

LOGBOOK

2026

Stories, data, and mechanisms of
crime proliferation in Italian ports
and beyond

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To Michele Albanese,

a fellow companion and a rigorous journalist,
who chose every day to stand on the side of truth,
even when it came at a high cost.
His absence weighs heavily, but his example endures.

Logbook – Third Edition (based on 2025 data)

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Introduction

Anti-mafia reports state it, data from investigative sources confirm it, and inquiries conducted by Public Prosecutors' Offices across Italy certify it: maritime ports represent an opportunity for corruption networks and criminal groups to increase their profits and strengthen collusive relationships. Ports are relevant both for the business generated by illicit trafficking and for the investments required to keep infrastructures operational—both of which constitute potential areas for the expansion of criminal and corrupt interests. The combination of large volumes of goods, logistical complexity, and institutional vulnerabilities makes ports particularly attractive to mafia organizations.

This is not only about economic resources, but also about gains in terms of political consensus and the construction of political and entrepreneurial careers. For this reason, ports must be understood not only as gateways for goods (legal or illegal), but also as spaces where strategic decisions for entire territories are defined and projected. Controlling a port means overseeing transit corridors, accessing information on cargo, and having the capacity to intervene along the logistics chain. Illicit activities in ports distort market competition, foster the shadow economy, and weaken the trust of lawful operators.

In particular, Italian ports have increasingly

become crucial nodes in national and international drug trafficking. This is confirmed by the Prosecutor General of the Court of Cassation, Pietro Gaeta, in his report on the administration of justice for the year 2025. As noted, “given the expected increase in controls in major European ports (Rotterdam, Antwerp, Hamburg) and Italian ports (Gioia Tauro), trafficking routes have adapted to mitigate the risk of seizure, preferring secondary ports—both European and Italian—where Albanian families and groups have further expanded their presence. These groups have positioned their intermediaries along the entire cocaine trafficking chain: from production sites and ports of departure in South America to arrival ports in Europe and Italy (among the secondary ports, Livorno, Vado Ligure, Civitavecchia, Ravenna, Trieste and Catania can be identified, where seizures have been recorded in the context of proceedings handled by the competent District Anti-Mafia Directorates), offering at the international level the role of a ‘service agency’, acting as brokers for the major criminal organizations involved, including Italian mafias.”

The figures presented in this third edition of the Logbook report confirm the seriousness of the phenomenon, with an increase in investigative and repressive activities that, on the one hand, demonstrate the continuity of criminal action over time and, on the other,

highlight the important work carried out by law enforcement agencies, oversight bodies, and judiciary. Through the processing of data derived from the analysis of press releases issued by the Customs and Monopolies Agency and the Guardia di Finanza, supplemented by the daily press review produced by Assoport, it has been possible to identify episodes of illegality that occurred within the Italian port system in 2025.

- In 2025, 131 cases of crime were recorded within Italian ports (a 14% increase compared to 2024), involving 38 ports (30 in 2024, an increase of 27%). The highest number of cases was recorded in the port of Civitavecchia, with 14 cases, rising from eleventh place in 2024, when 4 cases had been recorded. This is followed by the ports of Ancona and Gioia Tauro with 13 cases each, and Genoa with 12 cases (the latter dropping from first place in 2023, when it had recorded 13 cases). Particularly significant increases are observed in the port of Trieste (from 7 to 9 cases), Olbia (from 4 to 7 cases), and Brindisi (which rises from 5 to 6 events). Conversely, some ports that ranked among the most affected in 2024 show a marked decline in 2025: Livorno decreases from 16 to 5 cases (–11, –68.8%), Bari from 10 to 6 (–4, –40%), Naples from 7 to 2 (–5, –71.4%), while Venice records the sharpest decline, dropping from 7 to 1 case (–6, –85.7%). In 2025, several ports appear for the first time: Acciaroli, Acitrezza, Agropoli, Cervia, Fiumicino, Francavilla al Mare, Manfredonia, Ragusa, Siracusa, and Taureana di Palmi.

- At the regional level, Marche, with 16 cases, is the region with the highest number of criminal events in ports, followed by Calabria, Lazio, Sardinia, and Liguria with 15 cases each, and Apulia and Sicily with 14.

- Of the 131 cases of crime, 56% (73) concern illegal import activities (77.9% in 2024), 10% (13) involve illegal export activities (9.5% in 2023), and 11% (15) relate to seizures of goods in transit. A non-negligible share is represented by the category “other”, which includes 28 events (21% of the total), covering cases not related to inbound/outbound trafficking or for which the logistics chain is unknown.

131 cases of crime
+14% by 2024

38 ports in 2025
30 in 2024

- If we consider illicit markets, drug trafficking is the most frequent category, with 40 events (approximately 31.5% of the total). This is followed by trafficking in counterfeit goods, with 34 cases (26.8%), and smuggling, with 29 events (approximately 22%). Taken together, these three categories account for 103 events, nearly 80% of the total, outlining a relatively concentrated yet structurally significant core of criminal activities that exploit port infrastructures as strategic logistical hubs. The incidence of economic and financial crimes is significantly lower: financial offences and currency-related violations amount to 5 cases each (3.9%). Additional phenomena, such as theft and illicit waste trafficking, account for 4 events each (both 3.1%), while illegal possession of weapons and receiving stolen goods amount to 2 cases per category (1.6% each).

- Overall, in the four-year period 2022–2025, there were 496 criminal events in Italian por-

ts—approximately one every three days. Within this picture, 2022 stands out with 140 criminal events, followed by 2025 with 130. In total, 53 Italian ports recorded incidents of illegality over the four-year period, 34 of which are of national relevance. Genoa ranks first with 49 cases, accounting for 9.8% of the total. In second place is the port of Livorno with 42 events (8.4%), followed by Ancona with 40 events (8%), and in third place Civitavecchia with 32 events (6.4%). Gioia Tauro and Trieste follow, both increasing to 27 cases; Palermo, which loses some positions, records 25 events; Brindisi rises to 23 cases; and Naples and Salerno record 21 each.

Analysing the reports of the National Anti-Mafia Directorate and the Anti-Mafia Investigative Directorate, published between 1994 and 2024, it emerges that:

496 criminal events in Italian ports
2022/2025

1 every 3 days

- 113 clans have been identified as operating in both illegal and legal business activities, across 71 Italian ports that have been subject to criminal projections. This is a phenomenon that has affected the entire country, from north to south;

- Of the 71 ports identified, 38 are of national economic relevance. Considering that there are 58 such ports overall, this means that 65.5% of Italy's main commercial ports have been exposed to organized criminal inte-

113 clan
operating in 1994/2024

71 ports
38 national economic
relevance

rests. These include some of the leading freight hubs, both in terms of general and bulk cargo and container volumes, such as Ancona, Augusta, Brindisi, Cagliari, Genoa, Gioia Tauro, La Spezia, Naples, Ravenna, Salerno, Savona and Vado Ligure, Taranto, Trieste, and Venice;

- The analysis of institutional reports shows that as many as 26 criminal groups have been involved in port-related activities. These include both historically rooted mafia groups and lesser-known criminal organizations, highlighting how ports can represent opportunities for territorial groups to establish connections with a wide range of criminal networks worldwide. Among them are the traditional Italian mafias—'ndrangheta, camorra, and cosa nostra—but also other Italian criminal organizations such as the Banda della Magliana, Sacra Corona Unita, Stidda, and Bari-based criminal groups. In addition, there are projections of various groups identified solely by their geographical origin (either referring to where they operate or the territorial origin of their members), including groups from Asia, Eastern Europe, and North Africa, as well as specific national groups such as those from Albania, China, Mexico, and Nigeria;

- There were 45 cases of alleged corruption in Italian Port System Authorities between 2018 and 2025. This picture, which does

not fully capture the entirety of corrupt phenomena occurring in Italian ports, is based on the analysis of reports by the Transparency and Anti-Corruption Officers published on the websites of all Port System Authorities. The monitoring therefore covered 16 public bodies over a period of 8 years.

The report aims to serve as a work of documentation and exposure, shedding light on a reality that is often overlooked and on dynamics that are too frequently underrated. The intent is not to criminalise, but to illuminate, because we know that where there is darkness, it is easier for mafias to conduct business.

The port system is increasingly an attractive sector for criminal networks that, having significant capital at their disposal, also view ports as areas for possible infiltration into the legal economy. This infiltration is primarily financial in nature and poses a serious threat to the healthy functioning of local economies, and therefore cannot be underestimated. Ports are gateways not only for goods and people, but also for mafias, illicit trafficking, manipulated procurement processes, corrupt systems, and money laundering.

It is necessary to raise the bar: constant vigilance is required, along with strengthened safeguards for legality and a reduction of systemic vulnerabilities through enhanced customs controls. Greater use of port intelligence is needed, including X-ray scanning technologies and data analytics, as well as increased training and staff rotation among port personnel to reduce the risk of corruption. This should be accompanied by efforts to raise awareness and foster accountability among port economic operators.

At the same time, a proactive engagement of port workers appears to be necessary, as they represent a fundamental component of the port ecosystem. There is a need for greater implementation of electronic container tracking systems and, not least, for promoting international cooperation between port authorities and law enforcement agencies.

In continuity, preventive measures are required, such as greater transparency in decision-making processes concerning port-related choices, stronger anti-corruption frameworks, and advanced whistleblower protection programmes, all of which can contribute to containing criminal infiltration.

1

ILLEGALITY IN PORTS: 2025 IN THE SPOTLIGHT

1.1 Numbers and geography of cases

In 2025, 131 criminal events were recorded in Italian ports. Through the analysis of press releases from the Customs and Monopolies Agency and the Financial Police, complemented by the daily press review produced by *Asoport*, it was possible to identify episodes of illegality occurring within the Italian port system.

The picture that emerges shows that not only major commercial ports are affected by this phenomenon, but also smaller ports, where recreational boating or fishing are the predominant activities. This snapshot certainly represents an underestimation of the phenomenon as a whole: the sources are limited and not all events are reported in the media, and there are still no institutional archives or reports that systematically document crime in ports.

The data collection uses the criminal event as the unit of analysis; therefore, any di-

screpancies between the number of ports or types of business and the number of cases are due to the fact that some criminal events involved more than one port and more than one type of activity.

In 2025, a significant increase in criminal events in Italian ports is recorded: cases rise from 115 to 131, marking an increase of nearly 14% on an annual basis. Alongside the overall rise in the number of cases, there is also a geographical expansion of the phenomenon: the number of ports involved increases from 30 to 38, corresponding to an increase of approximately 27%, indicating a broader territorial spread of criminal activity.

In 2025, strongly differentiated dynamics can be observed across ports, with substantial variations both in absolute and relative terms. Civitavecchia emerges as the port with the highest number of events, increasing from 4 cases in 2024 to 14 in 2025 (+10 events, +250%). Particularly significant increases are also recorded in Ancona, which rises from 6 to 13 cases (+7, +116.7%), and

in Cagliari, from 2 to 6 cases (+4, +200%). Gioia Tauro consolidates its position among the most exposed ports, with 13 events in 2025, up from 8 in 2024 (+5, +62.5%).

More moderate but still noteworthy growth is observed in Genoa, which increases from 10 to 12 cases (+2, +20%), Trieste, from 7 to 9 cases (+2, +28.6%), Olbia, from 4 to 7 cases (+3, +75%), and Brindisi, which rises from 5 to 6 events (+1, +20%).

By contrast, some ports that were among the most affected in 2024 show a marked

decline in 2025. Livorno drops from 16 to 5 cases (-11, -68.8%), Bari from 10 to 6 (-4, -40%), Naples from 7 to 2 (-5, -71.4%), while Venice records the sharpest decrease, falling from 7 to 1 case (-6, -85.7%).

In 2025, several ports also appear for the first time: Acciaroli, Acitrezza, Agropoli, Cervia, Fiumicino, Francavilla al Mare, Manfredonia, Ragusa, Siracusa, and Taureana di Palmi.

LIST OF PORTS AND NUMBER OF RECORDED EVENTS (2025)

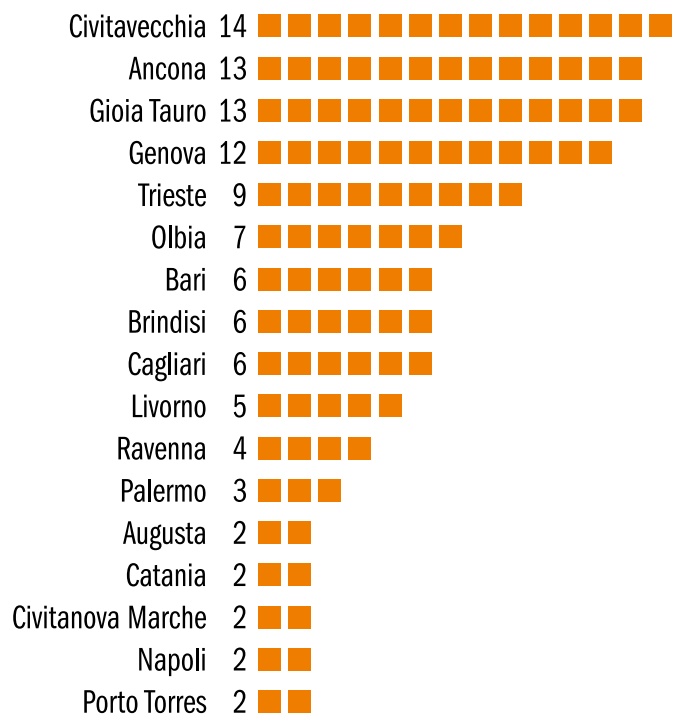


FIGURE 1 | Source Libera's elaboration based on ADM, GdF, and Assoportori data

The analysis of the data at regional level also points to markedly differentiated territorial dynamics. In 2025, particularly sharp increases are observed in Lazio (from 5 to 15 cases, +10, +200%), Marche (from 6 to 16 cases, +10, +166.7%), and Sardinia (from 7 to 15 cases, +8, +114.3%). Significant growth is also recorded in Sicily (from

8 to 14 cases, +6, +75%), Calabria (from 11 to 15, +4, +36.4%), Emilia-Romagna (from 3 to 5, +2, +66.7%), and Friuli-Venezia Giulia (from 7 to 9, +2, +28.6%).

Conversely, several regions show a clear contraction in 2025. The most substantial decline occurs in Tuscany, where cases drop from 17 to 5 (-12, -70.6%), followed by Veneto

(from 7 to 1, -6, -85.7%) and Campania (from 12 to 7, -5, -41.7%). Liguria (from 16 to 15, -1, -6.3%) and Apulia (from 15 to 14, -1, -6.7%) remain broadly stable, with only marginal decreases.

Overall, the regional pattern suggests a partial geographical reconfiguration of the phenomenon, with strong growth in some central

and island regions and a decline in areas that had recorded higher levels of incidence in 2024.

NUMBER OF EVENTS RECORDED BY REGION (YEAR 2025)

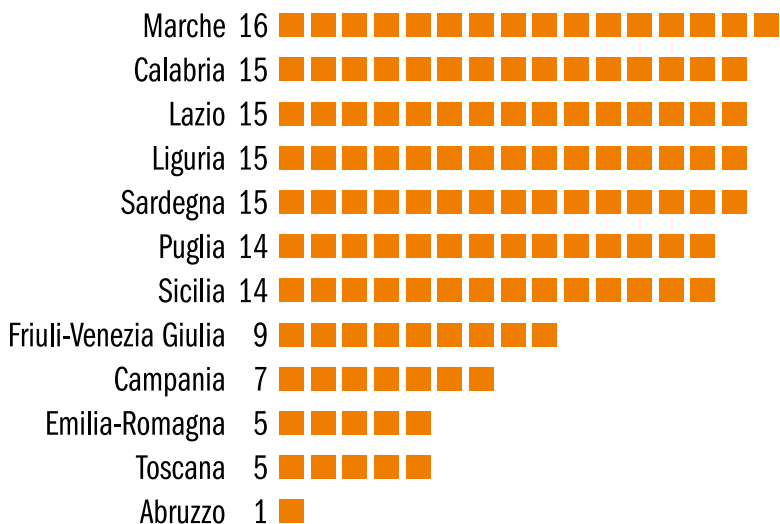


FIGURE 2 | Source Libera's elaboration based on ADM, GdF, and Assoporti data

The analysis of the types of trafficking involved in criminal events shows a clear predominance of import operations, which account for 73 cases, corresponding to 56% of the total. This finding confirms the central role of incoming flows as the primary area of exposure to criminal activities, in line with what has been observed in previous years.

By contrast, the incidence of events related

to exports is significantly lower, amounting to 13 cases (10%), as is that of transit-related activities, with 15 cases (11%). A non-negligible share is represented by the "other" category, which includes 28 events, corresponding to 22% of the total, covering cases not directly related to inbound or outbound trafficking or for which the logistics chain is unknown.

Overall, the distribution by type highlights how the vulnerability of Italian ports is primarily concentrated in inbound goods flows, while also pointing to a significant diversification

in the ways in which criminal events occur.

NUMERO DI EPISODI CRIMINALI AVVENUTI NEI PORTI (ANNO 2025)



FIGURE 3 | Source Libera's elaboration based on ADM, GdF, and Assoporti data

An analysis of the activities attributable to criminal actors shows that in the vast majority of cases—128 out of 131—they relate to illegal business activities, while only three episodes concern practices connected to sectors of the formally legal economy.

A first case concerns the port of Civitavecchia, where a significant number of operators

were found to be providing chauffeur-driven rental services without meeting the requirements set out in current legislation. These operators reportedly approached passengers in the immediate vicinity of port terminals, offering transfer services and tourist tours to the capital at particularly high prices.

The other two episodes occurred in the ports

of Acciaroli and Acitrezza and involve cases of unlawful occupation of maritime state property. In the first case, a metal structure of approximately 120 square metres was seized, as it lacked the necessary authorisations. In the second, a joint operation by the competent authorities led to the removal of numerous vessels moored without authorisation in the new harbour, thereby restoring the area to public use.

Turning to illegal business activities, drug trafficking emerges as the most recurrent category, with 40 events, accounting for approximately 31.3% of the total. This is followed by the trafficking of counterfeit goods, with 35 cases (27.3%), and smuggling, with 27 events (around 21.1%). Together, these three categories account for 103 events—nearly 80% of the total—highlighting a rela-

tively concentrated yet structurally significant core of criminal activities that exploit port infrastructures as strategic logistical hubs.

The incidence of economic and financial offences is significantly lower: financial and currency-related crimes each account for 5 cases (3.9%).

Among the other categories, there are 4 cases of illegal waste trafficking, 3 thefts, 2 cases of receiving stolen goods, and 2 cases of illegal possession of weapons, while only one case each is recorded for extortion, money laundering, and arms trafficking.

CRIMINAL EVENTS LINKED TO THE ILLEGAL ECONOMY (YEAR 2025)



FIGURE 4 | Source Libera's elaboration based on ADM, GdF, and Assoporti data

1.2 An overview of illegal markets

Money laundering and receiving stolen goods

An episode linked to international money laundering practices and the handling of stolen luxury goods was identified in the port of Genoa, which was used as a logistical hub for the illicit export of high-end vehicles to Morocco and Mauritania. The estimated economic value of the operation amounts to approximately €1.5 million, and enforcement activities led to two arrests, as well as the reporting of 24 individuals involved in various capacities.

Investigations revealed that most of the vehicles were proceeds of thefts committed in Lazio; in other cases, however, they had been obtained through misappropriation to the detriment of leasing companies or through false theft reports filed with the consent or complicity of the registered owners. Once acquired through these methods, the vehicles were channeled into illegal export routes via the Ligurian port, becoming part of a structured circuit aimed at reusing and concealing their illicit origin.

Another episode concerns the port of Brindisi, where stolen agricultural machinery was intercepted while being transported towards Greece.

Extortion

An episode of extortion aggravated by the use of mafia methods was identified within the port of Naples, where three individuals were arrested on charges of having imposed

extortionate demands aimed at strengthening a criminal group linked to the Mazzarella clan. The investigation, coordinated by the District Anti-Mafia Directorate, originated from a complaint filed in 2022 by the victims—two brothers who owned a commercial business and a stevedoring company operating within the port area.

According to the findings, they were subjected over time to repeated pressure and acts of physical violence, aimed at enforcing a periodic payment of €500 per month, in addition to the demand for a substantial lump sum presented as alleged arrears owed to the criminal organization.

The case highlights how traditional extortion practices continue to find space even within complex infrastructural contexts such as ports.

Arms trafficking

An episode linked to the illicit trafficking of military-related materials was intercepted in the port of Ravenna, where a shipment bound for Israel was halted due to the absence of the required export authorisations. The cargo, consisting of more than eight hundred metal components, included cranks, cylinders, arms, metal sheets, and other mechanical elements.

Although these were raw components, the presence of certifications and serial numbers made it possible to classify them as military material in all respects, thus subject to specific export control regimes. Particular investigative attention focused on the role of an intermediary, the head of the company responsible for commercial brokerage, who is believed to have been involved in the attempted export of the material in violation of

current regulations.

Illegal possession of weapons

Two episodes related to the illegal possession of weapons were identified within port areas. The first case was recorded in the port of Porto Torres, involving a vehicle disembarked from a motor vessel arriving from Ajaccio. Following a thorough inspection of the private car, officers discovered a sophisticated hidden compartment concealed within the passenger cabin and equipped with a dedicated opening mechanism. Inside the compartment, several items were found, including a machete with a 36 cm blade, a firerarm silencer, three revolver cylinders, and ammunition.

A second episode was detected at the Cruise Terminal of the port of Ravenna, where police seized a weapon unlawfully carried in the luggage of a passenger in transit and bound for Croatia. The luggage contained a Browning semi-automatic pistol, calibre 6.35 mm, complete with a magazine holding six rounds and a chambered cartridge, thereby constituting a situation of particular danger.

Receiving stolen goods

Two cases of receiving stolen goods were also documented. The first concerns the port of Ancona, where the State Police arrested a 61-year-old man of Macedonian nationality, stopped while attempting to board a ferry bound for Greece. Inside the vehicle, officers found six bicycles and various construction tools, which were later confirmed to have been stolen from two companies based in Alto Adige.

The second episode involved the port of Salerno and emerged following inspections of eleven containers arriving from the port of Montreal and bound for Guinea, declared as carrying used vehicles. The checks led to the seizure of ten high-displacement cars, with an estimated total market value of approximately €500,000. Nine of the vehicles, belonging to Honda and Toyota brands, were found to be stolen in Canada, confirming the port's involvement in transnational networks of receiving stolen goods.

Illegal waste trafficking

During the period under consideration, four episodes related to illegal waste trafficking were identified, located in Campania (two cases, in the ports of Ischia and Naples), in Apulia (port of Manfredonia), and in Marche (port of Ancona). The cases analysed reveal heterogeneous operational methods, but share the common use of port infrastructures as strategic hubs for the concealment, transfer, or export of special and hazardous waste.

A first episode concerns the port of Manfredonia, where targeted inspections led to the detection of the management and handling of hazardous waste lacking adequate traceability, as well as the failure to pay the required fees for its disposal. The violations identified resulted in the imposition of fines amounting to approximately €2 million.

A second case developed within the port context of the island of Ischia, particularly in the municipality of Casamicciola Terme, where an operation coordinated by the District Anti-Mafia Directorate led to the seizure of a vessel used for maritime transport. The investigation concerned an alleged illegal

trafficking of waste and hazardous materials, also linked to the management of materials deriving from emergency events, such as the mud produced by the 2022 flood and debris from buildings damaged by the 2017 earthquake.

Also in Campania, a further episode involved the port of Naples, where approximately 370 tonnes of industrial waste originating from a company based in Caivano were seized. The waste had been formally destined for a steel plant in Turkey as material for blast furnace processing. Technical inspections established that the scrap was in fact mixed with municipal solid waste and hazardous waste, including oily components, parts of exhausted batteries, plastic and rubber materials, electronic boards, tyres, and oxidised metal residues. The shipment was accompanied by falsified documentation attesting to non-existent treatment or recovery activities.

Finally, in the port of Ancona, an enforcement operation led to the seizure of over 58 tonnes of special waste that two Italian companies, both legally based in Lombardy, were attempting to import illegally from Albania. The material, declared as “aluminium skimmings,” in fact contained high concentrations of zinc, lead, and copper, such as to pose a significant environmental risk, with potential acute and chronic toxicity effects on aquatic ecosystems.

Theft

Three episodes related to theft were identified across different port contexts, characterised by heterogeneous methods and stolen goods. A first case concerns the port of Ancona, where the theft of over 20 kilograms of copper was recorded, carried out by an indi-



vidual with operational responsibilities within a port warehouse. A second episode, also involving copper theft, was detected in the port of Augusta, near the harbour lighthouse. Finally, in the port of Agropoli, the theft of an inflatable boat was reported, an episode that reflects more traditional forms of predatory crime, yet still exploits the permeability of port areas.

Currency violations

In 2025, five episodes related to currency violations were recorded in port settings, characterised by attempts to irregularly introduce large amounts of cash into the national territory. Two cases were identified in the

port of Bari, where, on two separate occasions, attempts were intercepted to import from Greece a total amount exceeding half a million euros. In both cases, two individuals were stopped while transporting the money concealed in their luggage, in violation of mandatory declaration requirements under current legislation.

Similar operational methods were observed in the port of Ancona, where two additional attempts to import cash irregularly were documented, amounting respectively to €160,000 and €250,000, again through concealment in passengers' luggage.

A fifth episode involved the port of Civita-vecchia, where a total sum of approximately

€350,000 was seized as part of a broader set of checks on irregular currency transport. Overall, the cases analysed show a recurring use of relatively simple yet effective concealment practices, exploiting passenger flows and international maritime connections as privileged channels for the illicit transfer of capital.

Financial crime

In 2025, several episodes related to financial and fiscal offences were identified, distributed across the national territory and involving the ports of Catania, Imperia, Civita-vecchia, Trieste, Cagliari, and Genoa. Overall, these cases highlight the use of port infrastructures as privileged spaces for evasive and fraudulent practices, particularly in the recreational boating sector.

A significant share of the episodes concerns customs smuggling and the evasion of import duties. In this context, two sailing yachts with a total value exceeding €150,000 were seized, along with additional pleasure craft, one of which—estimated to be worth approximately €1.5 million—was confiscated as part of enforcement activities targeting customs-related tax evasion. In a further case of aggravated customs smuggling, the competent authorities seized a yacht and identified evaded customs duties amounting to approximately €60,000.

Further investigations targeted the nautical charter sector, revealing forms of systematic tax evasion linked to non-compliance with reporting obligations. In particular, the inquiries identified irregularities involving twelve commercial companies, mainly related to the failure to submit cadastral declarations and the non-payment of taxes.

Smuggling

In 2025, 27 cases of smuggling were recorded, distributed across the national territory and particularly concentrated in some coastal regions. Marche emerges as the area with the highest number of episodes (5 cases), followed by Sardinia (4 cases), Lazio (4 cases), Sicily (4 cases), and Emilia-Romagna (3 cases). Additional cases were identified in Apulia (2 cases), Liguria (2 cases), and Calabria (2 cases), while Tuscany appears with a single episode.

From the perspective of the types of goods involved, smuggling is strongly concentrated in the food sector, which accounts for 12 out of 27 cases, corresponding to 44.4% of the total. This category includes seizures of fish, seafood products, and foodstuffs, with quantities ranging from 30 kg to shipments exceeding 4.5 tonnes, highlighting the use of ports as key entry points for irregular trade in perishable goods.

Cases involving cigarettes and processed tobacco follow, accounting for 4 episodes (14.8%), characterised by particularly large quantities, including seizures of 21 and 22 tonnes, as well as smaller consignments. Motor vehicles appear in 3 cases (11.1%), including both individual vehicles and a multiple seizure involving 13 units, while pyrotechnic materials are involved in 2 episodes (7.4%), one of which refers to an exceptionally large shipment amounting to 120 tonnes.

Additional types of goods appear sporadically, with one case each (3.7%): olive oil and alcoholic products (over 5,300 litres of oil), smoking accessories, live animals (birds and a turtle), recreational vessels, and cash, including a seizure amounting to €600,000.

From the perspective of flows, most episodes

are associated with import operations, while cases related to export and transit are more limited, although the latter are characterised by particularly large quantities.

Trafficking of counterfeit goods

In 2025, 35 episodes related to the trafficking of counterfeit goods were recorded, confirming the central role of Italian ports as logistical hubs for the entry, transit, and, to a lesser extent, exit of illicit goods destined for national and European markets. From a geographical perspective, a particularly significant role emerges for the ports of Liguria—especially Genoa (5) and La Spezia (1)—as well as Apulia (with the ports of Bari, 4 cases, and Brindisi, 3), Marche (port of Ancona, 4 cases), and Friuli-Venezia Giulia, where the port of Trieste stands out as a crucial node for the transit of goods towards Northern Europe, with as many as 7 episodes. Additional cases were recorded in the ports of Cagliari (3), Livorno (2), Venice (1), Civitavecchia (2), Augusta (1), Siracusa (1), and Salerno (1).

From the perspective of commercial flows, most cases are associated with import operations (26), while a significant share concerns transit (9). Notably, transit cases are concentrated in two ports: the port of Cagliari, which in two instances was involved in the transit of counterfeit toys originating from Morocco, and the port of Trieste, where all 7 episodes concern transit, specifically from Turkey (6 cases) and China (1 case).

The main foreign areas of origin are China (12), Turkey (8), and Greece (7), followed by Morocco and Senegal. In several cases (6), it was not possible to reconstruct the supply chain. From a commodity perspective, the trafficking of counterfeit goods appears

highly diversified, though with some notable concentrations. The clothing and fashion accessories sector represents the most recurrent category, with over 14 out of 35 episodes, often characterised by very large quantities, ranging from several thousand to nearly one million items in a single seizure.

The food sector is also particularly significant (6 cases), as is the trafficking of toys (6 cases). The latter highlights how counterfeiting does not concern only non-essential goods but also involves products that may be relevant for public health and consumer safety. Additional cases include electronic accessories (3), cosmetics (2), household goods (2), pharmaceuticals (1), and plant protection products (1).

Overall, the analysis portrays a structurally complex counterfeit market, combining large consignments intended for distribution on a European scale with more fragmented flows, intercepted in passengers' luggage or within mixed cargo shipments.

Drug trafficking

Drug trafficking constitutes one of the main areas of criminal activity detected in Italian ports in 2025. Out of 131 recorded events, 40 are linked to this illicit market, accounting for approximately 30.5% of the total and making it the most significant criminal business in quantitative terms during the year.

In terms of substances, cocaine is by far the most frequently seized drug. It is involved in 26 cases, rising to 27 when including an additional episode in which 1 kg of cocaine was found alongside 6 kg of hashish at the port of Villa San Giovanni.

Hashish appears in two further cases. The

first was recorded in the port of Ancona, where 50 kg of the substance were seized. The second, considerably larger in scale, occurred off the coast of Marsala in Sicily, where a shipment of 670 kg was intercepted at sea during a transshipment operation between a Tunisian-flagged fishing vessel and a high-powered inflatable boat.

Six cases are instead linked to marijuana trafficking, showing significant variation in both quantities and concealment methods. A particularly noteworthy episode took place in the port of Ancona, where, during inspections of heavy vehicles about to embark, more than 163 kg of narcotics were seized, including over 161 kg of high-THC marijuana and more than 2 kg of methamphetamine concealed inside a truck. According to investigators, once placed on the illegal market, the shipment could have generated profits of several million euros.

In the remaining cases, marijuana seizures vary widely in scale, ranging from relatively small quantities—such as 3 kg transported on a sailing boat in the port of Olbia—to more substantial seizures, including 81 kg in the port of Civitavecchia, 150 kg in the ports of Milazzo and Catania, and a major seizure of 1,200 kg in the port of Gioia Tauro. In the latter case, the shipment, originating from Canada, was concealed among timber transported on a container vessel and was estimated to have generated approximately €1.8 million in profits for the criminal organizations involved.

Also in the port of Gioia Tauro, a further episode was recorded involving the seizure of 3 kg of cannabis, likewise originating from Canada and hidden in duffel bags placed inside a container together with food products, most likely to evade detection by canine units.

Alongside cannabinoids, the dataset also records trafficking in opium and heroin. In the port of Trieste, 30 kg of opium were seized from a heavy goods vehicle arriving from Iraq and bound for the Netherlands. The substance was concealed inside plastic-wrapped packages, which were in turn embedded within refractory bricks and custom-made resin objects, destined for a European logistics company before being delivered to final recipients shielded by false identities.

Another particularly significant case was recorded in the port of Genoa, where 140 kg of heroin originating from Iran were seized. The substance had been concealed within approximately 60,000 concrete bricks, into which the heroin had been directly incorporated during the production process, making detection extremely difficult and possible only through careful analysis of minor irregularities in the building materials.

Finally, again in the port of Genoa, authorities intercepted a shipment of chemical precursors used in drug production: over 10 tonnes of industrial products containing approximately 700 kg of potassium permanganate, a substance commonly used in the refinement of cocaine and heroin. The cargo, originating from the port of Durban (South Africa), confirms that Italian ports are involved not only in the trafficking of finished drugs but also in upstream stages of drug production chains.

Cocaine

Within the broader drug market, cocaine trafficking is the most frequently encountered activity in Italian ports. In 2025, recorded episodes involve seven regions—Calabria, Lazio, Liguria, Apulia, Sardinia, Sicily, and Tuscany—confirming a wide and cross-regional

territorial spread.

A first episode was recorded in the port of Taranto, where 35 kg of cocaine imported from Spain were intercepted. Two Georgian nationals, who had just disembarked from a container vessel, were arrested following an attempted escape.

In Sicily, two separate cases were recorded. In the port of Messina, 2 kg of cocaine were seized, concealed within the front seats of a vehicle. In Trapani, 6 kg of the substance were found inside the personal locker of a worker with no prior criminal record operating in a warehouse within the port area. The estimated value of the seizure is around €600,000.

Liguria appears with two cases, both linked to imports from Ecuador. In the port of Genoa, a shipment of nearly 250 kg of cocaine was intercepted, concealed in duffel bags containing canned tuna, with an estimated value of between €40 and €50 million. A second episode involved the port of Vado Ligure, where 24 kg of cocaine were seized, hidden inside a container of bananas originating from the port of Puerto Bolívar, packaged in 20 blocks, many of which bore a distinctive marking.

In Tuscany, the port of Livorno is involved in two particularly significant cases. In the first, 127 kg of cocaine were seized, concealed among timber inside a container, with an estimated value exceeding €150 million. In the second episode, of exceptional scale, approximately 2 tonnes of cocaine were hidden within cocoa powder, highlighting a high level of sophistication in concealment techniques.

In Sardinia, cases are concentrated in the ports of Cagliari (two episodes) and Olbia (three episodes). In these contexts, cocaine is primarily introduced via passenger ferries.

In Olbia, one case involved the discovery of 11 kg of the substance hidden in a false compartment in a minivan; in another, a woman was arrested after 83 cocaine pellets were found to have been ingested; in a third episode, two individuals disembarking at the port were carrying 47 kg of cocaine, concealed within an aluminium cavity in an articulated truck.

In Cagliari, similar methods are observed: in one case, 1 kg of cocaine was seized from a passenger's luggage, while in another episode 20 kg were concealed in a hidden compartment within an articulated truck.

The port of Civitavecchia records four episodes. One involves export, with the arrest of a Nigerian national who had ingested pellets containing 280 grams of cocaine. The other three cases concern imports of increasing scale: 138 kg concealed in an articulated truck disembarked from a vessel arriving from Barcelona; 50 kg hidden inside a container from Ecuador; and a major seizure of approximately 500 kg, concealed in containers arriving from South America and disguised among cover cargo, with an estimated black market value exceeding €100 million.

A central role is once again confirmed for the port of Gioia Tauro, which remains one of the main cocaine hubs in the Mediterranean.

According to the data collected, numerous shipments were intercepted at the Calabrian port, with quantities of 110, 27, 1,170, 228, 417, 288, 175, 788, 248, and 435 kg. Concealment techniques appear highly diversified, including paper reels, bananas, sacks of combustible material, entire containers, ventilation panels, refrigerated containers carrying frozen octopus and shrimp, bags of pellets, used vehicles, sacks of sesame seeds, and peanuts. This variety highlights both the high adaptability of criminal organizations and the strategic importance of the port as a structural node in transatlantic cocaine routes.

Overall, the analysis of cocaine trafficking in Italian ports points to a highly structured, transnational, and multi-layered market, characterised by large containerised shipments, smaller flows channelled through ferries and passengers, and the continuous refinement of concealment techniques aimed at evading controls.

2

ILLICIT ACTIVITIES IN PORTS: A FOUR-YEAR OVERVIEW

Overall, in the four-year period 2022–2025, a total of 496 criminal events were recorded in Italian ports—an average of one every three days. Within this picture, 2022 stands out with 140 events, followed by 2025 with 130.

In total, 53 Italian ports were affected by illegal activities over the four-year period, 34 of which are classified as nationally significant. The number of ports involved shows a growing trend over time: 29 in 2022, 28 in 2023, 30 in 2024, and 38 in 2025.

As illustrated in Figure 6, nearly half of the ports (23) were affected by only a single incident over the four years (Acciaroli, Acitrezza, Agropoli, Barletta, Capri, Carrara, Catanzaro, Cervia, Fiumicino, Formia, Francavilla al Mare, Gaeta, Golfo Aranci, Lacco Ameno, Manfredonia, Marghera, Marina di Stabia, Ragusa, Riposto, San Benedetto del Tronto, Siracusa, Taureana di Palmi, Tremestieri). Other ports display more irregular patterns, with very high numbers in some years and much lower figures in others (for example Bari, Catania, Gioia Tauro, and Palermo).

At the same time, a number of ports show consistent levels of activity across the years,

each recording more than four criminal events annually: Ancona, Civitavecchia, Genoa, Livorno, and Trieste.

Significant changes can be observed in the most recent year: notable increases in Cagliari (from 2 to 6 cases), Civitavecchia (from 5 to 14), Gioia Tauro (from 8 to 13), and Olbia (from 4 to 7), alongside marked declines in Bari (from 10 to 6), Livorno (from 16 to 5), Naples (from 7 to 2), and Venice (from 7 to 1).

The picture shifts when considering the overall distribution of events across the period, allowing for a ranking of ports. Genoa ranks first with 40 recorded episodes, accounting for 9.8% of the total. Livorno follows with 42 events (8.4%), while Ancona records 40 episodes (8%). Civitavecchia ranks next with 32 events (6.4%). This is followed by Gioia Tauro and Trieste, both showing growth with 27 cases each; Palermo, which drops in the ranking with 25 events; Brindisi, which rises to 23 cases; and Naples and Salerno, both with 21 events.

NUMBER OF CRIMINAL EVENTS IN ITALIAN PORTS (2022–2025)

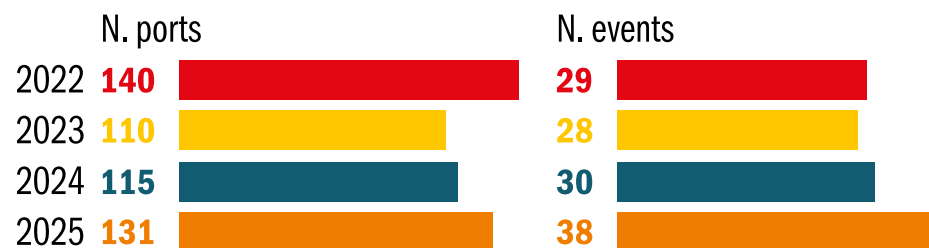
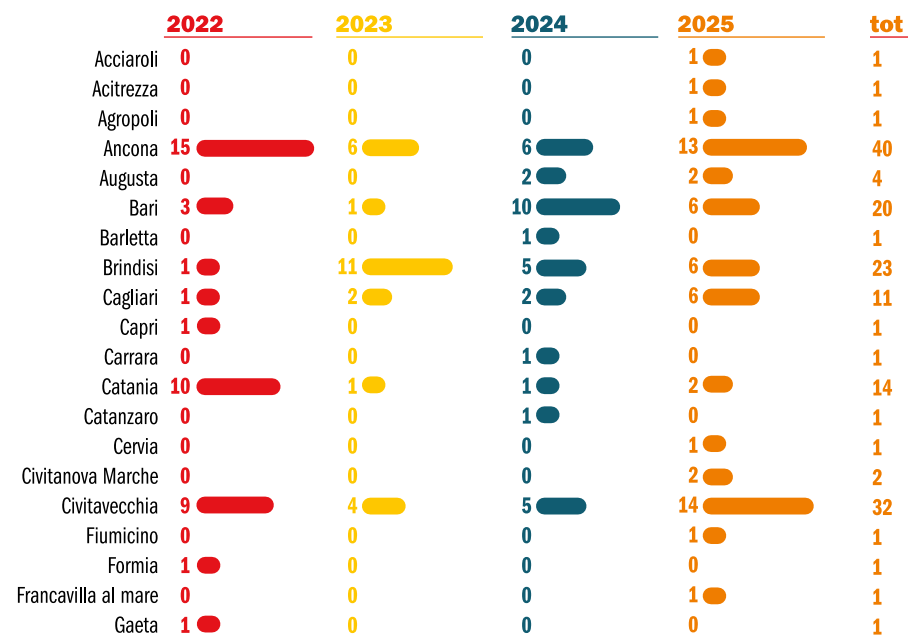


FIGURE 5 | Source: Libera’s elaboration based on ADM, GdF, and Assoport data

NUMBER OF CRIMINAL EVENTS IN ITALIAN PORTS BY PORT (2022–2025)



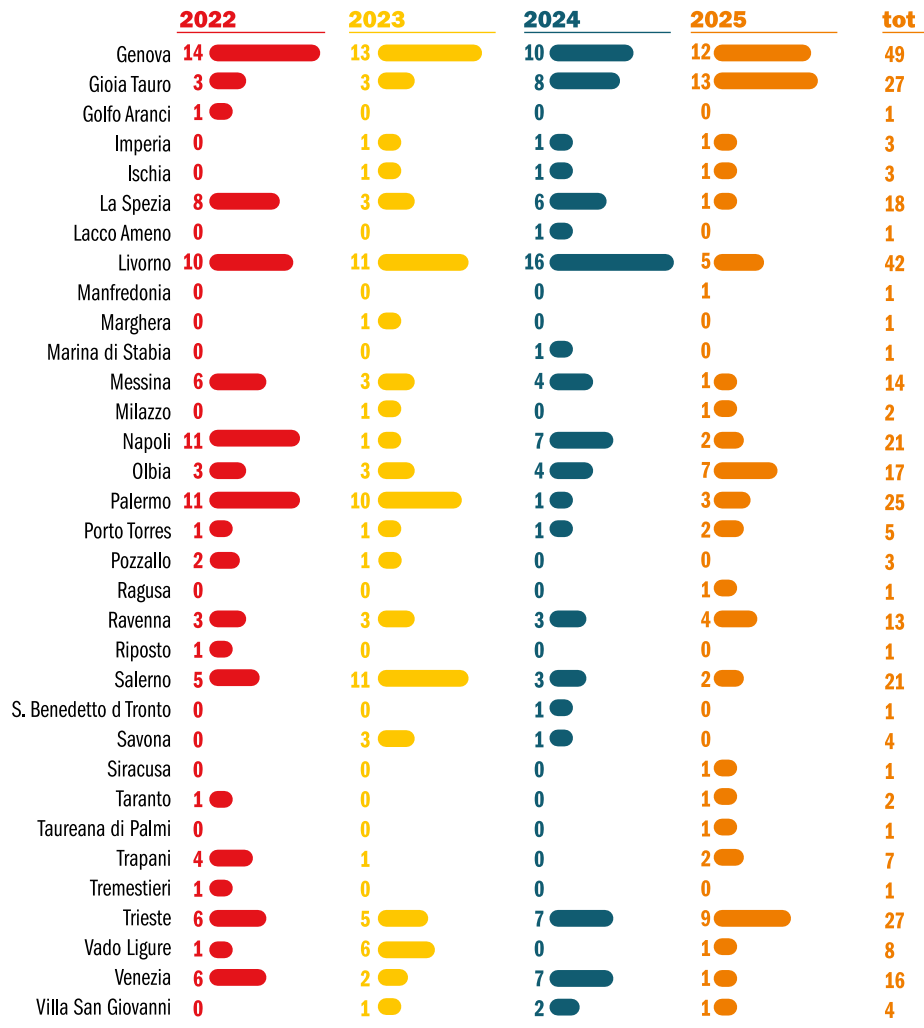


FIGURE 6 | Source: Libera’s elaboration based on ADM, GdF, and Assoporti data

When the data are aggregated at the regional level (Figure 7), some shifts emerge compared to the previous assessment, pointing to a partial reconfiguration in the distribution of

events.

Despite these changes, the top positions remain unchanged: Liguria ranks first, accounting for 16.1% of all criminal events (80 ca-

ses), followed by Sicily with 14.7% (73 events), and Campania with 9.9% (49 events). Apulia moves into fourth place with 46 ca-

ses, followed jointly by Marche and Tuscany, each recording 43 events, corresponding to 8.7% of the total.

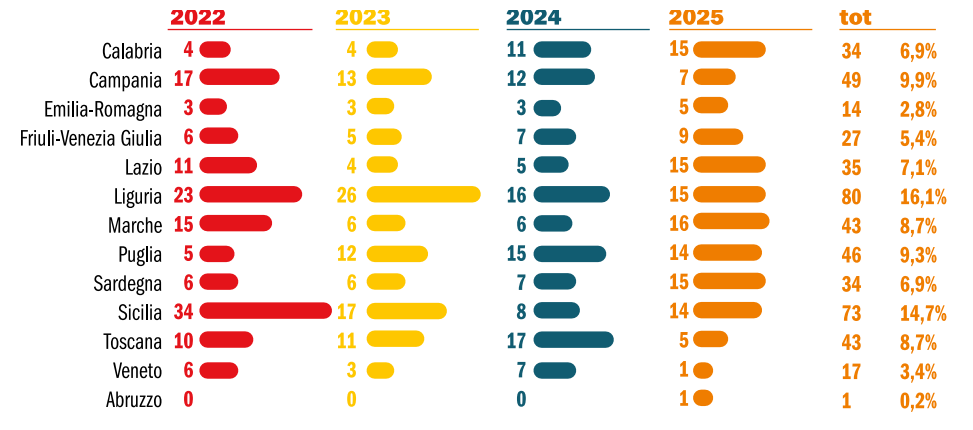


FIGURE 7 | Source: Libera’s elaboration based on ADM, GdF, and Assoporti data

An analysis of the legal and illegal markets in which criminal events were recorded shows that only a small share—just nine cases—concerned lawful economic activities. These include three cases in construction and civil engineering, four related to unauthorized use and illegal occupation

of public maritime property, one involving the restaurant sector, and one linked to transport activities.

The vast majority of events, by contrast, are associated with illegal markets (Figure 8).

CRIMINAL EVENTS BY ILLEGAL MARKET (2022–2025)

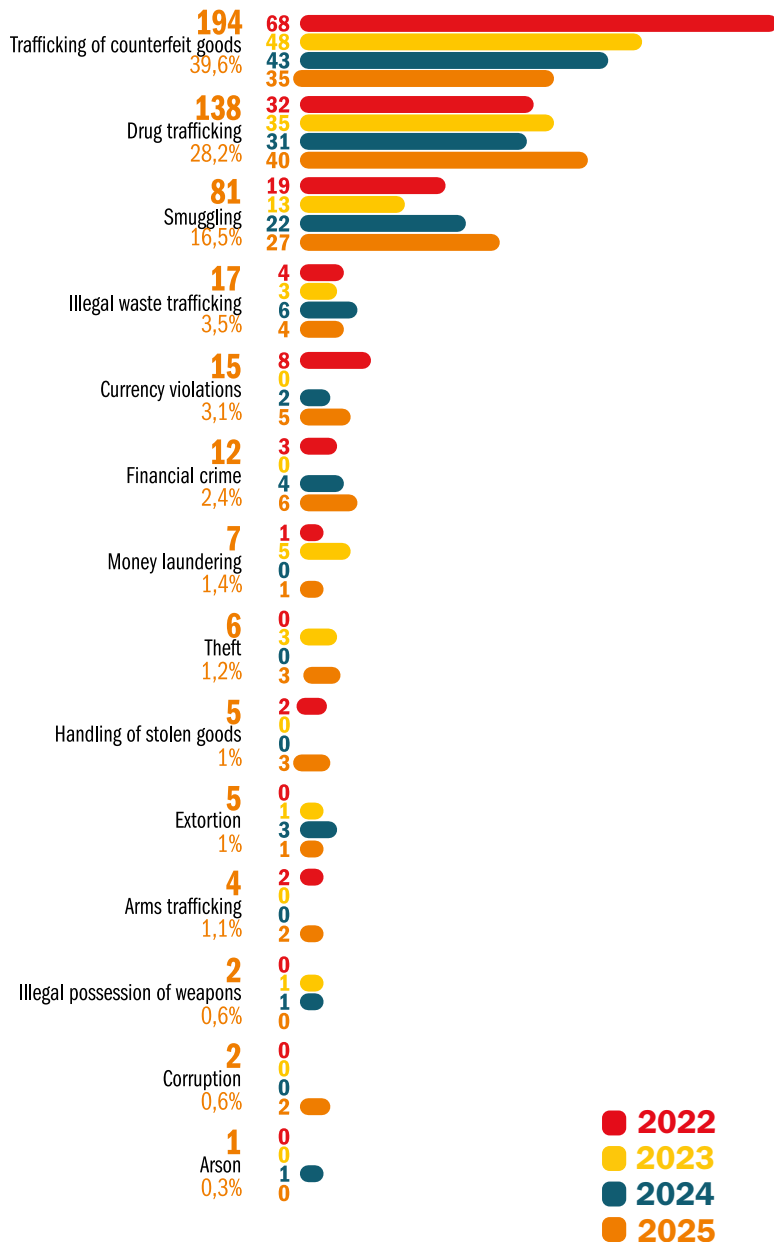


FIGURE 8 | Source: Libera's elaboration based on ADM, GdF, and Assoporti data

The four-year overview provides a picture in which port-related crime appears both concentrated and widespread. On the one hand, a significant share of events consistently clusters in a number of major national ports, confirming their structural role within criminal activities. On the other hand, the steady increase in the number of ports involved points to a geographical expansion of risk, increasingly affecting medium-sized and smaller ports as well.

This pattern suggests that Italian ports are not merely occasional sites where criminal activities are intercepted, but rather differentiated nodes within a complex logistical system, in which both organized and common crime are able to adapt strategies, routes, and operational methods to the opportunities offered by specific local contexts.

The uneven trends observed across several ports—marked by sharp year-to-year fluctuations—coexist with the presence of ports showing a persistent occurrence of criminal events over time. This coexistence points to two complementary dynamics: on the one hand, the ability of criminal groups to exploit contingent windows of opportunity, linked to specific routes, particular types of trafficking, or periods of reduced enforcement intensity; on the other, the existence of structural vulnerabilities that make certain ports consistently attractive for illicit activities.

In this sense, port-related crime does not appear as an episodic phenomenon, but rather as an evolving process that unfolds over time, combining stability with adaptation.

The clear predominance of events linked to illegal markets—particularly trafficking

in counterfeit goods, drug trafficking, and smuggling—highlights how ports primarily function as spaces of intermediation between transnational criminal economies and destination markets. The marginal incidence of cases associated with lawful economic activities should not, however, lead to an underestimation of the risk of infiltration. On the contrary, it suggests that illicit flows are largely embedded within the infrastructures and supply chains of legal trade, exploiting their complexity and scale to conceal both goods and financial transactions.

Finally, the regional distribution of events confirms the prominence of certain areas of the country, while also pointing to an ongoing geographical reconfiguration of the phenomenon that cannot be interpreted solely through a territorial lens. Differences across regions and ports reflect not only the presence of entrenched criminal groups, but also the varying roles of ports within logistical chains, the types of goods handled, and their degree of exposure to international flows.

Within this framework, the growth of infrastructural investments and the strategic centrality of Italian ports in global trade networks make it all the more urgent to strengthen tools for monitoring, prevention, and transparency, in order to reduce the vulnerabilities that continue to be exploited by criminal economies.

3

CRIMINAL CONTROL OVER PORTS: THE ROLE OF ORGANIZED CRIME

Between 1994 and 2024, organized crime interests have affected approximately one in five Italian ports. The analysis of reports published by the National Anti-Mafia Directorate (DNA) and the Anti-Mafia Investigative Directorate (DIA) over the period considered allows for the identification of 113 clans involved in both illegal and legal business activities (+4 compared to the previous assessment), with 71 Italian ports (+2 compared to the previous assessment) affected by criminal projections. This provides a picture that highlights both the structural dimension of the phenomenon and its capacity to become deeply embedded across the country's port nodes.

The mapping reveals a widespread presence of criminal interests across the entire national territory, involving both southern and northern regions, as well as ports located along both the eastern and western coasts of the peninsula. For some time, DNA and DIA reports have pointed to the presence of criminal groups operating in both legal and

illegal markets within Italian and European ports, with drug trafficking occupying a particularly central role.

In this context, mafia organizations play a significant—though not exclusive—role. Particularly in illicit markets, criminal activities unfold along complex supply chains involving a plurality of actors: from production to shipment, from transportation to the retrieval of goods, and finally to their exit from port areas and subsequent distribution. These are broad and fragmented operational chains, within which mafia organizations do not always constitute the dominant actor, but often function as a strategic node.

The picture that emerges from this reconstruction is particularly alarming. All ports hosting Port System Authorities have been the object of interest by organized crime. Of the 71 ports identified, 38 are of national economic significance. Considering that there are 58 ports in this category overall, this means that 65.5% of Italy's main commercial

ports have been exposed to organized criminal interests.

These include some of the country's leading freight hubs—handling both general cargo and bulk goods, as well as high volumes of container traffic—such as Ancona, Augusta, Brindisi, Cagliari, Genoa, Gioia Tauro, La Spezia, Naples, Ravenna, Salerno, Savona and Vado Ligure, Taranto, Trieste, and Venice.

A further relevant aspect concerns the type of

ports involved. In addition to major commercial hubs, smaller ports and those primarily oriented toward tourism have also attracted the interest of criminal groups. This suggests that not only freight flows themselves are attractive, but more broadly the range of economic activities—both legal and illegal—that develop around port infrastructures, making them strategic spaces for the operation and adaptation of criminal organizations.



LIST OF PORTS

• Liguria

- Genova
- Imperia
- La Spezia
- Loano
- Ospedaletti
- Rapallo
- San Lorenzo al Mare
- Savona
- Vado Ligure
- Ventimiglia

Toscana

- Carrara
- Livorno

Lazio

- Civitavecchia
- Fiumicino
- Gaeta
- Ostia

Sardegna

- Alghero
- Arbatax
- Cagliari
- Olbia
- Porto Torres

Campania

- Castellamare di Stabia
- Granatello
- Mergellina
- Napoli
- Salerno

Calabria

- Amantea
- Badolato
- Catanzaro
- Cetraro
- Corigliano Calabro
- Crotona
- Gioia Tauro
- Isola Capo Rizzuto
- Reggio Calabria
- Tropea

Friuli Venezia Giulia

- Monfalcone
- Trieste

Veneto

- Marghera
- Venezia

Emilia Romagna

- Ravenna

Marche

- Ancona

Abruzzo

- Ortona
- Pescara
- Vasto
- Giulianova

Molise

- Campomarino
- Termoli

Puglia

- Bari
- Barletta
- Bisceglie
- Brindisi
- Giovinazzo
- Mola di Bari
- Monopoli
- Taranto
- Vieste

Sicilia

- Augusta
- Acitrezza
- Balestrate
- Catania
- Mazara del Vallo
- Messina
- Palermo
- Porto Empedocle
- Pozzallo
- Termini Imerese
- Trapani



FIGURE 9 | Source: Libera's elaboration based on DNA and DIA data (1994–2024)

Over time, institutional reports have highlighted the presence of heterogeneous criminal interests, attributable to a plurality of groups of both Italian and foreign origin. The analysis shows that as many as 26 distinct criminal typologies have been involved in port-related activities (Figure 10), encompassing both historically entrenched mafia organizations and less well-known criminal groups.

This finding suggests that port infrastructures represent strategic arenas of contact and interaction for territorially diverse groups, enabling engagement with a multiplicity of criminal organizations operating at a transnational scale. As illustrated in Figure 10, the mapping clearly captures the involvement of traditional Italian mafias, while also revealing the growing interest of foreign criminal organizations in port-related activities.

Although, in some cases, the classification of criminal episodes within institutional reports follows different criteria—making it more difficult to assign a single, unambiguous criminal typology—it nevertheless remains evident that criminal activities in port settings are not exclusively national in scope, but involve networks and actors of diverse geographical origins.

Within this framework, the presence of collaborative arrangements between different criminal groups becomes particularly significant. Where illegal trafficking networks require a high degree of organizational complexity, criminal networks emerge in which different actors contribute complementary specialized skills, enabling the successful execution of criminal operations. This trend is especially visible in drug trafficking and the trafficking of counterfeit goods, both of which often require specific capabilities in cargo retrieval as well as in the production of falsified documentation.

An empirical illustration of this plurality of actors can be found, for instance, in the DIA report for 2024, which highlights the operational presence of the 'ndrangheta, the camorra, and Italian criminal groups—particularly from the Bari area—alongside foreign groups of Bulgarian and Albanian origin.

It is also important to emphasize that the interests of criminal groups—and particularly of certain mafia clans—have extended into the sphere of legal business activities. These dynamics often emerge in ports that are not primary in commercial terms, yet nonetheless provide favorable contexts for economic exploitation and criminal infiltration.

Some cases are particularly illustrative in this regard. In Calabria, the port of Tropea has attracted the interest of the La Rosa clan in activities related to maritime service provision, while the Mancuso clan has operated in the passenger maritime transport sector. In the port of Isola Capo Rizzuto, infiltration by the Arena clan has been observed in construction site preparation and land development activities, while in Corigliano Calabro the Straface clan has been involved in the management of public market services.

Similar dynamics can be found in other port contexts. In Apulia, in the ports of Bari and Giovinazzo, the Capriati clan has exercised control over economic activities, particularly in the security services sector. In the same sector, Cosa Nostra has been reported to have infiltrated the port of Porto Empedocle. In Campomarino, in Campania, the Moccia clan has shown interest in the construction of public infrastructure projects.

LIST OF CRIMINAL GROUPS INVOLVED

- Banda della Magliana
- Camorra
- Cosa Nostra
- Albanian criminal groups
- Asian criminal groups
- Bari-based criminal groups
- Bulgarian criminal groups
- Campanian criminal groups
- Chinese criminal groups
- Colombian criminal groups
- Dominican criminal groups
- Eastern European criminal groups
- Iraqi criminal groups
- Iranian criminal groups
- Italian criminal groups
- Mexican criminal groups
- Nigerian criminal groups
- North African criminal groups
- Apulian criminal groups
- Romanian criminal groups
- Syrian criminal groups
- South American criminal groups
- Turkish criminal groups
- 'Ndrangheta
- Sacra Corona Unita
- Stidda



Focusing specifically on mafia actors, the table provides a regional overview of the evidence collected, highlighting the activities of each group—whether in legal or illegal business—and the port in which they take place.

In some cases, the criminal activities of different groups recur across different years and periods; as a result, certain entries appear more than once in the table and are retained here for the sake of completeness.

FIGURE 10 | Source: Libera's elaboration based on DNA and DIA data (1994–2024)

CALABRIA

Port	Group Name	Consortium name	Illegal business	Legal business
Gioia Tauro	Piromalli	'ndrangheta	Extortion	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Piromalli	'ndrangheta	Smuggling of cigarettes and other tobacco products (TLE)	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Piromalli-Molè	'ndrangheta	N/A	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Piromalli-Molè; Pesce	'ndrangheta	Extortion	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Piromalli-Molè	'ndrangheta	N/A	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Piromalli-Molè	'ndrangheta	N/A	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Piromalli-Molè; Bellocco-Pesce	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Piromalli-Molè	'ndrangheta	N/A	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Piromalli-Molè	'ndrangheta	N/A	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Piromalli-Molè; Bellocco-Pesce	'ndrangheta	N/A	N/A
Tropea	La Rosa	'ndrangheta	N/A	Other maritime transport-related services
Gioia Tauro	Alvaro	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Piromalli; Alvaro; Crea; Molè	'ndrangheta	N/A	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Santangelo; Cortese; Nirta; Strangio; Pesce - Bellocco	cosa nostra; 'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Piromalli-Molè; Bellocco-Pesce	'ndrangheta	N/A	N/A
Isola Capo Rizzuto	Arena	'ndrangheta	N/A	Construction site preparation and land development
Gioia Tauro	Alvaro; Piromalli; Molè	'ndrangheta	N/A	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Piromalli; Bellocco-Pesce	'ndrangheta	N/A	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Alvaro	'ndrangheta	N/A	N/A
Amantea	Gentile	'ndrangheta	Arms Trafficking	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Piromalli-Molè; Bellocco-Pesce	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Piromalli-Molè; Bellocco-Pesce	'ndrangheta	Trafficking of counterfeit goods	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Molè; Pesce; Piromalli	Chinese criminal groups	Trafficking of counterfeit goods	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Alvaro; Piromalli; Molè	'ndrangheta	N/A	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Molè	'ndrangheta	Extortion	Maritime cargo handling
Gioia Tauro	Piromalli-Pesce	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking; Arms trafficking	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Piromalli; Alvaro; Molè	'ndrangheta	N/A	Maritime cargo handling
Gioia Tauro	Piromalli-Pesce	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking; Arms trafficking	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Pesce	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Barbieri	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Corigliano Calabro	Straface	'ndrangheta	N/A	Public market management

Port	Group Name	Consortium name	Illegal business	Legal business
				services
Gioia Tauro	Molè; Pesce; Piromalli	Chinese criminal groups; 'ndrangheta	Trafficking of counterfeit goods; Smuggling of cigarettes and other tobacco products (TLE)	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Molè; Pesce; Piromalli	Chinese criminal groups; 'ndrangheta	Trafficking of counterfeit goods; Smuggling of cigarettes and other tobacco products (TLE)	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Piromalli-Molè; Bellocco-Pesce	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Jerinò; Aquino; Bruzzese; Commisso; Pesce	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Pesce	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Piromalli; Molè	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Gioia Tauro; Livorno	Mancuso	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Corigliano Calabro	Straface	'ndrangheta	N/A	Public market management services
Gioia Tauro	Pesce; Bellocco	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking; loan sharking; Extortion; Arms trafficking	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Molè; Pesce; Piromalli	Chinese criminal groups; 'ndrangheta	Trafficking of counterfeit goods; Smuggling of cigarettes and other tobacco products (TLE)	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Pesce	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Alvaro	'ndrangheta; Italian criminal groups	N/A	Maritime cargo handling
Gioia Tauro	Piromalli-Molè; Bellocco-Pesce	'ndrangheta	N/A	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Piromalli-Molè; Bellocco-Pesce	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Piromalli	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking; Smuggling of cigarettes and other tobacco products (TLE)	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Morabito; Palamara; Bruzzaniti	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Pesce; Pesce-Oppedisano; Varca	'ndrangheta; Colombian criminal groups	Drug trafficking	Other maritime transport-related services
Gioia Tauro	Fidanzati	'ndrangheta; cosa nostra	Drug trafficking	N/A
Corigliano Calabro	Straface	'ndrangheta	N/A	Public market management services

Port	Group Name	Consortium name	Illegal business	Legal business
Crotone	Vrenna; Ciampà; Bonaventura; Megna; Farao; Marincola; Grande Aracri	'ndrangheta	Extortion	Land transport
Gioia Tauro	letto; Cua; Pipicella	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Pesce	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	Other maritime transport-related services
Gioia Tauro	Pesce	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Pesce; Molè	'ndrangheta	Trafficking of counterfeit goods	Other maritime transport-related services; Land transport
Gioia Tauro	letto; Cua; Pipicella; Commiso; Aquino; Coluccio	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Brandimarte	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Ursino; Gambino	'ndrangheta; cosa nostra	Drug trafficking	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Jerinò; Aquino; Bruzzese; Commiso; Pesce	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Pesce; Molè	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking; Trafficking of counterfeit goods	Other maritime transport-related services; Land transport
Gioia Tauro	Mancuso; Pesce; Bellocco; Piromalli; Alvaro	'ndrangheta	N/A	N/A
Gioia Tauro; Genova	Avignone; Paviglianiti	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Alvaro; Coluccio; Aquino	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Crotone	Grande Aracri; Ciampà; Barilari	'ndrangheta	N/A	Other maritime transport-related services; Land transport
Tropea	Mancuso	'ndrangheta	N/A	Maritime passenger transport
Gioia Tauro	Mancuso	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Livorno, Napoli, Salerno; Genova; Gioia Tauro	Molè; Piromalli; Alvaro; Crea	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Commiso; Pesce	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Tassone	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking; money laundering	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Commiso; Pesce; De Masi	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Pesce-Bellocco	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
	Ferrentino; Chindamo; Lamari	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Muto	'ndrangheta	N/A	N/A
Cetraro	Gallace	'ndrangheta	N/A	N/A
Badolato	Gallace	'ndrangheta	Extortion	N/A
Badolato	Assisi; Agresta	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A

Port	Group Name	Consortium name	Illegal business	Legal business
Gioia Tauro	Bellocco; Piromalli; Molè; Avignone; Paviglianiti	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Morabito; Palamara; Bruzzaniti	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Trigila	N/A	Drug trafficking	N/A
Reggio Calabria	Molè - Piromalli; Alvaro; Crea; Pesce	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Livorno; Napoli; Salerno; Genova; Gioia Tauro	Pesce-Bellocco	'ndrangheta	N/A	Maritime cargo handling
Gioia Tauro	casalesi	camorra; 'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Pesce-Molè	'ndrangheta	N/A	Control of legal business
Gioia Tauro	Pesce-Bellocco	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Bellocco	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Bellocco	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Nirta; Barbaro; Pelle; Giorgi	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Cacciola; Grasso	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Morabito-Palamara-Bruzzaniti; Amato-Pagano	'ndrangheta; camorra	Drug trafficking	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Morabito	'ndrangheta	Arms trafficking	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Piromalli; Crea; Alvaro; Gallico; Ladini; Pedullà	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Gioia Tauro	Piromalli; Crea; Alvaro; Gallico; Facchineri; Ladini; Petullà	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A

CAMPANIA

Port	Group name	Consortium name	Illegal business	Legal business
Napoli	Mazzarella; Alleanza di Secondigliano; Casalesi	camorra	Trafficking of counterfeit goods; Corruption; Forgery; Fraud; Fraud (deception-based offence)	N/A
Napoli	Casalesi; Mazzarella; Alleanza di Secondigliano	Chinese criminal groups; camorra	Trafficking of counterfeit goods	N/A
Napoli	Mazzarella	Chinese criminal groups; camorra	Trafficking of counterfeit goods	N/A
Castellamare di Stabia	Casalesi; Setola	camorra	Money laundering	N/A
Campomarino	Moccia	camorra	N/A	Construction of public infrastructure
Napoli	Mazzarella	Chinese criminal groups; camorra	Trafficking of counterfeit goods	N/A
Livorno, Napoli, Salerno; Genova; Gioia Tauro	Molè; Piromalli; Alvaro; Crea	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Salerno	Annunziata-Aquino	camorra	Smuggling of cigarettes and other tobacco products (TLE); Drug trafficking	N/A
Salerno	Tamarisco	camorra	Drug trafficking	N/A
Livorno; Napoli; Salerno; Genova; Gioia Tauro	Molè - Piromalli; Alvaro; Crea; Pesce	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Napoli	Montescuro	camorra	Extortion	N/A
Napoli	Di Lauro	N/A	Smuggling of cigarettes and other tobacco products (TLE)	N/A
Salerno	Alvaro	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Mergellina	Piccirillo	Camorra	Attempted extortion	N/A

FRIULI VENEZIA GIULIA

Port	Group Name	Consortium name	Illegal business	Legal business
Monfalcone	Mancuso	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Trieste	Iona	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Trieste	Veneruso	camorra	Money laundering	N/A

LAZIO

Port	Group Name	Consortium name	Illegal business	Legal business
Civitavecchia	Misso; Mazzarella	camorra	Trafficking of counterfeit goods	N/A
Civitavecchia	Gionta	camorra	Drug trafficking	N/A

LIGURIA

Port	Group Name	Consortium name	Illegal business	Legal business
Genova	Madonia	cosa nostra	Drug trafficking	N/A
Genova	Pastore	N/A	Drug trafficking	N/A
La Spezia	Birra	camorra	Illegal waste trafficking	N/A
La Spezia	Romeo-Siviglia	'ndrangheta	N/A	N/A
La Spezia	Romeo-Siviglia	'ndrangheta	N/A	N/A
Palermo; La Spezia	Galatolo	Cosa nostra	N/A	Shipbuilding industry
Gioia Tauro; Genova	Avignone; Paviglianiti	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Genova	Bellocco	'ndrangheta; Albanian criminal groups; Italian criminal groups	Drug trafficking	N/A
Genova	Martino	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Genova	Bellocco	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Genova	Avignone	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Livorno, Napoli, Salerno; Genova; Gioia Tauro	Molè; Piromalli; Alvaro; Crea	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Genova	Alvaro; Bellocco; Gallico; Mancuso	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Genova	Bellocco-Pesce	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Genova	Piromalli-Molè	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Livorno; Napoli; Salerno; Genova; Gioia Tauro	Molè - Piromalli; Alvaro; Crea; Pesce	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Genova	Alvaro	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Genova	clan del golfo	N/A	Drug trafficking	N/A
Genova	Avignone	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Genova	Alvaro	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Genova	Bellocco	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Genova	Scali-Abbate	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A

PUGLIA

Port	Group Name	Consortium name	Illegal business	Legal business
Bari	Shabani	Albanian criminal groups	Drug trafficking	N/A
Barletta	Lagji	Albanian criminal groups	Drug trafficking; Human trafficking; Arms trafficking	N/A
Brindisi	Gionta; Gallo; Limelli; Vangone	camorra	Drug trafficking	N/A
Giovinazzo	Capriati	N/A	N/A	Control of legal business
Bari	Capriati	N/A	N/A	Other maritime transport-related services; Private security services
Bari	Capriati	Bari-based criminal group	Extortion	Private security services
Bisceglie	Griner; Palermi-Milella; Parisi	N/A	Drug trafficking	N/A
Bari	Strisciuglio	Bari-based criminal group	Extortion	N/A

SICILIA

Port	Group Name	Consortium name	Illegal business	Legal business
Palermo	Acquasanta	cosa nostra	N/A	Construction of public infrastructure
Porto Empedocle	Messina	cosa nostra	N/A	Private security services
Palermo	Galatolo; Fontana	cosa nostra	N/A	Shipbuilding industry
Palermo; La Spezia	Galatolo	cosa nostra	N/A	Shipbuilding industry
Palermo; Termini Imerese	Corso dei Mille	cosa nostra	N/A	Maritime cargo handling
Acitrezza; Catania	Nizza; Santapaola	cosa nostra; Albanian criminal groups	Drug trafficking	N/A
Gallipoli	Santapaola	cosa nostra	Drug trafficking	N/A
Palermo	Brancaccio	cosa nostra	Drug trafficking	N/A
Augusta	Santapaola; Ercolano	cosa nostra	Trafficking of counterfeit goods	N/A

TOSCANA

Port	Group Name	Consortium name	Illegal business	Legal business
Livorno	Barbaro; La Torre	'ndrangheta; camorra	Drug trafficking	N/A
Livorno, Napoli, Salerno; Genova; Gioia Tauro	Molè; Piromalli; Alvaro; Crea	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Livorno	Bellocco; Molè-Piromalli	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Livorno; Napoli; Salerno; Genova; Gioia Tauro	Molè - Piromalli; Alvaro; Crea; Pesce	'ndrangheta	Drug trafficking	N/A
Livorno	Ciarelli; Di Silvio	Italian criminal groups	Drug trafficking	N/A

4

STRATEGIC HUB AND CRIMINAL OPPORTUNITIES: THE PORT OF LIVORNO

di Marco Antonelli e Giuseppe Lodeserto

This chapter reconstructs how the Port of Livorno has, over time, become a central node in both national and international criminal dynamics, particularly within the global cocaine trade. The analysis of institutional and judicial sources portrays a port used not only as a point of arrival, but also as a space for transit and operational experimentation.

What emerges is the presence of flexible transnational criminal networks, capable of adapting to the opportunities offered by port logistics and of intertwining with segments of the legal supply chain. At the core of these dynamics lie access to port space, the role of intermediaries, and the increasing professionalization of recovery teams.

The added value of this research lies in its cross-sectional and longitudinal reading of sources, which makes it possible to connect individual seizures, operational dynamics, and organizational transformations, thereby providing a comprehensive picture that would be difficult to capture through the analysis of isolated cases.

The following sections examine some of the structural features of the Tuscan port system—and of Livorno in particular—before turning to a closer analysis of specific criminal dynamics.

4.1 Tuscany within national and international maritime flows

Tuscany is a region with approximately 630 km of coastline, nearly 400 km along the mainland and the remainder across its islands (the Tuscan Archipelago consists of 12 islands, among which Elba is the largest). This coastal stretch faces two seas—the Ligurian Sea and the Tyrrhenian Sea—giving the region a strategic position between central and northern Italy.

Owing to this geographical location, Tuscany's port infrastructures fall under the jurisdiction of two Port System Authorities: the Eastern Ligurian Sea Authority (which includes the ports of La Spezia and Massa-Carrara) and the North-Central Tyrrhenian Sea Authority

(which includes the ports of Livorno, Capraia, Piombino, Portoferraio, Rio Marina, and Cavo). In total, the region counts 33 ports, marinas, and mooring points.

This diversity of port facilities—from commercial ports to smaller berthing points—represents a significant asset for the maritime sector. A substantial share of the regional economy is linked to these activities, as evidenced by traffic volumes in both freight and passenger flows, which are also significant at the national level.

Considering the annual tonnage handled in Tuscan ports, a steady increase can be observed between 2016 and 2019, interrupted in 2020 due to the pandemic crisis, followed by a gradual recovery. As shown in Figure 11, the port of Livorno remains the main hub for cargo handling, although in the most recent three-year period it has experienced a gradual decline, partly offset by the growth in traffic recorded at the port of Marina di Carrara.

FREIGHT VOLUMES HANDLED IN TUSCAN PORTS, 2016–2024

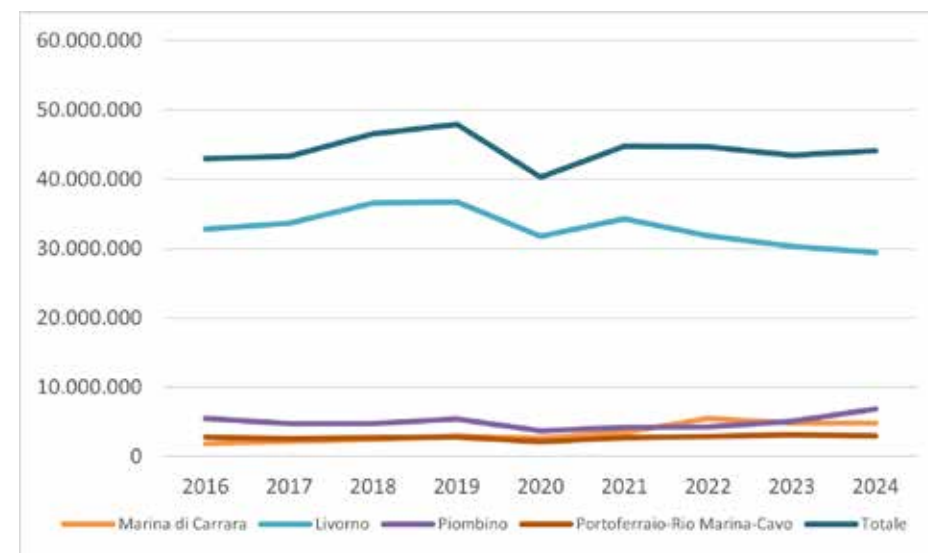


FIGURE 11 | Source: Authors' elaboration based on Assoporti data

A similar trend emerges from the analysis of TEUs handled in commercial ports. After a decline between 2016 and 2017, volumes increased steadily up to 2019, when the ports of Livorno and Piombino recorded positive figures, followed by a downturn in 2020.

After a recovery in 2021, the port of Livorno

experienced a gradual decline in the number of TEUs handled, reaching its lowest levels in the period under consideration during 2023–2024. By contrast, the port of Marina di Carrara recorded a significant increase in TEU volumes, which have nearly tripled since 2021 compared to 2016 levels (Figure 12).

This growth is largely driven by the rise in the handling of stone materials (marble and scrap of marble).

TEUS HANDLED IN TUSCAN PORTS, 2016–2024

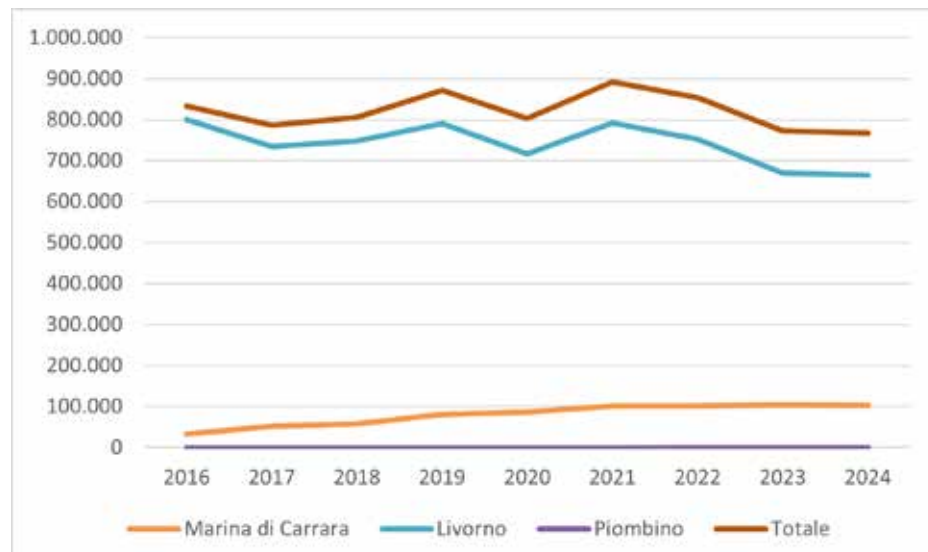


FIGURE 12 | Source: Authors' elaboration based on Assoport data

Despite some reductions in traffic volumes, Tuscan ports continue to play a central role within the national landscape. Looking at 2024 data, the Port System Authority of the Northern Tyrrhenian Sea (thus excluding the port of Marina di Carrara) ranks third in terms of general cargo tonnage handled, and fourth when liquid and dry bulk are also included. It ranks sixth in terms of TEUs handled, and fourth when transshipment is excluded.

Within the Tuscan port system, passenger traffic also plays a significant role, both in relation to cruise activities—which connect

Tuscany with the rest of the Mediterranean and global destinations—and ferry services, which link the Tuscan islands to the mainland as well as Tuscany to other regions and countries in the Mediterranean.

An analysis of data over the past nine years (Figure 13) shows a gradual, albeit modest, increase in passenger numbers between 2016 and 2019, with the port of Livorno playing a key role. In 2020, however, traffic was heavily affected by the pandemic and the resulting restrictions on mobility, leading to a reduction of nearly one-third in passenger numbers compared to the pre-

vious year.

From 2021 onwards, a steady recovery can be observed, culminating in record levels of passenger traffic in 2023 and 2024—

approximately 10.7 million passengers—once again with the port of Livorno assuming an increasingly central role.

PASSENGER TRAFFIC IN TUSCAN PORTS, 2016–2024

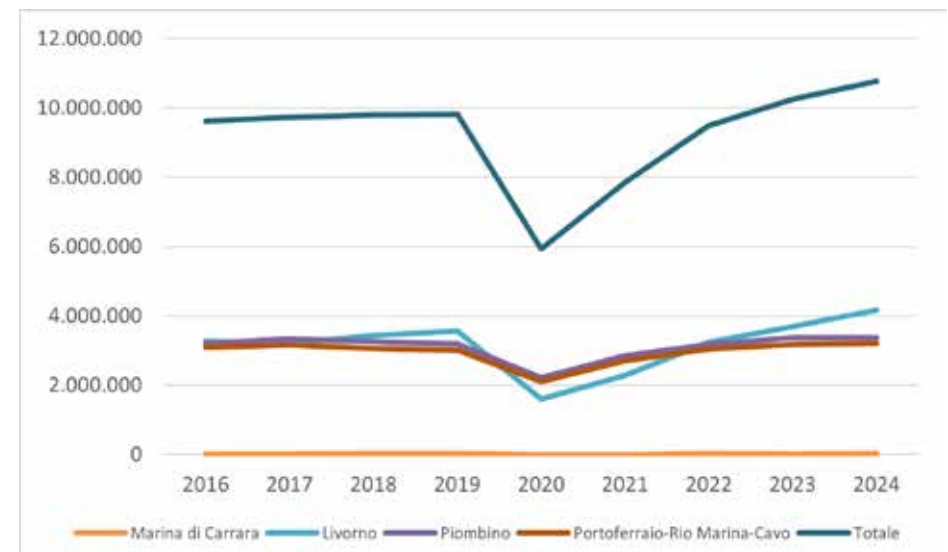


FIGURE 13 | Source: Authors' elaboration based on Assoport data

4.2 Livorno as a logistical node

Among Tuscan ports, Livorno is undoubtedly the most significant, with a long history marked by a deep connection to the development of the city. This can be observed both from a social perspective—having fostered strong integration among people from different parts of the world—and from an urban standpoint, with a high degree of continuity between the city centre and the maritime space.

In the past, the port was also recognised for the strong political militancy of its workforce, which was at the forefront of numerous mobilisations between the 1960s and the 1990s. These mobilisations addressed both port-related issues—particularly in opposition to the introduction of functional autonomy and reforms reshaping the port labour market—and broader solidarity causes. This feature remains evident today, as illustrated by the mobilisations that took place in 2025 in support of the population

of Gaza, opposing arms trafficking and the war economy.

More recent developments have also involved infrastructure modernisation strategies, including the expansion of port areas both adjacent to the city and towards the northern coastline. In particular, the “Darsena Europa” project envisages the construction of facilities capable of accommodating large vessels, including approximately 3 km of quays, two major terminals, 2 million square metres of new areas, and a new port entrance with seabed depths reaching –20 metres.

From an economic and functional perspective, the Port of Livorno is a multipurpose port, capable of handling a wide range of cargo types and vessel categories. As a result, it exhibits a highly articulated internal structure: the location of customs gates is strongly shaped by the port’s complex and discontinuous morphology, as well as by the differentiated activities distributed across its various operational areas.

In total, the port of Livorno is equipped with eleven customs gates, monitored in different ways depending on whether they serve intra-EU or extra-Schengen traffic, as well as on the type of goods and passengers in transit and their associated fiscal and customs risk profiles.

The port’s infrastructural endowment also enables connections to the main national road and rail networks, as well as to the airport areas of Pisa and Florence. Thanks to a relatively extensive hinterland—primarily encompassing Tuscany, Emilia-Romagna, Umbria, and Marche—the business and industrial ecosystem linked to the Port of Livorno is broad and diversified. This makes it a particularly attractive hub, where both commercial and cruise-related activities play a significant role.

An analysis of data over the past 16 years (2009–2024) provides useful insights into the port’s development and its evolving dynamics.

Focusing on passenger traffic at the Port of Livorno (Figure 14), a decline can be observed between 2010 and 2014, followed by a gradual recovery in subsequent years. Passenger volumes peaked in 2019, before dropping sharply in 2020 due to pandemic-related restrictions. The recovery that followed has been both steady and pronounced, culminating in record figures in 2023 and even more so in 2024, when the port surpassed 4 million passengers.

NUMBER OF PASSENGERS IN THE PORT OF LIVORNO (2009–2024)

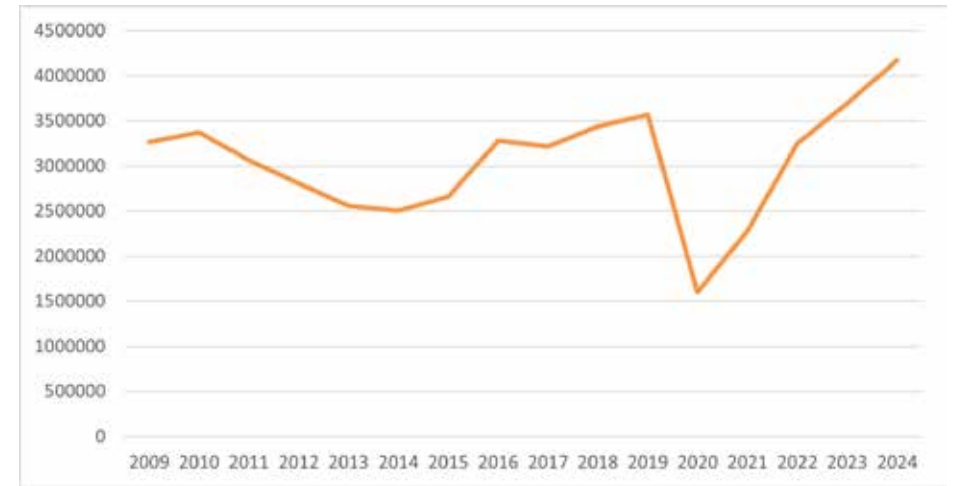


FIGURE 14| Source: Authors’ elaboration based on Assoport data

From a commercial perspective, the Port of Livorno confirms its position as one of Italy’s leading logistics hubs. Data for 2024 show that Livorno ranks third nationwide in general cargo throughput—behind Gioia Tauro and Genoa—and fifth in terms of TEUs handled, following Gioia Tauro, Genoa, La Spezia, and Trieste. It also ranks first for RO-RO traffic, with approximately 485,000 units handled annually, excluding crossings in the Strait of Messina.

Looking at these trends over time, a pattern of uneven but overall growth emerges. Cargo volumes increased steadily over the decade 2009–2019, with slight declines between 2010 and 2012 and again in 2020 (Figure 15). After a recovery in 2021, the following years show a gradual downward trend.

TOTAL CARGO THROUGHPUT IN THE PORT OF LIVORNO (2009–2020)

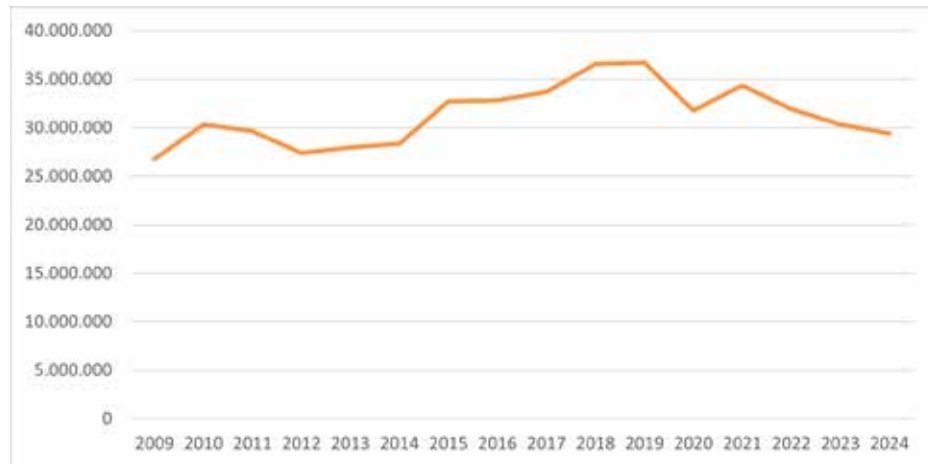


FIGURE 15 | Source: Authors' elaboration based on Assoport data

A more fine-grained breakdown by cargo type shows that dry bulk volumes have remained relatively stable over time, while liquid bulk has experienced a gradual decline since 2019. By contrast, the growth of general cargo—particularly from 2013–

2014 onwards—has been the key factor enabling the port to maintain a significant position within the national market (Figure 16).

CARGO THROUGHPUT IN THE PORT OF LIVORNO BY TYPE OF GOODS (2009–2024)

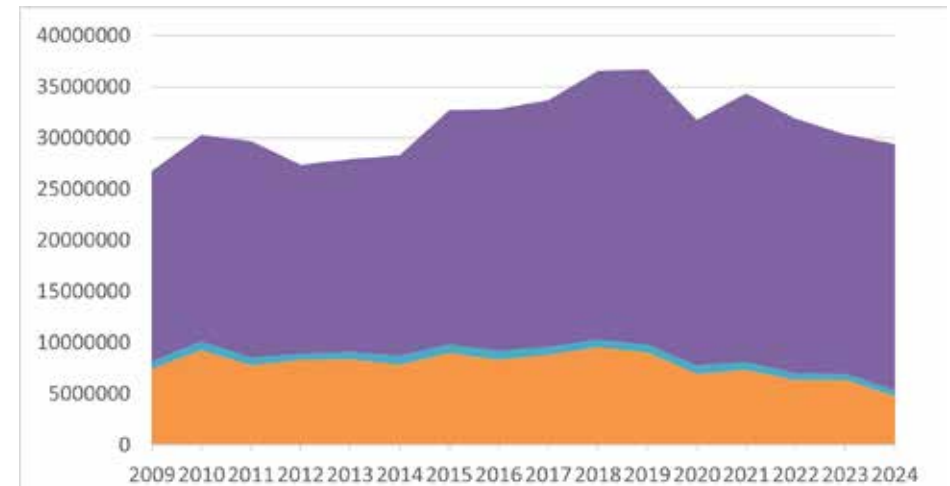


FIGURE 16 | Source: Authors' elaboration based on Assoport data

Turning to container traffic, measured in TEUs, two key trends emerge over time (Figure 17). First, volumes show a sustained increase, stabilizing above 600,000 TEUs annually from 2015 onwards. Second, there is a clear shift in how the port is used within logistics chains.

From 2015, in particular, a sharp rise can be observed in containers handled through transshipment operations—that is, containers unloaded and reloaded onto other

vessels. In percentage terms, transshipment accounts for over 20% of total container traffic from 2015 onwards, peaking at 29% in 2019 and 28% in 2020.

However, from 2022 onwards, the number of transshipped containers declines significantly, dropping by nearly 50% compared to the previous year. By 2023, transshipment accounts for only around 10% of total volumes.

NUMBER OF TEUS HANDLED AT THE PORT OF LIVORNO (2009–2024)

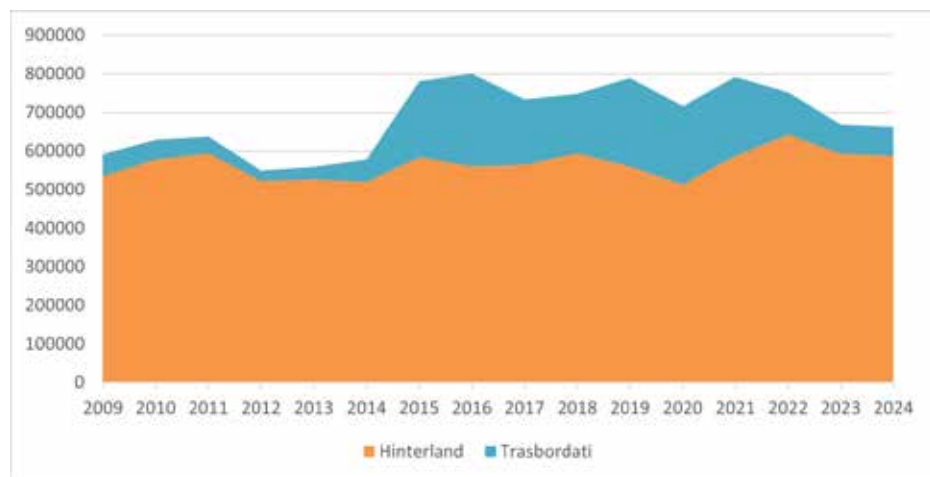


FIGURE 17 | Source: Authors' elaboration based on Assoport data

4.3 Illegal and criminal ports

This section examines the main forms of criminal activity identified in Tuscan ports, with particular attention to the Port of Livorno. The analysis focuses on different types of illicit practices that have been documented over time by institutional actors.

The dataset draws on reports and documentation produced by key institutional observers: the National Anti-Mafia Directorate (DNA), which coordinates anti-mafia and counter-terrorism investigations nationwide; the Central Directorate for Anti-Drug Services (DCSA), a multi-agency body within the Department of Public Security of the Ministry of the Interior; and the Customs and Monopolies Agency. These sources are triangulated with judicial records and journalistic materials. As such, the

findings presented here should be read not only as a snapshot of major illicit flows, but also as an analytical lens through which to interpret the monitoring and enforcement practices of these institutions.

The resulting picture is complex and multifaceted. Over the period under consideration—from the early 2000s to the end of 2025—the Port of Livorno appears to have been used predominantly for illicit trafficking activities, with comparatively limited involvement in legal business infiltration. Over the past two decades, the most recurrent forms of illegal activity include trafficking in counterfeit goods, smuggling (including cigarette smuggling), waste trafficking, and drug trafficking.

Trafficking of counterfeit goods

Trafficking in counterfeit goods has been recorded primarily as an import phenomenon, involving the entry into the national territory of a wide range of products—typically originating from Asian markets, particularly China—bearing false indications of origin or failing to meet regulatory safety standards.

Among the goods identified are textile machinery that does not comply with sectoral safety requirements; environmentally hazardous refrigerant gases; unsafe pyrotechnic materials; electrical devices and lightbulbs with incorrect information regarding product safety responsibility; as well as expired or improperly stored food and healthcare products.

Investigations indicate that the criminal networks involved in this business are predominantly of Chinese and Italian origin. In the latter case, several companies based in central and northern Italy have been found to play a complicit role, sourcing goods similar to original products at lower prices in order to increase profit margins upon resale.

Smuggling

Smuggling activities have likewise involved a broad range of goods imported in violation of customs duties and VAT regulations. As with counterfeit goods, the main routes connect Asian markets to the Port of Livorno.

Some investigations have revealed schemes in which criminal groups falsely declared goods as destined for VAT warehouses—allowing for deferred tax payments

upon release into the national market—by activating VAT numbers registered to non-existent entities or short-lived companies. These entities would carry out multiple import operations before being dissolved without settling the due taxes.

A notable example is the “Arcobaleno” operation conducted by the Guardia di Finanza in Livorno in 2012, which uncovered a trafficking scheme managed by Chinese and Italian actors involving approximately 40,000 rolls of fabric and 1.5 million garments, with an estimated value of €4 million (DNA, 2013).

Cigarette smuggling

The smuggling of cigarettes and counterfeit tobacco products follows routes similar to those observed for other illicit trades, linking Asian (particularly China) and Middle Eastern markets (notably the United Arab Emirates) to the Port of Livorno (DNA, 2010). Judicial investigations have identified criminal groups composed of Chinese, Tunisian, and Italian actors.

For instance, following the seizure of 20 tonnes of counterfeit cigarettes—worth approximately €5 million—hidden in containers arriving from China, six individuals of Chinese origin and one Italian national were arrested. The group had exploited the corporate identities and VAT numbers of unsuspecting Italian companies with no prior criminal record in order to bypass controls (DNA, 2010).

A similar modus operandi has been documented more recently in connection with the seizure of 7,000 kg of smuggled and partially counterfeit tobacco. In addition to identity theft involving the recipient compa-

nies, the criminal network—composed of individuals from Campania and Tunisia—relied on the collaboration of a Livorno-based freight forwarder directly involved in the illicit activity.

Illegal waste trafficking

According to DNA reports, waste trafficking involving the Port of Livorno has often taken place within broader inter-port networks, also involving ports such as Ancona, Catania, Genoa, Gioia Tauro, and La Spezia. In one investigation, China emerged as the destination country, a pattern confirmed in subsequent reports, including the 2017 DNA report, which identified ongoing illegal waste shipments departing from Livorno.

This trend continued in later years. A 2018 investigation uncovered an international trafficking scheme involving contaminated metal waste exported to China, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Korea (DNA, 2018). Senegal also appears among destination countries, as evidenced by a 2020 case involving the export of 11 tonnes of textile waste.

Over time, however, cases of waste importation have also been documented. These include, in particular, shipments of copper derived from demolition activities, imported by companies with the aim of recovering and reusing the material—a process that may entail significant public health risks.

Across both outbound and inbound routes, Italian companies appear to play a key role, often motivated by profit opportunities. On the one hand, they may obtain low-cost materials for reinvestment; on the other, they can dispose of waste at reduced costs by circumventing the regulatory burdens associated with proper and safe disposal.

Drug trafficking

For several years, the centrality of the Port of Livorno in drug trafficking has been consistently highlighted in major institutional reports. For instance, the 2018 report by the National Anti-Mafia Directorate (DNA) notes that “the Port of Livorno now plays a role no less important than that of Gioia Tauro and the Ligurian ports as a point of entry into Europe—and into Italy—for narcotics arriving mainly from South America, either directly or following an initial landing at other European ports. This situation is linked to the strong operational presence of the *’ndrangheta*, in connection with local criminal groups providing logistical support” (DNA, 2018, p. 17).

This assessment is echoed by other law enforcement bodies. The Anti-Mafia Investigative Directorate (DIA), for example, states that “with regard to drug trafficking, the port area of Livorno has for years become a strategic hub for both national and transnational illicit flows” (DIA, 2020b, p. LXXXI).

Along similar lines, the then Prosecutor General of Florence, Marcello Viola, speaking at the inauguration of the 2021 judicial year, observed that the Port of Livorno “appears to have become an increasingly important and preferred alternative to ports such as Gioia Tauro and Genoa for the importation of narcotics—particularly cocaine—from South America.”

This interpretation has been reaffirmed more recently. In 2024, the Prosecutor General of the Florence Court of Appeal, Ettore Squillace Greco, described the port as “an important node in international drug trafficking, in which the *’ndrangheta* continues to play a leading role [even though segments of the Calabrian mafia bourgeoi-

sie now increasingly privilege legal economic circuits and global financial flows over direct involvement in drug trafficking].”

The central role of the Port of Livorno in regional criminal dynamics was further emphasized during the inauguration of the 2025 judicial year, when the Prosecutor General stated that “international drug trafficking has had one of its key hubs in the Port of Livorno, as evidenced by the hundreds of kilograms of drugs seized by the Guardia di Finanza in cooperation with the Customs Agency.”

The relocation of trafficking activities toward the Port of Livorno also finds support in analyses by the Central Directorate for Anti-Drug Services (DCSA), which notes that “the significant seizures recorded in the ports of Genoa, Vado Ligure, Civitavecchia and Livorno, in addition to Gioia Tauro, suggest that criminal organizations—having long considered the Calabrian port as the primary gateway for cocaine from South America—have more recently begun to diversify toward other Mediterranean ports, alongside those in Northern Europe, in order to reduce the risk of losing shipments” (DCSA, 2020, p. 4).

This trend appears to be driven both by strategic decisions within criminal organizations and by converging interests with actors operating in other ports, who provide logistical support and expertise. As another DCSA report observes, “the larger seizures recorded in the ports of Genoa and Livorno, compared to Gioia Tauro, indicate that the choice of port is no longer determined by territorial control or traditional criminal strongholds, but rather by the connections that organizations are able to establish—also abroad—and by their logi-

stical capabilities, including the management and control of freight transport companies, not limited to maritime transport” (DCSA, 2019, p. 16).

The growing interest in the Port of Livorno thus appears to result from a combination of factors. Some are linked to the port’s integration within major legal trade routes—such as the Atlantic route connecting drug-producing or exporting countries to Europe, and the Mediterranean route linking North African export hubs to continental shores. Others stem from strategic adaptations by criminal groups, which increasingly view Livorno as a viable alternative to ports where enforcement activities have intensified over time.

This centrality within illicit trafficking networks is reflected in a series of record seizures in recent years. In 2020, the port was the site of the largest seizure of the year—and one of the most significant in recent decades—amounting to approximately 3,300 kg of cocaine. In the same year, Livorno ranked second only to Gioia Tauro in terms of total cocaine seized. In 2022, it recorded the highest quantity of marijuana seized nationwide, with 195.74 kg, accounting for 15.3% of the national total.

Within this context, cocaine trafficking emerges as particularly significant. Judicial and journalistic evidence consistently identify it as one of the core businesses of criminal networks operating through the Port of Livorno.

A comparison between regional cocaine seizure data and those recorded at the Port of Livorno clearly highlights the port’s central role within the dynamics of the illicit drug market (Figure 18). Periods marked by higher volumes of cocaine seized at

the regional level correspond to intensified interception activities within the port area. Conversely, in years when no cocaine is detected in the port, overall regional figures also remain comparatively low.

Focusing on port-level seizures—excluding years in which no seizures were recorded (2012, 2013, 2014, and 2017)—and comparing them with regional data, it emerges that the port consistently accounts for more than 50% of total seizures. Particularly high shares are observed in 2018 (90%), 2019 (95%), and 2020 (96%).

An exception is 2021, when a major seizure of approximately 480 kg took place inland, in the province of Arezzo. Even in that year, however, the Port of Livorno registered the second-largest seizure at the regional level, amounting to around 118 kg.

COCAINE SEIZURES IN THE PORT OF LIVORNO AND IN TUSCANY (KG), 2011–2024

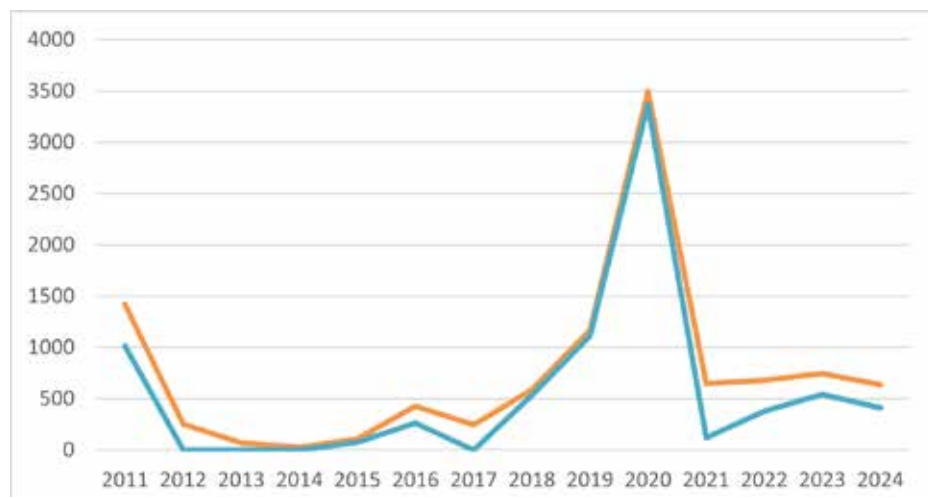


FIGURE 18 | Source: Authors' elaboration based on DCSA reports (2014–2025)

4.4 Cocaine trafficking: a complex market

The combined analysis of institutional reports and judicial documents related to major anti-drug operations makes it possible to identify several key features of the Port of Livorno. First, the multiplicity of functions performed by the port over time, together with the diversification of the markets connected to its activities, appears to have broadened the range of criminal opportunities. Within this framework, Livorno emerges as an attractive hub for transnational trafficking networks, for structured criminal groups (among Italian mafias, the 'ndrangheta features most prominently), and, at times, even for actors experimenting with the port as a logistical node for the first time.

In this regard, the Anti-Mafia Investigative Directorate (DIA) observes that “the 'ndrangheta, Albanian groups, as well as other criminal organizations, use the port of Livorno as a preferred alternative to ports such as Gioia Tauro and Genoa” (DIA, 2020a, p. 365). This starting point is useful not only for describing the actors and operational modalities of criminal activity in the port area, but also for examining, in parallel, the responses of law enforcement and their relevance for our analysis.

A first immediate indicator is the frequency of seizures and, above all, the quantities intercepted in recent years. Looking at the most recent period, in 2022 authorities seized 158 kg of cocaine hidden in a false compartment within a container arriving from Malta, 208 kg concealed in a container from Ecuador, and an additional 9 kg hidden among goods transported on a RO-

RO vessel.

In January 2023, the Guardia di Finanza in Livorno seized 180 kg of cocaine concealed in a refrigerated container carrying bananas, which had departed approximately one month earlier from a South American port.

Shortly thereafter, on 1 April 2023, another operation led to the arrest of three Albanian nationals caught attempting to retrieve 53 kg of cocaine from a container arriving from South America—an amount estimated by investigators to be worth over €10 million.

On 18 July 2023, the Guardia di Finanza in Livorno arrested five Albanian nationals during a recovery operation involving more than 60 kg of cocaine, divided into bricks and concealed inside a container that had just arrived at the port from South America. The shipment, placed under controlled delivery, was subsequently monitored through its onward movement until it reached Santa Croce sull'Arno (Pisa).

A few weeks later, on 5 August 2023, a further joint operation by the Guardia di Finanza and the Customs Agency led to the arrest of an Albanian national as he attempted to retrieve approximately 40 kg of cocaine—again in brick form—hidden in a container arriving from Ecuador.

In November 2024, investigations conducted by the Economic and Financial Police Unit of Pisa and the SCICO of the Guardia di Finanza, with the support of the Livorno Naval Unit and under the coordination of the DCSA, uncovered and dismantled a broader criminal network specializing in the importation of large quantities of cocaine from South America. The inquiry revealed the existence of an autonomous

structure operating between Ecuador and Colombia, capable of channeling drugs into Italy through Livorno, Genoa, and Savona, as well as via other European ports.

The operation resulted in 23 arrests (involving Italian, Albanian, Romanian, and Ukrainian nationals), targeting individuals allegedly involved in a criminal organization managing so-called “contaminated” containers upon arrival. Dedicated teams were responsible for extracting the cocaine, which was then distributed to different criminal groups. The investigation also led to the seizure of over two tonnes of cocaine, 45 kg of hashish, and 20 kg of marijuana, with an estimated market value of around €70 million.

In January 2025, a joint operation by the Guardia di Finanza and the Customs and Monopolies Agency resulted in the seizure of 217 kg of cocaine concealed within a container arriving from South America. The drug, divided into nearly 200 bricks, had been hidden a shipment of timber. According to investigative estimates, once distributed on retail markets, the shipment could have generated profits exceeding €150 million.

On 9 April 2025, the Port of Livorno was once again at the center of a major operation targeting international drug trafficking. During the intervention, officials from the Anti-Fraud Unit of the Customs Office, together with the Guardia di Finanza in Livorno, seized over two tonnes of high-purity cocaine, divided into approximately 1,800 bricks. The drugs had been concealed in a dry container loaded with cocoa powder and transported aboard the cargo vessel Mersin Express, arriving from the port of Guayaquil in Ecuador. According to investi-



gative estimates, once released onto the market, the shipment could have generated profits exceeding €500 million.

The sequence of seizures should not be interpreted as a mere accumulation of isolated episodes, but rather as a valuable empirical trace for reconstructing recurring practices and operational configurations that unfold over time within the port. Even this preliminary overview suggests that drug trafficking does not present itself as a uniform phenomenon. Routes shift, concealment techniques evolve, and the quantities involved vary significantly.

As a result, these trafficking activities require the involvement of a plurality of actors whose roles are not interchangeable, operating both within the legal supply chain

(transport, freight forwarding, customs clearance) and within criminal networks (coordination, recovery, distribution). The following sections focus more closely on these dimensions, examining them in greater detail through the Livorno case.

4.5 Organising trafficking: actors and operational practices

Taken together, these episodes show that the Port of Livorno is used through different yet recurring modalities, combining operational adaptability, the exploitation of logistical routines, and the ability to rapidly mobilise human and technical resources within the port environment.

The strategies employed in maritime drug trafficking are multiple and do not always rely on ports as points of entry. In some cases, alternative methods are used to bypass port infrastructures altogether—for example, offshore transfers or deliveries carried out away from the coastline. When trafficking operations are instead embedded within commercial flows and port infrastructures, criminal organizations may rely either on their own assets (such as private vessels) or on third-party carriers, inserting themselves into the routes and fleets of regular maritime transport.

In the latter case, concealment can take several forms: within commercial cargo, inside the structure of the vessel (such as cavities, hulls, or keels), or through luggage and onboard equipment. When drugs are hidden within cargo, additional variables come into play, including the type of vessel (bulk carriers, RO-RO ships, container ships) and, most importantly, specific container-based techniques. These range from using the container as a full concealment space, to the creation of double walls or hidden compartments, the insertion of drugs into cavities within goods (either pre-existing or specially created), and even chemical dissolution within the cargo itself. It is also not uncommon for duffel bags to be placed near container doors to facilitate rapid retrieval.

In the case of Livorno, official communications from the Customs Agency point to a wide range of “cover goods” used to conceal illicit shipments, including bananas, coffee, coconut peat, timber, and stage equipment. In some cases, drugs are inserted into containers without the knowledge of the shipping company or the consignee; in others, evidence suggests varying degrees

of awareness or complicity among the firms involved.

When illicit goods travel alongside legitimate cargo and the receiving company is part of the criminal network, the role of freight forwarders and specialised professionals becomes crucial. Their level of awareness may differ, but their technical and operational contribution is essential: they ensure formally compliant documentation while simultaneously coordinating logistics and information flows required for the recovery or onward distribution of the drugs.

An illustrative example emerges from a case involving a group of Italian entrepreneurs who organized cocaine imports from South America via Livorno. Due to an error in indicating the port of destination (Catania instead of Livorno), corrupt port workers were unable to retrieve the shipment when the vessel called at Livorno. A subsequent attempt to access the container in Catania also failed (Italian Supreme Court, 2018). This episode clearly demonstrates how illicit trafficking depends on the proper functioning of legal logistics systems, from which it borrows procedures, timelines, documentation, and constraints.

Different concealment techniques correspond to different recovery methods. One practice that has significantly affected several Italian ports in recent years is the so-called rip-off: a mechanism that relies on the presence of insiders within the port capable of accessing containers, extracting the drugs—often placed alongside legitimate cargo or stored in duffel bags near the container doors—and restoring conditions so as not to raise suspicion.

The analysis shows that this practice has spread across both northern and southern

ports and, over time, has fostered forms of local specialization. Livorno, too, has been the setting for similar dynamics on several occasions. In the “Akurius” investigation, prosecutors described the existence of a genuine “drug recovery agency, a task force that could be activated when needed through its leader” (Florence Court, 2017, p. 19).

In the waters off Livorno, alternative solutions have also emerged, designed to reduce exposure to port controls. When operations within the port are considered too risky or uncertain, criminal organizations may shift part of the operation outside the port area, effectively redrawing the boundaries of trafficking activities.

A notable example is the 2017 “Molo 13” operation. Following an unexpected change in the route of a commercial vessel carrying approximately 200 kg of concealed cocaine aboard the container ship Fleur N, individuals linked to the Gallace clan rapidly organized an alternative recovery strategy. With the complicity of crew members and a skipper operating a private vessel, the drug-filled duffel bags were to be thrown overboard, kept afloat using empty canisters, and later retrieved at sea by a sailing boat. The operation ultimately failed due to deteriorating sea conditions: the cargo was carried away by the waves and discovered the following day by personnel from the Livorno Naval Academy near the military facility.

Beyond illustrating flexibility and adaptive capacity, this case highlights how criminal groups may at times consider it “safer” to relocate parts of the operation outside the port, even if this entails greater logistical complexity—more personnel, additional

resources, and, crucially, the collusion of crew members. Such strategies increase the exposure of seafarers, who are required to manage delicate operations at sea that are difficult to conceal from other crew members. From a policy perspective, this underscores the need for monitoring and preventive measures along the entire trafficking route: ports of departure, transit points, and destination ports alike.

Finally, when traffickers rely on their own vessels (such as pleasure boats), additional logistical requirements come into play. These include the selection of qualified crew members (at least one experienced skipper), access to a “safe” mooring location, and the availability of suitable facilities at or near the destination port. In regions such as Tuscany, these conditions may be facilitated by the widespread presence of marinas and infrastructure dedicated to recreational boating.

These operational patterns confirm that drug trafficking does not enter the port environment randomly. Rather, it is structured around the port’s own rules, vulnerabilities, and available skills, making the port a crucial interface between the legal economy and criminal circuits.

Not all seizures recorded in Tuscan ports concern shipments destined for the regional territory. A significant share of these flows is embedded within broader national and European transit routes. Legal trade routes—shaped by shipping companies and logistics networks—also orient illicit trafficking: embedding illegal goods within existing channels allows criminal actors to reduce costs, risks, and transit times. As a result, part of the drugs intercepted may be “in transit,” destined for other Italian or

European ports.

From this perspective, several cases illustrate how Livorno plays a key role even when it is not the final destination. At the beginning of 2019, following intelligence provided by the DCSA, the Guardia di Finanza in Livorno intercepted approximately 650 kg of cocaine (582 bricks) concealed in 23 duffel bags hidden within a shipment of coffee (Operation Milk and Coffee). The container, shipped from Honduras and transshipped in Costa Rica, was destined for Barcelona and then for a company in Madrid; however, the intervention took place in Livorno, which functioned in this instance as a transit node. This episode clearly shows how centrality in legal trade routes can translate into a similar centrality in illicit flows, even when the port is not the final commercial destination.

An even more striking case concerns the seizure of approximately three tonnes of cocaine aboard a cargo vessel departing from Colombia and bound for Marseille—an operation described by sources as one of the largest seizures in Europe in the past 25 years and the second largest ever recorded in Italy. Through international coordination, law enforcement agencies (notably the Carabinieri in Livorno) intercepted the shipment, hidden in around ninety backpacks placed inside a container. The drugs were replaced, listening devices were installed, and after passing through the port of Genoa, the container continued to Marseille. There, the operation enabled the use of advanced cooperation tools, including a controlled delivery on French territory, ultimately leading to the arrest of individuals involved in the recovery phase.

These elements show how the port can

become a point of convergence between supranational investigative needs and operational cooperation mechanisms. Within the port space, national and international rules and procedures intersect and are often tested in practice. From this perspective, criminal organizations appear to exploit conventional maritime transport not so much because of the specific “identity” of a given port, but rather because of the varying opportunities for access and impunity it can offer. The diversity of these techniques does not merely reflect criminal ingenuity; it also reveals the capacity of trafficking networks to adapt selectively to the material and organizational features of the ports involved.

4.6 The internationalization of criminal logistics

Among the most relevant aspects emerging from the analysis is the growing internationalization of both trafficking activities and the composition of the actors involved. Recent investigations point, on the one hand, to the presence in Tuscany of high-ranking members of the 'ndrangheta acting as key brokers in organizing imports from South America; on the other, to the involvement of groups of Albanian origin primarily engaged in operational coordination and cargo retrieval.

The choice to use Tuscany as a logistical base appears closely linked to the possibility of exploiting infrastructures capable of projecting illicit goods into the broader European market. Within this system, the port of Livorno plays a central role—not as an isolated node, but as part of a wider network of ports and logistical corridors.

In such contexts, international trafficking networks—even when they include mafia-type organizations—frequently rely on intermediaries and brokers able to assemble the necessary actors, especially within the port environment. What emerges is a non-monolithic configuration: multidimensional networks with nodes distributed across multiple countries, specialized functions, and flexible, on-demand activation. In this framework, intermediaries play a crucial role in ensuring operational connections, reliability, and coordination across different segments of the supply chain. As a result, analyses focused exclusively on a single organization risk being overly reductive: even when mafias are present, they do not necessarily exercise stable or direct control over all phases of the trafficking process.

Part of the recent debate tends to frame the involvement of foreign organized crime in the port as a relatively new development. However, available evidence suggests a greater degree of continuity over time. The presence of foreign criminal groups and the use of licit economic supply chains as a cover have in fact been a recurring feature for at least two decades of investigations. As early as the early 2000s, the D.I.A. was already highlighting similar dynamics. In Operation Emissario (February 2000), an investigation involving a group composed of Italian and South American nationals led to the arrest of five individuals caught attempting to retrieve a shipment of cocaine transported by couriers on board a vessel flying the Panamanian flag (D.I.A., 2000, p. 87).

Several years later, in August 2006, an investigation conducted by the Guardia di Finanza of Varese led to the arrest of ten

individuals (nine Dominican nationals and one Italian national, who was the recipient of the shipment) and to the seizure of 115 kilograms of cocaine that had arrived at the port of Livorno aboard a vessel from Santo Domingo (Proc. Pen. no. 8271/06 R.G.N.R. D.D.A. Bologna). The case is particularly significant as it illustrates the use of a legitimate supply chain as a form of “cover”: the drug was concealed within a container among regularly shipped goods (coconut peat, commonly used in agriculture). The exporter was a company based in Santo Domingo, while the importer was a firm in Pistoia that purchased the goods according to customer demand.

According to the reconstruction, the Dominican “coordinator” of the group operating in Ravenna secured the collaboration of the Italian woman, who was entrusted with managing relations with the importing company and placed orders for the coconut peat in her name. Accomplices in Santo Domingo handled the concealment of the cocaine prior to departure; once the shipment had cleared customs in Livorno, a driver transported the container to a location designated by the woman, where the goods were unloaded, the cocaine retrieved, and the coconut peat either discarded or redistributed.

Logistical contingencies also became part of the operational trajectory. Due to a coordination failure with the accomplices, an initial shipment proved unsuccessful, as the cocaine could not be inserted into the container before departure. Nonetheless, the woman was required to collect the goods and place a new order, fabricating a justification so as not to raise suspicion. The second shipment departed only months later and reached Livorno during the night

between 30 and 31 July 2006.

Technical investigative activities further made it possible to reconstruct payment arrangements and compensation schemes, while also shedding light on the sophistication of concealment techniques: according to the seizure report, the boxes containing the cocaine were lined with metal sheets in order to evade X-ray scanning.

4.7 Livorno as a node in transnational networks: diverse organizations, differentiated roles

The analysis of selected investigations makes it possible to identify specific mechanisms through which the port is exploited, while also highlighting potential vulnerabilities in the functioning of the port area. For the purposes of this report, the relevance of these operations lies not only in the quantities seized, but above all in the modes of access to the port and in the relationships activated to ensure the retrieval of the drugs. Within this framework, the 'ndrangheta often emerges as a significant—though not exclusive—actor within networks in which multiple groups and individuals coexist, each performing differentiated roles.

Operation “Tamanaco”

By way of example, in the section devoted to the 'ndrangheta, the D.I.A. (2020) refers to Operation Tamanaco, carried out on 22 June 2010 by the Guardia di Finanza of Catanzaro, which reconstructed a complex and articulated system of international trafficking involving convicted Calabrian and

Campanian individuals, foreign drug traffickers operating between South America, Africa, and Northern Europe, as well as actors apparently external to criminal circuits.

According to the judicial sources cited, a Venezuelan exporter/shipper reported difficulties in identifying a shipping company operating a direct route to Livorno; at the same time, he stressed the need for the container to be unloaded specifically in the Livorno port (“...the important thing is that it is unloaded where... where we say...”) and to do so through a particular shipping company (“...with this company... you can send as many as you want...”). (Court of Reggio Calabria, pre-trial detention order no. 124/09, Operation Tamanaco).

The loss of the shipment generated tensions among the actors involved and revealed the mechanisms through which risk was allocated: up to the point of arrival at the port of destination, responsibility remained with the exporter/shipper, and was then transferred to the recipient, who was nonetheless required to bear the cost of the cocaine consignment. In the specific case, one of the key actors allegedly claimed to have the situation under control in the port of Livorno, relying less on actual guarantees than on the relatively low percentage of containers subject to inspection.

Within this framework, an intercepted conversation is particularly revealing, as it highlights the importance of intermediaries and, more broadly, of logistical organization over mere financial capacity:

“[...] The real channel that works is us... because the problem is not having the money to carry out the deal, but the organization that allows you to operate, to have the means, the people to collect, transport...

to pay customs, people willing to work...”.

Operation “Vulcano”

Several investigations show how the port of Livorno has been used over time by multiple ‘ndrangheta clans. In Operation Vulcano, conducted by the Public Prosecutor’s Office of Reggio Calabria, organized imports from Panama emerged along routes including Rotterdam, Livorno, Naples, Salerno, Genoa, and Gioia Tauro.

The pre-trial detention order (no. 65/2016 R.O.C.C.) describes an organization that could rely on maritime personnel, including the captain of a motor vessel operating along transoceanic routes. The plan involved an offshore transshipment, beyond “ten nautical miles,” in order to reduce the risk of monitoring; however, the operation was postponed due to concerns over possible controls, leading to a request for higher compensation (200,000 euros) and the subsequent “cascade” search for additional available manpower.

The order also highlights how a port operator linked to the ‘ndrangheta devised a system of “recovery teams,” remunerated through a percentage of the cargo. At the same time, the sources point to an interpretative framework in which cocaine is not only an end in itself, but also a means to achieve broader objectives: economic power, alliance-building capacity, and, ultimately, territorial control.

Beyond ‘ndrangheta

Investigations provide a picture that is not exclusively centred on the ‘ndrangheta.

Operation White Iron (2018), which led to the seizure of approximately 80 kilograms of cocaine, revealed the use of the port by organizations active in other territories, with recipients in the Latina area and links to groups such as Ciarelli–Di Silvio and connections to the Casamonica clan. In this case, the drugs were concealed within cavities carved into metal supports loaded inside the container; the cocaine was produced in Colombia and transported in a container departing from Chile.

Similar elements emerge in Operation Miracolo, which reconstructed two distinct organizations: one oriented toward importation from Costa Rica, the other toward distribution in Lombardy. The former relied on a company legally based in Barcelona and active in the trade of tropical fruit, used as a cover for maritime imports transiting through several ports (Genoa, Savona, Livorno). Judicial orders describe the direct presence of organisers during both the preparation and unloading phases, as well as the use of a “trusted” freight forwarder to handle customs clearance and transport toward Liguria and Lombardy. Two shipments (101.04 kg and 114.225 kg) were seized in the port of Livorno on 27 and 28 March 2018.

A further example is provided by the investigation Picciotteria, which identified a cell based in Africo (Reggio Calabria) and operating in Marcon (Venice). Through a food import-export company, the group imported cocaine from South America; according to the D.N.A., “high-purity cocaine arrived at the port of Livorno, was transported by road and cleared through customs at the port of Venice, and was then destined for subsequent distribution” (D.N.A., 2017, p. 1150).

Taken together, these cases suggest that the port does not appear to be the exclusive domain of a single organization capable of exercising stable control over the illicit market. Rather, different and autonomous groups exploit Livorno at different times and in different ways, mobilising varying combinations of human resources and specialised expertise.

Operation “Akuarius”

The Akuarius investigation offers particularly clear insight into the interplay between criminal networks, local intermediaries, and resources embedded within the port environment. Conducted by the Carabinieri and the Guardia di Finanza of Livorno and coordinated by the Livorno Public Prosecutor’s Office, the investigation unfolded between 2014 and 2017. The prosecution case centred on an association involved in importing cocaine from South America into Europe through the port of Livorno.

The investigation highlighted the connections between actors based in the Livorno area and segments of the ‘ndrangheta from the province of Vibo Valentia, anticipating patterns that would also emerge in subsequent investigations. The reconstruction reveals cross-cutting ties with the Bellocco, Molè-Piromalli, Avignone, and Paviglianiti families, as well as individuals under investigation in the provinces of Florence and Pistoia.

A key feature is the networked structure of the organization: the presence of actors with diverse profiles and competencies and, above all, the centrality of certain intermediaries capable of mobilising both financial and relational resources. Funding

was reportedly linked to members of the Pimomalli-Molè clan, through an emissary based in Tuscany; however, the management of the logistics of extraction from the port did not appear to be directly handled by the mafia group. Instead, it was entrusted to a local intermediary with a criminal record, who had established contacts with the Calabrian component during a previous period of detention. This individual organized a recovery team and recruited additional operational figures, creating the conditions necessary for access to—and continued presence within—the port.

Within this framework, two categories of actors assume particular relevance: security personnel at access points and port workers. The former facilitated entry without checks and without activating surveillance systems; the latter were able to identify in advance the location of containers, accelerate retrieval operations, and provide practical guidance to blend in (for instance, by using orange safety vests). Both groups could also signal the presence of law enforcement. In this way, the network exploited established routines and procedures within the port environment while inserting itself into its vulnerabilities, which, according to a witness, may also concern the physical perimeter (such as maritime access points and breaches in fencing).

These resources address the main operational obstacle faced by criminal groups acting within port areas—especially when they lack local embeddedness: access. The recruitment of contacts often follows a “cascade” mechanism, activated by the local intermediary, who selects individuals deemed “available” and involves them in a corrupt exchange supported by financial incentives. In this configuration, the mafia

group tends to externalise segments of the operation and delegate tasks to other actors, while the overall logistics proceed in a compartmentalised manner, with each participant overseeing only a specific phase of the process.

Those operating in closest contact with the drugs are typically members of the so-called “fish” group, described as a rapid-response unit specialised in retrieval operations, often using the rip-off method. In an intercepted conversation, one of the actors emphasises the group’s operational expertise: “they’re people who... I mean... they’ve got the strength, they can do it, they’ve got the skills; we carried out a job down there that—well, you know it better than me, you know the port, right?”



The cases analysed so far allow us to draw some preliminary conclusions regarding the transformation of drug trafficking and the role assumed by the port of Livorno within this broader context.

The 2025 major seizure

In March 2025, the 2nd Operational Unit of the Guardia di Finanza of Livorno, together with the Customs and Monopolies Agency at the same port, carried out an exceptionally significant seizure: 1,800 packages of cocaine, with a total weight of 2,080.096 kilograms. The operation was described as a “record” seizure and resulted from targeted monitoring activities and preventive risk analysis conducted on the container

vessel M/N Mersin Express, arriving from South America and docking on 23 March 2025 at the Darsena Toscana Terminal in the port of Livorno.

The intervention stemmed from a careful assessment of the risks associated with commercial shipments departing from the port of Guayaquil (Ecuador), considered a strategic hub for international drug trafficking. In particular, authorities had identified cocoa and coal as “sensitive” commodities, frequently used by traffickers to conceal drugs within containers, including through the so-called rip-off method (a technique involving the clandestine insertion of drugs into legitimate cargo, often without the knowledge of the official exporter or importer). In this case, the cocaine was hidden in sacks of cocoa formally destined for the port of Barcelona.

An initial inspection carried out using X-ray scanners revealed anomalies in the shape of the cargo units, consistent with packages of narcotics. A subsequent physical inspection confirmed the presence of the 1,800 packages. The wrappings displayed differentiated features, often marked by distinctive signs or logos, likely used by criminal organizations to identify specific shipments or ownership. In particular, the packages were wrapped using: green packing tape; brown tape with a sheet bearing the “Mercedes” logo; brown tape with a “Dolce & Gabbana” label; blue tape with a “Dior” logo; tape with a sheet depicting the “Ferrari” brand; and red or blue tape with a sheet marked by a “G” topped with a crown.

During the weighing and cataloguing procedures, investigators also identified the presence of geolocation devices of the “Air-

Tag” type—tracking tools that allow remote monitoring of cargo along the logistical chain. The use of such devices indicates a high level of organization and control on the part of traffickers, who are able to track shipments in real time up to the recovery phase at the destination port.

4.8 A “flexible” port

Taken together, the materials analysed portray a port that cannot be interpreted as a marginal or residual space within the major hubs of international drug trafficking. On the contrary, the port of Livorno emerges as a fully functional node within strategies of route diversification, used both as a point of entry and as a transit port, depending on the opportunities it offers in terms of accessibility, operational timing, and levels of risk. This “flexible” role helps explain why the Livorno port consistently appears in institutional reports and judicial investigations, even in cases where the final destination of the goods lies in other Italian or European territories.

The cocaine trafficking that passes through Livorno does not present itself as a homogeneous phenomenon, nor is it reducible to a single operational model. Routes of origin, types of cover goods, concealment techniques, and volumes handled vary significantly, adapting each time to logistical conditions, available resources, and perceived levels of control. This plurality of methods corresponds to a multiplicity of actors involved, positioned along a supply chain that intertwines legal and criminal segments and requires differentiated skills at every stage of the trafficking process.

Within this framework, one element that emerges with particular clarity is the centrality of the issue of access to the port area. The arrival of drugs at the port represents only one phase of the operation: the decisive moment is often the recovery and subsequent extraction from the port. Investigations show how logistical errors, incomplete information, or the absence of reliable protection networks can compromise even large-scale, well-financed trafficking operations. For this reason, illicit trafficking appears structurally dependent on the functioning of the legal supply chain—from shipping and customs clearance procedures to the everyday practices of container handling and the management of port spaces.

The analysis further confirms that the port of Livorno is traversed by complex transnational criminal networks in which different actors and groups coexist. The recurring presence of the *'ndrangheta* is accompanied by that of groups of Albanian origin and other criminal organizations, which cooperate in flexible and not always hierarchical ways. Rather than a stable and unified control over the port, what emerges is a plurality of networks with variable geometries, activated in relation to specific operations and capable of dissolving or rapidly reconfiguring.

In this context, a decisive role is played by intermediaries and brokers—figures capable of linking the “outside” and the “inside” of the port, activating economic and relational resources, and recruiting, often on a temporary basis, the skills necessary for the successful completion of trafficking operations. Alongside these actors, one can observe a process of progressive professionalisation in recovery activities, mar-

ked by the presence of specialised teams and the adoption of now well-established techniques—such as rip-off—which allow for reduced operational time and lower exposure to risk, while further segmenting responsibilities.

Finally, the frequent identification of in-transit shipments confirms that Livorno functions as a node within broader criminal chains, where illicit strategies intersect with transnational investigative practices. It is precisely this intermediate position that makes the port a site where, on the one hand, the adaptive capacities of criminal organizations are tested and, on the other, the effectiveness of cooperation and coordination tools among law enforcement agencies is measured.

Overall, the findings suggest that prevention and enforcement policies cannot be limited to the strict control of port spaces, but must take into account the entire trajectory of goods and the vulnerabilities that emerge along the interface between port, hinterland, and global logistics chains. In conclusion, the port does not appear merely as a site of goods transit, but as a social and institutional space where vulnerabilities, responsibilities, and opportunities for intervention converge. Understanding these dynamics thus becomes a necessary step in strengthening prevention and enforcement strategies capable of addressing the complexity of contemporary trafficking.

5

CORRUPTION IN PORT SYSTEM
AUTHORITIES: AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS¹

Between 2018 and 2025, a total of 45 cases of alleged corruption were identified within Italian Port System Authorities, marking an increase of four cases compared to 2024. This increase should not be automatically interpreted as a linear rise in corrupt practices; rather, it must also be understood in light of processes of emergence and formalisation of such incidents, as well as the varying capacity of Port System Authorities to detect, record, and report them over time. Although this snapshot does not capture the entirety of corrupt phenomena affecting Italian ports, it is based on the analysis of the reports produced by the Anti-Corruption and Transparency Officers, published on the institutional websites of all Port System Authorities.

The monitoring activity therefore covered 16 public entities over a period of eight years. These reports are mandated by current legislation: by 15 December each year, the

responsible officer is required to report on the outcomes of activities carried out, with particular reference to corruption-related events involving the administration, as well as any ongoing disciplinary and criminal proceedings. The analysis shows that 18 corruption events were explicitly reported, while communications relating to pending disciplinary and criminal proceedings amount to 27. The distinction between reported corruption events and communications concerning ongoing disciplinary and criminal proceedings makes it possible to capture two different dimensions of the phenomenon: on the one hand, specific and circumscribed episodes; on the other, judicial and disciplinary processes that often unfold over multiple years and span several reporting cycles.

A MAP OF CORRUPTION
IN PORT SYSTEM
AUTHORITIES
(2018–2025)

2018/2025

Observation period

16

Port System Authorities monitored

45

Total recorded cases

18

Reported corruption events

27

Disciplinary and criminal proceedings

~5

Average annual cases

10

Port System Authorities with at least
one case

Source: Libera's elaboration based on data from the RPCT reports of Port System Authorities

As already noted, the available data capture only a portion of the corrupt practices affecting the port sector. In fact, they refer exclusively to cases involving employees, managers, or political leadership within Port System Authorities, without including incidents that may have involved other public or private actors operating within port areas. The monitoring also highlights several critical issues at a general level, particularly concerning compliance with transparency obligations. For instance, with reference to 2018, three authorities did not publish the report on their institutional websites or made available documents that were not accessible. As for 2024, at the time of writing, one Port Authority has uploaded a file that is not readable. Additionally, in several cases, reports are published in non-editable formats or follow structures that deviate from the standard template, making both content interpretation and comparative analysis more difficult.

Looking more closely at the recorded corruption events, they span heterogeneous areas: five concern public procurement, three relate to administrative measures expanding the legal sphere of beneficiaries with direct and immediate economic effects, two involve concessions and authorisations, one concerns personnel recruitment and management, one relates to supervision and inspection activities in port areas, and one concerns the management of revenues, expenditures, and assets. In a further five cases, the relevant area is not specified. The offences identified are also diverse and include, among others, corruption for acts contrary to official duties, embezzlement and ideological falsification, abuse of office and false statements, fraud, corruption and bid-rigging, as well as cases of environmental pollution. The 18 identified corruption events occurred across 9 Port

System Authorities, four of which recorded more than one episode during the period under review, for a total of 12 events.

AREAS INVOLVED IN REPORTED CORRUPTION EVENTS

5

Public procurement

3

Administrative measures with direct economic effects

2

Concessions and authorisations

1

Personnel recruitment and management

1

Supervision and inspection activities

1

Management of revenues, expenditures, and assets

1

Area not specified

When examining communications concerning ongoing disciplinary and criminal proceedings, the areas involved appear multiple and often overlapping. In particular, the most affected domain is public procurement, with seven reports. This is followed by controls, checks, inspections, and sanctions, with six cases, and by administrative measures expanding the legal sphere of beneficiaries with direct and immediate economic effects, also accounting for six cases. Closely behind are administrative measures without direct and immediate economic effects, which amount to three reports, as do concessions and authorisations.

The planning of tenders, as well as the programming and management of revenues, expenditures, and assets, each record two communications, while the awarding of works, services, and supplies represents the least affected area, with only one case. In several instances, the relevant area is not specified within the reports—an element that does not merely constitute an informational limitation, but also points to a broader weakness in the standardisation and overall quality of reporting practices adopted by these authorities.

AREAS INVOLVED IN DISCIPLINARY AND CRIMINAL PROCEEDINGS

7

Public procurement

6

Controls, checks, inspections, and sanctions

6

Administrative measures with direct economic effects

3

Administrative measures without direct economic effects

3

Concessions and authorisations

2

Tender design and planning

2

Management of revenues, expenditures, and assets

2

Maladministration

1

Awarding of works, services, and supplies



The distribution of events further shows that alleged corruption is not evenly spread across Port System Authorities, but rather tends to concentrate within a limited number of entities, where episodes recur over time, suggesting the presence of persistent structural and organizational weaknesses. On the one hand, these data may be interpreted as an indicator of the capacity of Port System Authorities to detect and report corruption-related incidents emerging within their sphere of competence, although in most cases these events are linked to judicial investigations of criminal relevance, to which administrations respond following the intervention of law enforcement agencies.

On the other hand, however, the significance of these figures should not be underestimated, even though they refer to a limited sample: on average, around five corruption-related events are recorded each year, and 10 out of 16 Port System Authorities are involved in cases of alleged corruption. This uneven distribution, combined with the recurrence of episodes in specific entities,

points to the existence of enduring organizational vulnerabilities.

Although the data only partially capture the full extent of the phenomenon, they nonetheless outline a context characterised by significant exposure to corruption risks. A key element of the analysis concerns the scale of investments allocated to port infrastructure, for which Port System Authorities are directly responsible: the financial resources managed at the local level are particularly substantial. This contributes to making the legal economic activities generated by these authorities highly attractive to criminal interests, thereby fostering dynamics of corruption and collusion.

In this context, the central role played by Port System Authorities in planning and managing large-scale infrastructure investments further increases the attractiveness of these legal markets, rendering them particularly exposed to corrupt practices and to criminal interests aimed at capturing public resources.

6

TO GIOIA TAURO, FROM SANTOS: THE ITALO-BRAZILIAN COCAINE CONNECTION

by *Gabriel Patriarca*

Located in the state of São Paulo, in south-eastern Brazil, the Port of Santos is the largest port in South America. It covers more than 9 square kilometres spread along 16 kilometres of quays on both banks of a navigation channel that separates the cities of Santos and Guarujá. Thus, despite being known as the Port of Santos, its multipurpose facilities span the municipalities of Santos, Guarujá and Cubatão, comprising 55 terminals across primary and secondary zones.

In 2024, 179.8 million tonnes of cargo were handled at the port, of which 59.9 million tonnes were containerised, equivalent to 5.5 million TEUs – twenty-foot equivalent units, the standard measure of container volume. With an intense daily flow of more than 7,000 lorries, nearly 9,000 containers and 15 vessels, the Port of Santos accounted for 29% of Brazil's US\$600 billion in foreign trade, connecting the national economy to more than 200 countries and 600 ports (Autoridade Portuária de Santos, 2025a; 2025b). In this sense, it represents one of the largest gateways into and out of South America, both for licit and illicit goods.

Over the past decade, Brazil has consolidated its position as the main departure country for cocaine originating in the Andean region and destined for Europe (Unodc, 2022). The drug is imported by land or air directly from producing countries such as Bolivia, Peru and Colombia, or indirectly via Paraguay, which functions as a transit hub. A particularly strategic corridor, known as the so-called “redneck route”, is formed by Brazil's borders with Bolivia and Paraguay, with highways leading directly to the Port of Santos (Abreu, 2018). From there, high-purity cocaine in hydrochloride form is shipped by sea to destinations around the world.

Cocaine seizures at the Port of Santos increased dramatically in 2016, when 10,622 kg were detected – almost 1,000% more than in the previous year. One of the most frequently cited explanations is that, in that year, all containers bound for European ports began to be scanned. This volume continued to grow until it peaked in 2019, when seizures totalled 27,053 kg, before declining from 2023 onward.

COCAINE SEIZURES AT THE PORT OF SANTOS

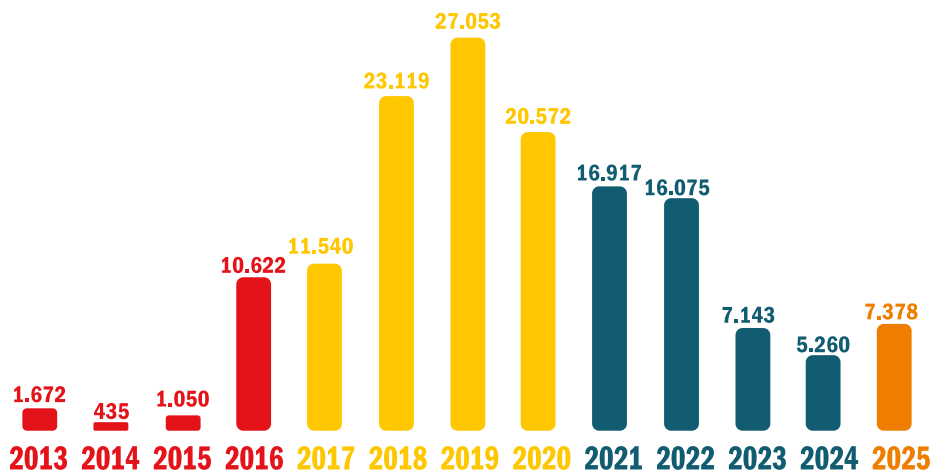


FIGURE 19 | Author's elaboration based on data from Santos Customs.

According to data from the Santos Customs Office, 345 operations resulted in seizures between early 2016 and the end of 2025. On average, 35 operations were carried out per year, with 417 kg seized per operation. The consignments were bound for 68 ports across 50 countries on four continents. Overall, 86% of these countries were in Europe, followed by Africa (16%), Asia (8%) and, in more recent cases, Oceania (2%), with figures that overlap transshipment and destination ports. The five main countries, both in terms of the number of operations and the quantities seized, were Belgium, Spain, the Netherlands, Germany and France. The first three stand out markedly: 110 operations involved consignments bound for Belgium, 74 for Spain and 50 for the Netherlands, totaling 57,766 kg, 32,559 kg and 20,048 kg of cocaine, respectively. The Belgian port of Antwerp, the Spanish ports of Algeciras and Valencia, and the Dutch port of Rotterdam

were the most frequently identified.

Italy ranks sixth in terms of the number of operations and seventh in terms of quantities seized. There were 18 seizures, totaling 5,428 kg of cocaine, with consignments bound primarily for the port of Gioia Tauro (10), as well as Vado Ligure (2), Genoa (1), Livorno (1) and others not identified (4). These cases illustrate a diversity of modalities, involving either infiltration into legal trade routes or the establishment of dedicated legal routes for drug trafficking, in line with Antonelli's (2024) typology. Most consignments were placed in containers, with cocaine concealed either inside or outside the cargo; however, cases of insertion into submerged compartments of vessel hulls by divers were also recorded.

SOURCE: AUTHOR'S ELABORATION BASED ON DATA FROM THE CUSTOMS OF SANTOS.

Date	Quantity seized	Port of transshipment or destination	Place of concealment	Mode of concealment	Cargo
18/01/2016	174,10	Gioia Tauro	Container	Outside the cargo	Coffee
02/09/2016	602,00	Gioia Tauro	Container	Outside the cargo	Sugar
21/08/2018	261,00	Gioia Tauro	Container	Outside the cargo	Meat
01/11/2019	198,00	Gioia Tauro	Container	Inside the cargo	Coffee
18/05/2020	730,00	Livorno	Container	Outside the cargo	Paper
25/07/2020	278,00	Gioia Tauro	Container	Outside the cargo	Printers
06/08/2020	219,00	Gioia Tauro	Container	Inside the cargo	Sugar
09/10/2020	71,00	Gioia Tauro	Container	Outside the cargo	Coffee
11/10/2020	42,00	Gioia Tauro	Container	Outside the cargo	Cotton
26/11/2020	298,00	Gioia Tauro	Container	Inside the cargo	Paper
15/12/2020	670,00	Gioia Tauro	Container	Inside the cargo	Coffee
15/08/2022	561,00	Vado Ligure	Container	Inside the cargo	Aluminium oxide
16/08/2022	557,00	Vado Ligure	Container	Inside the cargo	Aluminium oxide
17/08/2022	95,83	Not identified	Vessel	Submerged hull compartments	Not applicable
22/08/2022	141,68	Not identified	Vessel	Submerged hull compartments	Not applicable
16/01/2023	293,00	Not identified	Vessel	Submerged hull compartments	Not applicable
19/04/2023	117,79	Not identified	Vessel	Submerged hull compartments	Not applicable
14/07/2023	119,00	Genoa	Container	Outside the cargo	Baggage

TABELLA | Source: author's analysis based on data from Santos Customs.

Meanwhile, the relevance of the Italo-Brazilian connection is not limited to consignments dispatched directly between the two countries, as transit hubs are also used. For example, a seizure of 1,195 kg was made at the Port of Santos in September 2018. The drug was concealed inside tractor compartment rollers destined for the Port of Abidjan, in Côte d'Ivoire. Investigations culminated

in the joint international operation Spaghetti Connection, launched in Abidjan in June 2019. Six Italians were arrested who operated a front company in Côte d'Ivoire to import the tractors containing the cocaine and who, on at least two occasions, successfully received the shipments and forwarded them to Italy. Among them were members of the 'Ndrangheta.

The presence of the Calabrian mafia in Brazil had been identified earlier (Patriarca and Adorno, 2025). In March 2014, after a year-long investigation that began when Italian authorities informed their Brazilian counterparts of a drug trafficking scheme linked to the 'Ndrangheta at the Port of Santos, Operation Monte Pollino was launched by the Brazilian Federal Police (PF). Evidence of this South American branch of the mafia had been uncovered during Operation Bongustasio, conducted in Italy since 2010, leaving Brazilian authorities responsible for identifying those in charge of exports and dismantling the scheme domestically. What the PF discovered was that the 'ndranghetisti financed the logistics, which were coordinated by a Chilean national acting as their representative and regarded as the 'Ndrangheta's "trusted man" in Brazil (Jozino, 2022). He lived in a luxury house in Praia Grande, a city neighbouring Santos.

In the scheme uncovered by Operation Monte Pollino, 'ndranghetisti operated largely independently of the Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC) – Brazil's largest criminal organization, commonly referred to as a faction (*faccção*, in Portuguese), founded in São Paulo more than 30 years ago and regarded as the governing authority of the criminal underworld in the state. It was in the early 2010s that PCC traffickers entered the wholesale cocaine market, dispatching their first consignments through the Port of Santos. Around 2014, the organization established a kind of internal department to manage these schemes and gradually consolidated itself as a platform capable of connecting sellers and buyers while providing transport logistics (Feltran, 2025). Consequently, an increasing number of drug trafficking schemes operating through the Port of Santos came to in-

volve PCC members or the organization as a whole, including those linked to the 'Ndrangheta – thus strengthening the Italo-Brazilian connection.

Indeed, at virtually the same time as Operation Monte Pollino, cocaine shipments were already being sent by the PCC to the 'Ndrangheta through the Port of Santos, as uncovered in Operation Oversea. Investigations conducted in Italy also began increasingly to identify connections between 'ndranghetisti and traffickers linked to the PCC, as in 2016, when Domenico Pelle, of the Pelle-Vottari 'ndrina, maintained contacts with a Brazilian supplier known as Fuminho, the right-hand man of the faction's leader in Brazil (Anesi et al., 2018). For the PF, Fuminho acted as the broker bridging the Italo-Brazilian connection between the mafia and the faction until his arrest in 2020 in Maputo, Mozambique, after 21 years on the run (Abreu, 2020).

He was not, however, the only intermediary, and the connection was sustained through different Brazilians and Italians. Indeed, while Operation Spaghetti Connection was being launched in Côte d'Ivoire, an investigation into another 'Ndrangheta scheme was under way in Brazil, in which the PF examined links between the cases. In July 2019, Nicola Assisi and his son Patrick were arrested during Operation Barão Invisível, stemming from this investigation. They were found in the penthouse of a luxury building, which they had refurbished as a bunker, in Praia Grande – the same city where the Chilean arrested in 2014 had lived. According to the Italian police, "father and son worked together with one of the largest Brazilian criminal factions", an implicit reference to the PCC (G1, 2019).

Other figures also shaped this story, one of whose most recent chapters was written in

João Pessoa, in north-eastern Brazil, where Rocco Morabito was found in 2021. He had been arrested in Uruguay in 2017 but escaped two years later, becoming one of the most wanted 'ndranghetisti. As it turned out, Morabito was found in the company of Vincenzo Pasquino, who was also a fugitive. Pasquino had arrived in Brazil in the same year as Morabito's arrest in Uruguay and worked closely with the Assisi family, having assumed the role of main broker after the arrest of father and son. According to the PF, all of them had links to the PCC (Jozino, 2021). The crucial difference is that, when extradited to Italy in 2024, Pasquino agreed to cooperate with the justice system. After decades of mafia life, following his affiliation with the Volpiano 'ndrina in 2011, he became a pentito, breaking the code of omertà for the first time and revealing details of the 'Ndrangheta's activities in Gioia Tauro and its connection with the PCC in Santos, as well as other criminal ventures in Italy and Brazil (Godoy, 2024). For this reason, Italian and Brazilian authorities also reached an unprecedented agreement to establish permanent joint investigation teams based on the information provided by Pasquino.

This last chapter, although not the final one – since, as far as is known, Pasquino has already been replaced by another broker – stands as one of the most significant to date. It is believed that his testimony may trigger disruptions and dismantling processes in 'Ndrangheta schemes similar to those produced within Cosa Nostra by the confessions of Tommaso Buscetta to Judge Giovanni Falcone in the 1980s. Based on what Don Masino, as Buscetta was known, revealed after being arrested in Brazil in 1983, the history of the Sicilian mafia in the country could be told (Demori, 2016). The history of the 'Ndrangheta, however, remains to be written. What is already clear is that the PCC will be part of it and that, in its opening lines, two names will appear: Gioia Tauro and Santos. Given the influence of the Calabrian mafia in the former and of São Paulo's faction in the latter, the Italo-Brazilian connection will dock at these ports, even as increasingly diverse routes are incorporated into its itineraries.

7

PORTS, INTERNATIONAL COCAINE TRAFFICKING, AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE PCC

Interview with Lincoln Gakiya, who has served for 35 years as a public prosecutor (promotor de justiça) within the Public Prosecutor's Office of the State of São Paulo and is a member of the Special Action Group to Combat Organized Crime (GAECO). Over the past twenty years, he has primarily focused on investigations into organized crime, particularly the Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC), which today represents the largest criminal organization in South America and one of the largest globally, with approximately 40,000 affiliates.

What have been the main transformations and most significant changes observed in recent years in organized crime in Brazil, particularly with regard to ports? And what is the role of the PCC?

At present, the PCC's main source of funding is the international trafficking of cocaine to Europe. Around 90% of the cocaine leaving Brazil is exported by sea, and a significant share of this trade is directly or indirectly managed by the PCC. There are, of course, other criminal groups involved in drug traffi-

cking, but control over ports—particularly the Port of Santos—is largely exercised by the PCC. Starting from this observation, within the Public Prosecutor's Office we have asked ourselves why organized crime has chosen ports as the primary channel for exporting cocaine to Europe. At first glance, one might assume that this is simply due to the volume of shipments—sometimes amounting to 500 kg, one tonne, two tonnes, or even ten tonnes—which would make air transport impractical. However, this explanation is not sufficient. Airport controls are generally more effective than those in ports.

Taking the Port of Santos as an example—located in the State of São Paulo, where I carry out my work—it should be noted that it is the largest port in Latin America: a vast infrastructure handling over 10,000 containers per day and employing approximately 55,000 workers on a daily basis. In Brazil, port authorities are public entities appointed by the federal government, but port operations are entirely managed by private actors, similarly to what occurs in Italy and many other European ports. This feature also contributes to making control more complex. During se-

veral inspection visits, I observed significant shortcomings in access control systems for workers and operators within port terminals. This represents a major point of vulnerability. Today, our primary concern—beyond attempting to contain the expansion of drug trafficking—is to identify the structural vulnerabilities of Brazilian ports that facilitate their use as a preferred channel for illicit trafficking.

It is important to stress that these weaknesses do not concern only the Port of Santos, but affect Brazilian ports more broadly. Nor do I refer solely to maritime ports: Brazil also has numerous river ports, particularly in the northern region of the country, in the Amazon and in border areas, for instance with Guyana. These contexts deserve careful analysis, also because Brazilian ports are not only used for cocaine trafficking.

Brazil is also affected by serious phenomena such as capital flight, as well as the smuggling of gold and other precious metals illegally extracted from the Amazon region and subsequently exported, sometimes as far as Europe. These activities also represent important sources of funding for criminal organizations. The PCC itself is involved in illegal mining activities in the Amazon region, including within indigenous territories, in a practice that is doubly illegal.

What is the impact of criminal organizations on Brazilian ports?

What I can state with certainty is the existence of what I define as a true criminal ecosystem. This ecosystem is not composed solely of criminal factions. It also includes, for instance, port workers' unions, political actors, officials—including public officials—involved in corrupt practices, as well as import-export companies. To this must be added the entire

logistical chain that allows goods to reach ports: road controls, border police, and intermediate passages that often presuppose a certain level of corruption for goods to arrive at the port and be subsequently loaded.

The issue, therefore, does not concern only the port space in a narrow sense, but rather the broader set of activities and relationships revolving around the administration and functioning of a port. There is an entire logistical chain that enables certain goods—including drugs—to reach ports. In Brazil, for example, a significant share of goods arrives by rail: many shipments reach port terminals directly through the railway network. This too represents a critical vulnerability, as it creates additional challenges for control and inspection.

All these elements contribute to what I define as a port criminal ecosystem, which extends well beyond the physical boundaries of the port and involves the entire logistical and infrastructural context. This is a phenomenon that likely does not concern Brazil alone, but can also be observed in other countries, including Italy.

In this scenario, do criminal groups tend to rely more on violence or corruption?

In the Port of Santos, considering the role of the PCC, it is important to note that this organization exercises almost total territorial control in the State of São Paulo. There are no other criminal organizations capable of competing with the PCC in that area: it is a hegemonic dominance. In this context, violence tends to be a residual element, at least with regard to the Port of Santos. Any other criminal group attempting to operate in that port would be immediately repelled or forced to pay a sort of “access fee” to the PCC. This

dynamic is well known among criminal actors and significantly reduces conflict.

The situation is different in other areas of Brazil, particularly in the southern regions. In some ports in these areas, numerous homicides linked to port activities have occurred, especially in phases when the control of criminal organizations was not yet fully consolidated. In such cases, corrupt workers have at times diverted part of the drugs for personal use or for independent resale, or rival criminal groups have infiltrated port activities, generating violent conflicts.

There are also situations in which a worker or an official occupying a strategic position initially receives a corrupt offer to facilitate illicit trafficking. When this offer is refused, threats may follow and, in some cases, direct violence is used. It also happens that a worker reports the illicit behaviour of a colleague; in such circumstances, whistleblowers often become targets of intimidation or even homicide.

This mechanism produces a widespread code of silence: those who do not accept corruption still tend to “look the other way,” avoiding reporting wrongdoing out of fear of retaliation. They do not directly participate in criminal activities, but neither do they cooperate with authorities.

Are there connections between the PCC and Italian mafias?

PCC trafficking activities are often carried out in collaboration with European criminal organizations, particularly the 'ndrangheta. The PCC and the 'ndrangheta jointly control the entire logistical chain of cocaine trafficking: from procurement in producing countries—Bolivia, Peru, and Colombia—to transit through

Brazil, and finally distribution in Europe. Within this framework, the PCC is responsible for purchasing and the initial stages of transportation, meaning that the 'ndrangheta does not need to send its own members to South America or advance capital for the acquisition of the drugs.

In other words, from the acquisition of cocaine in producing countries such as Bolivia, Peru, and Colombia, through its movement across Brazil, the process is handled by the PCC. The organization typically transports the drugs to São Paulo and then to the Port of Santos, though not exclusively. For instance, following enforcement operations in Santos, some criminal groups have shifted their activities to other ports—both in northeastern Brazil, where governance conditions are often weaker than in São Paulo, and in southern Brazil, particularly in the state of Santa Catarina. In Paraná, for example, there is the port of Navegantes; in Santa Catarina, the ports of Itajaí and Paranaguá.

All these ports already have points of connection with the PCC and are ready, in the event of increased controls in Santos, to rapidly redirect large shipments to Itajaí, Navegantes, Paranaguá, or even to ports in the Northeast. Moreover, the PCC has internal codes—initiation rituals, forms of appointment, and a code of silence—that are very similar to those of mafia organizations. I personally have a theory that these were learned from two Italian fugitives arrested in São Paulo in 1990, the Torsi brothers. They spent time in prison alongside one of the founders of the PCC, exchanging a great deal of information, and we suspect that this interaction may have provided inspiration for the creation of the PCC.

In trafficking routes towards Europe, are there also triangulations involving other countries, particularly in Africa?

Yes. What we have observed is that control and surveillance systems in African ports are significantly weaker than those in Europe. These systems are often fragile and particularly exposed to corruption. To provide a concrete example, one of the most prominent Brazilian drug traffickers—likely the most significant until recently—Gilberto Aparecido dos Santos, known as Fuminho, was arrested in Mozambique. He had been a fugitive for over twenty years in Brazil, following final convictions in the State of São Paulo, and was living between South Africa and Mozambique, where he coordinated operations linked to local ports.

When certain routes become riskier or more heavily monitored, criminal organizations shift towards alternative routes perceived as safer. In this logic, Africa represents a strategic logistical platform: the primary objective is to move the drugs out of South America and bring them either to the African continent or directly to Europe. Once one of these hubs is reached, subsequent stages of distribution become easier.

With regard to African routes, we have observed frequent use of countries such as Mozambique and Côte d'Ivoire, as well as, to a lesser extent, other areas of West Africa. From there, the drugs are directed towards Spain, Portugal, and Italy, as well as major Northern European logistical hubs such as Rotterdam and Antwerp.

At present, what are the main areas of intervention needed to counter these phenomena?

They are multiple. The financial dimension, for instance, is crucial. The relevant authorities, together with the Public Prosecutor's Office, have developed expertise in tracing financial flows, which are often concealed through multi-layered mechanisms, including the purchase of real estate and companies. However, this capacity is still only partial, as digital money transfers are now widespread, sometimes involving crypto-assets that, depending on how they are used, remain difficult or impossible to trace.

I believe we have now reached a point where a globalisation of international cooperation is necessary—an unprecedented level of cooperation—to effectively tackle this phenomenon. In Brazil, for example, I am advocating for legislative reform. We already have a law regulating the classification of criminal organizations, broadly aligned with the provisions of the Palermo Convention, but this framework does not adequately address mafia-type organizations. These are fundamentally different structures: we are not dealing simply with three or four individuals operating in a stable criminal activity. We are dealing with a mafia, and therefore we need specific legislation.

I have taken part in a working group within Brazil's Ministry of Justice aimed at promoting a reform proposal. We have developed a draft inspired by Italian legislation—Articles 416-bis and 41-bis—adapted to the Brazilian context.

8

ILLICIT TRAFFICKING AND COUNTER-STRATEGIES IN THE PORT OF MARSEILLE

Interview with Nicolas Bessone, Prosecutor of Marseille. The Public Prosecutor's Office operates within an interregional jurisdiction specialised in combating organized crime and major financial crime. Its competence extends across the entire Mediterranean arc, from the Spanish to the Italian border, including Corsica.

What is the criminal situation in Marseille and in the territories under your jurisdiction?

In recent years, we have observed an evolution of the phenomenon, marked by a progressive rejuvenation of criminal actors: young individuals who are at the same time perpetrators of crimes but also, in some respects, victims of forms of exploitation comparable to human trafficking. This is accompanied by extremely high levels of violence. We are witnessing genuine territorial wars, and in some cases even direct confrontation with the State.

When the Minister of Justice, Darmanin, rapidly introduced ultra-high-security detention

units for individuals linked to organized crime—modelled on the Italian system—coordinated attacks were carried out against prison officers and detention facilities with the aim of forcing the State to reverse course. We have even witnessed press conferences organized by figures associated with mafia-type groups.

What are the main activities you carry out in terms of law enforcement?

The first aspect consists in seeking to develop cooperating witnesses and in focusing on the organization as a whole, rather than on individual events. Often, interventions target specific offences—extortion, drug trafficking, violent disputes, homicides—but this approach risks merely reacting to events as they occur. Instead, thanks to new legal instruments at our disposal, we aim to concentrate on criminal organizations in their entirety. To do so, it is essential to secure cooperating witnesses. The most recent law, adopted in 2025, has introduced several tools that should allow us to be far more effective in

encouraging even high-ranking members of criminal organizations to cooperate with the justice system—something that has so far been relatively rare.

A second line of action involves moving beyond customs seizures or the simple confiscation of illegal goods. The objective is to target the logistical chains of criminal organizations. In the field of drug trafficking, this first requires territorial control, through the action of the prefect against dealing points and the intervention of the prosecutor's office through expedited judicial procedures. However, beyond repression, reducing demand remains essential, through strengthened prevention policies and treatment pathways for drug addiction.

Moreover, I am firmly convinced that the scale of drug trafficking makes it necessary to involve civil society. While we know how to remove criminals from the field, the broader environment surrounding them still represents a relatively new challenge for France. For this reason, we seek to implement a comprehensive, integrated approach.

With regard to ports, what actions do you implement and what are the main difficulties you encounter?

Our main problem is that we struggle to know what is actually happening inside the port. The environment of the Port of Marseille is highly closed. Customs officers and judicial police face considerable difficulties in obtaining information from within.

Moreover, we experienced what could be described as a setback a little over two years ago. Due to serious suspicions of corruption involving a group of anti-drug police officers tasked with a controlled delivery operation,

an investigation was opened, which is currently ongoing in Paris. These officers are suspected of diverting part of the seized goods and reselling them.

To improve our operational capacity, we have developed very close working relationships with what we call the DNRED—the intelligence service of the customs administration. In recent years, there have been both legislative changes and a shift in the approach and functioning of this service. In the past, their main objective was to carry out seizures of goods; today, they are increasingly oriented towards judicial work.

In addition, together with other prosecutors and offices across the interregional jurisdiction, we have established a port liaison office, aimed at facilitating the exchange of information on different phenomena and improving coordination in operational activities.

In which ports have you identified illicit trafficking, particularly drugs?

There are several. The Port of Marseille has never been a major hub for drug trafficking—particularly cocaine—unlike, within France, the Port of Le Havre or, at the European level, ports such as Antwerp and Rotterdam. This is because vessels arriving from South America enter the Mediterranean through the Strait of Gibraltar and typically call first at Italian ports. Marseille is positioned further along the route, before the Port of Barcelona.

From the traffickers' perspective, the later the unloading takes place, the greater the risk of passing through customs scanners. That said, this does not mean that nothing occurs in the Port of Marseille. The Port of Sète can also serve as an entry point, particularly for container-based trafficking, as it

is a major port with significant connections to Turkey.

By contrast, Corsican ports only register small-scale arrivals, proportionate to the island's population—around 350,000 inhabitants—since it is not advantageous for traffickers to unload large quantities on an island and then face additional logistical challenges for onward transport.

Beyond drug trafficking, what other forms of illicit activity have been identified in the Port of Marseille?

The Port of Marseille is somewhat like the city itself: everything happens there. There is trafficking in stolen vehicles destined for export to the Maghreb, trafficking in counterfeit goods, and many other illegal activities. The port is therefore a place where numerous types of crime occur, not limited to drug trafficking.

To give you a sense of the situation, a senior port official once told me—almost as if it were a positive outcome: “I told the dockworkers: you can let stolen goods pass, you can let counterfeit goods pass, but I do not want drugs. That is the only red line I set.” When a senior port official speaks in these terms, it is clear that there is still a great deal of work to be done.

In recent years, have you observed the emergence of new phenomena?

A relatively new development is that synthetic drugs originating from Northern Europe are often exported, through the Port of Marseille, to Maghreb countries, where they appear to be in high demand. Somewhat surprisingly, therefore, we are not only a port of entry for drugs, but also a port of export.

Moreover, due to the strong geopolitical tensions currently existing between Algeria and Morocco, we have observed something quite unexpected. The border between the two countries appears to have become extremely difficult to cross, and for this reason we have also recorded cases of cannabis resin being exported from Marseille to Algeria and Tunisia, as the more direct and seemingly natural route has effectively been disrupted.

What are the main areas of intervention you intend to focus on in the coming years?

First, on the technical level. Administrative customs will soon be equipped with a very costly scanner, but one with higher productivity. Currently, as in many other ports, the share of cargo inspected through scanning is extremely low—around 0.1%. As a result, the probability for criminal organizations that goods will be unexpectedly seized is almost zero, which in some respects makes our port more attractive than those in Northern Europe. Within a few months, we will have this new scanner, which should allow us to inspect approximately 10–15% of cargo.

Second, on the strategic level. Our strategy is also based on these liaison offices, which serve to detect phenomena, gather information, and support operational action. Furthermore, I hope that with the establishment of the National Anti-Organized Crime Prosecutor's Office and the new legal instruments coming into force, we will be able to infiltrate the port more effectively.

Third, on judicial cooperation. Cooperation is working well—particularly with Italian authorities, with whom we collaborate very effectively, especially since the introduction of joint investigation teams and, more broadly, thanks to European instruments. However, we

still face difficulties on the customs side, as we do not share the same legal framework. In practical terms, the problem is that every time we attempt to transform a customs seizure into a judicial proceeding, we encounter the lack of full legal harmonisation.

8.1 The Port of Marseille and the operational methods of drug traffickers

Interview with Isabelle Fort, Deputy Prosecutor of Marseille

What are the main operational methods used by drug traffickers in the Port of Marseille?

Our approach has first and foremost been to identify the techniques used in the Port of Marseille, as well as its structural weaknesses. As for the techniques employed, the primary one is the rip-off method, whereby drugs are inserted into containers. Once this technique was identified, we also sought to detect the forms of complicity and the corruption risks associated with it. In the case of rip-off, internal collusion is almost always required—particularly involving port workers—in order to extract cocaine from containers.

Another method involves concealment within legal cargo. As you know, narcotics—as well as many other illicit goods transported by sea—most often rely on legal trade as a cover. By embedding themselves within maritime transport flows, they become much more difficult to detect. In cases where drugs are concealed within legitimate shipments—which arrive regularly, for example bananas from the port of Guadeloupe, or oil and other goods—we have identified another vulnerability: the companies receiving the goods, and more broadly the entire logistical chain, including security, road transport, drivers, and

so on.

Another vector observed in Marseille involves passengers, particularly during the cruise season. During this period, ships depart from Latin America, call at ports in Italy, France, and Spain, and then continue towards Northern Europe. We have therefore identified this route and, every spring, we work together with customs services to target controls on passengers and routes, with the aim of improving our ability to detect cocaine trafficking.

The drop-off method, by contrast, has so far been relatively limited in our territory. However, our jurisdiction extends from Corsica to the Italian border and as far as Perpignan. Within this area, there are numerous small ports, as well as fishermen and divers who could potentially retrieve packages left at sea. In our context, fishermen likely represent a dimension that has not yet been sufficiently analysed and on which we are not working enough.

It should also be noted that Northern European ports, in particular, have invested heavily in port security, especially through scanners and control systems. This has partially displaced trafficking towards secondary ports, and we believe that part of this traffic may also occur through drop-off methods, with divers or fishermen retrieving the goods at a later stage.

Finally, the use of recreational boating also falls within these emerging phenomena in southern France and will need to be addressed in a comprehensive manner.

In continuity with previous editions of *Diario di bordo*, this report aims to provide an updated analysis of criminal phenomena in Italian ports, with a specific focus on mafia organizations. Given the limited availability of data on this topic, an extensive empirical

METHODOLOGICAL APPENDIX

study was conducted which—although not exhaustive—seeks to offer as comprehensive a picture as possible of a plurality of phenomena. To this end, different methods were adopted, primarily based on the analysis of open sources, complemented by interviews.

In Chapters 1 and 2, in order to systematically map the highest possible number of criminal events occurring in port areas during the year 2025, and in continuity with previous editions of the report, a cross-analysis of multiple data sources was carried out, drawing on three main datasets: (a) the archive of press releases produced by the Customs and Monopolies Agency; (b) the archive of press releases produced by the Guardia di Finanza; and (c) the press review archive compiled by Assoporti. All documents published between 01/01/2025 and 31/12/2025 were manually analysed to identify events that took place within port areas. Once selected, the information contained in these documents was coded into a dataset structured into six macro-sections (event references; geographical references; criminal projections; criminal activities; actors involved; other), comprising a total of 25 variables. The construction of the dataset was carried out in several stages: (1) identification and definition of variables; (2) data collection and entry; (3) revision.

Phase 1. The dataset is composed of six sections covering: event coding information (unique identifier; year; date; source; page); geographical references (region; port; im-

port/export/transit trade; country and port of import; country and port of export); references to criminal projections (group name; consortium name; territorial origin); references to criminal activities (legal business; illegal business; quantity and type of seized goods; type of vessel; location of concealment); references to criminal actors (number and type of public and private actors involved); and summary and references (mode of emergence; summary; notes).

Phase 2. The data collection and coding phase was conducted manually, drawing on sources freely accessible online through the institutional websites of the relevant authorities. By “criminal event” we refer to all publicly reported incidents involving a criminal offence, the initiation of investigations, investigative activities, or seizures, provided that they contain a sufficient number of variables to allow for consistent classification. Only events occurring within port areas were included, excluding other phenomena related to the broader maritime sphere. For example, the following were not included: cases of human trafficking where the port was not the destination but merely indicated by authorities; arms trafficking related to legal trade (although 2025 saw significant civil society mobilisation against arms trafficking in logistical infrastructures, only events meeting the above criteria were included for consistency); violations of maritime or labour safety regulations; illegal fishing activities; seizures of vessels as war-related sanctions; and fraud

occurring in hinterland logistics activities.

Phase 3. The collected entries were standardised and, where referring to the same event, merged. Due to the specific nature of the sources, it was not possible to populate all variables for every event. This depends on the type of source used, which serves purposes different from those of the present analysis. Although the dataset does not fully capture the full range and diversity of criminal manifestations, it currently represents the first systematic and scientific attempt to map the phenomenon.

Naturally, all the sources examined present certain limitations that must be acknowledged. The first, common to all, concerns the different purposes for which these sources were produced compared to the analytical goals pursued here. Press releases issued by the Customs and Monopolies Agency and the Guardia di Finanza are designed to report on the enforcement activities of their respective territorial units; they therefore tend to emphasise operational mechanisms and enforcement campaigns rather than the broader criminal dynamics of each event.

A second limitation lies in the fact that, although the Customs Agency and the Guardia di Finanza have specific competences in port environments, they are not the only law enforcement bodies operating in these areas. As a result, the data refer exclusively to activities in which these agencies are directly involved.

Third, with regard to the press review compiled by Assoporti—whose selection criteria are not explicitly stated—it includes only those criminal events that have gained public visibility through print or digital media.

In light of these considerations, the findings

should be interpreted according to the following premises:

1. they may reflect the level of activity of law enforcement agencies, or their capacity to intervene within port contexts;
2. a higher number of recorded criminal events in a given port does not necessarily correspond to higher levels of criminal activity, but it does indicate a greater exposure of that port to criminal interests;
3. data on criminal events must be analysed in relation to the functioning of the legal economy: the type, scale, and core business of a port contribute to shaping the conditions under which specific illicit phenomena may occur.

Overall, notwithstanding these limitations, the data contained in the dataset should be considered an underestimation of the actual number of criminal events occurring in port areas. It is also important to note that not all recorded events—despite having achieved some form of public visibility—lead to sanctions, judicial proceedings, or convictions. For the purposes of this report, the collected elements should therefore be interpreted as warning signals regarding the attractiveness of ports for criminal interests.

A different analytical approach and empirical basis characterise the chapter devoted to organized crime interests in port environments (Chapter 3). The data presented reflect the specific nature of the sources used (DNA and DIA reports), which provide a particular perspective on the phenomenon, often focused on investigative operations and intelligence information. Two main datasets were examined: (1) the annual reports of the National Anti-Mafia Directorate (DNA), published between 2006 and 2018 and referring to the

previous year; and (2) the semi-annual reports of the Anti-Mafia Investigation Directorate (DIA), published from the first half of 1992 to 2024, thus extending the temporal scope of the dataset by one additional year compared to the previous edition of the report.

This methodological choice was necessary due to the impossibility of accessing DNA reports beyond a certain date, as they have not been publicly released. Although the sources are heterogeneous, this does not generate significant drawbacks for the purposes of the chapter: the aim is to analyse the emergence of the phenomenon, for which only a conservative estimate can be obtained. Within the examined documents, all references containing the terms “port(s)” and “port-related” and connected in some way to indications of criminal projection within port infrastructures were collected. Some references are more detailed and relate to police operations or judicial investigations; others merely signal the presence of criminal interests, sometimes specifying the relevant market (legal or illegal). All references were systematically coded into a dataset. Given the specific nature of the sources, the analysis does not focus on annually recorded criminal projections—which would be highly variable due to multiple influencing factors—but instead adopts a systemic and diachronic perspective over time.

The purposes of these documents clearly differ from those of scientific analysis; therefore, several limitations must be acknowledged. They reflect an institutional perspective on the phenomenon, tend to emphasise the actions carried out by the respective agencies (without specifying data collection methodologies), and, in most cases, do not include a dedicated section on criminal projections in port areas. Despite these limitations, they

remain among the most valuable available sources, as they are produced by actors with specific expertise in the field.

Chapter 4, by contrast, presents a case study focusing on the Port of Livorno. The chapter builds upon, expands, and updates previous research. In particular, the analytical framework draws on the chapter “Antonelli M. (2021), *Infiltrazioni criminali nel sistema della logistica e dei porti in Toscana*, in D. della Porta, S. Sberna, A. Vannucci (eds), *Quinto rapporto sui fenomeni corruttivi e di criminalità organizzata in Toscana (Anno 2020)*, Edizioni della Regione Toscana, Florence, pp. 75–113” and on the second-level Master’s thesis “Lodeserto G. (2024), *Network crime, organized crime, mafie: focus sul traffico di cocaina nel porto di Livorno alla luce delle operazioni di polizia giudiziaria*.” The empirical material has been further enriched through the use of judicial documents, recent institutional reports (including DIA reports and reports presented at the inauguration of the judicial year), and data collected in previous editions of the *Diario di bordo* report, thereby providing a diachronic perspective on the issue.

In this third edition of the report, Chapter 5 also includes an analysis of corruption events occurring in port contexts. To this end, all reports produced by the Anti-Corruption and Transparency Officers of the Port System Authorities were collected and analysed for the period 2018–2025. These reports are a legal requirement: by 15 December each year, the responsible officer must publish a report on the outcomes of the activities carried out, including information on corruption events involving the relevant public administration, as well as ongoing disciplinary and criminal proceedings. The relevant sections of these reports were coded according to two sets of

variables: (1) number of corruption events, area of occurrence, type of offence; (2) number of communications concerning ongoing disciplinary and criminal proceedings, type of offence, and area of the proceedings. All events thus derive from internal mapping processes conducted by each administration and are here presented in a systematised form.

These reports, as legally mandated administrative sources, provide information on corruption events that have emerged within the relevant administrations, as well as on ongoing disciplinary and criminal proceedings. It should be noted, however, that these data do not allow for an estimation of the overall extent of corruption in port contexts; rather, they capture only those episodes directly involving employees, managers, or senior officials of the Port System Authorities and formally recorded in reporting documents. Cases involving other public or private actors operating within port areas, as well as unreported or unformalised corrupt practices, remain excluded. Moreover, variability in publication formats, levels of detail, and standardisation across reports affects the comparability of data over time and across different authorities. For these reasons, the findings should be interpreted as indicators of emergence and administrative reporting capacity, rather than as a comprehensive measure of the actual incidence of corruption in Italian ports.

Chapter 6 includes a contribution by Gabriel Patriarca, which summarises part of the findings of his research. For a more in-depth analysis of criminal interests in Brazilian ports, see Patriarca, G., & Adorno, S. (2025), *A dive ahead: the adaptive dimensions between cocaine smuggling and policing in major Brazilian ports*, *Global Crime*, 26(3–4), 217–

236, and Patriarca, G., & Adorno, S. (2025), *Rip-off clássico, contemporâneo e falso: deslocamentos táticos de uma modalidade de exportação de cocaína em portos do Brasil*, *Revista Criminalidad*, 67(1), 97–110.

Finally, Chapters 7 and 8, which provide an international perspective on the topic under investigation, include two excerpts from interviews selected for their particular relevance to the contents of this report. The first interview was conducted on 15 January 2026 in Rome, at Libera’s headquarters, with Lincoln Gakiya; the second took place online on 17 February 2026 with Nicolas Bessone. Both interviews explored the professional trajectories of the magistrates involved and their experience in combating criminal phenomena, with specific reference to port contexts.

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Libera was founded in 1995 in response to a deep need for justice and to fill, or at least ease, a thirst for truth. It came into being to build paths of hope and change. It was created to ensure that those whose lives were shattered by mafia violence are not left alone, and to stand alongside everyone committed to fighting organised crime and the corruption that sustains it.

Libera is a story of encounters and dialogue. It is a network of national and local associations, movements and groups, cooperatives, schools, dioceses and parishes, scout groups and many others. All are united in a commitment that is not only against mafias, corruption and criminal activity and those who fuel them, but deeply for something else: for social justice, for the pursuit of truth, for the protection of rights, for transparent politics, for a democratic rule of law based on equality, for a living and shared memory, and for a form of citizenship worthy of the spirit and hopes of the Constitution.

Libera is active across the whole of Italy, with 20 regional coordination centres, 83 provincial hubs and 296 local branches. Beyond Italy, 115 international organisations are part of the Libera Internazionale network, spanning 35 countries across Europe, Africa and Latin America.

Every summer, more than 4,000 young people take part in commitment and training camps held on confiscated assets. Around 1,000 others are involved in environmental protection projects in collaboration with the Forestry Branch of the Carabinieri. Over 5,000 schools and university departments work with Libera to design and deliver educational programmes focused on responsibility and democratic legality, involving thousands of students and hundreds of schoolteachers and university lecturers.

Libera is a shared and responsible story, sustained by the testimony of the families of innocent victims of the mafias, who strive to keep the ideals and dreams of their loved ones alive.

Libera stands for projects and pathways that promote human dignity and social justice, driven by the belief that these goals can only be achieved through collective effort. Libera has always been a means, not an end in itself: the true goal is a daily commitment to free the country from mafias, corruption and illegality.

In one word: freedom.



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