

New ICAIE Estimate on the Size of the Global Illegal Economy: At Least \$6 Trillion Annually

Criminal syndicates and threat networks continue to diversify across industries to expand their illicit empires in every corner of the globe.

WASHINGTON, DC, UNITED STATES, July 13, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- CRIME CONVERGENCE: [ILLEGAL TRADE](#) & [ILLICIT MARKETS](#)

The International Coalition Against Illicit Economies (ICAIE) announced today a new estimate on the Size of the Global Illegal Economy of at Least \$6 Trillion Annually as [illicit trade](#) continues to accelerate around the world.



In today's dynamic and ever-changing security landscapes, criminal syndicates and threat networks continue to diversify across industries to expand their illicit empires in our communities, and in every corner of the globe.

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Transnational criminal groups are gaining more power, diversifying, and building alliances that could allow them to expand their operations in unprecedented ways that harm our global security.”

David M. Luna

"Globalization has not only expanded legitimate commerce — it has given criminal networks the scale, speed, and reach to operate across borders as never before," said David M. Luna, Executive Director, ICAIE.

\$6 TRILLION ESTIMATED SIZE OF THE GLOBAL ILLEGAL ECONOMY

Today's illicit markets are no longer isolated crimes. They are interlinked threat multipliers: what happens in one market destabilizes many others, and no country, region, or community stands untouched.

ILLICIT TRADE IS A THREAT MULTIPLIER

Sophisticated criminal entrepreneurs no longer specialize—they diversify and scale.



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The same illicit networks trafficking narcotics also move people, arms, endangered wildlife, pillaged gold and critical minerals alongside fake medicines, electronics, apparel, and illegal cigarettes and alcohol products.

Their routes stretch from Mexico and Brazil's Tri-Border Area to the Mekong Valley and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Diversification does more than grow profit, it lets illicit networks infiltrate governance institutions and penetrate legitimate sectors, laundering dirty money back into the formal economy while using criminal proceeds to buy impunity and corrupt the very police and security institutions meant to keep the public safe.

Find New ICAIE Executive Brief, July 2026 at: Estimate on the Size of the Global Illegal Economy: At Least \$6 Trillion Annually

The International Coalition Against Illicit Economies (ICAIE) works with governments, institutions, industry, and civil society to disrupt the criminal networks behind crime convergence and illegal trade—before a spectrum of threats metastasizes into greater chaos, instability, and insecurity.

Learn more about ICAIE: <https://icaie.com/>

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