



**TRANSNATIONAL ALLIANCE  
TO COMBAT ILLICIT TRADE**

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# CONFRONTING THE THREAT OF ILLICIT TRADE

SPOTLIGHT ON THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC



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# Combatting Illicit Trade in the Dominican Republic

## Introduction

The Dominican Republic has demonstrated remarkable economic resilience and growth across multiple sectors, establishing itself as a model in the Caribbean region. Over the past two decades, the country's economy has expanded at an average annual rate of 5.8%, significantly outpacing the Latin American and Caribbean average of 2.6%. This robust growth has been driven by strategic investments in tourism, real estate, and telecommunications, attracting substantial foreign investment and contributing to the nation's economic dynamism. Additionally, the Dominican Republic's effective policy responses and structural flexibility have enabled it to adapt to changing global conditions, further solidifying its position as a resilient economy in the region.

However, the country's rapid economic growth, coupled with a large informal sector and regulatory gaps, has rendered it susceptible to illicit trade. Estimates suggest that the Dominican Republic loses approximately three billion pesos each year due to illicit trade, with substantial revenue losses stemming from illegal activities such as smuggling, counterfeiting, product adulteration, label tampering (which includes, but is not limited to decoding) and tax evasion. Consequently, illicit trade not only deprives the government of critical tax revenue but also places a significant burden on legitimate industries. The economic impact extends beyond lost revenue; it weakens regulatory compliance, compromises consumer safety, and disrupts fair competition, ultimately undermining sustainable economic growth. Addressing the negative impacts of illicit trade requires robust enforcement, increased border security, and strengthened public-private partnerships to curb illicit trade and protect both the economy and public health.

It has become clear that the national government has the issue of illicit trade at the forefront of its priorities, given Vice President Raquel Peña's declaration of the issue as a matter of national security, as well as both her and various cabinet ministers' evident support of efforts to combat it. Illicit trade erodes the productivity and profitability of multiple commercial sectors, draining billions from the legitimate economy each year and undermining economic development and growth. This illegal and unfair competition stemming from illicit trade deprives legitimate businesses of profits, weakening their ability to create jobs and pay taxes. It also deprives the government of funds intended for public investments. In 2021, the Minister for Industry and Commerce, Victor Bisonó, said that every year the Dominican Republic stopped collecting 3 billion Dominican pesos due to illicit trade. This loss does not take into account the costs incurred by the government in its efforts to combat this practice, such as the creation of high-level task forces. Tackling illicit trade would not only improve resource mobilization in the Dominican Republic, but would also contribute to stronger investor confidence, reinforcing its reputation as a destination for legitimate business.

# Dominican Republic's Structural Capability to Address Illicit Trade

Overall, the Dominican Republic's regulatory bodies, institutions, and enforcement agencies are well-rounded and in line with international standards. Similarly, existing legislation and regulations aimed at deterring illicit trade are generally viewed as adequate. However, there are several primary challenges that need to be addressed:

## 1. High Levels of Informal Employment and Shadow Economy

Although poverty rates have been successfully reduced, a significant portion of the Dominican Republic's workforce operates informally, estimated to account for 34% of GDP. Since the informal sector lacks regulatory oversight and tax compliance mechanisms, illicit goods avoid tax collections and circulate more freely.

## 2. Need for improvements in Regulatory and Enforcement Frameworks

Although new anti-contraband legislation has been introduced, gaps remain in its implementation and enforcement. Limited financial and human resources weaken the effectiveness of existing regulatory frameworks. Furthermore, existing anti-money laundering and asset recovery legislation have yet to be fully implemented by the government and are a key component in the fight against organized crime and corruption.

## 3. Border Vulnerabilities and Cross-Border Smuggling

The Dominican-Haitian border is a major entry point for illicit trade, including smuggling of contraband cigarettes, counterfeit alcohol, and unregulated medicines. While Dominican authorities have taken steps to enhance border security through increased monitoring and infrastructure improvements, effective enforcement of border controls is hindered by limited resources and coordination.

## 4. Corruption

Corruption is a pervasive issue that hampers the Dominican Republic's ability to effectively combat illicit trade. President Luis Abinader's administration has prioritized anti-corruption initiatives, promoting transparency and prosecutorial independence. However, continued reforms and capacity building within judicial and enforcement agencies are essential to strengthen their ability to effectively combat illicit trade and restore public trust.

## 5. Drug Trafficking and Organized Crime

The Dominican Republic is a major trans-shipment point for illicit drugs, including cocaine, heroin and fentanyl. The country also faces significant challenges with organized crime, as transnational criminal organizations exploit its land routes, airspace, and territorial waters to traffic drugs primarily destined for the United States and Europe. Despite recent updates to the country's anti-money laundering regulations and a strengthening of the Financial Intelligence Unit, the country is vulnerable to money laundering and illicit financial flows generated from these activities. Furthermore, illicit trade threatens to worsen the presence of organized crime groups in the country, given such practices have been closely linked to

peripheral operations these groups tend to carry out in order to finance other criminal ventures, such as drug trafficking and human trafficking.

#### 6. Need for increased Public Awareness and Education

Public perception that illicit trade is a minor issue reduces community engagement and hinders efforts to address the broader social and economic consequences. Limited awareness campaigns mean that many consumers remain unaware of the risks associated with counterfeit and contraband products, including health risks and links to organized crime. Both private and public sector have worked together in the creation and implementation of training programs for active task forces from government that are identifying illicit products and sharing best practices to improve skills.

#### 7. Vulnerabilities in Free Trade Zones (FTZs)

Free Trade Zones (FTZs) are vital to the Dominican Republic's economy, with over 80 FTZ parks hosting hundreds of companies and contributing significantly to export revenues. However, these zones also present potential channels for illicit trade, as the high volume of goods passing through the zones, along with limited oversight, create challenges for customs authorities in monitoring each transaction. Strengthening oversight, implementing transparency measures, and adopting international best practices are essential steps to mitigate these vulnerabilities.

#### **The OECD Recommendations on Free Trade Zone Transparency**

The OECD Recommendations on Free Trade Zone (FTZ) Transparency and the accompanying Code of Conduct for FTZ Operators establish a framework to enhance oversight and accountability within FTZs. Developed in response to evidence that FTZs can be exploited by criminal networks for the transit and storage of illicit goods, these guidelines promote transparency to strengthen customs controls, improve reporting practices, and support the monitoring of goods moving through FTZs. The Code of Conduct for FTZ Operators complements this by setting standards to help zone operators prevent misuse, encourage ethical business practices, and reinforce compliance with international trade laws.

## Sectors Affected by Illicit Trade

### Counterfeit and Pirated Goods

The Dominican Republic has made significant strides in strengthening intellectual property rights (IPR), thereby earning its removal from the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) Special 301 Watch List in 2023. Enforcement efforts by the *National Advisory Council on Intellectual Property* have improved interagency coordination, resulting in the management of 584 cases in 2022 and the seizure of millions of counterfeit products. Under the guidance of the Interministerial Council on Intellectual Property, agencies have enhanced cooperation, stepped up actions against signal piracy, improved resource allocation, and increased transparency by publishing enforcement statistics. The number of

specialized IP prosecutors has also grown, supported by training and technical assistance from U.S. counterparts.

While notable progress has been made, the institutions responsible for IPR enforcement still face capacity challenges. Many agencies remain under-resourced, limiting their ability to fully address the scale of counterfeiting and online piracy in the country. Counterfeit goods, including clothing, accessories, electronics, and toys, are openly sold in major areas such as Santo Domingo, Santiago de los Caballeros, and popular tourist destinations like Punta Cana and Bávaro. Markets like Villa Consuelo, La Venezuela, and Herrera are particularly known for the sale of counterfeit items, often treated as though they are legitimate goods. Social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook have increasingly become prominent channels for advertising and selling counterfeit products.

### Substandard and Falsified Medicines

Counterfeit pharmaceuticals remain a persistent threat, posing severe health risks to consumers. Counterfeit drugs, often sold openly in informal markets or through rogue online pharmacies, can lack effective ingredients or contain harmful substances.

In November 2022, authorities dismantled a criminal gang involved in the sale and production of counterfeit medicines in La Guáyiga, Santo Domingo Oeste. The raid resulted in the arrest of three individuals and the seizure of approximately 800,000 counterfeit medicine units, including Amoxicillin and Complex B. In 2023, the Dominican Republic continued its crackdown on counterfeit medicines, with the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Crimes and Offenses Against Health initiating eight cases targeting counterfeit products sold in pharmacies and illicit markets. These actions led to the seizure of more than four million units of counterfeit medicines. In January 2023, CECCOM, the Specialized Body for the Control of Fuels and Merchandise Trade, destroyed 471,000 counterfeit medicines, which were seized by the DGA, PEDECSA, and Pro Consumidor in different operations. These achievements underscore the country's commitment to safeguarding public health and reinforcing intellectual property protections, while also highlighting the ongoing threat posed by counterfeit pharmaceuticals to public health in the Dominican Republic.

### Illicit Tobacco

The Dominican Republic faces significant challenges with illicit tobacco trade, particularly involving “illicit whites,”<sup>1</sup> with the Capital brand, manufactured in Dubai, dominating the Dominican Republic’s illicit tobacco market, accounting for over 60% of illegal cigarette sales. These cigarettes primarily enter the country through land and sea crossings along the Dominican-Haitian border. In 2022, approximately 32% of cigarettes sold in the Dominican Republic were illicit, with around three out of every ten cigarettes evading taxes and

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<sup>1</sup> illicit whites are cigarette brands legally manufactured in one country but smuggled into other markets where they are neither registered, taxed, nor regulated. Unlike counterfeits, these brands are produced by legitimate companies, yet are intended for distribution through illegal channels. They typically lack the tax stamps, health warnings, and packaging regulations required in the destination country, enabling them to evade taxes and circumvent public health regulations.

bypassing packaging regulations. None of the 28 identified illegal brands in the market comply with mandatory tax stamps or health warnings.

In response, Dominican authorities have ramped up enforcement. CECCOM conducted over 900 operations from 2020 to 2022, leading to the confiscation of more than 280 million illegal cigarettes and reducing the illicit trade share from 49.4% to 31%. Dominican Customs also increased port seizures, especially in the latter half of 2022, supported by enhanced intelligence-sharing with foreign customs, including Panama. Expanding this collaboration—potentially through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)—could further strengthen enforcement efforts and reduce the influx of illicit tobacco products into the Dominican market.

### Illicit Alcohol

Counterfeit alcohol poses significant public health risks in the Dominican Republic, where it's frequently sold in nightclubs and bars when consumers have no idea that the product is substandard and dangerous. In 2021, the Ministry of Public Health reported 26 deaths and over 80 individuals affected by methanol poisoning linked to adulterated alcohol.

To combat this issue, the government has intensified enforcement actions. In 2022, authorities handled more than 584 cases nationwide, resulting in the seizure of tens of millions of infringing products, including counterfeit alcoholic beverages. The National Institute for the Protection of Consumer Rights (Pro Consumidor) has also taken a firm stance by closing businesses involved in selling adulterated alcoholic beverages and refusing to reopen them, emphasizing the commitment to public safety. The local industry, particularly the importing sector, has also played a role in the education of government authorities in best practices for the correct identification and mitigation of the different types of illicit trade. Despite these efforts, counterfeit alcohol remains a persistent threat. Continuous consumer awareness campaigns and robust enforcement are essential to effectively combat this issue and safeguard public health.

At the commercial level, the import sector is significantly impacted, primarily by smugglers who, by importing products illicitly, evade taxes and other costs associated with the operations and permits of legitimate trade. This situation allows them to set prices for products below their market value, attracting consumers and creating unfair competition that results in losses for legitimate traders. The profits generated from this unfair practice finance illicit trade networks and the criminal groups associated with them, strengthening these groups and increasing their influence in the market. In the case of brands with exclusive representation agreements in the country, smuggling leads to a dilution and breach of their brand presentation in alignment with their global strategic guidelines.

If carried out, recent government proposals to increase taxes on alcohol should also include measures to prioritize enhanced enforcement to address the inevitable rise in illicit trade it would bring about, as it has been repeatedly proven higher taxes shift demand toward cheaper, unregulated and illicit alternatives. Bolstering enforcement alongside any tax adjustment will help safeguard consumer safety, support legitimate businesses, and protect government revenues. Furthermore, an increase in the Ad Valorem tax is ill-advised by

international standards, given the likelihood of it driving up illicit trade further by causing a dramatic increase in prices, and thus a more dramatic shift in consumer preference towards cheaper, illicit products. Alternatively, when contemplating tax increases, the use of specific tax is considered international best practice due to the objective nature of its calculation, and the ease of projection of estimated tax collection.

### Illegal Pesticides

The trade in illegal pesticides poses serious risks to public health, agriculture, and the environment in the Dominican Republic. These unregulated products often contain banned or harmful substances that can contaminate soil and water, endanger farm workers, and undermine food safety. In January 2023, the National Institute for the Protection of Consumer Rights (Pro Consumidor) committed to monitoring and regulating the retail sale of highly dangerous pesticides leading to the tragic death of a woman and her baby. Investigations revealed that these pesticides were sold outside of regulatory controls, prompting authorities to implement surveillance mechanisms to ensure responsible sales and proper use.

Recent restrictions on several active pesticide ingredients, including neonicotinoids, may unintentionally create opportunities for illegal trade. Evidence from Europe shows that such restrictions can drive demand for unregulated products, as black markets emerge to fill the gap left by restricted products. Criminal agents exploit these regulatory gaps by supplying counterfeit or unsafe alternatives, thereby undermining safety standards and enforcement efforts. To mitigate these risks, it is essential to combine regulatory restrictions with robust enforcement, increased vigilance from customs officials—particularly regarding pesticide and fertilizer imports—and heightened awareness among farmers and consumers.

### Human Trafficking and Forced Labor

Human trafficking and forced labor remain persistent issues in the Dominican Republic, impacting vulnerable communities, including undocumented migrants and low-income individuals. Forced labor is reported in agriculture, particularly in sectors like sugarcane and coffee, where child labor is also prevalent. While improved protocols and support systems for trafficking victims have been implemented, additional resources for victim protection and expanded measures are essential to effectively combat and reduce human trafficking.

## **Policy Recommendations**

Illicit trade undermines the Dominican Republic's economic growth, endangers public health, and fosters criminal networks. To encourage an effective policy response to this threat, TRACIT has prepared a set of policy recommendations that the Dominican Republic can implement to improve its ability to defend against illicit trade.

It is imperative that the Dominican Republic prioritize efforts to mitigate illicit trade and safeguard economic and socio-cultural development. It also has potential to demonstrate leadership in the region. By strengthening regulatory enforcement, the Dominican Republic can better address the challenges posed by illicit trade, ensuring sustainable growth and economic security for the future.

### 1. Strengthen and Fully Implement Law 17-19 Against Illicit Trade

Ensure the complete adoption and rigorous enforcement of the 2019 anti-contraband legislation, Law 17-19, to comprehensively combat illicit trade. Law 17-19 provides a robust framework with strong enforcement provisions, including sanctions for seizure, destruction, and closure of non-compliant premises, as well as stringent financial and criminal penalties to deter illegal activities that impact both the economy and public health.

### 2. Enhance Regulatory Controls

Ensure that anti-contraband legislation is fully operationalized through structured and controlled regulatory measures. This requires empowering, training, and providing sufficient financial and human resources to government agencies for effective implementation, enforcement, and compliance. Implementation of existing anti-money laundering and asset recovery legislation must be strengthened in order to effectively fight illicit trade, organized crime and corruption. Furthermore, it is important to strengthen vigilance and regulation around alcohol used for the elaboration of alcoholic beverages, such as methanol and imported neutral alcohol.

### 3. Broaden the Scope of Anti-Contraband Legislation

The current anti-contraband legislation focuses on illicit trade in pharmaceuticals, tobacco, alcohol, and petroleum fuels. However, there is a growing need to expand the scope to include counterfeiting of consumer goods, clothing, shoes, electronics, and illicit trade in natural resources, such as timber and minerals. In the case of illicit trade in alcohol, the tampering of lot codes is still commonplace. Lot codes are essential tools for government authorities to be able to trace and verify the authenticity of products, given that products that do not meet these standards compromise consumer safety, damage the reputation and economic stability of legitimate brands, businesses, and governments.

Addressing these areas is essential to effectively combat the range of illicit activities impacting the Dominican Republic's economy, environment, and public health.

### 4. Improve Interagency Cooperation at the National Level

A positive example is the recent enactment of Decree 405-22, which establishes comprehensive regulations under Law 17-19 to combat illicit trade, smuggling, and counterfeiting, with a particular focus on the illicit alcohol market. Decree 405-22 exemplifies a coordinated interagency approach, involving the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, Ministry of Public Health, CECCOM, the National Police, Customs, and the Tax Directorate. This framework clarifies each agency's roles in operations, intelligence gathering, inspections, and judicial processes, setting a strong precedent for enhanced regulatory controls across sectors. Recently approved protocols that establish mechanisms for cross-government agency collaboration in the search, seizure and prosecuting of illicit alcohol, tobacco and medicine are a step in the right direction, but need to have dedicated resources assigned, as well as a solid integration between collaborating agencies in order to have a meaningful effect.



## 5. Strengthen Customs Enforcement

Enhance customs enforcement and oversight, specifically at the Dominican-Haitian border, to address the significant challenges posed by illicit trade. This critical border area requires targeted measures, including increased automation of customs processes to reduce human involvement and minimize corruption opportunities. Implementing advanced technology, such as electronic tracking systems and automated inspections, will streamline procedures and improve the accuracy and transparency of goods crossing the border. Additionally, prioritizing interagency coordination and intelligence-sharing at the border can improve the interception of illicit goods. Strengthening partnerships with international customs agencies, particularly those in neighboring regions, can further enhance enforcement capabilities.

## 6. Intensify Public-Private Coordination

Enhanced coordination with private sector experts is essential for designing and implementing effective programs to combat illicit, contraband, and counterfeit products. The successful launch of the *Observatorio Industrial contra el Comercio Ilícito* (OICI) serves as a model collaborative platform for monitoring and addressing illicit trade, offering a proven approach to intelligence gathering and information-sharing that strengthens enforcement and prevention efforts.

To build on this success, the Dominican Republic should focus on enhancing the OICI's capabilities, further refining its data-sharing mechanisms and analytical tools. Additionally, promoting this model regionally as an example of effective public-private cooperation can encourage other countries to adopt similar approaches, creating a unified front across the region in combating illicit trade and protecting legitimate markets.

## 7. Raise Awareness and Strengthen Controls Against Illicit Pesticides

Illicit pesticides pose serious risks to public health, agriculture, and the environment in the Dominican Republic. Addressing this issue effectively requires enhanced resources for regulatory agencies to monitor imports and sales, increased vigilance from customs officials to intercept illegal pesticides and fertilizers at borders, and effective interagency collaboration to prevent the circulation of counterfeit products. As an urgent priority, the Observatorio Industrial contra el Comercio Ilícito (OICI) should actively coordinate efforts to maximize the impact of these measures and promote a unified response.

- **Alert Local Authorities:** Ensure that local authorities are informed of the potential risks and prevalence of counterfeit and illegal pesticides to prioritize enforcement and inspection activities.
- **Increase Customs Vigilance:** Enhance customs protocols, with a particular focus on pesticide and fertilizer imports, to prevent entry of unregulated products.
- **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Launch campaigns to educate farmers and consumers on the negative impacts of illicit pesticides on agriculture, public health, and the environment, raising awareness of the importance of using regulated products.

## **8. Ensure Scrutiny of Fiscal Marking Techniques**

Any new measures to combat illicit trade through fiscal marking techniques should be carefully scrutinized for cost-effectiveness and balanced with other policy measures. Fiscal marking programs can represent a substantial investment of government resources for both implementation and monitoring. Careful scrutiny should be applied to both direct costs (e.g., equipment, taxpayer burden) and indirect costs (e.g., industry burdens, logistics costs for imported products, system differences across jurisdictions and sectors) to ensure proportionality between the effectiveness of curbing illicit trade, the cost of the remedy, and potential disruptions to legitimate business.

Flexibility by the government and close collaboration with industry—including both local producers and importers—can provide intelligence-sharing, technical support, cooperation with law enforcement and customs, and insights from international best practices to ensure a cost-effective system.

For example, the Dominican government attempted the integration of its TRAFICO tax stamp program, but after various economic studies, it was demonstrated to be inapplicable to the alcohol import sector due to the rise in cost and logistical complexity its implementation would represent. For instance, it became evident that there was no physical space available in the Dominican Republic for the running of an operation to place these stamps on the massive variety of imported products. Also given the way import sector works based on legal framework, in order to bring alcoholic beverages into the country, companies must pay taxes at the moment of importation, making the tax stamps useless for mitigating illicit trade.

## **9. Enforce Criminal Penalties**

The Dominican Republic's anti-contraband legislation significantly raises the level of deterrent penalties. It is critical that these provisions are swiftly translated into clear regulations and enforced through judicial and administrative systems. In addition, it is important that the government imposes sanctions for using fake fiscal markings or stamps. Recent sentences of two years in prison for the illegal sale of counterfeit medicines and three years in prison, along with an RD\$8,000,000 fine, for clandestine alcohol production and tax evasion underscore the importance of deterrent penalties in combating illicit trade. Such rulings reinforce the legal framework and send a strong message to those who violate regulations on regulated products.

## **10. Strengthen Health-Focused Legislation and Enforcement Against Counterfeit Products**

To effectively reduce health risks from counterfeit products, it is essential that Dominican authorities expand and enforce legislation specifically targeting fake goods that compromise consumer safety. Beyond pharmaceuticals, other counterfeited products such as alcohol, food, cosmetics, and personal care items pose significant health threats. The Dominican Republic must strengthen health-focused legislation and enforcement against counterfeit products. Moreover, leadership in this area could motivate neighboring countries to adopt similar standards, fostering a collaborative regional approach to enhance consumer safety and brand protection.

### 11. Strengthen Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) Enforcement

The Dominican Republic has made substantial progress in IPR enforcement, resulting in its removal from the U.S. Trade Representative's (USTR) Special 301 Watch List in 2023. If this achievement is to be sustained, continued efforts are needed to address both online and physical markets that traffic in counterfeit and pirated goods. Stricter online enforcement should prioritize monitoring and regulating e-commerce platforms to hold them accountable for the sale of counterfeit products. Implementing clear liability standards for e-commerce platforms is an essential measure to reduce the availability of illicit goods online. Effective measures to deter online piracy should also be introduced, ensuring that platform operators and intermediaries face liability for enabling access to illegal or infringing materials. Customs and *ex parte* enforcement should be strengthened to empower customs authorities to take *ex officio* actions and streamline processes for *ex parte* seizures, enabling swift and surprise enforcement to prevent counterfeit goods from entering or circulating in the market. Collaboration with intermediaries, such as payment processors, logistics companies, and others, is crucial to disrupt the supply chains of counterfeit goods, both online and offline.

### 12. Develop a Multilateral, Cross-Sector Response to Illicit Trade

Transnational criminals are not bound by national borders. The Dominican Republic must enhance government-to-government cooperation across borders, especially in customs, law enforcement, and information exchange on exports and high-risk products vulnerable to tax arbitrage and smuggling.

### 13. Strengthen Oversight and Enforcement in Free Trade Zones (FTZs)

While FTZs, or free ports, are essential to regional trade, they are vulnerable to misuse for moving illicit goods due to limited oversight, inadequate customs controls, and lighter regulatory frameworks. To deter FTZs from being exploited for illicit trade, the OECD has issued recommendations on enhancing transparency in FTZs, accompanied by a Code of Conduct for FTZ Operators. The Dominican Republic should consider adopting these OECD recommendations and promoting the Code of Conduct within its FTZs to establish stronger transparency, increase accountability, and deter the abuse of these zones as conduits for illicit trade. These measures would not only improve regulatory compliance within FTZs but also protect legitimate trade and enhance the country's commitment to regional and global standards in combating illicit trade.

### 14. Address Corruption

Combat pervasive corruption that facilitates illicit trade, particularly within customs, law enforcement, and the judiciary. Increased automation in customs procedures can help reduce opportunities for corruption by minimizing human involvement in sensitive processes. Enhancing transparency in public procurement is also essential to limit corrupt practices and protect legitimate companies from financial losses and reputational harm. Confronting corruption directly is crucial to the success of any anti-illicit trade strategy.

## 15. Enhance Public Awareness and Education on Illicit Trade

Strengthening local and regional education campaigns is essential to shift public perception and understanding of illicit trade. Strengthening public awareness around the dangers of counterfeit products is crucial in reducing demand for these goods. This includes emphasizing the health risks posed by counterfeit items like food, cosmetics, and medicines. Community-level awareness activities can emphasize that contraband and counterfeit goods are not trivial but are linked to organized crime and pose serious national security risks. A good example of this is the Ministry of Industry and Commerce's 2023 media campaign: "When you buy illegal cigarettes, you're buying a problem," which was aimed at raising awareness of illicit tobaccos' impact on the local industry and educating consumers.

Educating the public on the broader impacts of illicit trade fosters a strong community stance against these activities, promoting a safer and more secure environment. Partnering with local media outlets, schools, and community leaders can amplify these messages, with campaigns that highlight the connections between illicit trade, community harm, and organized crime.