

ON THE TRAIL OF AFRICAN GOLD

Quantifying production
and trade to combat illicit flows

KEY RESULTS

Gold production in Africa

- Each year, between 321 tonnes and 474 tonnes of gold produced through artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) are not declared in Africa (corresponding to a value of between USD 23.7 billion and USD 35 billion at the price of gold on 1 May 2024). In 2022, this represented between 72% and 80% of total ASM gold production or between 32% and 41% of total gold production (artisanal or small-scale and industrial or semi-industrial) on the African continent.
- In nine African countries, the estimated production of undeclared ASM gold exceeds 20 tonnes per year.
- Total gold production in Africa has reached between 991 tonnes and 1,144 tonnes in 2022. This represents between a quarter and a third of global production of mined gold in 2022.
- More than half of the gold extracted in Africa in 2022 came from ASM.
- Forty-one of the 54 African countries have an estimated ASM gold production of at least 100 kg per year and 15 of these countries produce ASM gold, but do not officially report any production.

Comparison of gold production in Africa and trade in African gold

- The vast majority of African gold that is not declared at the production stage or for export is declared for import into non-African countries. In other words, gold originating from clandestine African circuits acquires a legal existence when it enters the international market (in particular via the UAE).
- A comparison with import data shows that undeclared ASM gold production in Africa is very likely to reach, or even exceed, the high end of the range of estimates calculated by SWISSAID, i.e. 474 tonnes.
- Most of the gold produced by ASM in Africa is not declared for export.

Availability and reliability of data on the gold sector in Africa

- When collecting data on gold production and trade in Africa, SWISSAID found that much of this data is not in the public domain or simply does not exist.
- When SWISSAID analysed the data collected, it found that many figures were erroneous, incomplete, inaccurate, unreliable or inconsistent. The South African authorities' statistics on the gold trade in South Africa, in particular, are opaque and do not give an accurate picture of the gold trade in that country.

Trade in African gold

- More than 435 tonnes of gold was smuggled out of Africa in 2022, representing more than a tonne a day. At the price of gold on 1 May 2024, this corresponds to a value of USD 30.7 billion. The overwhelming majority of this gold was imported into the United Arab Emirates (UAE) before being re-exported to other countries.
- In 2022, 66.5% (405 tonnes) of the gold imported into the UAE from Africa was smuggled out of African countries. Between 2012 and 2022, 2,569 tonnes of African gold imported into the UAE was not declared for export in African countries. At the average price of gold over these eleven years, this corresponds to a total value of USD 115.3 billion.
- Twelve African countries are involved in smuggling more than 20 tonnes of gold a year. Most gold smuggling in Africa takes place in Mali, Ghana and Zimbabwe.
- Gold smuggling in Africa more than doubled between 2012 and 2022.
- The vast majority of African gold is shipped to a few countries. The UAE, Switzerland and India were the three main countries importing gold from Africa between 2012 and 2022. In 2022, almost 80% of African gold imported abroad went to these three countries, with over 47% going to the UAE alone. These percentages are even higher if we correct for artificial statistical discrepancies.
- The majority of African industrial gold was exported to South Africa, Switzerland and India, while 80 to 85% of African ASM gold was exported to the UAE.
- Between 2012 and 2022, the vast majority of declared intra-African gold trade involved South Africa as a destination country. However, most of the African gold imported into South Africa was then re-exported to non-African countries.