly to 46,320, reflecting a 21% increase from the 38,315 cases reported in 2023. This notable uptick may be attributed to a combination of enhanced enforcement efforts, increased trafficking activity, or improved reporting mechanisms.

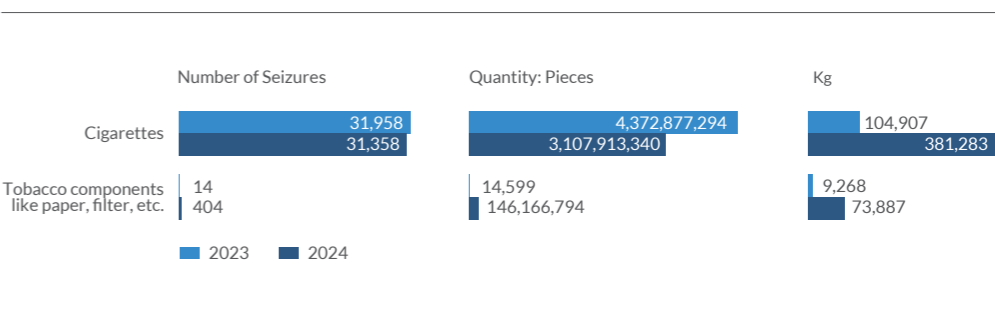
A small group of WCO Members continues to drive the bulk of global seizure reporting. Just 13 countries accounted for around 85% of all cases reported over the two-year period, leaving 15% spread across the remaining reporting Members.

Among these, Saudi Arabia reported the highest volume, with over 39,000 cases across the two years – surging from 15,969 in 2023 to 23,190 in 2024. The United Kingdom and Ireland also ranked among the most active, together contributing more than 25,000 cases. Austria, Kuwait, Oman, and Italy followed, each with consistent reporting above 2,000 cases, suggesting sustained interdiction efforts.

The presence of multiple Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries – such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, the UAE, Qatar, and Jordan – within the top reporting group highlights the Middle East’s central role in the tobacco enforcement landscape. Meanwhile, contributions from European countries suggest ongoing engagement in tackling illicit trade within or near major consumer markets.

2.3 Tobacco products and conveyance method

Figure 13: Cigarettes and their components

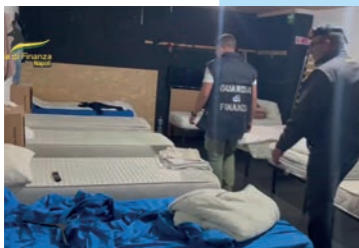


Cigarettes remained the most seized tobacco product across both years, with a consistently high number of cases: 31,958 in 2023 and 31,358 in 2024. While the number of seizures remained stable, the quantity of seized sticks declined in 2024 – dropping from 4.37 billion pieces in 2023 to 3.1 billion in 2024, a 29% decrease.

Interestingly, this decline in pieces count was accompanied by a substantial increase in weight, with seizures rising from 104,907 kg in 2023 to 381,283 kg in 2024. This suggests that although fewer individual cigarettes were intercepted, the shipments were likely bulkier or more concentrated – perhaps reflecting a shift towards less fragmented smuggling consignments.

An important yet often overlooked category – cigarette components such as paper, filters, and other manufacturing materials – also featured in the data. Although smaller in absolute volume, seizures of these components increased notably. In 2024, authorities intercepted 146 million items of such materials (up from just 14,599 in 2023), alongside 73,887 kg, up from 9,268 kg the previous year.

These changes point to a possible shift in trafficking tactics, where criminal groups may be importing components separately for local assembly of illicit cigarettes (as was indicated in Case study 2), thereby circumventing detection thresholds or import restrictions. The rise in seizures of both finished products and components suggests a dual-layered supply chain that Customs must monitor closely.



Courtesy of
the Guardia di
Finanza/Italian
Customs Authority.

Case study 5. SEIZURE OF A CLANDESTINE CIGARETTE MANUFACTURING PLANT

Italy's Guardia di Finanza, supported by the Economic and Financial Police Unit of Benevento, uncovered a large-scale illicit cigarette manufacturing operation in that city. The intervention, part of a broader enforcement framework to combat the smuggling of processed tobacco products, led to the arrest of several individuals and the seizure of approximately 27 tonnes of shredded tobacco ready for illegal commercialization.

During the operation, officers discovered a fully functioning clandestine facility equipped with three production machines, hundreds of thousands of semi-finished components (filters, bobbins, foil, empty packets), and more than five million counterfeit labels. The factory had all the features of an industrial production site, including living quarters and a rest area designed to enable non-stop operations. Additionally, over 75 kg of finished cigarettes were seized, packaged and branded with counterfeit versions of popular trademarks including "Marlboro Rosse," "Marlboro Gold," "Marlboro Warning Bionde," "Marlboro Warning Rosse," and "Rothmans Blu." The illicit profits from this operation were estimated to exceed €3 million.

This operation exemplifies the increasing technical complexity of tobacco-related criminal activity in Europe. The case reflects not only the threat to fiscal revenues and public health but also the need for continued vigilance against transnational organized crime networks involved in the illicit tobacco trade.

Figure 14: Seizure trends of cigarettes and their components by region

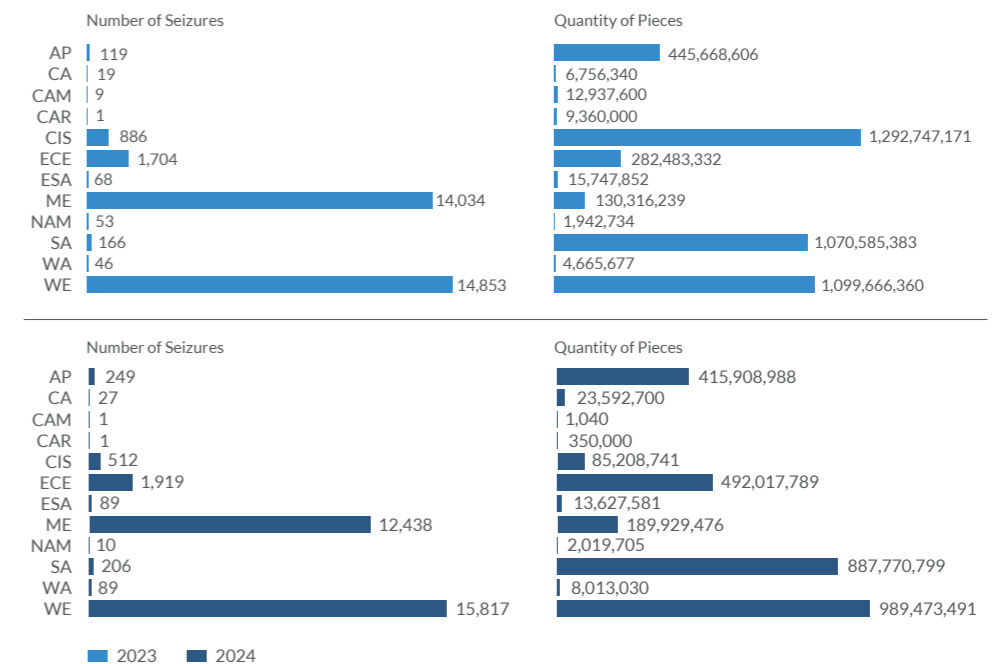


Figure 14 offers a close look at quantity trends by region, revealing significant shifts in the scale and nature of intercepted shipments.

The most dramatic changes occurred in Eastern and Central Europe (ECE), where seized cigarette volumes surged from 282 million sticks in 2023 to nearly 492 million in 2024 – a 74% increase. Furthermore, tobacco component seizures persisted in the region, potentially indicating a strongly growing interdiction of local assembly operations or precursors feeding illicit manufacturing.

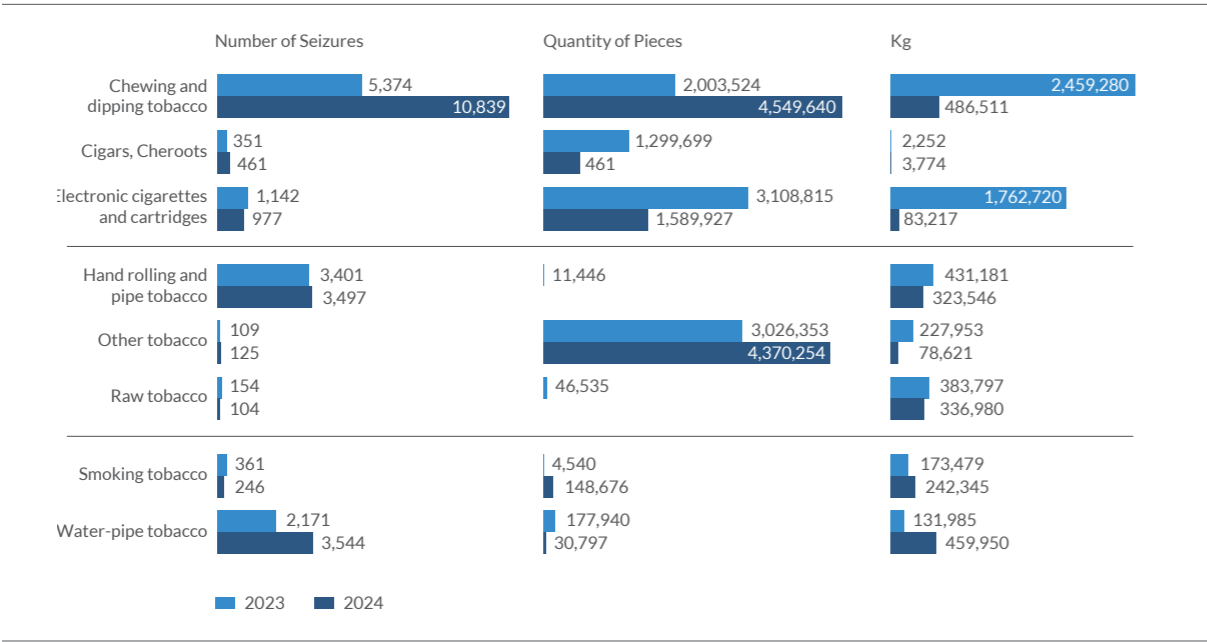
The Middle East (ME) also saw cigarette quantities grow from 130 million to 190 million sticks, indicating a 46% rise. This aligns with the region's continued standing as a primary destination for illicit tobacco, as seen in other analyses.

In Central America (CA), seizures jumped from 6.8 million to 23.6 million pieces, representing a 249% increase – a potential signal that the region is becoming more active as either a transit corridor or an emerging market.

West Africa (WA) also recorded an increase in seized cigarette volumes, growing by over 70% from 4.7 million to 8 million pieces. Though absolute numbers remain modest, the trend is worth monitoring.

These developments reveal that behind seemingly flat seizure counts, the scale and complexity of intercepted shipments are evolving rapidly. In some regions, seizures are becoming larger, more concentrated, or more diversified, especially when components are factored in.

Figure 15: Seizures of tobacco products beyond cigarettes



While cigarettes continue to dominate seizure volumes, the data from 2023 and 2024 reveal an increasingly diverse profile of illicit tobacco products encountered by Member Customs administrations.

Chewing and dipping tobacco emerged as the most seized non-cigarette product, with cases doubling from 5,374 in 2023 to 10,839 in 2024. The quantity seized in pieces more than doubled, rising from 2 million to over 4.5 million, while the weight dropped significantly from 2.45 million kg to just 486,511 kg.

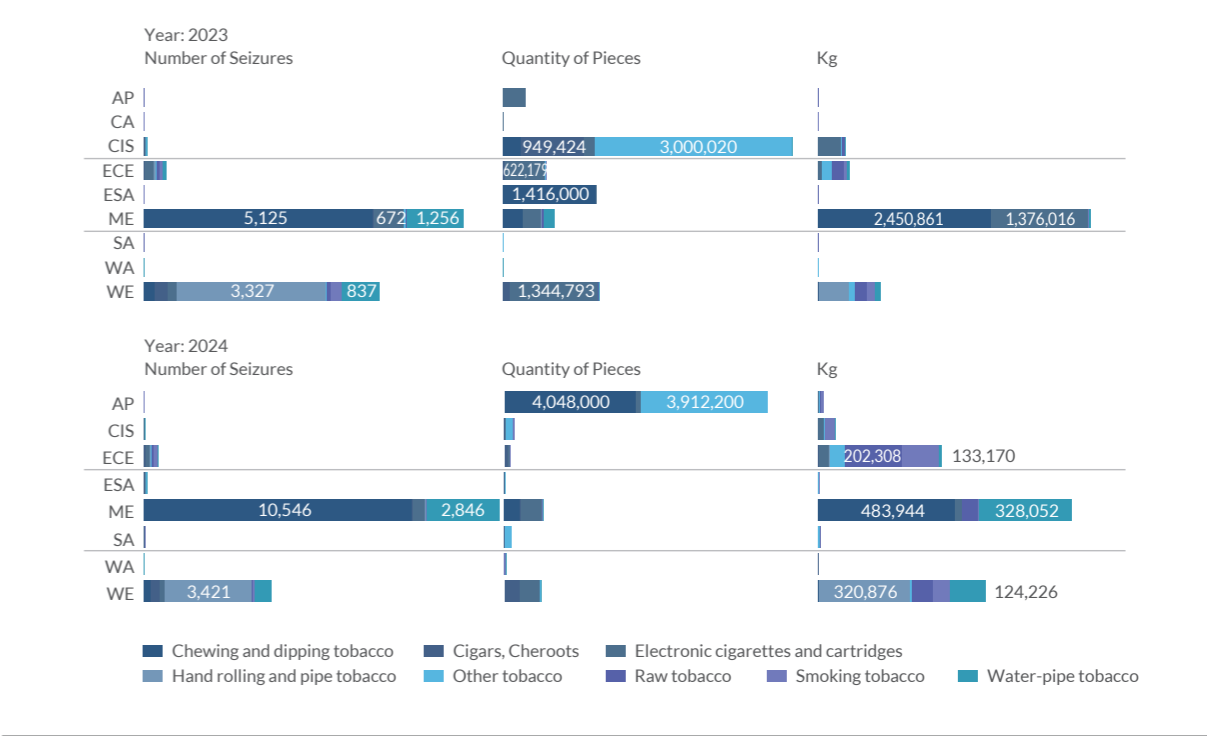
Electronic cigarettes and cartridges maintained a consistent enforcement footprint, with close to 1,000 seizures per year. However, the quantity in pieces intercepted decreased sharply from 3.1 million in 2023 to 1.6 million in 2024, while the corresponding weight increased significantly.

Hand-rolling and pipe tobacco remained steady in terms of seizures (around 3,400 annually) but showed a drop in quantity and weight.

Notably, water-pipe tobacco (such as Hookah) seizures rose from 2,171 to 3,544 cases, though the quantity reported in kg fluctuated – dropping from 177,940 kg in 2023 to just 30,797 kg in 2024. Finally, raw tobacco saw decreases in seizures and quantities.

Taken together, the data shows that non-cigarette tobacco products are consistently present across the illicit supply chain, and in some cases – such as chewing tobacco and e-cigarettes – are escalating.

Figure 16: Seizure trends of tobacco products beyond cigarettes by region



While overall seizure counts offer valuable enforcement benchmarks, a deeper dive into the quantities seized by product and region reveals nuanced shifts in trafficking activity and enforcement focus.

In the Asia-Pacific (AP) region, the most striking change was the sudden emergence of chewing and dipping tobacco and other tobacco products, with over 4 million pieces and 3.9 million pieces seized in 2024 respectively – where no such quantities were reported the previous year.

The Middle East (ME) saw continued escalation in electronic cigarettes and cartridges, rising by 137%, from 279,000 to over 662,000 pieces. Even more remarkable was the tenfold increase in water-pipe tobacco, from 28,000 kg in 2023 to 328,000 kg in 2024.

Western Europe (WE) also experienced a dramatic jump in cigars and cheroots, from 102,000 to over 456,000 pieces – a 344% increase. Interestingly, these volume surges occurred in regions where total seizure counts remained relatively stable, highlighting the importance of tracking both frequency and volume to understand trafficking evolution. Some product types, like electronic cigarettes, are moving in fewer but larger consignments, while others, like chewing tobacco, are expanding in both frequency and mass.

Case study 6.
CIGARETTES CONCEALED INSIDE LOAVES OF BREAD

The National Customs Agency of the Republic of Bulgaria seized 61,160 cigarettes hidden within the hollowed-out interiors of bread. The seizure took place in Vidin, Bulgaria. The destination point of the route was the Netherlands.

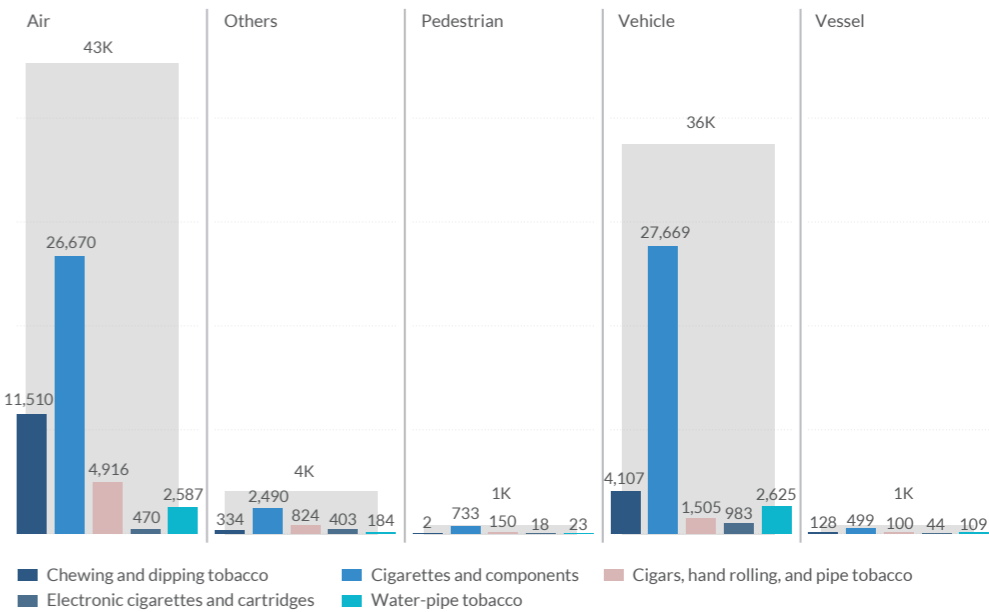
In April 2024, in the area of the Danube Bridge near Vidin, Bulgarian Customs officers stopped a cargo van leaving Bulgaria for inspection on the basis of risk profiling. According to the transport documents provided by the 49 year-old male driver from Bulgaria, the vehicle was loaded with bread. As further X-ray analysis revealed suspicious areas of varying density within the cargo, the officers decided to carry out a meticulous search.

During a subsequent physical inspection, Customs officers found that some of the loaves of bread contained hidden cartons of cigarettes with Bulgarian excise labels. A total of 61,160 cigarettes were seized, including various brands such as Marlboro, Dunhill, Parliament, Ome and Karelia. (CEN ID: BG0025903)



Courtesy of National Customs Agency of the Republic of Bulgaria.

Figure 17: Number of cases by conveyance and product type



The distribution of seizures by conveyance offers a revealing look into how different tobacco products are trafficked across borders. The most prominent modes identified in 2023–2024 were air and land (vehicle) transport, which together accounted for the vast majority of reported cases.

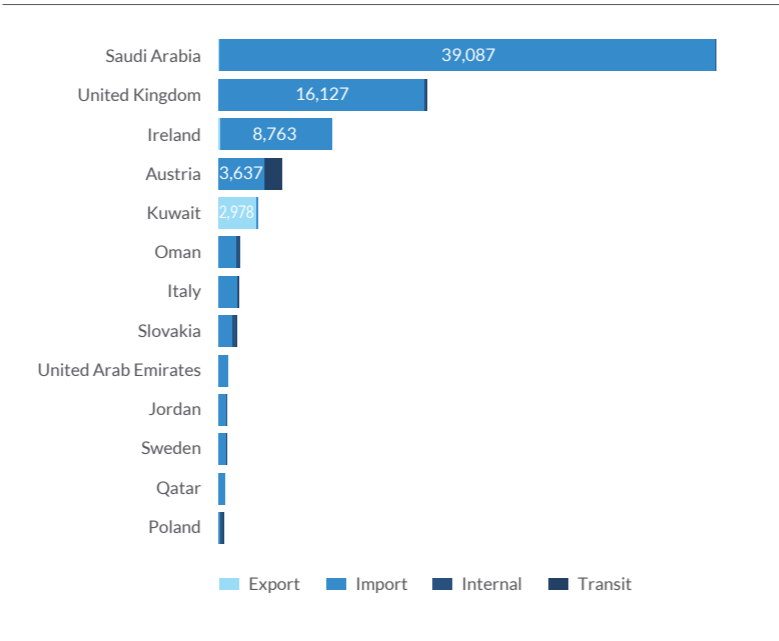
Air transport led the total reported cases, with over 43,000 seizures. Cigarettes dominated this mode of transport with 26,383 cases, followed by chewing and dipping tobacco (11,510 cases) and hand-rolling/smoking products (4,660). Notably, electronic cigarettes and even water-pipe tobacco were frequently intercepted in air shipments, suggesting the use of air cargo and passenger luggage for high-frequency, lower-volume trafficking of diversified tobacco products.

Vehicles, primarily used in land-border contexts, were nearly as prevalent, registering 36,000+ cases. Cigarettes again led by volume (27,669), with significant figures for chewing tobacco, hand-rolling, and water-pipe products. This mode of transport likely reflects regional overland smuggling, often involving concealed compartments or modified vehicles crossing land borders.

Maritime routes (vessels) recorded fewer seizures overall, but significant quantities of cigarettes and electronic cigarettes were intercepted – likely indicating the use of containerized shipments for bulk trafficking. 499 cases of cigarettes were noted in vessels, alongside 128 for chewing tobacco.

Pedestrian and ‘other’ categories, while lower in volume, highlight the opportunistic nature of tobacco smuggling. For example, 733 cases of cigarettes were seized from pedestrians – suggesting informal border crossings or courier-style smuggling.

Figure 18: High-case Members by directions of movement



An analysis of seizure direction reveals that the majority of reported tobacco cases involve imports, reflecting ongoing interdiction at the point of entry into national territories. Among the top reporting countries, Saudi Arabia stood out with a staggering 39,087 import-related cases, highlighting both a high-demand destination and an enforcement hotspot for inbound tobacco trafficking. The United Kingdom and Ireland followed with 16,127 and 8,763 import cases, respectively.

While imports dominated, some countries reported substantial numbers in other movement categories. For example, Kuwait registered nearly 3,000 export cases. Austria, meanwhile, displayed a mixed profile with both import and transit-related cases, suggesting that it may serve as a routing corridor for tobacco flows within Europe.

Case study 7. SEIZURE OF CIGARETTES CAST INTO A CONCRETE SLAB

The National Customs Agency of the Republic of Bulgaria seized 5,400 cigarettes cast in a concrete slab. The seizure took place in Vidin, Bulgaria. The destination point of the route was Germany.

In August 2024, in the area of the Danube Bridge in Vidin, Bulgarian Customs officers stopped a delivery van for inspection on the basis of risk profiling. The van had Bulgarian registration plates and was leaving Bulgaria. Inside the vehicle's cover-load, Customs officers found an unaccompanied consignment - a concrete slab. According to the driver, a Bulgarian citizen, it was a commercial sample. It turned out that the concrete slab contained a total of 5,400 cigarettes, including brands such as Davidoff and Marlboro, with a Bulgarian excise stamp. (CEN ID: BG0030316)



National Customs Agency of the Republic of Bulgaria.

Figure 19: Concealment and detection method



The analysis of concealment methods reveals that illicit tobacco is hidden or transported using a wide range of tactics, from baggage and courier packages to premises and mail, and each concealment strategy corresponds to varying detection approaches.

The most common concealment tactic was in baggage, accounting for nearly 45,000 cases. Of these, over 57% were detected through routine controls, with 41% discovered via risk profiling. This suggests that traditional screening and targeted profiling remain highly effective at passenger control points.

In transport concealment methods – likely covering vehicular concealment – were overwhelmingly detected through risk profiling (89%), indicating robust border and inland targeting practices.

Express courier shipments were almost exclusively intercepted through risk profiling (86%), with a small number also identified through intelligence-driven efforts, reflecting the challenge of high-volume, time-sensitive environments where Customs must rely heavily on advance data and selectivity.

Freight consignments, typically associated with large-scale operations, were detected primarily via risk profiling (70%), while random selection and intelligence-based checks accounted for smaller shares.

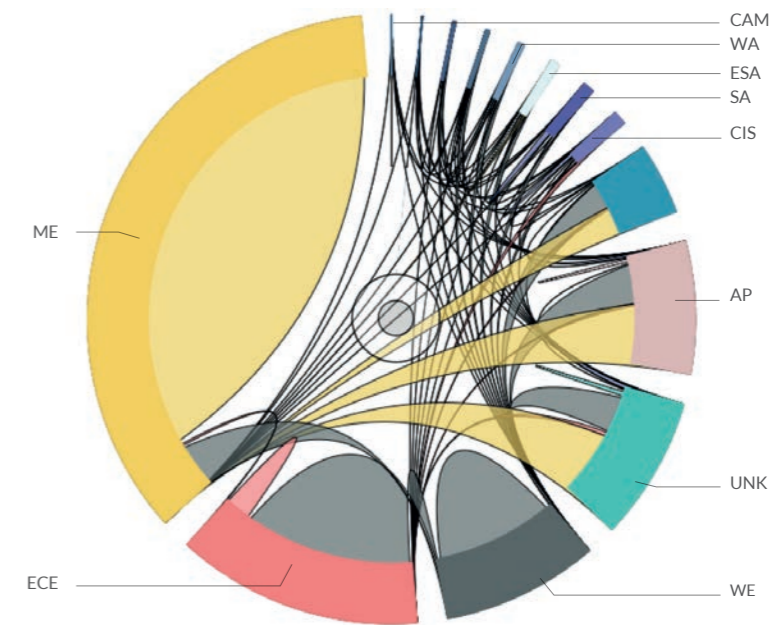
Interestingly, mail concealments showed a more balanced profile: while 69% were detected via risk profiling, random checks (25%) also played a notable role. This mixed approach may reflect variation in postal handling systems and entry points.

Premises-based detections (e.g., storage facilities or distribution hubs) presented a unique pattern: nearly half (47%) were identified through routine control, and 45% via intelligence-led investigations.

Some concealments, such as on the person or in marketplaces, were discovered almost entirely through routine controls, underscoring the value of visible, in-person inspection activities. Finally, a small number of seizures were not concealed at all, with cases often arising through routine checks or profiling.

Figure 20 illustrates the trafficking flow of tobacco products and reveals dynamic trafficking patterns spanning both intra- and interregional corridors. While a significant share of seizures occurred within the same region, cross-regional movements continue to play a notable role.

Figure 20: Regional flow of tobacco products



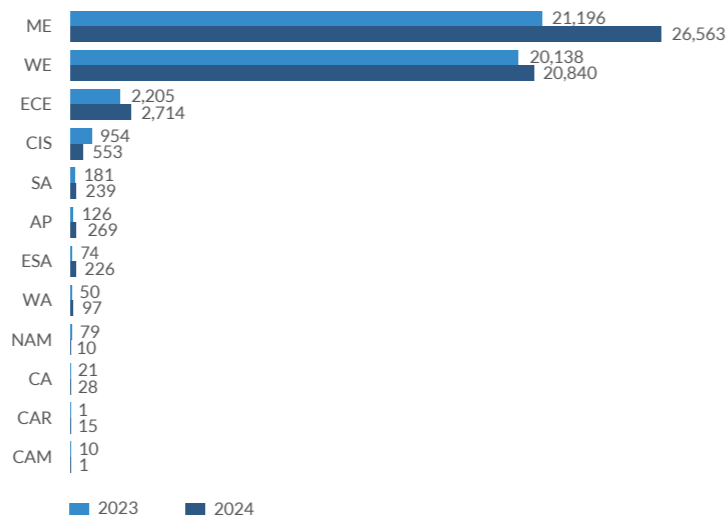
The Middle East (ME) emerged as a dominant node in both origin and destination roles. A large volume of seizures involved flows within the ME region, indicating strong internal demand and movement – possibly from free zones, ports, or local manufacturing hubs to domestic markets. Notably, ME also received flows from Eastern and Central Europe (ECE) and Western Europe (WE), suggesting long-distance smuggling routes feeding into Middle Eastern markets.

Similarly, ECE and WE both recorded high internal movement, but also dispatched significant volumes across regions, particularly towards ME, the Asia-Pacific (AP) region, and even into Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) territories. This triangulation reinforces the idea of ECE/WE not only as destination markets but also as logistical pivots or transit zones into larger illicit networks.

Interestingly, seizures from unknown origins or destinations (UNK) formed a considerable portion of flows. These likely represent cases where intelligence was partial, concealment was effective, or documentation was intentionally falsified, or reporting matter – adding another layer of complexity to enforcement operations.

Although smaller in absolute volume, flows from Africa (ESA, WA) and the Caribbean and Central America (CAM, CAR) were present, hinting at non-traditional or emerging routes.

Figure 21: Tobacco seizure trends by region



Between 2023 and 2024, tobacco seizures increased across most WCO regions, reflecting both intensified enforcement and potentially growing trafficking activity.

The Middle East (ME) maintained its position as the region with the highest number of reported cases, rising from 21,196 seizures in 2023 to 26,563 in 2024 – an increase of over 25%. This sustained enforcement presence highlights the region's strategic role as a destination and redistribution point for illicit tobacco.

Western Europe (WE) followed closely, with seizures increasing modestly from 20,138 to 20,840, suggesting a consistently high baseline of enforcement activity. Notably, Eastern and Central Europe (ECE) experienced a more significant percentage growth – from 2,205 to 2,714 seizures, a 23% jump.

The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) showed a decline, dropping from 954 to 553 seizures. Whether this signals an actual reduction in trafficking or reflects shifts in reporting practices or enforcement prioritization remains unclear.

Several smaller-volume regions, such as Asia-Pacific (AP), Southern Africa (SA), and Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA), posted noticeable increases. For instance, ESA tripled its reported cases – from 74 in 2023 to 226 in 2024. In contrast, regions such as North America (NAM) and Central America (CA) remained relatively stable, while the Caribbean (CAR) and Central Africa (CAM) saw minimal activity across both years.

Overall, while ME and WE continue to anchor global tobacco enforcement figures, several emerging regions show growing activity, reflecting a more distributed enforcement landscape and a need for continued investment in detection capacity and intelligence sharing.

3. Operation

OPERATION LYNX IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION YIELDS SIGNIFICANT RESULTS DUE TO GOOD COOPERATION AND CLOSE COLLABORATION

3.1 Background

As part of the WCO's work programme within the framework of the Working Group on Revenue Compliance and Fraud (WGRCF) and spearheaded by the WCO's Revenue Programme, Operation LYNX commenced in the Asia-Pacific region in September 2024. The primary focus of the operation centred on revenue fraud associated with excisable products, namely tobacco and alcohol; however, the operation also had a focus on other areas of smuggling, related to prohibited or restricted items.

The pre-operational meeting and workshop took place in Bangkok, Thailand from 24 to 25 September 2024, with the Operational Phase commencing in early October 2024. A total of 13 Members participated in the operation including Australia, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Hong Kong China, Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines, Cambodia, Thailand, United Kingdom, Sri Lanka and Brunei Darussalam, as well as the RILO-AP, with significant results being obtained across the region.

The WCO's Revenue Programme with the assistance of staff from the WCO's CEN Programme created a dedicated CENcomm closed user group, which facilitated the real-time sharing of information and seizure data in a secure environment. As a result of close collaboration and interoperability among participants, a wide variety of commodities were seized.

3.2 Seizure overview

Figure 22: Operation LYNX overview



Figure 22 illustrates the overview of the operation of cumulative commodities from 13 countries.

The most common item was over 60 million cigarettes, along with 60,000 kg of tobacco paraphernalia, namely filters. Additionally, 54,000 litres of fuel were reported, while high-value commodities included 7 kg of gold. 15 kg of methamphetamines were also among the seized commodities.

3.3 Way forward

Due to the success of Operation LYNX Asia-Pacific, and in keeping with the WGRCF Work Programme, further phases of Operation LYNX are in the early stages of planning, for roll-out in other regions. With tobacco remaining one of the most smuggled commodities encountered by Customs, the rollout of similar-type operations will further enhance regional cooperation, as well as disrupt organized criminal activity associated with illicit tobacco trade flows.



WCO

Some of the counterfeit cigarettes seized during Operation LYNX. Photo Credit: Bangladesh Customs



CONCLUSION

The Customs seizures submitted by WCO Members through CEN for the 2023–2024 reporting period underscores the persistent and evolving threat of illicit trade in excise goods, with tobacco continuing to dominate seizure activity and alcohol-related cases reflecting more targeted yet impactful enforcement.

The scale and scope of tobacco trafficking remain a major concern. With over 85,000 reported cases and billions of individual sticks intercepted, the illicit tobacco trade shows signs of both entrenchment and expansion. The proliferation of product types – including cigarettes, chewing tobacco, water-pipe tobacco, e-cigarettes, and even modular components like filters and rolling paper – demonstrates the increasing complexity and adaptability of smuggling networks. High concentrations of cases in a handful of WCO Members highlight the importance of sustained enforcement at key risk points, while emerging patterns such as component-based smuggling suggest that traffickers are continuously recalibrating their methods.

Alcohol products remain a high-risk revenue category. The majority of intercepted consignments involved spirits, often concealed in land transport or mixed with legitimate shipments. Several cases involved counterfeit labelling and misdeclaration, indicating persistent fraud risks. While fewer Members contributed alcohol-related data, those that did often reported substantial quantities – pointing to the need for wider and more consistent reporting to understand the full scope of the challenge.

Across both categories, the data revealed several commonalities:

- Air and land conveyance remain the dominant methods of transport for illicit goods.
- Risk profiling and routine control continue to be the most effective detection tools.
- Seizures are increasingly tied to intelligence-led operations, with several regions noting the success of targeted inspections, often driven by cross-border cooperation.
- Regional trafficking flows show a balance of intraregional movement and well-established transregional corridors – especially between Europe, the Middle East, and Asia-Pacific.

One of the clearest trends is the discrepancy between case numbers and quantity volumes. In many regions, seizure frequency remained steady while the volume of goods intercepted rose dramatically. This indicates a shift towards fewer but higher-volume consignments, potentially involving more organized networks and more consolidated supply routes.

The 2023–2024 data also illustrate the value of comprehensive and standardized reporting. Increased Member participation allowed for a more robust analysis of both global and regional trends, but gaps remain – particularly in the reporting of more seizure data and more robust classification of products and units.

As traffickers evolve, so too must the enforcement community. This chapter reinforces the need for:

- Enhanced data sharing among Customs administrations;
- Continued investment in targeting capacity and risk assessment and profiling;
- Report seizure data in CEN to encourage broader participation in global reporting;
- Strengthened regional cooperation and joint operations, especially in emerging or underreported corridors.

The illicit trade in excise goods poses a direct threat to national revenue streams and the integrity of global trade systems. With tobacco volumes surging and alcohol-related fraud persisting, WCO Members must remain vigilant, agile, and united in their efforts to detect, disrupt, and deter these activities.





Fragility and conflict remain a significant threat to global security, particularly through the illicit access to weapons. The trafficking and diversion of small arms and light weapons (SALW), alongside the growing use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), remain the key drivers of violence and instability across regions.





These dynamics present serious challenges to both national and international peace and stability. This chapter draws upon data reported by WCO Members through the Customs Enforcement Network (CEN).

INTRODUCTION

As data submission is voluntary, the data set may exhibit variability and gaps, which can affect year-on-year comparability. Importantly, the data set primarily reflects seizures made by Customs authorities and generally excludes interdictions carried out by other law enforcement authorities or the military, particularly those involved in combating illicit arms trafficking. These limitations are essential to acknowledge when interpreting the data and assessing global patterns.

In certain analyses, where a single WCO Member accounts for a disproportionately high share of reported cases (typically exceeding 50–60%), the narrative explicitly notes the removal or separation of this data to provide a more balanced and representative view of broader trends.

This highlights a significant reporting imbalance as well: a small number of Members are responsible for over 80% of all reported cases, while the remaining 80+ Members together account for just 11%.

1. Weapons trafficking, 2023–2024

1.1 Definition of small arms and light weapons

The term “**small arms and light weapons**” (SALW) is defined by the United Nations in the International Tracing Instrument (ITI).⁸ This instrument was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 8 December 2005. It defines SALW as any man-portable lethal weapon that expels or launches, is designed to expel or launch, or may be readily converted to expel or launch a shot, bullet or projectile by the action of an explosive.

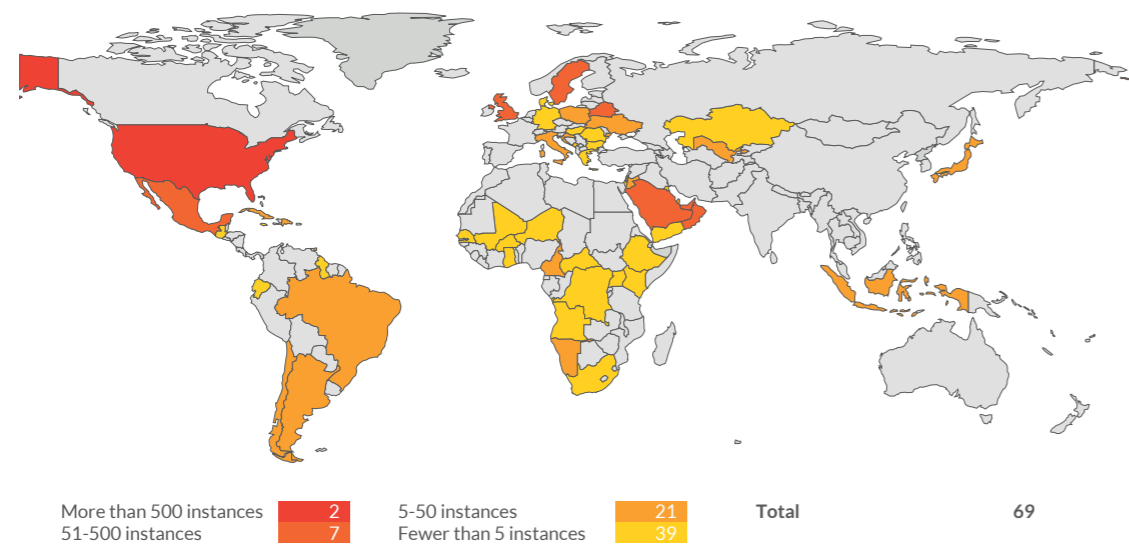
- a) “Small arms” are, broadly speaking, weapons designed for individual use. They include, inter alia, revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines, submachine guns, assault rifles and light machine guns.
- b) “Light weapons” are, broadly speaking, weapons designed for use by two or three persons serving as a crew, although some may be carried and used by a single person. They include, inter alia, general purpose or universal machine guns, medium machine guns, heavy machine guns, rifle grenades, under-barrel grenade launchers and mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft guns, portable anti-tank guns, recoilless rifles, man-portable launchers of anti-tank missile and rocket systems, man-portable launchers of anti-aircraft missile systems, and mortars of a calibre of less than 100 millimetres.

Therefore, non-lethal firearms, such as alarm pistols (also known as blank firing guns), imitation firearms, air guns, and others are not included under the SALW definition. Other weapons, such as knives, swords, knuckledusters, stun guns, throwing stars and similar items are also not included, but seizure data is of interest to WCO Members and will be included in the following chapter.

⁸ UNODC, *International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons*, available at: <https://www.unodc.org/documents/organized-crime/Firearms/ITI.pdf>

1.2 Overall trends in weapons trafficking, 2023–2024

Figure 1: Heat map of weapon cases reported by the WCO Member administrations in 2024



During the reporting period of the 2023–2024 calendar years, a total of 9,218 cases involving 18,722 seizures related to small arms and light weapons (SALW) were submitted by 69 WCO Members through the Customs Enforcement Network (CEN).

Every year, the number of cases reported by Members varies. Figure 1 represents this trend by highlighting the variations in the reporting levels among Members in 2024:

- 39 WCO Members reported fewer than five cases;
- 21 Members reported between 5 and 50 cases;
- 7 Members recorded between 51 and 500 cases; and
- Only 2 Members reported more than 500 cases, together accounting for 4,162 cases, or nearly 45% of all reported data.

Countries shaded in deep red reflect those with the highest number of cases, while lighter hues indicate lower reporting levels. Countries shown in grey either reported no cases or did not submit relevant data during the period. As can be seen, Figure 1 showcases concentration of reporting activity in certain regions, notably parts of North America, the Caribbean, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe.

While this map offers a valuable snapshot of Customs activity, it also reveals several notable limitations:

The high concentration of cases in just two Members suggests a skewed data set, in which a small number of Members dominate the global picture. Where necessary, further analysis excludes these outliers to enable a clearer interpretation of broader patterns.

The large number of countries reporting few or no cases – or not reporting at all – indicates possible gaps in detection capabilities, enforcement priorities, or reporting practices.

The prevalence of cases in particular transit or destination countries does not necessarily reflect production or origin points, reinforcing the need for targeted intelligence sharing and coordinated interdiction efforts.

Overall, the data provides important insight into Customs contributions to countering the illicit trade in SALW. However, the uneven distribution of reporting and potential underreporting call for continued efforts to enhance data quality, increase Member participation, and promote integrated approaches across enforcement agencies.

1.3 Number of weapons cases by WCO region in 2023 and 2024

Figure 2: Number of weapons cases by WCO region in 2023 and 2024

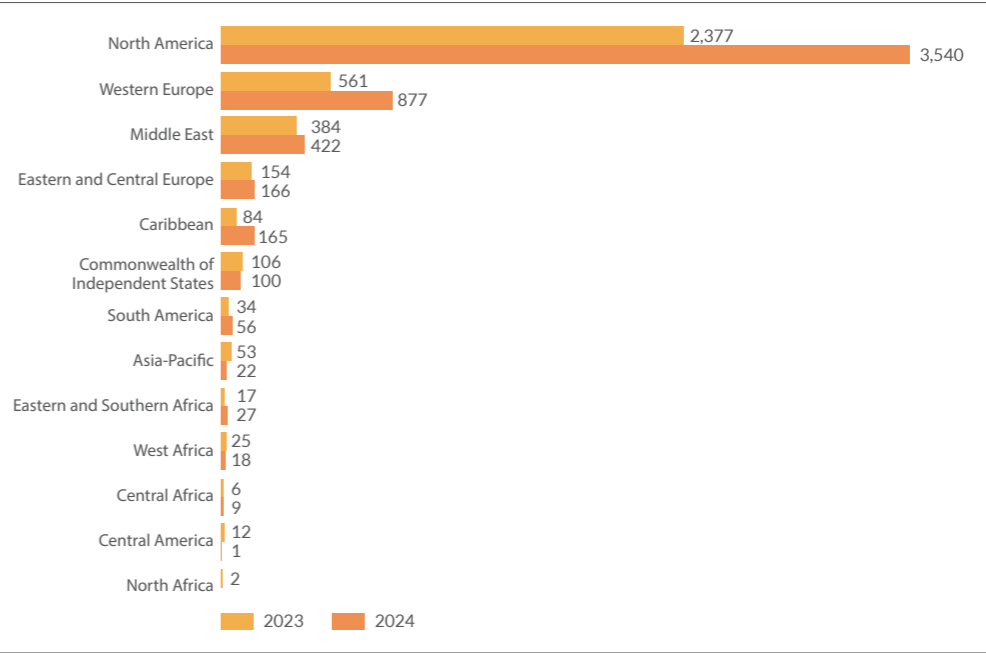


Figure 2 presents the number of reported SALW cases by WCO region for the years 2023 and 2024. The data reveals clear regional disparities in reporting volumes and year-over-year changes, reflecting a combination of enforcement intensity, risk exposure, and Customs capacity.

As shown in the graph above, regional variations in reported cases of firearms trafficking reveal several underlying trends. In North America, the high volume of cases likely reflects sustained interdiction efforts and a growing strategic focus on combating illicit firearms flows, particularly at key export points. Western Europe's upward trend may be tied to tighter border controls and increased inspections of parcel and postal shipments, which are frequently exploited for trafficking in this region. The Middle East maintains a steady pattern of reporting, which may reflect its persistent exposure to SALW trafficking amid ongoing conflict and instability (see Case study 1). Meanwhile, the Caribbean's sharp

increase stands out and may be attributed to enhanced enforcement capacity and improved reporting, supported by targeted initiatives such as WCO’s Operation Calypso, which strengthened regional coordination and operational attention on firearms and transshipment routes.

Regions such as Eastern and Central Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) displayed relative stability with minor fluctuations, while others – including Asia-Pacific, South America, and Africa (West, East, Central, and North) – reported comparatively fewer cases.



Photo Courtesy: Israel Customs Directorate.

Case study 1. DETECTION OF FIREARMS IN VEHICLE FUEL TANKS

On 9 November 2024, officers from Israel Customs Directorate intercepted a Toyota vehicle crossing from Jordan into Israel at the Arava/Yitzhak Rabin land border crossing point. The vehicle was being driven by two Israeli males aged 20 and 21 years old. Upon inspection, a concealment was found within the fuel tank of the vehicle in which 101 semi-automatic pistols were recovered.

This seizure followed the detection of 33 firearms and accessories in the fuel tank of a vehicle on 7 June 2024, and the recovery of 74 firearms concealed in a false compartment behind the back seat of a vehicle on 8 September 2024, both at the same land border crossing.

The use of vehicles to conceal large numbers of complete firearms is an ongoing threat.

Source: CEN data.

1.4 Top 10 Members reporting the highest number of cases and seizures

Figure 3: Top 10 Members reporting the highest number of cases and seizures⁹

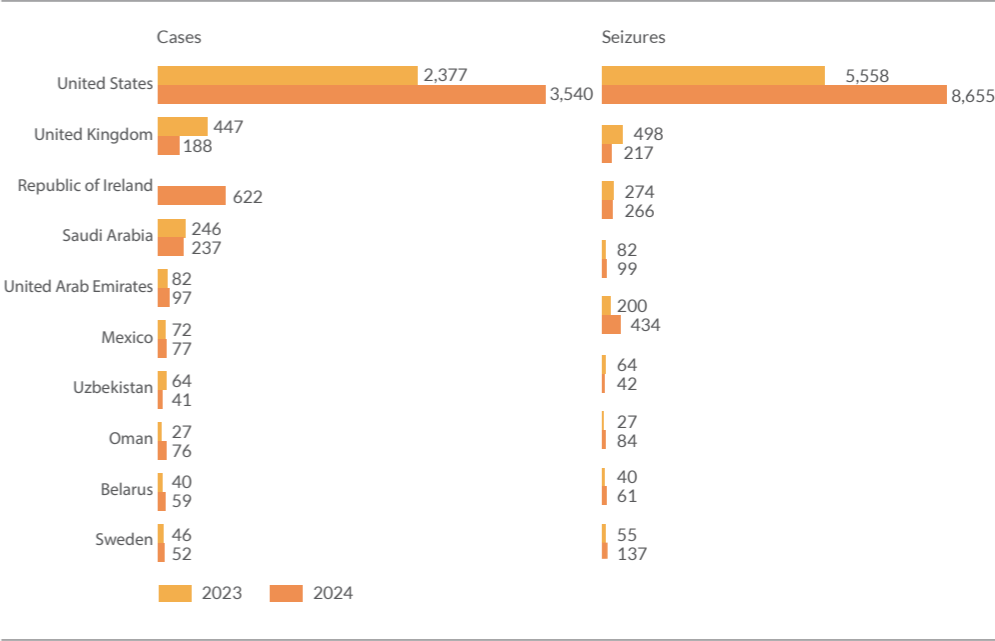


Figure 3 highlights the WCO Members that reported the highest number of weapon cases and seizures during 2023 and 2024, alongside their respective shares of global totals.

As illustrated in the graph above, a small group of Members continues to account for the vast majority of reported cases and seizures, with notable differences in scale and trends across countries. The United States remained the most significant contributor by a wide margin, reflecting both the scope of its outbound trafficking challenges and its sustained enforcement efforts. Republic of Ireland’s unexpectedly high figures in 2024 suggest a particularly active year in terms of detection and reporting, positioning it just behind the US.

In contrast, the United Kingdom showed a marked decrease from 2023 to 2024, possibly indicating a shift in trafficking dynamics or changes in enforcement priorities. Saudi Arabia maintained consistent and high reporting levels across both years, pointing to ongoing operational engagement. Other countries such as Mexico, Oman, United Arab Emirates, and Uzbekistan demonstrated steady or increasing activity. Belarus, Sweden and Türkiye also contributed moderate case volumes, while the rest of the WCO Members collectively accounted for a much smaller share of global reporting, underscoring the continued concentration of activity among a limited number of Members.

The concentration of data among a handful of Members continues to highlight not only their role as key enforcement actors but also the importance of improving data submission and enforcement capacity across a broader set of WCO Members. Enhanced engagement in the

⁹ One case may comprise seizures of multiple types of commodities. For example, one case may include seizures of a gun, ammunition and cash, therefore comprising three seizures. This differentiation is important to understand the analysis in this section.

CEN and greater harmonization of seizure reporting would allow for a more balanced and global understanding of SALW trafficking trends.

1.5 Weapons type by number of seizures and quantity in 2023 and 2024

Figure 4: Weapons type by number of seizures and quantity in 2023 and 2024

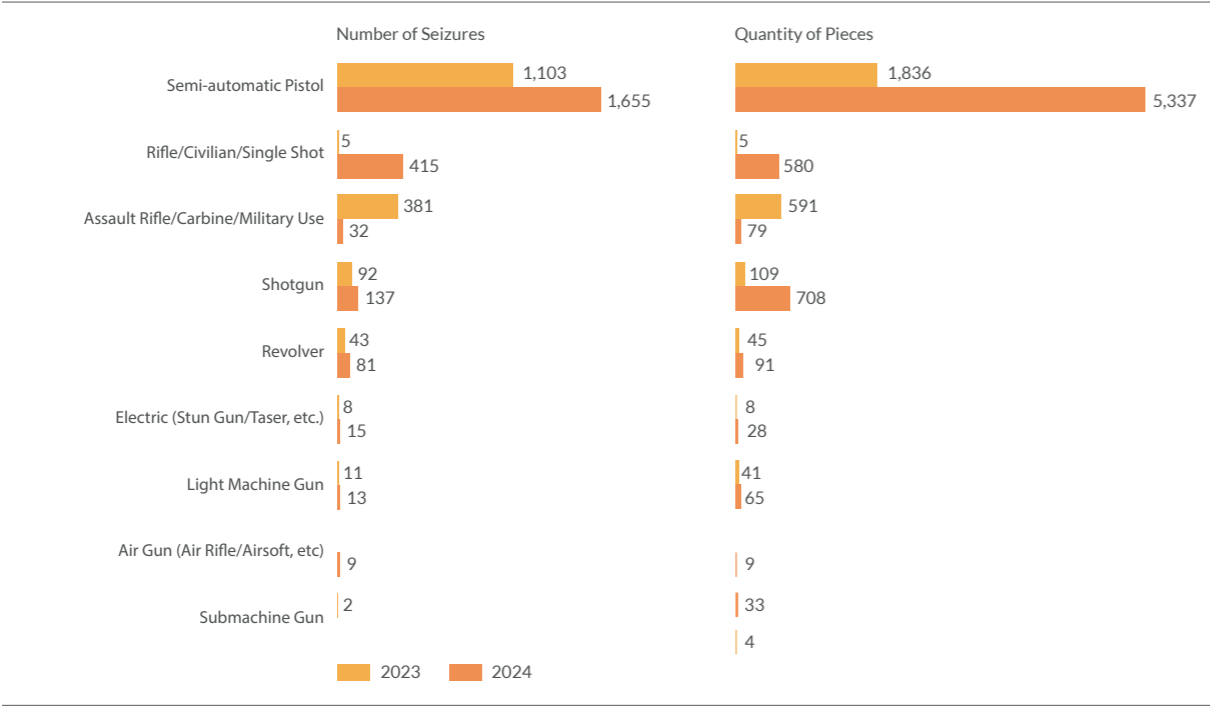


Figure 4 presents the types of weapons most frequently seized by Customs administrations in 2023 and 2024, categorized both by number of seizures and quantity in pieces. The data reveals substantial variation across weapon categories, with several showing sharp increases – both in frequency and volume – while others declined or disappeared entirely.

- Categories with increased seizures and quantities
- Semi-automatic pistols and civilian rifles both saw the largest increases in reported seizures and quantities in 2024, with the United States playing a key role in driving this trend. Notably, US seizures of semi-automatic pistols rose from 1,103 in 2023 to 1,655 in 2024, while rifle seizures surged from just five (5) to 415 over the same period. These sharp increases suggest a significant rise in trafficking activity or enhanced enforcement focus in the US, which has likely influenced the overall spike in both firearm categories globally.
 - Slash and stab weapons – such as knives, machetes, and improvised blades – recorded a notable rise in both seizures and quantities, with the total number of items increasing fivefold. This overall trend appears to have been significantly influenced by a single large import case reported by Belarus, involving 1,200 pieces originating from China concealed in a vehicle. While often considered lower profile, the growing presence of these weapons highlights an ongoing risk at borders, particularly through passenger traffic and postal channels.
 - Air guns – including air rifles and airsoft equipment – saw a sharp rise in reported seizures and quantities in 2024. This trend appears to be heavily influenced by a single import case reported by Saudi Arabia, involving 9,687 pieces. The trend may point to large-scale imports,

shifts in reporting or classification practices, or potential exploitation of regulatory gaps.

Categories with decreased seizures and quantities

- Assault rifles and carbines (military use) saw a marked drop in reported cases, falling from 2023 to 2024 in both volume and frequency. This trend appears to be driven largely by shifts in reporting from key countries, most notably the United States, which recorded a sharp decline in both imports and exports of this weapon category.
- Electric weapons (e.g. stun guns and tasers) registered a modest drop in seizures (197 to 164) while quantities increased slightly (1,055 to 1,196). This divergence suggests a trend towards bulk interceptions rather than frequent, smaller incidents.
- Revolvers rose from 66 to 95 seizures, with quantities increasing marginally. Though not at extreme levels, their gradual rise suggests continued monitoring is warranted, particularly if paired with indicators of organized trafficking.

The 2024 data reveal a broader shift in both the volume and variety of weapons intercepted, with specific countries playing a key role in shaping overall trends. While semi-automatic pistols remained the most seized firearm, significant spikes in air guns and slash weapons – driven largely by large-scale import attempts reported by Belarus and Saudi Arabia – point to evolving trafficking tactics and the exploitation of regulatory gaps. At the same time, sharp declines in categories like realistic imitation firearms and military-style rifles were influenced by reduced reporting from countries such as Australia and the United States.

This mixed landscape suggests that Customs administrations are actively adapting to emerging risks, while traffickers continue to shift strategies. Sustained monitoring, cross-border intelligence sharing, and attention to both traditional and non-conventional weapon types will be critical in addressing these dynamic challenges.

1.6 Firearms ammunition

Figure 5: Ammunition by number of seizures and quantity in 2023 and 2024

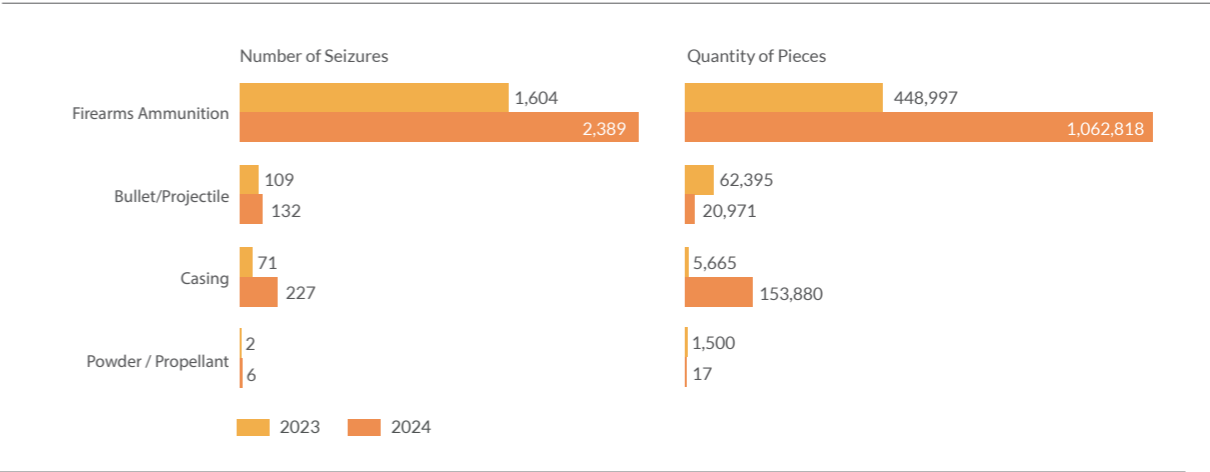


Figure 5 provides a breakdown of seizures and number of pieces related to ammunition components in 2023 and 2024, including complete rounds (firearms ammunition) and specific components such as bullets/projectiles, casings, propellants.

The data illustrates a sharp increase in both the number of seizures and the total volume of ammunition intercepted by Customs administrations globally.

Seizures of complete firearms ammunition rose from 1,604 in 2023 to 2,369 in 2024, marking a 48% increase. The growth in volume was even more striking, with quantities more than doubling from 448,997 to over 1.062 million pieces. This sharp rise likely reflects both an expansion in trafficking activity and a heightened operational focus by Customs administrations on bulk ammunition shipments specifically.

This sharp rise may also point to a growing trend in the trafficking of illicitly manufactured ammunition. Such ammunition is often produced outside of authorized channels, in unregulated or clandestine settings, and frequently lacks proper markings, making it difficult to trace. Its circulation is commonly linked to organized crime and non-state armed groups, and its presence in seizure data may indicate both an expansion of local production and the use of more sophisticated trafficking networks. The increase in quantities seized could therefore reflect not only higher interdiction rates but a broader shift towards the use and distribution of illicitly produced ammunition.

1.6.1 Trafficking of ammunition components

Just like firearms, small arms ammunition can also be broken down to its component parts and illicitly trafficked. A complete piece of ammunition is known as a cartridge, and conventional small arms ammunition consists of four distinct components. The first is the casing, which holds all the materials together. Next is the primer, the component responsible for igniting the cartridge; it is about the size of a watch battery and is located at the base of the cartridge. Then comes the propellant, commonly referred to as gunpowder. Finally, the projectile, which is the bullet at the top of the cartridge that is expelled when firing. Like firearm parts, detection of these components can be more difficult when being moved illicitly across the border.

1.6.2 Components

Bullets/projectiles showed a modest increase in seizures, rising from 137 in 2023 to 150 in 2024, while quantities more than doubled from 85,114 to 186,272 pieces. This significant rise in volume was largely driven by Jordan, which alone reported the import of 144,017 pieces across just two seizures. The data suggests a shift towards larger individual shipments and possibly improved detection of bulk trafficking attempts.

Casings saw a rise in both seizures and quantity in 2024, a trend overwhelmingly driven by the United States, which alone reported over 153,000 pieces across 208 seizures in 2024. This surge accounts almost entirely for the global increase and highlights the country's central role in shaping the data for this component category.

Powder/propellants, while rarely reported, saw an increase in seizures from two (2) in 2023 to seven (7) in 2024, with quantities remaining nearly unchanged at around 1,500 pieces. This volume was almost

entirely driven by a single import case reported by Namibia, which accounted for 1,500 pieces in one seizure. The data suggest that while the trafficking of these volatile materials remains limited, isolated large-scale cases can significantly influence annual totals.

Figure 6: Weapon parts by the number of seizures and quantity

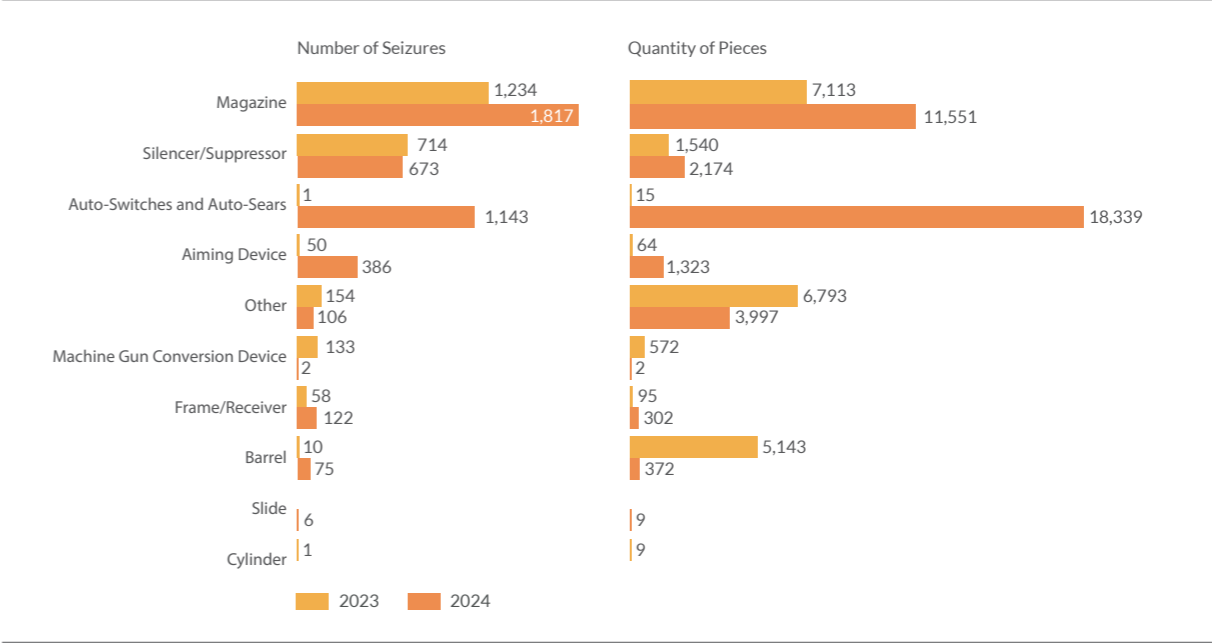


Figure 6 reveals significant increases across several critical components, underscoring the evolving complexity of illicit firearms trafficking.

1.6.3 High-volume components

Magazines remained the most frequently intercepted firearm component in 2024. Seizures rose from 1,246 in 2023 to 1,839 in 2024, while reported quantities increased from 7,217 to 11,672 pieces. Their consistent and widespread presence across both years confirms their essential role in functional firearms and suggests ongoing patterns of bulk trafficking or repeated concealment strategies.

Auto switches and auto sears are almost exclusively reported as bolts experienced a dramatic surge in 2024, with seizures jumping from just three (3) in 2023 to 1,147, and quantities rising sharply from 66 to 18,374 pieces. This increase was almost entirely driven by the United States, which alone reported 1,130 seizures and over 18,000 pieces.

1.6.4 Auto sears and auto switches

There has been a large increase in recent detections of various types of full-auto conversion devices being illicitly trafficked through mail and courier networks. These items are easily integrated with semi-automatic firearms to illegally convert them to fire automatically. A semi-automatic firearm fires one bullet each time the trigger is pulled, whereas a fully automatic firearm continues to fire for as long as the trigger is held down. This makes fully automatic firearms much more dangerous, and are often illegal for civilian ownership.

There are various types of full-auto conversion devices. These include “drop in auto sears”, which are designed for use on rifles, and items known as “switches”, which are designed to be used on certain semi-automatic pistols. In general, these items are made from plastic or metal and can even be manufactured using 3D printing technology. Their small size and ease of manufacture makes their proliferation both easy and affordable.

These switches are another example of criminal and terrorist networks utilizing new technologies to bypass existing firearm laws and import restrictions. Front-line officials need to be aware of these new technologies when conducting risk management and examinations to deliver effective enforcement.

Silencers and suppressors continued to feature prominently in both years, with seizures dipping slightly from 716 in 2023 to 677 in 2024, while quantities rose from 1,542 to 2,178. This increase was largely driven by the United States, which reported 651 seizures and 2,147 units in 2024 alone.

Aiming devices saw notable growth in 2024, with seizures rising from 61 in 2023 to 397, and quantities increasing from 76 to 1,359 pieces. While the United States remained the top contributor with 316 seizures and 748 units, there was a more even distribution in reporting, with Chile and Oman also playing key roles in this category.

Frames/receivers, the regulated core of many firearms, rose in seizures from 58 to 123, with a quantity increase from 95 to 508. This indicates rising interception of core parts potentially destined for illegal assembly, including ghost guns.

1.6.5 Declines and shifts

Barrels, another critical firearm component, showed a modest increase in seizures (13 to 82) but a decline in quantity from 5,146 to 372. Notably, the 2023 figures were heavily influenced by a single large export seizure reported by Türkiye involving 5,128 pieces, suggesting that the overall decline in 2024 may reflect the absence of such exceptional cases rather than a broad reduction in trafficking activity. Components like slides and cylinders appeared only in small numbers.

The 2024 seizure data highlight a notable increase in the trafficking of essential firearm components, particularly bolts (auto sears and auto switches), magazines, and frames – driven in part by large-volume seizures and improved detection efforts in key reporting countries such as the United States. The sharp rise in bolt (auto sear and auto switch) seizures may indicate the emergence of specialized supply chains or targeted operations focused on critical firing components. Additionally, the development of new technologies and the growing production of plastic components, including those that could potentially be 3D printed, present specific enforcement challenges (see Case study 2).



Source: CEN data

Case study 2.

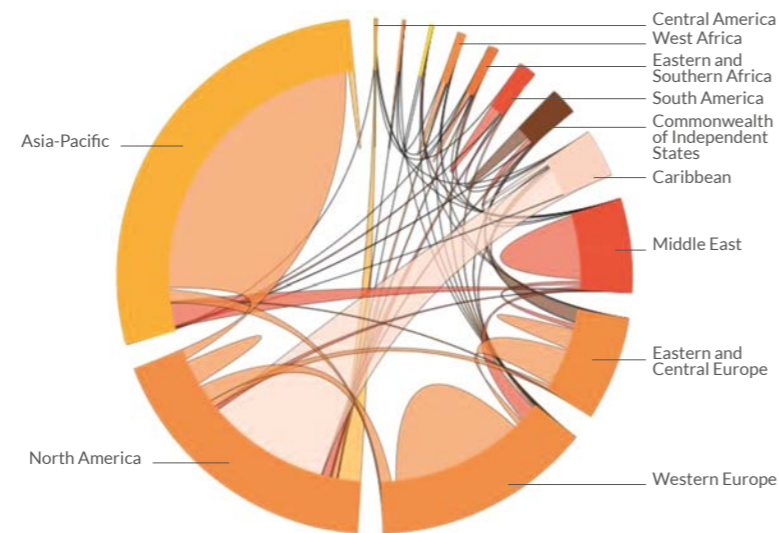
SEIZURE OF PISTOL-TO-RIFLE CONVERSION KITS

On 3 June 2024, officials from the Revenue Collection and Customs Control Agency of Argentina intercepted a 27-year-old Bolivian male crossing from Argentina into Bolivia at the La Quiaca Land Border Post. Upon inspection, officers detected two Micro-Roni branded conversion kits and two Cannon brand holographic laser optical sights. The conversion kits are a device that allows handguns to be converted into a carbine (short rifle). Users can simply insert their handgun, without requiring any modifications, into the frame of the conversion kit and subsequently change the form of their pistol to a shoulder mounted firearm. This allows for much more stability and accuracy. It also changes the classification of the firearm, for which the owner may not be licensed, and allows for the addition of accessories such as the holographic sights, which were also seized.

The pattern of component-level trafficking reinforces the need for modular risk assessment models, forensic follow-up, and coordinated reporting practices to better understand and combat this evolving trend.

1.7 Trafficking routes

Figure 7: Trafficking routes by region in 2023 and 2024



1.7.1 Top trafficking routes

North America → Caribbean: this remains the most prominent trafficking corridor, accounting for 763 cases. The sustained flow of firearms from the US mainland to Caribbean nations suggests organized trafficking networks linked to gang activity, regional instability, and vulnerabilities in maritime transshipment routes.

Asia-Pacific → North America: with 75 cases, this route indicates a steady inflow of weapons and components into North America. These movements may involve misdeclared shipments, dual-use goods, or import regulation violations, often obscured within complex international supply chains.

Within Western Europe: the intra-European circulation, reflected in 843 cases, points to potential secondary markets, online sales, or exploitation of regulatory gaps within Europe. Despite harmonized legislation, national enforcement disparities and grey market activity remain exploitable.

North America → Central America: this corridor recorded 143 cases, underscoring persistent security and trafficking dynamics in the region. These flows are likely linked to drug trafficking routes, arms-for-goods exchanges, and the arming of non-state actors.

Caribbean → North America: this reverse route registered 28 cases, possibly indicating returns of trafficked weapons, reciprocal exchanges, or enhanced outbound inspections. It may also reflect improved profiling and interception by Customs authorities in the Caribbean.



1.7.2 Regional patterns and strategic observations

North America stands out as both a dominant source and destination, reinforcing its position as a central hub in global SALW dynamics. It is deeply embedded in both hemispheric and intercontinental flows, reflecting both outbound supply and inbound demand for illicit items.

Western Europe is largely characterized by intraregional circulation, pointing to gaps in enforcement, continued mobility within internal borders, and the influence of digital marketplaces in facilitating domestic trafficking.

The Caribbean and Central America continue to act as high-risk recipient zones, where maritime smuggling routes, porous borders, and limited inspection infrastructure converge to facilitate arms inflows.

The Middle East, South America, and parts of Africa also register in the network but at lower volumes, possibly reflecting underreporting, emerging routes, or enforcement focus in other domains.

Figure 8: Weapon type and departure region by seizures and quantities in 2023 and 2024

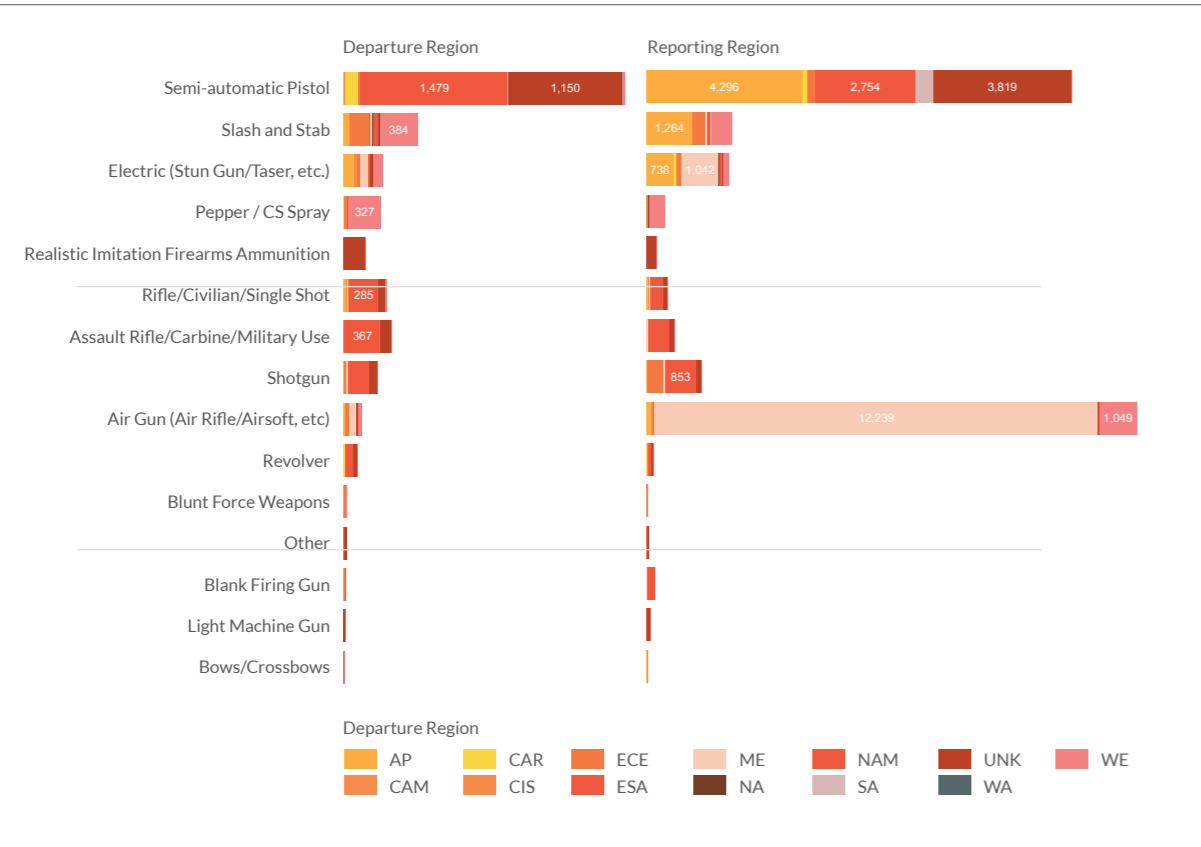


Figure 8 illustrates seizures and quantities of different weapon types by region of departure, offering a lens into how specific arms move across geographic boundaries.

The figure draws on data from 2023 and 2024, capturing the volume and spread of seizures and highlighting key regions driving global weapon flows. This analysis focuses on the highest-volume flows – by quantity – of weapon types across regional boundaries, enabling Customs to better understand origin-destination dynamics and emerging risk patterns.

1.8 Highest-volume weapon flows by quantity

1.8.1 Air guns (air rifle/airsoft, etc.)

A total of 12,134 pieces were reported as traded internally in the Middle East.

The intraregional pattern suggests local circulation or regional stockpiling, potentially for recreational or paramilitary purposes. These shipments may involve bulk commercial imports that fall under restriction in some jurisdictions or repackaged for diversion into unauthorized channels.

A total of 1,041 pieces were traded within Western Europe, a movement that may reflect variations in national regulations or increased seizures resulting from heightened EU enforcement standards. It also underscores the potential misuse of pneumatic arms in criminal activity when controls are inconsistent.

1.8.2 Semi-automatic pistols

A total of 2,747 pieces were traded within North America, highlighting ongoing challenges related to diversion from legal markets, resale through informal channels, and insufficient end-user controls.

1.8.3 Slash and stab weapons

A total of 1,202 pieces were traded from the Asia-Pacific region to the Commonwealth of Independent States, a less-expected flow that suggests the movement of rudimentary weapons through postal and small cargo routes, highlighting the need to strengthen enforcement efforts against low-tech but high-impact weaponry that may be overlooked in traditional risk targeting.

1.8.4 Regional patterns and observations

The Middle East appears as both a major source and recipient of high-volume air guns. This pattern could reflect regional stockpiling, redistribution within grey markets, or weaknesses in the regulation of pneumatic weapons.

Asia-Pacific emerges as a high-volume exporter of slash/stab weapons, indicating possible links to manufacturing hubs, re-export points, or the use of misdeclared shipments through complex logistics networks.

North America’s high internal movement of pistols demonstrates persistent domestic vulnerabilities. These flows suggest challenges in tracking end-use, controlling secondary markets, and limiting diversion from legal supply chains.

Western Europe shows high seizure volumes for non-lethal weapons such as air guns and pepper sprays. Although overall regulatory structures are harmonized, internal circulation remains problematic, particularly due to national-level discrepancies in classification, ownership laws, and enforcement thresholds.

This analysis reinforces that firearms trafficking is both cross-border and domestic, often involving “low profile” weapon types such as air guns, stab weapons, and replica firearms. Several patterns stand out:

- Middle East: regional movement of air guns may be driven by transit hub dynamics or regulatory gaps.
- Asia-Pacific: a notable exporting region, particularly for semi-automatic pistols and bladed weapons, highlighting the need for upstream controls.
- North America: high-volume internal flows underscore the importance of domestic risk targeting and traceability systems.
- Western Europe: internal seizures point to the need for inter-agency collaboration and harmonized interpretation of control measures.

1.9 Detection and conveyance

Figure 9. Detection and conveyance methods by number of cases in 2023 and 2024¹⁰

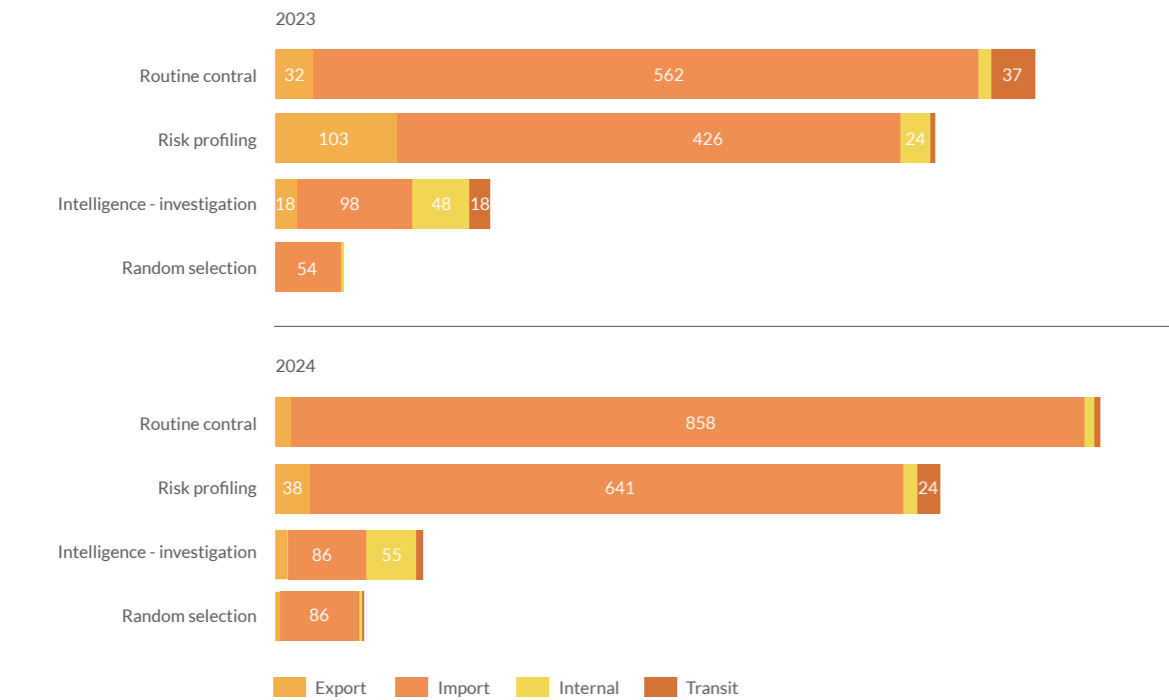


Figure 9 illustrates the primary detection methods used by Customs administrations to interdict SALW cases in 2023 and 2024. It excludes the United States due to a disproportionate skew in reporting under “risk profiling,” offering a clearer comparative view of enforcement practices across WCO Members.

Risk profiling and routine control remained the two primary detection methods across both years. Their continued dominance reflects a balanced approach between targeted risk-based interventions and border enforcement practices.

Intelligence and investigation showed consistent relevance, particularly in 2024, underscoring the growing importance of proactive, information-driven targeting.

Random selection also saw an increase in use in 2024, reinforcing its role as a complementary strategy. While applied less frequently, it continues to yield relevant outcomes, particularly in environments where risk indicators are less defined, or concealment tactics are evolving.

10 The data excludes the US data, which reported that all seizures were made using risk profiling.

1.9.1 Directional breakdown

Import movements continued to dominate SALW detections across all methods in both 2023 and 2024, clearly making up the majority of reported cases. This trend reinforces that illicit weapons and components are primarily entering reporting jurisdictions.

Internal movements were most evident in intelligence and investigation, especially in 2023, suggesting that domestic trafficking or redistribution often requires inter-agency coordination to detect.

Export-related seizures remained limited across both years and methods. Their lower representation, particularly under routine control and risk profiling, may point to ongoing reliance on importing countries to detect violations at their borders.

Transit detections were minimal overall, appearing sporadically and in small numbers across all detection methods. This likely reflects persistent enforcement blind spots or underreporting along key transshipment routes, despite their known vulnerability in global SALW trafficking dynamics.

This case aligns with the broader trends illustrated in Figure 8, which highlights risk profiling and routine control as the leading detection methods among WCO Members. The successful interdiction at Sangster International Airport in Jamaica reinforces the effectiveness of these approaches in identifying SALW movements, particularly when supported by targeted screening and coordinated enforcement efforts (see Case study 3).

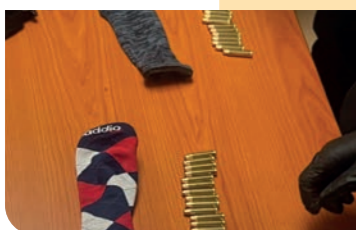


Photo Courtesy:
Jamaica Customs
Agency.

Case study 3. WEAPONS AND AMMUNITION SEIZED BY JAMAICAN CUSTOMS AT SANGSTER INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

In December 2024, Jamaican Customs officials discovered disassembled weapons and ammunitions concealed in a digital video recorder and socks inside a passenger's checked luggage. A 42-year-old male Jamaican national had travelled directly from the USA to Sangster International Airport, Montego Bay. These were detected during the WCO Operation Calypso led by WCO Project Bolt, which focused on the illicit movement of small arms and light weapons in the Caribbean region.

Overall, the dominance of risk profiling confirms the value of intelligence-enhanced targeting techniques, including the use of automated risk engines, past offender databases, and shipment pattern analysis. These techniques remain essential for detecting SALW, particularly when concealed among licit goods.

The strength of routine control – especially at import points – suggests that even in the absence of specific intelligence, regular inspections of high-risk commodities or modes (e.g., parcels, passengers, vehicles) continue to yield substantial enforcement outcomes.

Intelligence-based detection, while smaller in volume, offers qualitatively high-value interdictions and reflects increased use of inter-agency cooperation, CENcomm coordination, and pre-arrival targeting. Its role is likely to expand as more administrations adopt data fusion tools and integrate Customs-Border intelligence systems.

The lower frequency of export and transit detections calls for renewed focus on outbound controls, particularly in jurisdictions that serve as known source countries or transit hubs. Enhanced pre-departure screening and joint inspections may help to fill this gap.

Source: CEN data.

1.9.2 Conveyances

Figure 10: SALW by number seizures and type of conveyance in 2023 and 2024

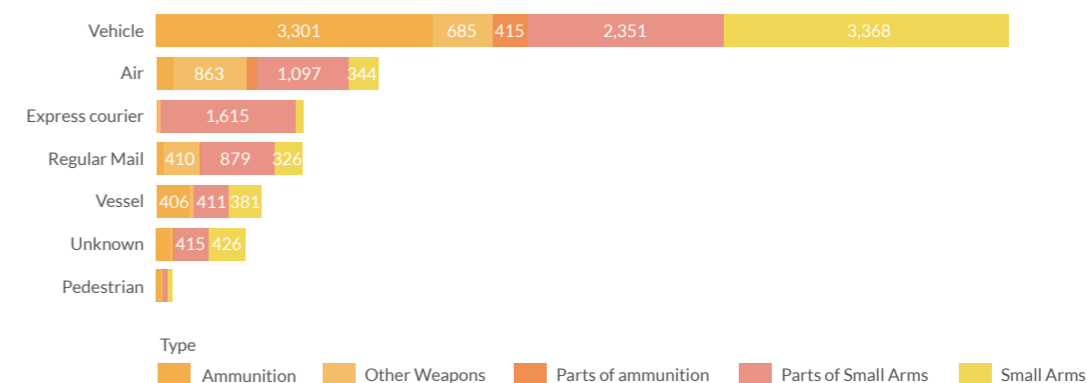


Figure 10 presents the distribution of seizures by conveyance method and type of SALW item seized during 2023 and 2024, including complete small arms, parts, ammunition, and other weapons. It helps identify key trafficking vectors and concealment methods used to move illicit weapons across borders.

Vehicles were the mode of transport most frequently associated with SALW seizures by far, with high figures across all categories: over 3,301 seizures involving ammunition, 3,368 involving small arms, and 2,351 involving parts of small arms. Their dominance reflects the accessibility of land borders, flexibility in concealment methods, and the continued relevance of overland trafficking routes in various regions.

Air transport ranked second, with strong representation across all categories, including 1,097 seizures involving parts of small arms, 863 involving other weapons, and 344 involving small arms. This trend highlights the continued exploitation of air cargo, passenger luggage, and mail via airports – often leveraging speed and limited pre-clearance checks.

Express courier services accounted for 1,615 seizures, primarily involving parts of small arms. Their growing use points to traffickers exploiting commercial shipping networks and the rise of e-commerce platforms, where inspection rates are often lower and volumes are high.

Regular mail also remained significant, with 879 seizures involving parts of small arms, 410 involving ammunition, and 326 involving small arms. These figures illustrate how traffickers capitalize on the anonymity and minimal oversight of postal channels to move lightweight, high-risk items like bullets and firearm parts.

Vessels accounted for moderate figures, including 411 seizures involving parts of small arms, 406 for ammunition, and 381 for small arms. While less dominant, maritime routes remain relevant for bulk shipments and containerized concealment, particularly in coastal and archipelagic regions.

Pedestrian traffic, though the least utilized mode, still accounted for 67 seizures involving ammunition and 54 involving small arms, underlining the ongoing use of body concealment or informal crossings in regions with porous borders.



Courtesy of National Revenue Administration of Poland (KAS).

Unknown conveyance methods contributed notably, especially in small arms with 427 seizures and 415 seizures involving parts of small arms. This may suggest concealment methods that obscured the mode of transport, or gaps in documentation during interdiction.

These seizures confirm that SALW trafficking is multi-modal, with smugglers utilizing land, air, sea, courier, and postal channels depending on risk levels, shipment volume, and concealment opportunities.

The increasing reliance on courier and postal services reflects a shift towards smaller, high-frequency shipments, often linked to online marketplaces and fragmented supply chains. Customs administrations should prioritize advanced screening measures such as X-ray imaging, intelligence-based parcel profiling, and cross-referencing with e-commerce data to strengthen detection capabilities.

While air and maritime flows appear less frequent in reported cases, this likely reflects the challenges of inspection and concealment in these environments rather than lower trafficking activity. Improving non-intrusive inspection technologies, expanding pre-arrival data exchange, and fostering closer cooperation between Customs and transport carriers will be essential to address these more complex trafficking methods.

Figure 11: Weapon types by number of seizures and type of conveyance in 2023 and 2024



Figure 11 cross-references seized weapon types with the conveyance modes used during 2023 and 2024 – air, vehicle, courier, mail, vessel, pedestrian, and unknown – highlighting how traffickers strategically pair transport methods with specific categories of arms and components.

The data highlights a clear contrast between large-scale trafficking using vehicles and more targeted, modular smuggling through courier and postal networks.

Vehicles remain the dominant conveyance for trafficking complete weapons and ammunition with 3,301 reported seizures of firearms; 2,176 seizures of semi-automatic pistols; and 1,978 seizures of magazines.

The high volume confirms that traffickers are continuing to exploit road transport for moving assembled arms and large-volume components, particularly through land borders where physical concealment is easier and inspection rates are lower.

Express courier channels are increasingly being used to move essential weapon parts, often outside the context of complete firearms. 306 seizures of silencers and suppressors along with 616 seizures of bolts (auto sears and auto switches) in the courier mode were reported, along with 702 seizures of silences and suppressors in vehicles.

This trend reflects a shift towards stealth over volume. By shipping critical firearm parts in isolation, traffickers reduce detection risk, often breaking shipments into multiple parcels to evade thresholds for high-risk goods.

Postal systems are commonly used for transporting smaller, essential parts, such as casings and bullets, aiming devices and small components.

This pattern suggests an increasing use of e-commerce platforms and decentralized logistics, enabling discreet supply chains that support reassembly at destination points.

Following are noteworthy trends by weapon type:

Suppressors and bolts (auto sears and auto switches) were rarely seized with full firearms, reinforcing the emerging tactic of disassembled trafficking. These components are highly functional yet less likely to trigger automated risk filters or high inspection prioritization unless profiling is properly adapted.

Magazines, while often overlooked as non-lethal, showed a trafficking volume nearly as high as complete firearms. Their widespread presence in vehicle seizures indicates they are often moved in bulk, possibly in tandem with other components or within personal vehicles.

Mail and courier systems are not commonly used for full firearms but are increasingly the preferred method for functional parts. This approach enables traffickers to circumvent regulatory controls while maintaining operational capability through reassembly after delivery.

In particular, vehicles are often used for full firearms and ammunition, prioritizing volume and concealment. Mail and courier channels are used for critical components, prioritizing discretion and modular delivery.

Silencers, bolts (auto sears and auto switches), and frames moved via courier or mail are often deliberately fragmented across parcels, creating additional barriers to detection and interdiction.



Operation Calypso, courtesy of Jamaica Customs Agency.

2. Operations

In 2024, two pivotal operations aimed at bolstering regional security and enhancing international cooperation were conducted: Operation Calypso, a key initiative under the WCO Project Bolt, and Operation Secure Horizon for Programme Global Shield. These operations represent concerted efforts to combat emerging threats and safeguard global stability through collaborative actions.

2.1 Operation Calypso

Operation Calypso was a joint Customs operation conducted with CARICOM IMPACS, aimed at allowing the Customs administrations in the region to test their capacity to identify and detain shipments of illicit small arms and light weapons, their component parts, ammunition and narcotics. In total, 28 Customs Administrations took part, along with partner agencies United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Passenger & Cargo Control Programme, INTERPOL, SEACOP, US Customs and Border Protection (CBP), Regional Security System (RSS),¹¹ Department of Homeland Security Joint Task Force – East (JTF-E) and Caribbean Customs Law Enforcement Council (CCLEC).

¹¹ The Regional Security System (RSS) is a collective security agreement among several Eastern Caribbean states, established in 1982. It aims to promote regional stability through mutual assistance in matters of national security, disaster response, and the prevention of smuggling and transnational crime. Member states include Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

2.1.1 Operational results

The Operation yielded significant enforcement outcomes. A total of 468 recorded seizures across 234 cases were reported. Semi-automatic pistols were the most frequently intercepted firearm type, followed by firearm ammunition. In total, more than 350 firearms and their components were seized along with approximately 8,250 pieces of ammunition and their parts.

Participating Customs administrations reported multiple seizures of drugs: more than one (1) tonne of cannabis was predominantly intercepted upon import into the region. One (1) tonne of cocaine was also seized mainly at export, highlighting the Caribbean’s role as a key transit hub for the illicit drug trade, since cocaine is not produced in the region.

Several Customs administrations reported eight (8) seizures of undeclared bulk cash, amounting to approximately USD \$2.93 million, with the money detected in baggage and in multiple currencies. Additionally, over 118 kg of gold were seized, all concealed in luggage.

Other seizures included smaller volumes of strategic goods, tobacco, hazardous materials, and pharmaceuticals.

Operation Calypso revealed patterns of poly-criminality and shifting smuggling tactics in the Caribbean. The operation highlighted the region’s strategic role in both the import and export of illicit goods – most notably, cocaine, herbal cannabis, and firearms. The concealment of weapons parts and ammunition in baggage and everyday items like sauce bottles underscores the increasingly sophisticated methods used by traffickers. Importantly, the findings point to the growing need for continued intelligence sharing, post-operational follow-up, and regional cooperation to close gaps and respond to these interconnected threats more effectively.

2.2 Operation Secure Horizon

Programme Global Shield conducted Operation Secure Horizon, focused on Southeast Europe, the Balkans and the Baltic region, in autumn 2024.

This operation specifically targeted the movement of explosive precursors and other equipment essential for improvised explosive device (IED) production. This was built upon the foundation laid by regional safety and security workshops conducted as part of Programme Global Shield in Cyprus, Estonia and Lithuania, along with the regional analysis of the IED threats.

The overall objectives of the operation were to curb the unauthorized diversion of chemical precursors and other components used in improvised explosive devices (IEDs). It aimed to enhance collaboration and information sharing among Customs administrations and other law enforcement and intelligence agencies, facilitated by the Regional Intelligence Liaison Office (RILO) network and INTERPOL.

The operation also sought to strengthen cooperation between border agencies across WCO Members to detect, intercept, and seize illegal

shipments of explosive precursors used in the manufacturing of IEDs. This would further support investigations aimed at identifying, disrupting, and dismantling transnational illicit networks. Additionally, the operation intended to increase the utilization of INTERPOL’s resources, particularly its databases.

2.2.1 Operational results

The operational results and analysis are divided into two main areas: the licit trade of explosive precursors and additional IED components within the participating regions, and seizures carried out by Member administrations. It is important to note that the data provided may not be exhaustive; therefore, the analysis should be considered indicative rather than definitive.

The trade data reported by participating WCO Members revealed that the majority of licit trade flows occurred within the European Union (EU) region, with a smaller but strategically significant volume of imports originating from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. During the reporting period, a total of 683 legitimate shipments were identified and thoroughly inspected by participating Customs administrations. The data indicated that Serbia and Hungary maintained the highest levels of trade activity with other Members. Key trade corridors included shipments from the United Arab Emirates transiting through Romania to Serbia, as well as movements from the United Kingdom to Lithuania and from Bulgaria to Ukraine.

Among all monitored goods, urea emerged as the most commonly traded explosive precursor across participating regions, ranking highest in both import and export transactions under the PGS monitoring framework. Ammonium nitrate was the second most traded explosive precursor, though the scale of this trade network was considerably smaller. Key participants in the ammonium nitrate trade included Bulgaria, Lithuania, Ukraine and the United Kingdom.

During the reporting phase, participating Member Customs administrations uploaded a total of 153 cases amounting to 280 seizures to the dedicated CENcomm platform. Slovakia reported the most cases (27%), followed by Poland (23%) and Serbia (20%). In addition to the explosive precursors, the top commodities seized were currency, tobacco, drugs and IPR goods.

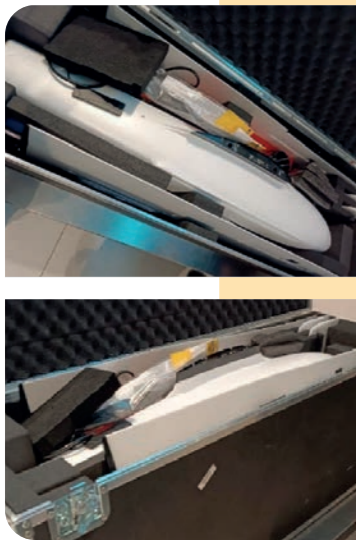
In total, the following items were seized during the reporting phase of the operation:

- 50 litres of explosive precursors;
- 2,300,000.00 euros in currency;
- more than 31 tonnes of tobacco;
- nearly 140,000 pieces of IPR-violative goods; and
- 1,615 pieces of weapons and ammunition.

Most cases were reported during the operational phase; however, some were recorded immediately following the pre-operational meeting and several Members continued reporting even after the operational phase. This was largely due to the extended activities of the joint border units, which remained operational beyond the designated time frame.

At the request of participating Members, the PGS programme expanded its scope to include the monitoring of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and their components. In this context, Moldova reported the seizure of a UAV prototype (see Case study 4) during the operational phase, highlighting the importance of this expanded focus. This case illustrates the evolving nature of security threats and the need for continued vigilance in monitoring emerging technologies.

Photo Courtesy:
Customs Service
of the Republic of
Moldova.



Case study 4.

MOLDOVA SEIZES UNDECLARED UAV PROTOTYPE AT CHIȘINĂU AIRPORT

In January 2024, Moldovan Customs authorities intercepted an undeclared unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) prototype equipped with a video camera at Chișinău International Airport. The discovery occurred during Operation Secure Horizon, led by WCO Programme Global Shield in Eastern Europe specifically the Balkan and Baltics subregions.

The UAV was found in the checked baggage of a 41-year-old non-resident passenger arriving from Warsaw. The item lacked any model identification or accompanying documentation, raising security concerns. Given the UAV's potential dual-use nature, Moldovan authorities launched an investigation to determine its origin and intended purpose. This case underscores the effectiveness of intelligence-driven Customs operations in detecting and preventing the unauthorized transport of strategic goods.

Source: CEN data.



ABBREVIATIONS

ABF	Australian Border Force
AFP	Australian Federal Police
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AIRCOP	Airport Communication Project
AML	Anti-Money Laundering
AP	Asia-Pacific
BMPE	Benzyl Methyl Phenyl Ether
BOLT	WCO Project BOLT
BRL	Brazilian Real
BURS	Botswana Unified Revenue Service
CA	Customs Administration
CAM	Central America
CAR	Caribbean
CBP	Customs and Border Protection (USA)
CCA	Central Customs Authority
CCP	Container Control Programme
CDP	Cultural and Documentary Products
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
CEN	Customs Enforcement Network
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species
CLP	Chemical Logistics Programme
COLIBRI	WCO Project on General Aviation Monitoring
COO	Country of Origin
COPOLAD	Cooperation Programme on Drugs Policies
CPC	Central Product Classification / Crime Prevention Centre
CTF	Counter-Terrorism Financing
DEA	Drug Enforcement Administration
DEMETER	WCO Global Operation on Waste & ODS trafficking
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
DRI	Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (India)
EAD	Electronic Advance Data
ECE	Economic Commission for Europe
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
ESA	Eastern and Southern Africa
ESC	Enforcement Sub-Committee
EU	European Union
EUR	Euro
FIU	Financial Intelligence Unit
GA	General Aviation

GBL	Gamma-Butyrolactone
GBP	British Pound Sterling
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIA	Gemological Institute of America
GRA	Ghana Revenue Authority
GTA	Global Trade Atlas
HAZ	Hazardous
HC	Hydrocarbons / Health Certificates
HFC	Hydrofluorocarbons
HZPF	Hot Zone Prioritization Forum
IA	Impact Assessment
ICPO	International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL)
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ID	Identification
IE	Ireland
IM	Import
IMO	International Maritime Organization
IND	India
IPR	Intellectual Property Rights
IT	Information Technology / Italy
ITR	Illicit Trade Report
IWT	Illegal Wildlife Trade
JPY	Japanese Yen
K9	Canine Unit
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
LAN	Local Area Network
LSD	Lysergic Acid Diethylamide
MAOC-N	Maritime Analysis and Operations Centre – Narcotics
MC	Mail Channel
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
ML	Money Laundering
MLA	Mutual Legal Assistance
MMC	Multi-Modal Corridor
MMO	Marine Management Organisation
MO	Modus Operandi
MOC	Memorandum of Cooperation
NCA	National Crime Agency (UK)
NCP	National Contact Point
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPS	New Psychoactive Substances
OAS	Organization of American States
OCG	Organized Crime Group
OCTAGON	WCO AML/CTF Strategic Capacity-Building Project

ODS	Ozone-Depleting Substances
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OIC	Organization of Islamic Cooperation
OJT	On-the-Job Training
OMD	Organisation Mondiale des Douanes
OPS	Operations
OPV	Offshore Patrol Vessel
P2P	Person-to-Person / Point-to-Point
PCCP	Passenger and Cargo Control Programme
PCP	Phencyclidine (drug family)
PCU	Port Control Unit
PIF	Public Investment Fund
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
R&D	Research and Development
RBF	Risk-Based Framework
RCA	Republic of Central Africa
RFB	Receita Federal do Brasil
RILO	Regional Intelligence Liaison Office
RIP	Rip-On/Rip-Off (container infiltration method)
RPS	Revenue Protection Service
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SA	South Africa / Saudi Arabia
SALW	Small Arms and Light Weapons
SAR	Suspicious Activity Report / Special Administrative Region
SARS	South African Revenue Service
SC	Sub-Committee
SEA	South East Asia
SDDP	Synthetic Drugs Detection Project
SG	Secretary General
SKU	Stock Keeping Unit
SMEs	Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
TCO	Transnational Criminal Organization
TETRA	Terrestrial Trunked Radio
TIM	Time-Stamped / Training Implementation Monitoring
TNT	Trinitrotoluene
TTO	Trinidad and Tobago
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UAV	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle
UK	United Kingdom
UNK	Unknown
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UPU	Universal Postal Union
US	United States

USA	United States of America
USD	United States Dollar
VAT	Value Added Tax
WA	West Africa
WCA	West and Central Africa
WCO	World Customs Organization
WE	Western Europe
WGRCF	WCO Global Research & Customs Forum
XOF	West African CFA Franc



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