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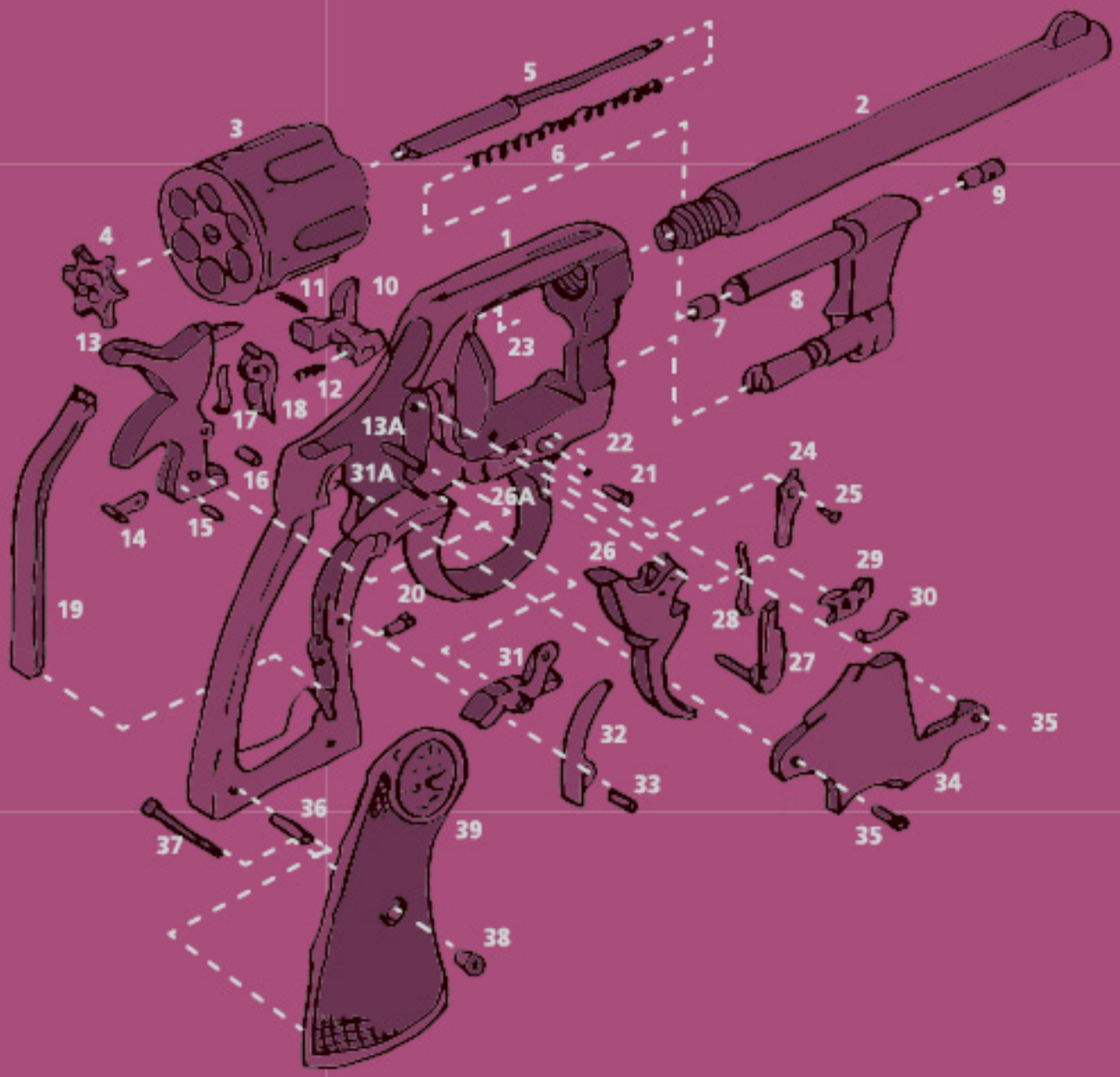

Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020

UNITED NATIONS OFFICE ON DRUGS AND CRIME
Vienna

Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020 - Introduction, Executive Summary, Conclusions and Policy Implications and Regional Overview

UNITED NATIONS
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INTRODUCTION

Firearms trafficking affects all parts of the world and impacts on society in multiple ways. It is a major concern in the context of human security, and it is central in law enforcement efforts and activities. Firearms are instrumental in much violence, particularly homicide; they are often used by organized criminals and they support operations related to armed conflicts and terrorism. The most common form of weapons trafficking involves small arms and light weapons; however, the character of this trafficking can vary significantly in different geographical contexts and in relation to different weapons.

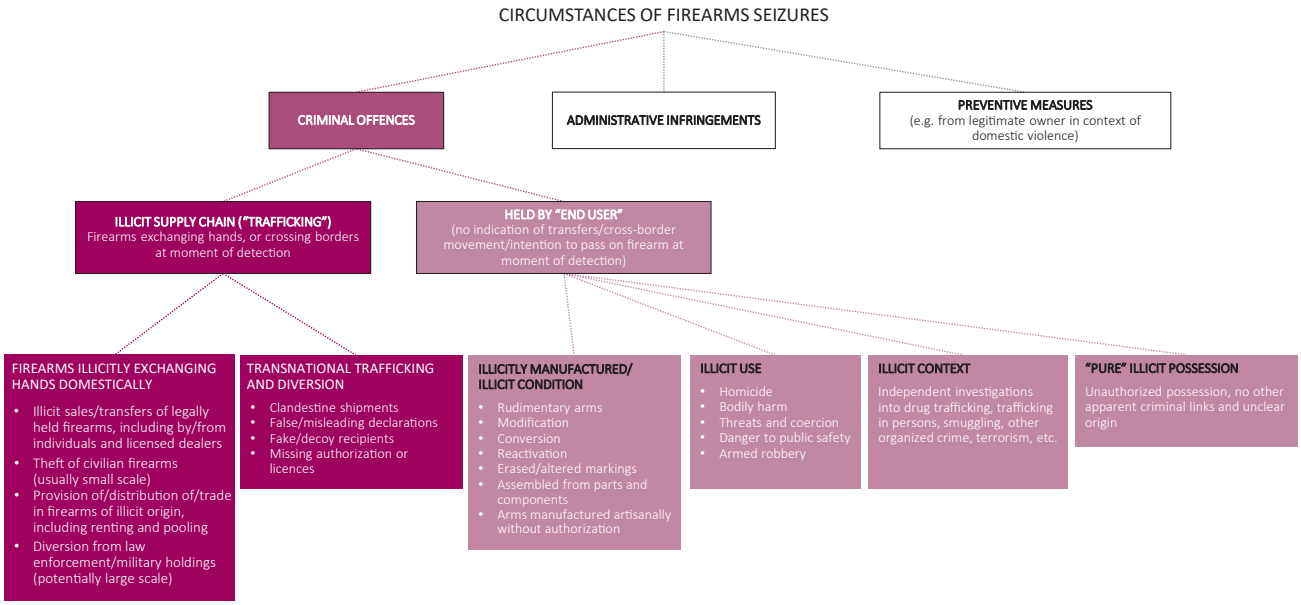
Firearms are usually manufactured for legal markets by licenced manufacturers. They can, however, be diverted into illegal markets at any point in their life cycle. The action of law enforcement aims at stopping their illegal movement. In many parts of the world, firearms are easily available for those who can afford them. Firearms can circulate in legal and illegal markets for a long time and because they are durable commodities, they can be easily reused and resold. This durability presents challenges to prevention and control activities. For this report, data from firearms seizures are used to have a closer look at firearms trafficking. Building on the 2015 UNODC Study on Firearms, this report analyses the flows of firearms trafficking, the types of firearms that are trafficked, how this trafficking is conducted and how it is related to other types of crime. The report is not aiming at estimating the value of the illegal market because the available data is too sporadic to support such an estimation.

The complex nature of firearms concerns is also reflected in the international legal framework. There is a wide variety of international and regional instruments addressing firearms and their trafficking. The overall framework of this report is based on the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunition ('the Firearms Protocol') supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime which was adopted by the General Assembly in 2001[1]. UNODC is the guardian of the Convention and its Protocols. The Firearms Protocol, which had 118 Parties as of October 2019, addresses the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms from the criminal justice angle, with a view to provide Member States with measures to address the transnational nature of the phenomenon and its links to organized and other serious crime. Many other instruments introduce a complementary approach to firearms trafficking from disarmament, trade or development perspectives.[2]

1 GA resolution 55/255 of 31 May 2001.

2 See a list of relevant instrument and documents in https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/firearms-protocol/international-legal-

FIG. 1 ---- Circumstances of firearms seizures



In the context of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, Member States have requested UNODC to collect and analyse quantitative and qualitative information and suitably disaggregated data on trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition[3]. In addition, within the framework of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, UNODC is monitoring the global developments related to the indicator 16.4.2 ("Proportion of seized, found or surrendered arms whose illicit origin or context has been traced or established by a competent authority in line with international instruments"). UNODC also serves as the international agency co-custodian of this indicator together with the Office of Disarmament Affairs (ODA).

Seizures data to help understand firearms trafficking?

In the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, "seizure (or freezing)" is defined as "temporarily prohibiting the transfer, conversion, disposition or movement of property or temporarily assuming custody or control of property on the basis of an order issued by a court or other competent authority" (article 2f). Seizure can precede final confiscation or forfeiture, defined as "permanent deprivation of property by order of a court or other competent authority" (article 2g).

Criteria for seizing firearms can vary considerably among different countries. The Firearms Protocol requires states to seize firearms which are illicitly trafficked or manufactured and to criminalize these offences. National legislation and regulations often go beyond the provisions of the Protocol and firearms can also be seized for other reasons such as having been used in criminal activities. Seizures can also be based on administrative violations such as a lack of a valid licence for possession or failure to comply with storage conditions.

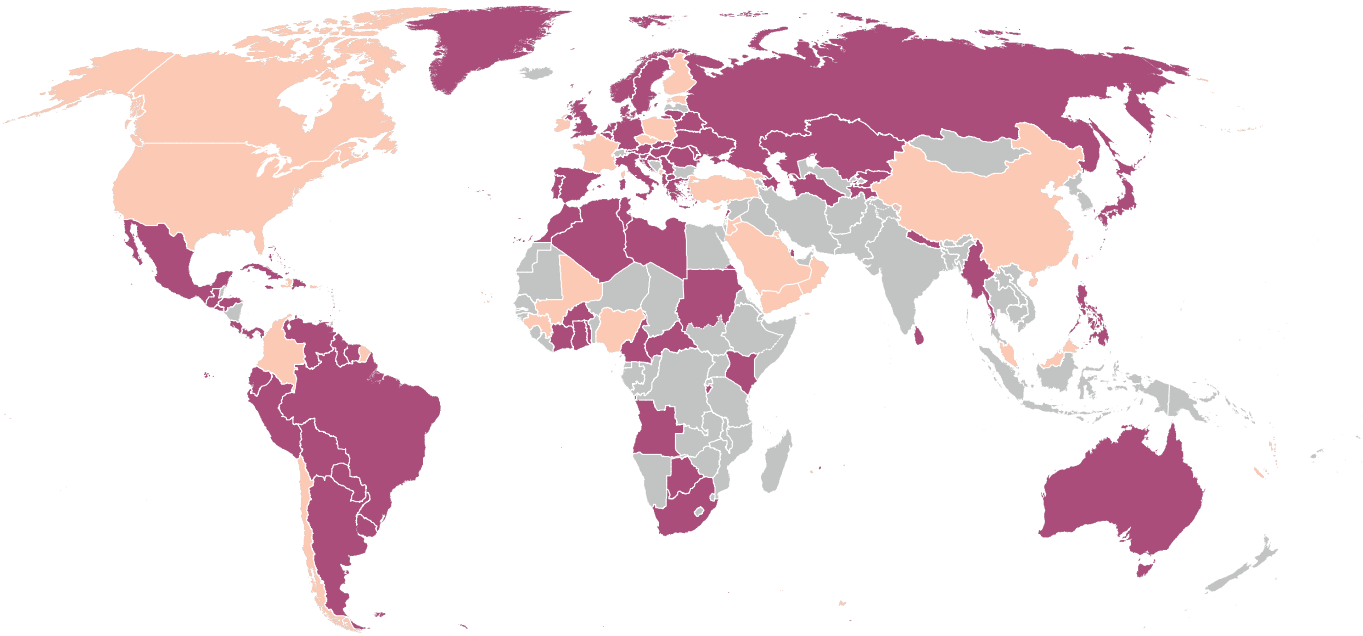
Seizures are a reflection of a complex reality and of different overlapping facets of the phenomenon of illicit trafficking[4] of firearms. Seizures may be related to criminal activity but some seizures may also arise out of infringements of an administrative nature. Whether a particular situation or conduct constitutes an administrative or a criminal offence will depend on the national legislation, but administrative offences would typically relate to expired licences, improper storage, inadequate maintenance, carrying or transporting a firearm in violation of applicable restrictions, etc. There are also seizures which happen as a preventive measure, typically in cases of domestic violence or threats of violence - even if no crime has been committed with the firearm.

Bearing in mind that firearms are durable goods which can last for decades, firearms may be detected in criminal settings long after they entered the black market (through diversion or illicit manufacture). Moreover, some criminal links which give rise to the seizure of a firearm may occur independently of whether the firearm had been previously trafficked or not. For example, a firearm can be used in the commission of a crime, and therefore seized, whether it was legally held or not. Sometimes a firearm is seized in the context of crimes or investigations which are unrelated

framework.html.

4 The UN Firearms Protocol uses the term "illicit trafficking". For editorial reasons, this term will be shortened to "trafficking" throughout this report.

MAP 1 Responses to the UN-IAFQ (2018 data collection exercise on firearms) and other countries/ territories with partial or supplementary data from other sources



Responses to the UN-IAFQ (Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire)*

Countries or territories with partial data for IAFQ indicators (2016/17) from other sources

* Includes responses from 6 countries limited to metadata and qualitative data only.

Source: UNODC elaboration of data from Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire and World Customs Organization.

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Dashed lines represent undetermined boundaries. Dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties. The final boundary between the Sudan and South Sudan has not yet been determined.A dispute exists between the Governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland concerning sovereignty over the Falkland Islands (Malvinas).

to arms offences, such as organized crime or drug trafficking; in such cases, trafficking may or may not have happened prior to the seizure. A firearm can also be seized because of its condition, such as the case of altered or deleted markings or illegal modifications, or because it was illegally manufactured, including conversion from other weapons, illegal assembly or illicitly manufactured in artisanal settings. Once more, such firearms may or may not have been trafficked prior to seizure. There may also be cases of a criminal nature in which a firearm seized from its holder is of unclear origin but there are no evident criminal links other than unauthorized possession.

The cases described above typically occur when a firearm is seized from its "end user", that is, a person or group of persons who held the firearm for their own purposes and use (lawful or not). This leaves the case of firearms which were detected in circumstances which suggest illegal transfers or movement at the moment of interception. Even among such firearms, such transfers or physical movement may be internal to a country, or transnational. Such seizures are those which reflect most directly the nature of illicit flows of firearms. Seizures from cross-border shipments, such as those made by Customs, are of particular interest.

Data sources and limitations

The report is based on data collected from Member States through the Illicit Arms Flow Questionnaire (IAFQ),[5] which was developed in cooperation with national and international experts, relevant international and regional organizations, and non-governmental organizations and research entities, in order to collect seizure data in both aggregate form and on a case-by-case basis. The questionnaire collected data on several aspects of firearms trafficking, such as trafficking routes, criminal context, tracing and the criminal justice system response to this crime. A total of 80 responses to the questionnaire were received. In addition, complementary sources of data were used, particularly national reports on the Implementation of the Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons and the International Tracing Instrument (collected and shared by the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs) and seizure data from the World Customs

5 Questionnaire on Illicit Arms Flows. Note by the Secretariat. Sixth Session of the open-ended intergovernmental working group on firearms established by the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, Vienna, 2-3 May 2018. CTOC/COP/WG.6/2018/CRP.2.

Organization (WCO). Most of the data cover the years 2016-2017. These sources were used in particular to generate quantitative data for some of the indicators covered by the Illicit Arms Flow Questionnaire, yielding data for a total of 107 countries and territories for at least one of the years 2016 or 2017.

There are some limitations concerning the use of seizure data in the context of firearms trafficking. Seizures can be made for reasons other than firearms trafficking per se. Firearms may be seized because they were used in the context of criminal activities such as drug trafficking or homicide. In addition, as for most such data related to crime, seizure data reflect both the level of trafficking and the effort and capacity of law enforcement to implement the regulatory mechanisms which may vary considerably between countries. Triangulating seizures data with other information and analysing them across countries help to use seizures data to inform patterns and dynamics of trafficking but seizures alone do not describe the level of trafficking. Legal definitions and regulatory frameworks can differ greatly from one country to the next, making country-level comparisons difficult and fraught with risks of comparing different phenomena. In addition to these general limitations, some specific limitations concerning the data collection for this report need to be noted. The data collection could not cover all countries in the world and even for those countries that did respond, the richness and quality of the responses varied. While some parts of the questionnaire resulted in good quality data, other parts were left empty or only scarce data were submitted. These limitations should be kept in mind when reading the report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Firearms trafficking is a global phenomenon with strong variations between countries

UNODC has carried out its most comprehensive collection of data on firearms trafficking to date, gathering details from survey responses and other sources in 81 countries for 2016-17. These data give a unique insight into the patterns of trafficking globally, regionally and nationally, providing a vital resource for law enforcement, policymakers and public bodies seeking to reduce the damage caused by the illicit circulation of firearms.

Based on these sources, a total of 550,000 firearms were seized during each of 2016 and 2017. The data showed wide variations among countries in terms of quantities seized, which ranged from less than 10 to more than 300,000. The nature of seizures reported also varied dramatically.

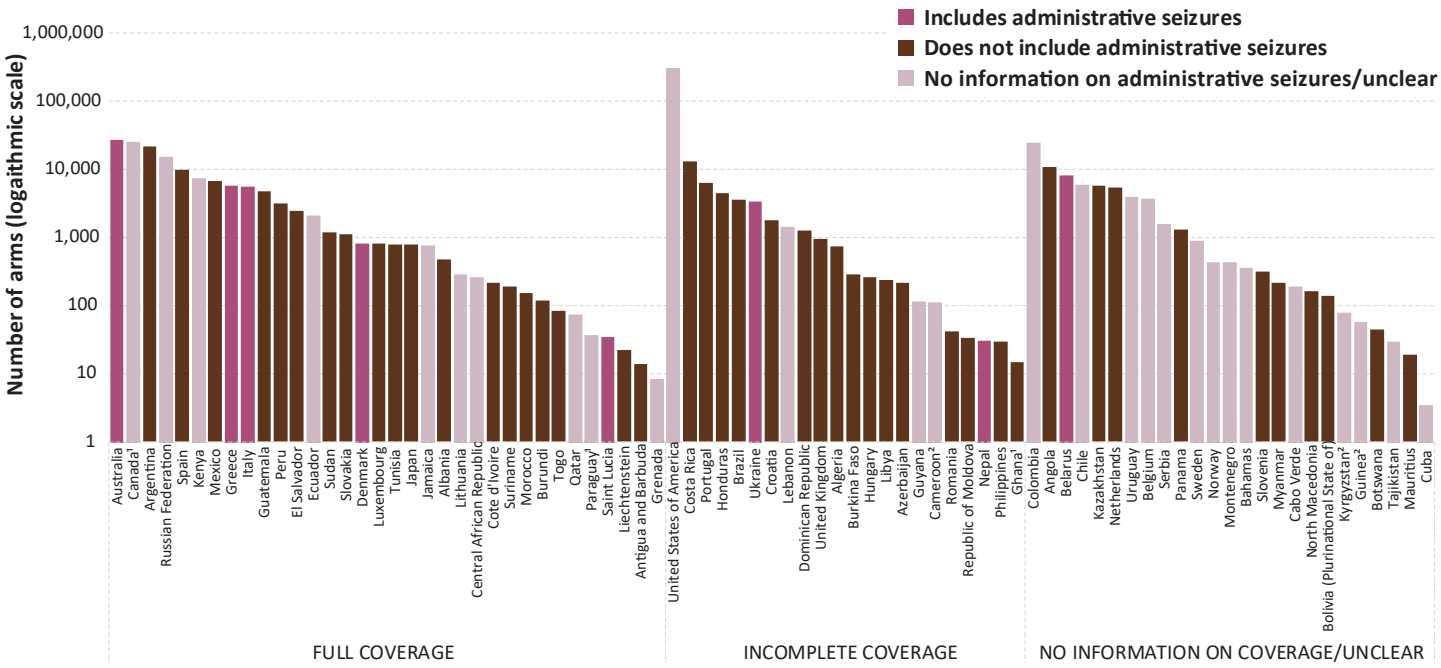
The real global figure for seizures is much higher than 550,000, as some of the countries covered by this study underreported their seizures for administrative reasons, and the quality of data varied significantly between countries. Also, many countries have not provided any information, including some of the world's most populous nations. Nonetheless, the coverage for this attempt at global data collection is good and likely to improve in the coming years, as data collection is streamlined and embedded in national institutions.

Pistols emerge as most seized firearms globally

Pistols are the world's most seized type of firearm. However, this pattern is driven to a large extent by the Americas, the region that reported the most seized firearms overall. Pistols constituted more than 50 per cent of the total firearms seized in the region during the reporting period.

In Africa and Asia, shotguns were the most prominent type. Rifles were the main type of firearm seized in Oceania, and in Europe the distribution was more equal between pistols, rifles and shotguns.

FIG. 3 ---- Total number of arms seized, by country and type of coverage, 2016-17 (average)

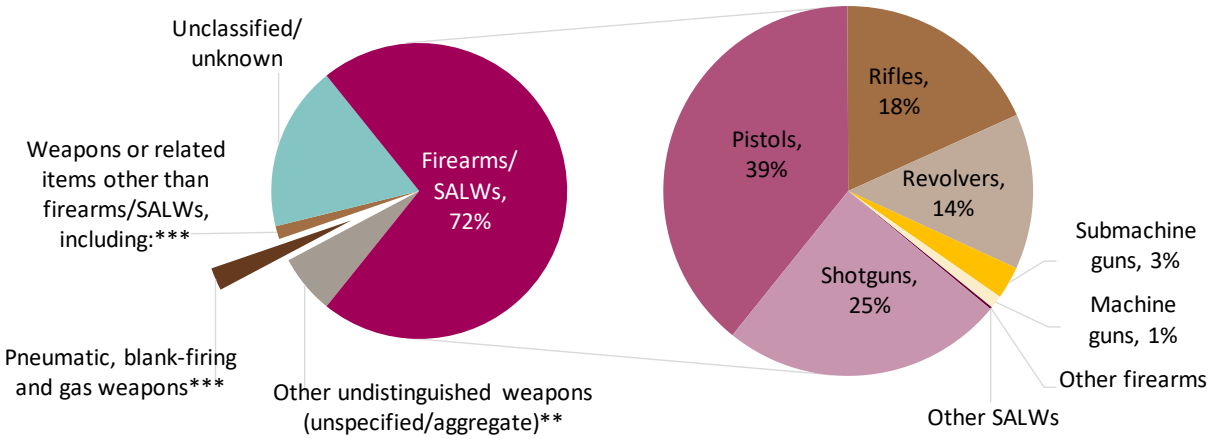


[1] For Canada, Ghana and Paraguay data were available for 2016 only.

[2] For Cameroon, Guinea and Kyrgyzstan data were available for 2017 only.

Sources: UNODC IAFQ and other official sources.

FIG. 2 ---- Typical distribution* of reported seized arms, by type, 2016-17



* Simple average based on data for 81 countries.

** Includes weapons reported under "Other" without sufficient information to allow further classification; some of these weapons may be firearms or small arms and light weapons (SALWs).

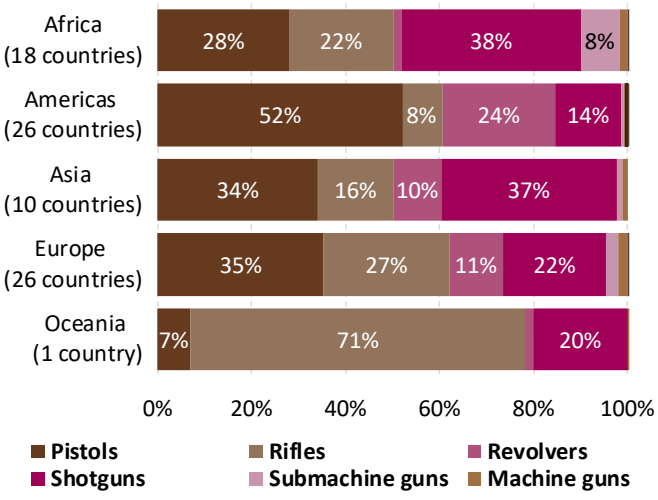
*** For some countries, the reported seizure data included weapons other than firearms/SALWs; however data on such weapons were not explicitly requested by the questionnaire. Hence the share of such weapons is subject to variations in the reporting practice across countries.

Source: UNODC IAFQ and other official sources.

However, many countries in Africa and Asia appear to have a lower capacity to intercept and report trafficked firearms, which may lead to underreporting of some types of firearms. Moreover, the total figures reported by countries include seizures which are not directly connected to trafficking. Based on customs seizures at borders, rifles emerge at par with pistols. This suggests that firearms such as rifles may play a bigger role in global trafficking patterns than what is reflected in the currently available data.

Looking more closely, links emerge between trafficking patterns and broader regional contexts. For example, countries with higher levels of violent deaths and homicide, particularly in Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean, tend to seize a higher percentage of firearms connected to violent crime. Similarly, in countries with higher levels of drug trafficking, more arms are seized linked to that activity.

FIG. 4 Typical distributions* of seized firearms/SALWs by type, according to region, 2016-17



* Simple averages, adjusted for any firearms/SALWs which could not be classified and quantified into the respective category and weapons other than firearms/SALWS.

Source: UNODC IAFQ and other official sources.

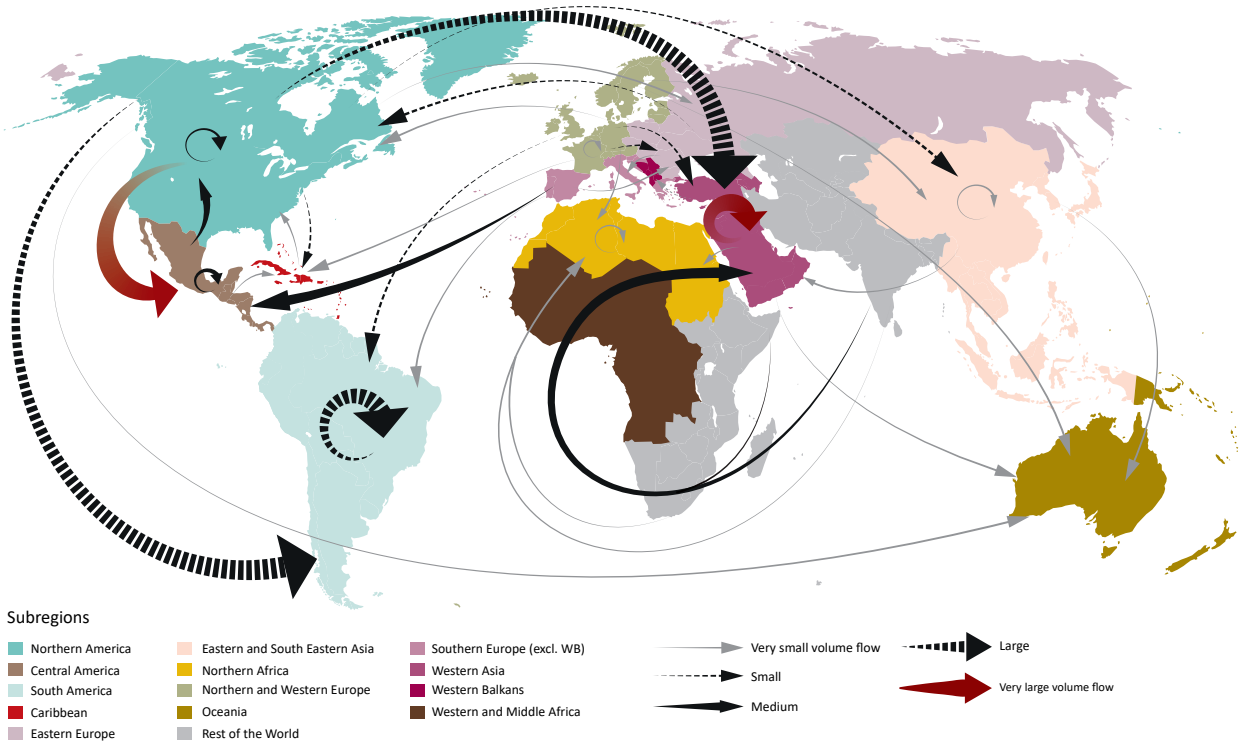
Transnational trafficking exists alongside domestic diversion and illicit manufacture

Most firearms seizures are made within national territories; seizures at borders on average account for less than 10 per cent of all interceptions. Seized weapons are overwhelmingly manufactured outside the country of seizure, but it is likely that the sourcing of firearms found in illicit markets has an important domestic component, such as firearms diverted from licit channels in the country of seizure.

There is often little connection to the country of manufacture – a significant proportion of arms seized on incoming shipments have not been transported directly from where they were produced. This suggests that vulnerability to firearms trafficking is mostly to be found in countries where firearms are diverted from legal holdings rather than where they are manufactured.

Northern America is the principal subregion of departure for seized firearms, according to the available data. On a smaller scale, Europe and Western Asia are also major

MAP 2 Main transnational firearms trafficking flows (as defined by routes of seized firearms), 2016-17



The breakdown into subregional groupings is based on the standard UN classification (M49), adapted to take into account the availability of data and regions of special interest of the study. Please see Methodological Annex for details.

Arrows represent flows between subregions (not specific countries).

Source: UNODC elaboration of data from Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire and World Customs Organization.

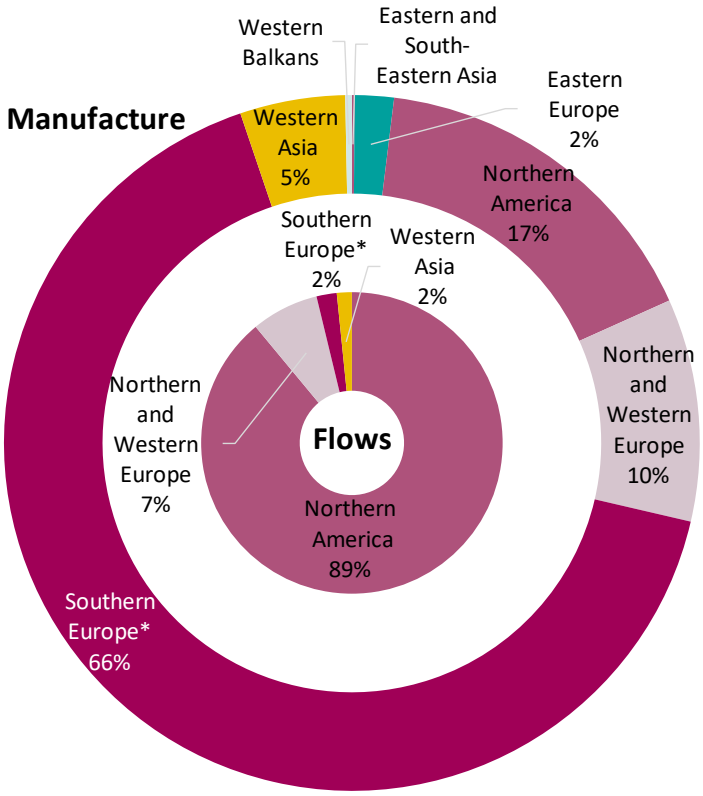
The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties. A dispute exists between the Governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland concerning sovereignty over the Falkland Islands (Malvinas).

departure points for illicit flows. However, illicit flows within subregions often account for significant proportions of firearms entering the market, notably in South America, Northern and Western Europe and Western Asia.

Transnational trafficking is concentrated within continents

Based on the routes of seized firearms, transnational trafficking flows seem to be mostly concentrated within continents. Northern America plays a significant role as departing subregion for other subregions, particularly South and Central America, as well as Western Asia. Northern America, Europe and Western Asia together accounted for almost all departure points of trafficking in 2016-17. In contrast with other parts of the world, outgoing flows from countries in Europe were predominantly intended for trafficking across continents.

FIG. 5 Distribution of subregions identified as origin of incoming illicit flows[a] (inner circle) and manufacture[a] (external circle) for seizures made in South America, 2016-17



*Excluding Western Balkans.

[a]The largest share of transnational illicit flows affecting countries in South America occurs between countries within South America. Similarly, countries in South America itself account for the largest share of manufacture of weapons seized in South America (including weapons seized in the country of manufacture). These shares are not shown in the above figure.

Note: The shares of flows and of manufacture are based on different kinds of data which require different methodologies. Therefore, the comparison should be made with caution. In both cases, the calculations adjust for the share which is not classified or reported as unknown.

Source: UNODC IAFQ and other official sources.

Central and South America together with Western Asia accounted for more than 80 per cent of trafficking destinations. These main destination areas are known for high levels of criminal violence or conflict and show the links between firearms trafficking and violent deaths.

Manufacturing country often unconnected to illicit flow

Illicit firearms flows are complex and do not necessarily follow licit flows. The country of manufacture of firearms and the country where diversions (when firearms leave the licit circuit and enter the illicit one) and seizures take place often do not overlap. This is clearly seen in the contrast between countries that are identified either as manufacturing countries or as the point where the illicit flow starts. While Europe emerges as the main manufacturing region in seizures made across the world, the most prominent subregion of illicit origin is Northern America. Firearms are durable goods and their circulation before and after diversion to the black market often involves several transfers.

Cross-border seizures are most common at land crossings, but sea shipments are bigger

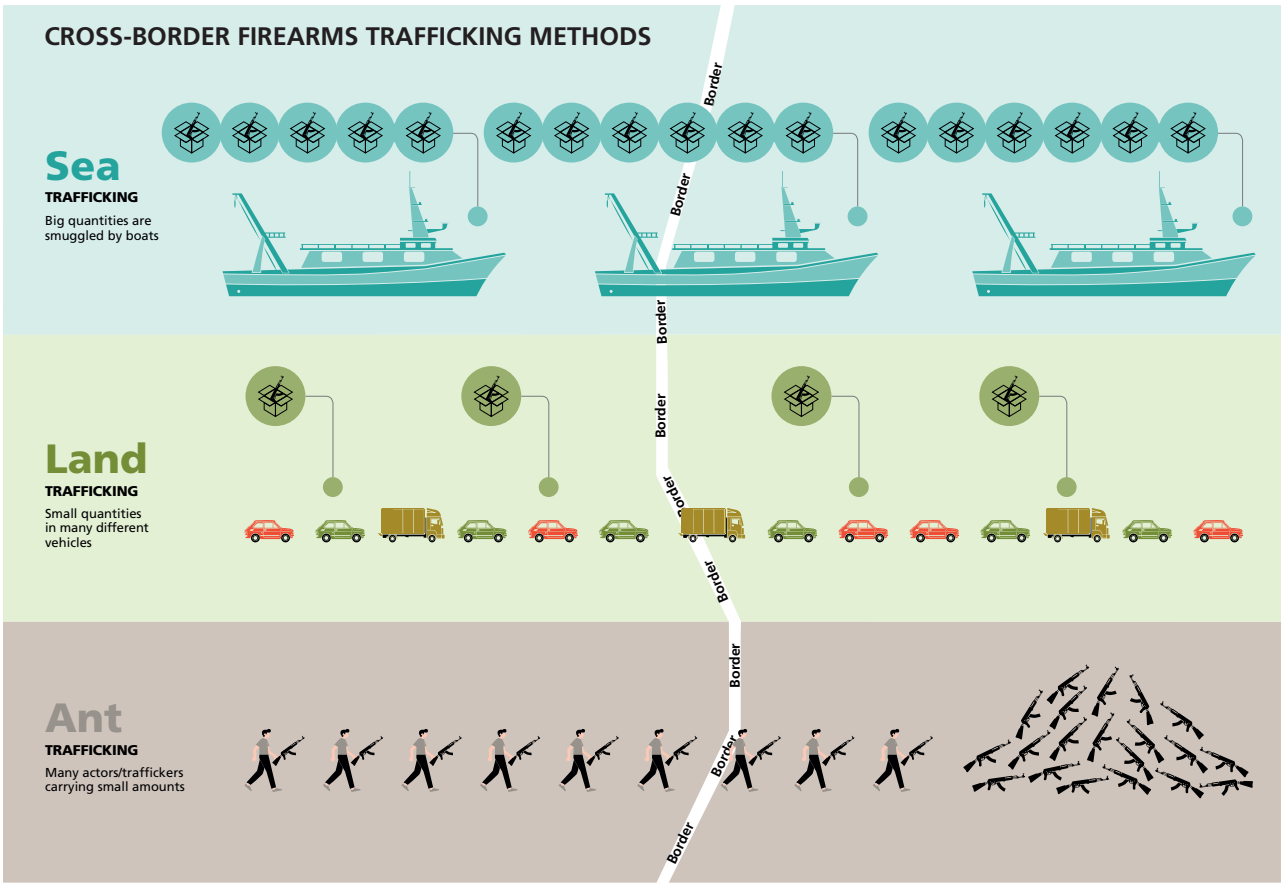
Traffickers tend to use sea transport for large shipments. Cases of seizures from vessels involved more than five times the number of firearms typically intercepted from other types of transportation. This suggests that law enforcement could get a better return on their investment if they focused on transportation by sea.

However, trafficking by land remains the most common type of cross-border case, accounting for roughly two-thirds of the total. Interceptions from vessels accounted for only around 6 per cent of all customs cases, but 33 per cent of the total number of firearms seized by customs.

Size of seizure case can reflect the intended use of the firearm

It appears that the vast majority of seizure cases entail law enforcement officers intercepting a single firearm or a very small number, according to available data. However, in terms of quantities of firearms seized, the big cases may account for a significant share. For example, among customs seizures carried out at national borders, roughly three quarters of cases involved one firearm, but around one half of firearms were seized in instances that involved 18 or more firearms.

Seizures of small consignments of one or two firearms may be linked to individual use, where the firearm is taken from the end user. These cases most commonly involved handguns. For example, more than 80 per cent of revolvers were captured in cases involving just a single firearm.



This type of case often entails a violation of possession regulations, but can also involve strategic "ant trafficking", whereby many people transport weapons in small consignments to meet large-scale demand and reduce the risk of disruption by law enforcement. This type of trafficking does not fully explain global arms trafficking, but there is evidence[1] that it is utilized to transport firearms from the United States to Mexico.

At the other end of this continuum, countries reported large seizures that seemed to respond to big instances of demand, for example conflict. Seizures of rifles, shotguns and pistols suggest that firearms of these types can be trafficked in consignments of hundreds and thousands. High-powered firearms such as machine guns and submachine guns are not often captured, but these rare seizure events generally involve larger quantities. Around one fifth of all customs seizure cases that included machine guns and submachine guns involved such firearms in batches of four or more; on the other hand, such hauls of revolvers, for example, were exceptional.

These big seizure cases were far more likely than smaller consignments to be linked to firearms trafficking offences.

Illicit sellers can compete with licit markets on price

The cost of buying firearms in the illicit market is usually significantly higher than in the licit sphere, reflecting the extra risks and profiteering involved in the black market. However, there are exceptions. In Latin America and the Caribbean, for example, illicit prices were lower than the licit price for handguns. This suggests ample availability of handguns in the illicit market.

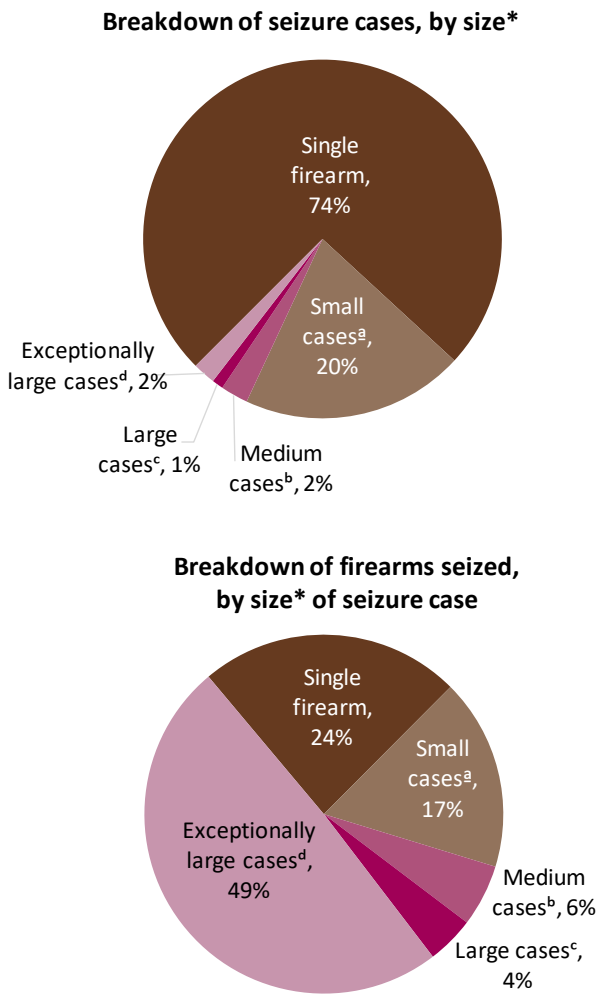
Price data from Europe point to the Western Balkans as a potential illicit source of firearms, notably assault rifles. Such weapons were far less expensive in the Western Balkans than in the rest of Europe.

Traffickers supply those seeking to assemble or convert weapons

Seizures of parts and components are relatively rare compared with seizures of firearms: on average, only 5 per cent of the number of firearms. However, a different picture emerges in countries where firearms in non-factory condition were seized in relatively high numbers (including artisanal or craft production), particularly in Africa and parts of Asia. Countries in these areas tend to report relatively high levels of seizures of parts and components.

Illicit manufacturing, conversion, reactivation and assembly of firearms is also present in some European countries,

FIG. 6 ---- Breakdowns of customs seizures, by size* of seizure case, 2016-17



*The size of a seizure case refers to the number of firearms seized in that particular instance.

[a] A case is considered "small" if between 2 and 5 firearms were seized in that particular instance.

[b] A case is considered "medium" if between 6 and 10 firearms were seized in that particular instance.

[c] A case is considered "large" if between 11 and 17 firearms were seized in that particular instance.

[d] A case is considered "exceptionally large" if at least 18 firearms were seized in that particular instance.

Source: World Customs Organization.

possibly reflecting national control mechanisms that make firearms hard to access legally. Modification of weapons may also serve the needs of the criminals to use smaller or more powerful weapons.

Firearms tracing remains insufficient and countries risk missing SDG target

Countries are committed to "significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows" under SDG Target 16.4. One of the indicators for this target is that the proportion of firearms traced to their illicit origins must be measured. Data from 14 countries in 2016-2017 suggest that, on average, this illicit origin or illicit context was established for just 28 per cent of the relevant category of firearms.

The countries that registered very high success rates in tracing firearms reported relatively low seizure levels, perhaps because tracing requires a lot of resources. On the other hand, some countries with high levels of seizures registered a low success rate, which may also be linked to firearms seized in connection with less serious offences and perhaps not prioritised in tracing.

Criminal justice responses tend to underplay the significance of firearms trafficking

Countries on average seized around two-thirds of firearms on the grounds of illicit possession, according to the legal justifications given by national authorities. Trafficking was, on average, named as the legal justification in only around 9 per cent of cases.

However, it is likely that the offence of illicit possession provides an easier and quicker way for law enforcement to justify stopping shipments and seizing firearms, and trafficking emerges as the actual offence only after further investigations – this is known as the "criminal context" of the seizure.

When the criminal context is factored in, the proportion of seized weapons that could be connected to trafficking more than doubles to roughly 19 per cent. The real proportion is likely to be even higher, once potential under-reporting of firearms trafficking is considered.

The evidence suggests that the criminal justice system focuses on firearms trafficking only in a relatively small percentage of the cases where it would be warranted – meaning firearms trafficking is a largely hidden phenomenon, only part of which comes to the surface.

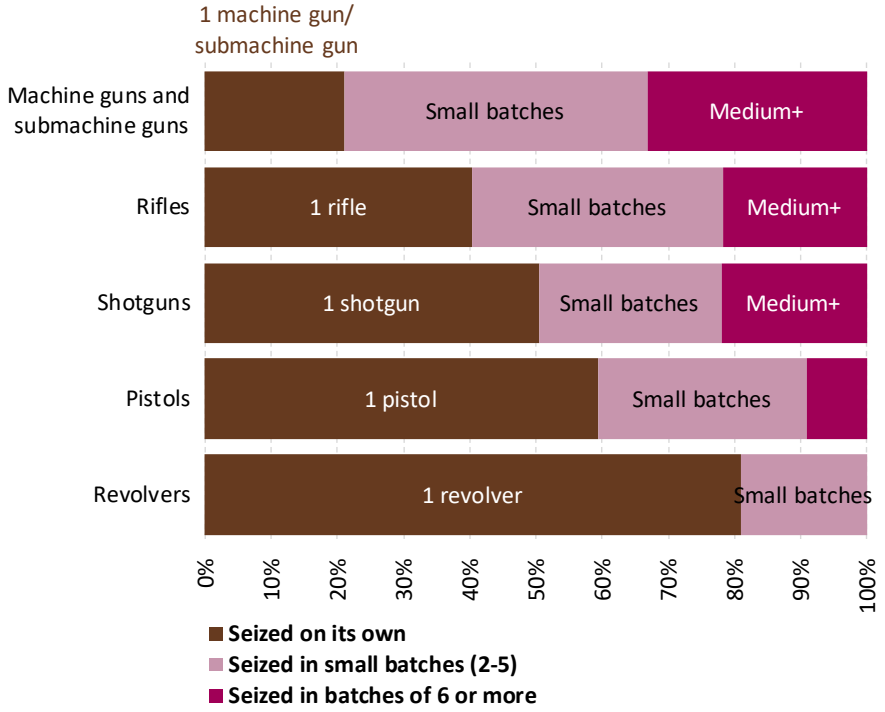
Violent crime and drug trafficking are frequently linked with seizures

Other than arms offences, the criminal conduct most commonly linked with firearms seizures was violent crime, particularly in Latin America and Africa. In Europe, drug trafficking was the biggest category.

On average, a larger share of firearms is seized in the context of violent crime in countries with high homicide rates. The same link is shown with drug seizures. In addition, drugs emerge as the most common commodity intercepted in the same seizures as firearms, followed by counterfeit goods, cultural property and natural resources

Unpicking the link between firearms trafficking and the broader criminal context in which seizures occur is difficult. Some exceptionally large individual seizure cases appear to be connected to areas with recent or ongoing

FIG. 7 Firearms seized in typical[a] customs seizure cases, by size[b] of seizure case (excluding cases with atypical very large number of firearms), 2016-17



[a] Isolated cases of a very large size were excluded; these were defined as cases with a size above the 98th percentile for the corresponding specific type of firearm.

[b] Size is measured as the number of firearms of the given specific type seized in the corresponding case.

Source: World Customs Organization.

conflicts, or countries with high levels of violence linked to organized crime. But several large hauls were reported that were apparently unconnected to conflict areas or organized crime.

Some countries may face specific problems related to conflict. Weapons feed conflict while it is going on, then stockpiles can proliferate in the aftermath, causing multiple difficulties for the authorities.

More than 50 per cent of homicides globally are carried out using firearms

Overall, more than 50 per cent of homicides globally each year are carried out with a firearm. The availability of firearms is linked to the homicide rate: a rise in the rate of firearms possession in a country often goes together with an increase in the homicide rate.

However, the significance of firearms varies depending on the context of the homicide. For example, firearms are by far the most significant method in homicides related to gangs or organized crime, but far less prominent when the homicide involves intimate partners and family members.

There is also a gender factor involved in the use of firearms in homicide. Most homicide victims and perpetrators globally are men, and this tends to be even more pronounced among firearms homicides. When considering homicides of intimate partners and family members, in which most victims are women, men were more likely than women to use a firearm when killing their female partners, while women were more likely than men to resort to a sharp object.

Overall, seizure data tended to suggest a relationship between the level of interception and the rate of homicide. Countries with higher levels of firearms seizures relative to firearms homicides tend to have lower levels of homicide, which might reflect an established and strong rule of law situation.

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The information and data presented in the Global Study on Firearms Trafficking provide an insight into the magnitude and extent of firearms trafficking and its links to other forms of crime. The Study constitutes the result of the first global data collection exercise via the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire (IAFQ), which builds upon an earlier effort to shed light on firearms trafficking undertaken by UNODC in 2015. The following is a discussion of the main conclusions and policy implications of its findings.

Member States and the international community have increased their efforts to collect evidence based information on firearms trafficking, but more needs to be done to provide the full picture and stop illicit trafficking flows.

Between 2015 and now, the attention as well as efforts of Member States and of the international community to develop, analyse and base policies and strategies for effective results against firearms trafficking on reliable datasets on seized and trafficked firearms increased significantly. This important development, which is also supported by the commitment of Member States to significantly reduce illicit arms flows inscribed in Target 16.4 of the Sustainable Development Goals, is reflected in various ways. There is a notable increase of analytical and research products on firearms trafficking, several initiatives by Member States to enhance their national firearms data collection capacities, tools and mechanisms, and a considerable increase in the response rate to the questionnaire by almost 40 per cent compared to the 2015 exercise conducted by UNODC.

In 80 countries, an amount of over 500,000 firearms have been seized in each of 2016 and 2017. However, existing gaps in data coverage in several of these countries and reported difficulties in detecting illicit trafficking flows lead to conclude that these amounts are likely to represent just the tip of the iceberg, as higher amounts of illicitly circulating firearms remain undiscovered and unreported.

More efforts are needed to enhance the intelligence picture on firearms trafficking by looking closer at the criminal context of each seizure and the whereabouts of the firearms, in order to better understand the nature and extent of the illicit trafficking flows and devise concrete preventive and control measures to stop the flows and reduce criminals' access to these arms.

Seizure data represent one of the most relevant proxies to disclose and monitor illicit trafficking flows, but need to be enriched with complementary analysis on the criminal context and on the illicit origin of the seized items.

The study has confirmed the relevance of using seizure results as an entry point to explore and further analyse the possible extent and nature of firearms trafficking patterns. While it is clear that not all seized firearms are necessarily linked to illicit traffic, seizure information, when usefully combined with complementary information on the seized items, the criminal context in which the seizure occurs, and the whereabout of these items, can help disclose illicit trafficking routes and patterns.

Firearms trafficking remains a largely invisible phenomenon

The vast majority of firearms are seized within national territories, in contexts other than illicit trafficking, either in the context of another crime, or when circulating within the national territory. Additional circumstantial information, such as the criminal context of the seizure and the tracing outcome of the items, must be analysed systematically in order to determine whether these arms were trafficked into the country prior to their seizure.

As a result, illicit firearms trafficking remains most often invisible and undisclosed, as illicit firearms are hardly intercepted at their point of diversion, but only when they re-emerge at the surface in connection with other criminal activities.

Countries must double their efforts to prevent, detect and intercept illicit firearms trafficking flows, especially at borders and during transfers.

Few arms are seized at borders. In order to invert this trend, countries must intensify their efforts to detect and combat the illicit trafficking activity itself and prevent that these firearms make their way in the hands of criminals and appear again in the context of other crimes.

Enhanced border control and risk profiling capacities are required to prevent and intercept illicit movement of firearms, including those arriving through less conventional means such as parcel and postal services deliveries. Detecting and investigating illicit trafficking requires additional efforts, time and resources, that are often not available to criminal justice practitioners.

Criminal justice responses tend to underplay the significance of firearms trafficking by focusing predominantly on illegal ownership rather than illicit origin and the criminals involved in trafficking.

The study confirms that, on average, around two thirds of firearms seizures were based on the legal ground of illicit possession, while complementary contextual information and tracing results clearly point to the fact that a considerable portion of these firearms may have been illicitly trafficked into the country prior to their seizure. The current practice of limiting seizure efforts to illicit possession charges reflect the relative short-sightedness of many criminal justice systems, that focus more on the firearm as a tool for crime or as evidence, and do not see the value of addressing its illicit origin and trafficking. By doing so, they meet the immediate objective of taking illicit firearms out of circulation, but the overarching goal of countering illicit trafficking remains largely undisclosed and unattended.

Achieving the SDG Target 16.4 requires a fundamental paradigm shift, and a more strategic vision and proactive responsiveness from criminal justice practitioners to look beyond the single firearm and give priority to the objective of investigating and prosecuting the illicit trafficking activity, and thus giving visibility and adequate responses to this underlying crime that is predicate to and fuels all the subsequent ones.

There is a close link between the domestic and transnational characteristics of firearms trafficking, which are not always clearly distinguished by national authorities. To understand the source of the issue and conceive appropriate responses, Member States need to set up systems that enable them to understand, analyse and react to the domestic and transnational extent of the issue.

The information and data presented in the study suggest that, on average, the diversion rate of firearms at domestic level is high. It is therefore plausible that illicit firearms circulate within national borders before they are eventually trafficked abroad. Looking at trafficking that crosses borders in isolation from domestic trafficking would be misleading because domestic trafficking is often the beginning of the illicit transnational supply chain of firearms. While these two phenomena require a joint analysis, distinct knowledge about the domestic and transnational extent and characteristics of firearms trafficking is essential for national authorities and policy makers to understand the source of the problem and conceive appropriate responses.

However, national legislation is not conducive to grasping the domestic or transnational nature of the phenomenon. Only 6 of 53 countries that provided the relevant data adopted a specific legal concept for transnational firearms trafficking, rendering the recording of disaggregated data on firearms seizures difficult.

In order to facilitate distinct data collection efforts on illicit transnational and domestic arms flows, Member States should consider developing two distinct legal concepts for the two phenomena. Keeping close track of seizures by customs authorities at land border crossings, airports and harbours on the one hand, and systematically recording, aggregating and analysing tracing results for seized firearms on the other, constitute further important measure to help increasing the understanding of the domestic and transnational extent and characteristics of the issue.

To prevent and combat firearms trafficking, it is necessary to scale up capacities, procedures and tools to identify the illicit origin of seized, found and surrendered firearms and to record the results in an accessible manner. Particular emphasis should be placed on:

- Recording information on firearms and their criminal context during the different steps of an investigations in an easily aggregable manner;
- Improving mechanisms and enhancing capacities for domestic and international tracing of seized firearms;
- Centralising relevant data in national databases that can help conduct tracing and support investigation of their possible illicit origin.

The relatively low response rate to the different questions of the IAFQ and the varying geographical and institutional coverage of the data in individual countries reflect the lack of systematic and comprehensive data collection procedures in Member States.

In order to develop a comprehensive insight into firearms trafficking, Member States should harmonise their recording requirements in the different steps of a firearms-relevant investigation, including the seizure, the in-depth analysis of the weapon, as well as its tracing outcome. The particularly low response rate to questions related to tracing results reveal the pressing need for Member States to enhance mechanisms and capacities for effective domestic as well as international tracing. Lastly, Member States should set up centralised databases that can help conduct tracing and support investigation of their possible illicit origin. This constitutes a crucial element of any effective firearms control regime.

Enhancing efforts to detecting and seize parts and components of firearms, including when shipped via fast parcel deliveries, may support the fight against various types of illicit manufacture of firearms, including conversion, assembly and craft production.

While the reported overall level of seizures of parts and components is low in comparison with firearms, the number of seizures is higher in countries where firearms in non-factory condition were seized, including artisanally manufactured, assembled and converted weapons. The dark number of illicitly circulating parts and components may likely be higher than the reported numbers, due to the difficulty in detecting and identifying them as items belonging to a firearm. Increased attention and capacities to take illicit parts and components out of circulation, including when shipped via fast parcel delivery services, may prevent various types of illicit firearms manufacture, such as conversion, assembly and craft production.

In order to address transnational firearms trafficking, law enforcement efforts should continue to target different types of transportation, in particular vehicles and vessels.

The information and data presented in the study reveal that vehicles and vessels constitute the primary types of transportation to traffic firearms across borders. Consequently, continued efforts to detect firearms in vehicles at land border crossings as well as in vessels at harbours are required.

Collecting and analysing data on lost and stolen firearms can further help to develop understanding about firearms trafficking and the point of diversion of trafficked firearms.

Supplementing the globally adopted indicator to measure illicit arms flows as one of the Sustainable Development Goals, Member States and the international community should further look into systematically collecting and analysing data on lost and stolen firearms. Such information can enrich the data on firearms seizures and increase understanding of illicit arms flows. Data recorded in the Interpol-administered iARMS database can constitute a useful starting point in this regard.

While the country of manufacture of seized firearms and the country of diversion often do not overlap, countries seizing illicitly trafficked firearms should inform the country of manufacture about the seizure. Such an information exchange is an important step to improve or put in place preventive measures at the early stages of the supply chain and may provide essential information for the export risk assessment to be undertaken by the exporting country.

An important share of trafficked firearms originate as legally manufactured firearms that are diverted to the black market only after their legal export. However, under international and regional instruments, such as the Arms Trade Treaty or the Central African Convention against the Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunition, countries are obliged to assess the risk of future diversion during their export risk assessment. While post-delivery verifications may constitute an effective measure to support the export risk assessment, information on trafficked firearms from the seizing country may constitute another important source of information for the manufacturing country. Member States should therefore maintain open communication channels and information exchange on trafficked and diverted firearms.

Integrated and comprehensive data collection mechanisms and use of standardized templates and tools can help improve the situation. Without this, Member States risk to miss attainment and monitoring of SDG Target 16.4. Increased participation and support for global data collection efforts is also required.

The low priority given by criminal justice systems to the issue of firearms trafficking is often also reflected in the rudimentary and isolated way in which data on firearms are sometimes collected and recorded in some countries. Consequently, data collection mechanisms and tools of many countries are also often not sufficiently equipped to fully capture the phenomenon of illicit trafficking and related offences, including new or emerging threats like trafficking in parts and components, parcel service and internet-enabled trafficking; conversion and modification of arms into live firing weapons, etc.

With increased visibility and awareness on the importance of addressing firearms trafficking, more priority should also be given to ensuring integrated and comprehensive methods of gathering, analysing and using data on firearms. Countries need to recognize the relevance of looking beyond firearms as an instrument or evidence, into their origin and possible trafficking, and to adapt their data collection and analysis mechanism accordingly in order to integrate broader crime data into the overall intelligence picture surrounding illicit firearms.

There is a need to enhance the intelligence picture on firearms trafficking by enhancing their counting mechanism from the bottom up, in order to facilitate the gathering and analysis of circumstantial information such as the criminal context, links to specific security threats like terrorism or organized crime, and to support evidence-based intelligence analysis and strategic decision-making.

Development and use of standardized tools, such as templates and automated applications that can help disaggregate the information from the moment it is produced / generated, and reduce risks of errors, can greatly contribute to enhance the picture and the analysis

Poor tracing practice and insufficient efforts to report on them reduce the likelihood to disclose and counter illicit arms flows, and put Member States at risk of not attaining and monitoring the SDG Target 16.4. Increased participation and support for global data collection efforts is required.

While seizure data provide the closest proxy to monitor firearms trafficking, only tracing the illicit origin can help establish the point of diversion of the seized firearms, and identify trafficking routes and patterns.

Countries must systematically trace and report on their efforts to establish the illicit origin of firearms seized in crime, with a view to investigate and prosecute the illicit trafficking offence, beyond and regardless of the main offence that has given rise to the law enforcement action leading to the seizure of the firearm. Without this, countries will not be able to detect and disrupt illicit trafficking networks and reduce the illicit arms flows by 2030.

Yet, looking at the overall number of countries providing processable data on the SDG-related question (14 countries) and the number of seized, found and surrendered arms they were able to trace to their illicit origin (28 per cent on average), Member States are at risk to fail attaining and monitoring the attainment of SDG Target 16.4. It is therefore necessary to scale up capacities, procedures and tools to identify the illicit origin of seized, found and surrendered firearms and to record the results in an accessible manner.

Transnational firearms trafficking constitutes a complex crime, with often fatal consequences. To counter the phenomenon effectively, Member States and the international community should invest in further research into existing links to other security threats and develop appropriate, multi-sectorial approaches.

The study confirms the interconnectedness of seized firearms on the one hand and drug trafficking as well as armed violence, in particular homicide, on the other. Further analysis on these links as well as on the interconnectedness between illicit firearms and other substantive topics, such as trafficking in other commodities and terrorism should be conducted. Insights into the interplay between illicit firearms on the one hand and corruption and money laundering on the other may further help in enhancing investigative approaches against these crimes.

While the study confirms that firearms used in homicide have a particular gender dimension, the impact of illicit firearms on men and women, boys and girls should be further researched and addressed.

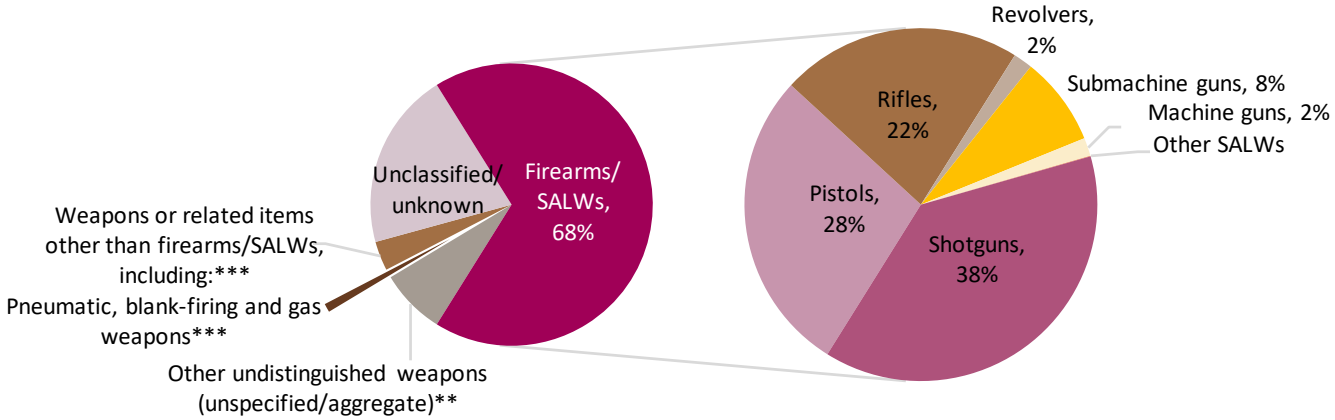
REGIONAL OVERVIEW

Africa

In Africa, the largest quantities of seized weapons seized were registered in Angola and Kenya. Aside from the prevalence of shotguns generally, notable proportions of machine guns were seized in Tunisia and of submachine guns in Burundi. In Central African Republic, aside from miscellaneous weapons such as grenades, artisanal weapons and cannons, the remaining seized weapons were predominantly rifles and submachine guns.

However, many countries in Africa and Asia appear to have a lower capacity to intercept and report trafficked firearms, which may lead to underreporting of some types of firearms. Moreover, the total figures reported by countries include seizures which are not directly connected to trafficking. Based on customs seizures at borders, rifles emerge at par with pistols. This suggests that firearms such as rifles may play a bigger role in global trafficking patterns than what is reflected in the currently available data.

FIG. 8 ---- Average distribution* of reported seized arms in Africa, by type, 2016-17



* Simple average based on data for 18 countries.

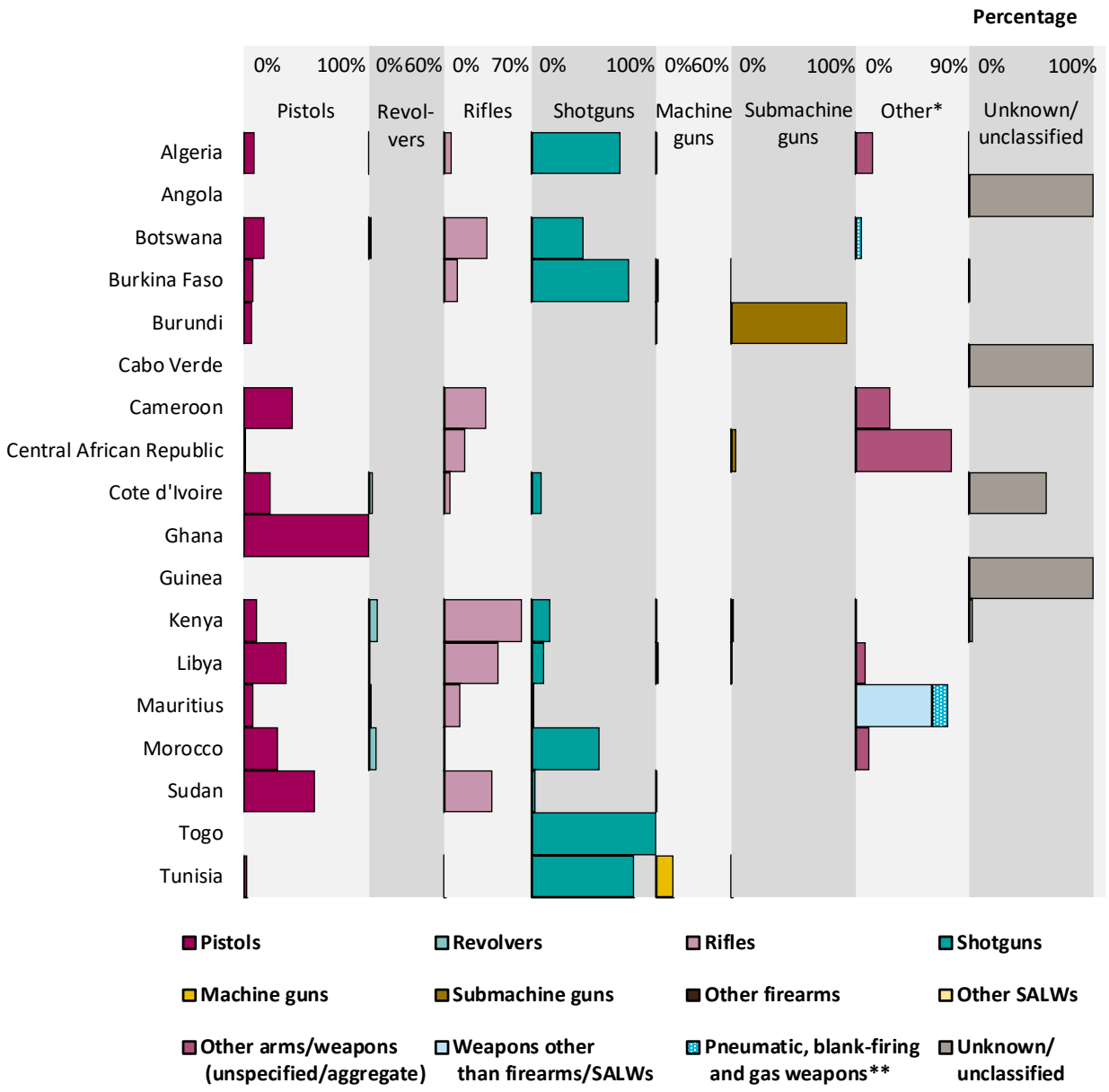
** Includes weapons reported under "Other" without sufficient information to allow further classification; some of these weapons may be firearms or SALWs.

*** For some countries, the reported seizure data included weapons other than firearms/SALWs; however data on such weapons were not explicitly requested by the questionnaire. Hence the share of such weapons is subject to variations in the reporting practice across countries.

Sources: UNODC IAFQ and other official sources.

Looking more closely, links emerge between trafficking patterns and broader regional contexts. For example, countries with higher levels of violent deaths and homicide, particularly in Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean, tend to seize a higher percentage of firearms connected to violent crime. Similarly, in countries with higher levels of drug trafficking, more arms are seized linked to that activity.

FIG. 9 ---- Distribution of seized arms by type, countries in Africa, 2016-17

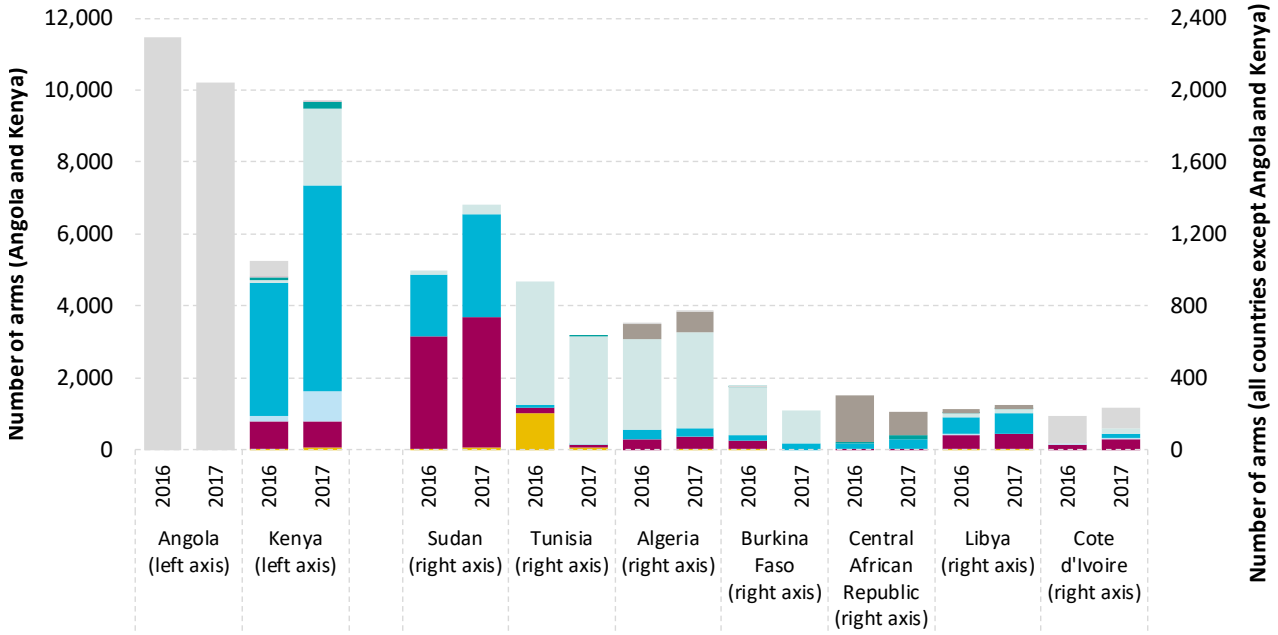


* Includes other firearms, other SALWs and other weapons. Also includes weapons reported under "Other" without sufficient information to allow further classification or disaggregation; some of these weapons may be firearms of the six foregoing standard types.

** Pneumatic, blank-firing and gas weapons fall under the preceding designation "Weapons other than firearms/SALWs", but are distinguished whenever the available data allows.

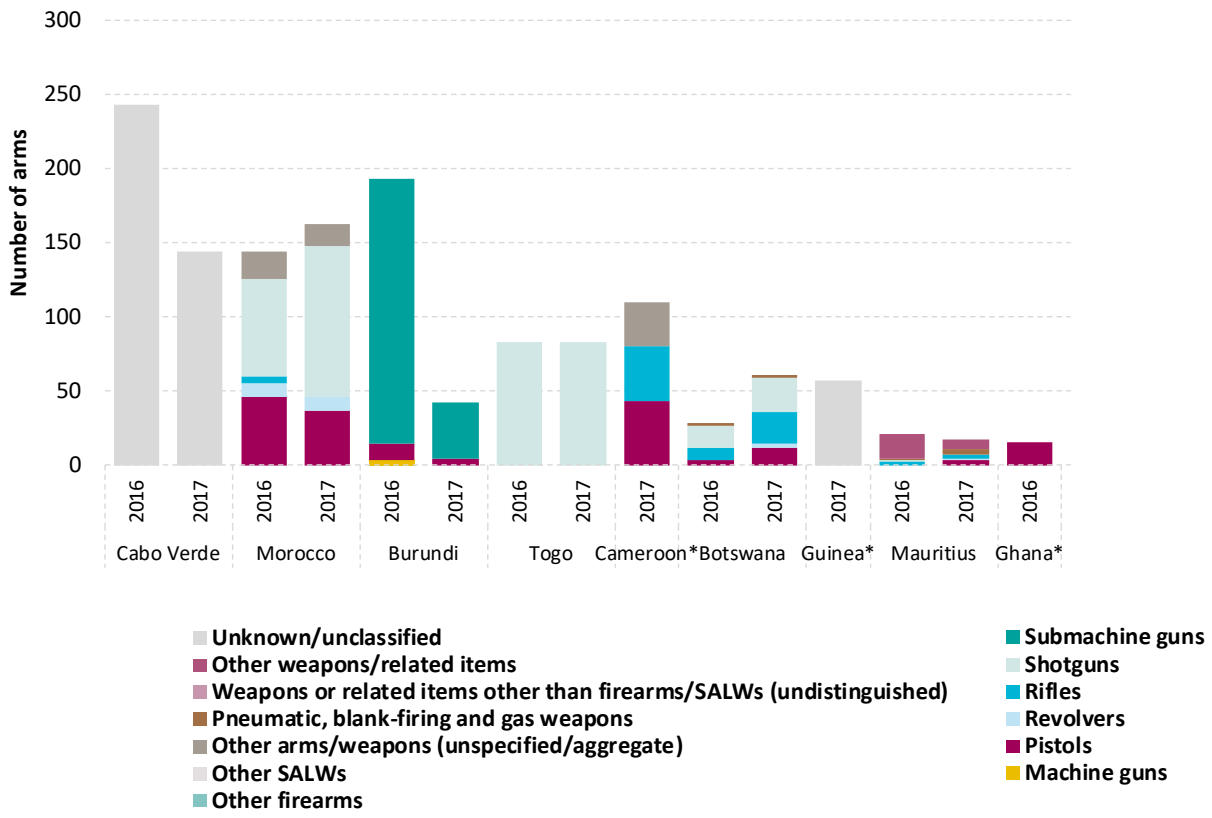
Sources: UNODC IAFQ and other official sources.

FIG. 10 Arms seized by countries in Africa, by type, 2016-17 (9 countries with largest quantities seized)



Sources: UNODC IAFQ and other official sources.

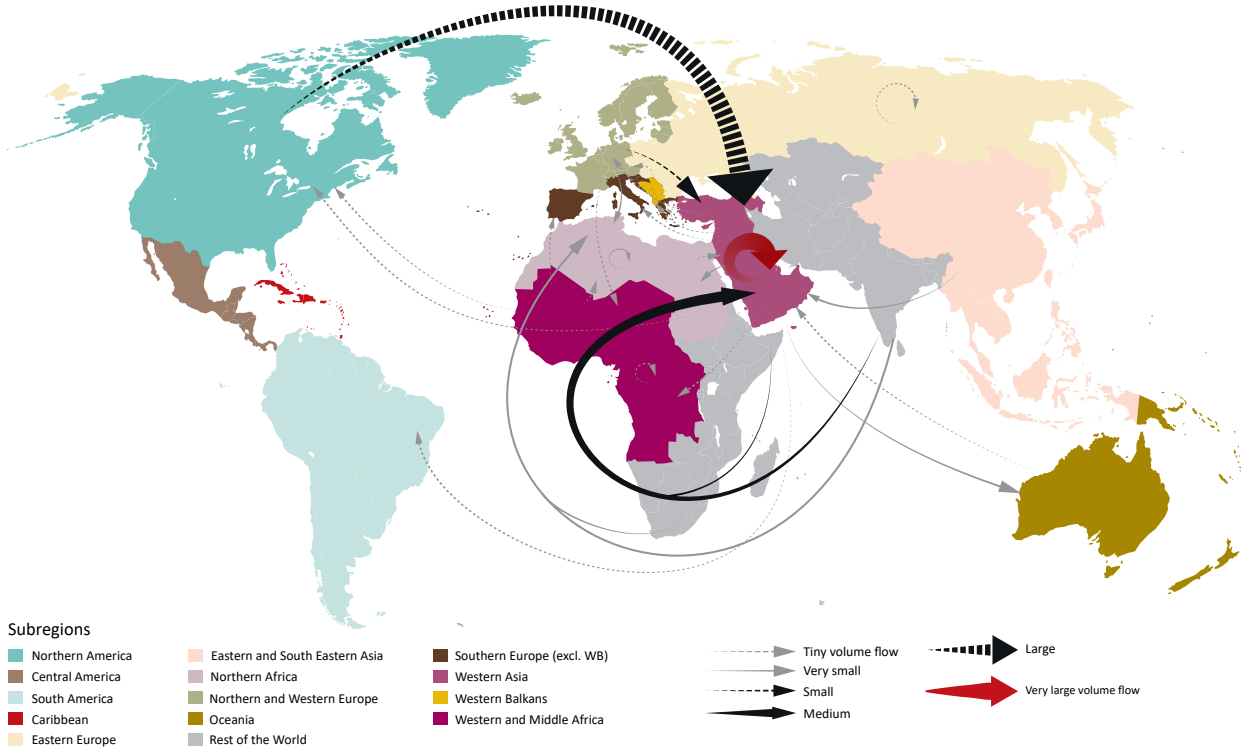
FIG. 11 Arms seized by countries in Africa, by type, 2016-17 (9 countries with lowest quantities seized)



* Data for Ghana were available for 2016 only; data for Cameroon and Guinea were available for 2017 only.

Sources: UNODC IAFQ and other official sources.

MAP 3 ---- Transnational firearms trafficking flows affecting Africa and Western Asia (as defined by routes of seized firearms), 2016-17



The breakdown into subregional groupings is based on the standard UN classification (M49), adapted to take into account the availability of data and regions of special interest of the study. Please see Methodological Annex for details.

Arrows represent flows between subregions (not specific countries).

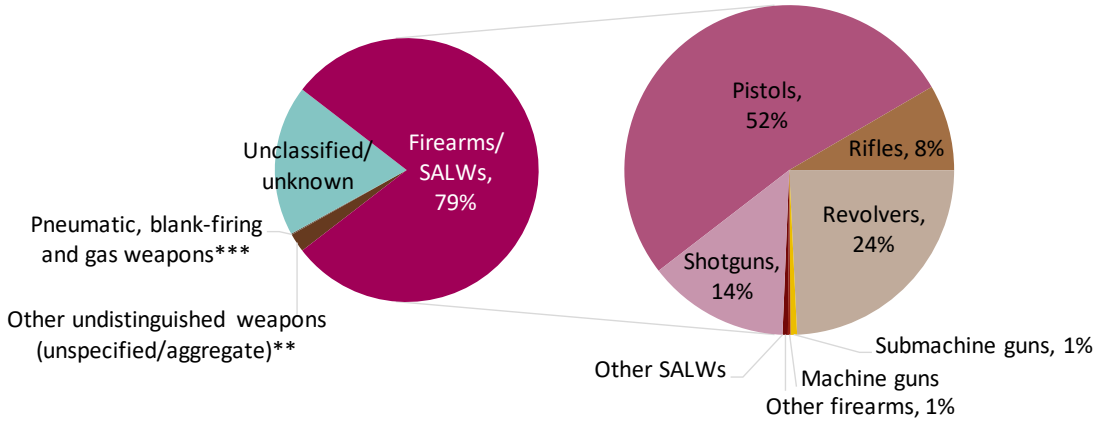
Source: UNODC elaboration of data from Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire and World Customs Organization.

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on these maps do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties. A dispute exists between the Governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland concerning sovereignty over the Falkland Islands (Malvinas).

Americas

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the largest quantities of seized weapons were reported by Colombia and Argentina. However, comprehensive data for Brazil were not available. Excluding weapons other than firearms/SALWs, as well as any firearms/SALWs which could not be classified and quantified into the respective category, the Americas were the region with the highest proportions of pistols (on average, 52 per cent) and revolvers (24 per cent). The proportion of rifles seized in Mexico was significantly higher than in other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.

FIG. 12 Average distribution* of reported seized arms in the Americas, 2016-17



* Simple average based on data for 26 countries.

** Includes weapons reported under "Other" without sufficient information to allow further classification; some of these weapons may be firearms or SALWs.

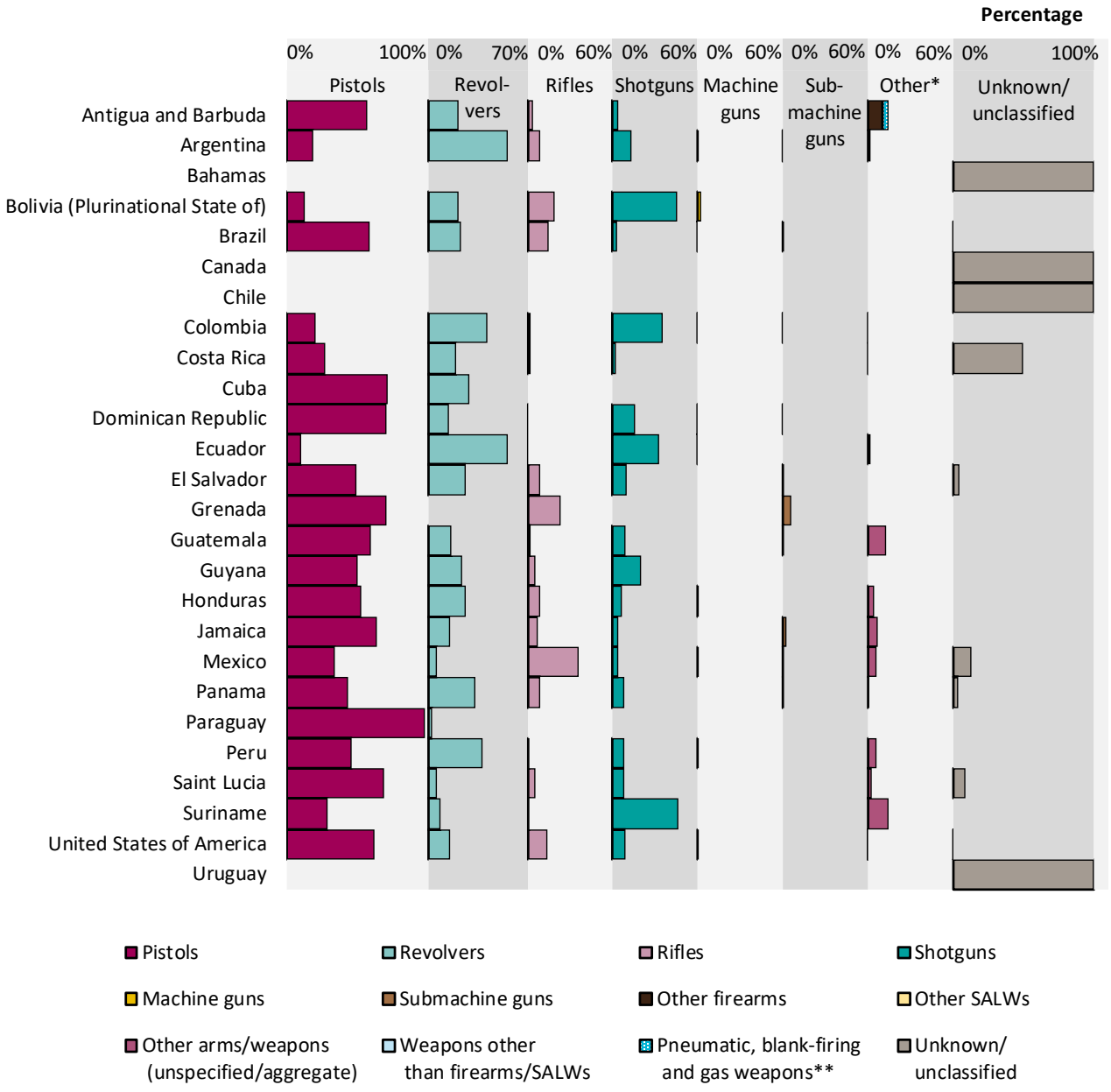
*** For some countries, the reported seizure data included weapons other than firearms/SALWs; however data on such weapons were not explicitly requested by the questionnaire. Hence the share of such weapons is subject to variations in the reporting practice across countries.

Sources: UNODC IAFQ and other official sources.

The data collection exercise carried out for the present study, which was focused on data for the years 2016 and 2017, built on an earlier exercise carried out by UNODC.[1] Hence, for some countries, seizure data were also available for earlier years. Despite a gap in the reporting periods and the potential for issues of comparability, in some cases it was also possible to derive meaningful longer-term increasing or decreasing trends. In Latin America, this was possible for three countries, all of which exhibited clear decreasing trends.

1 UNODC Study on Firearms, 2015.

FIG. 13 Distribution of seized arms by type, countries in the Americas, 2016-17

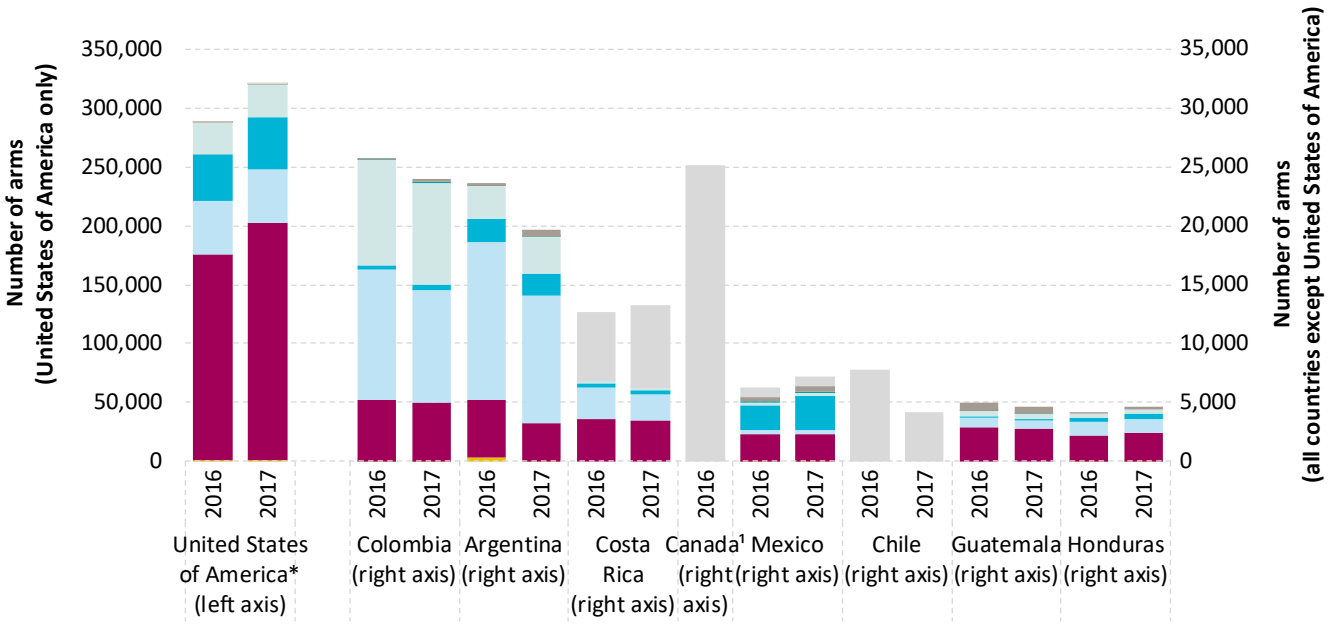


* Includes other firearms, other SALWs and other weapons. Also includes weapons reported under "Other" without sufficient information to allow further classification or disaggregation; some of these weapons may be firearms of the six foregoing standard types.

** Pneumatic, blank-firing and gas weapons fall under the preceding designation "Weapons other than firearms/SALWs", but are distinguished whenever the available data allows.

Sources: UNODC IAFQ and other official sources.

FIG. 14 Arms seized by countries in the Americas, by type, 2016-17 (9 countries with largest quantities seized)

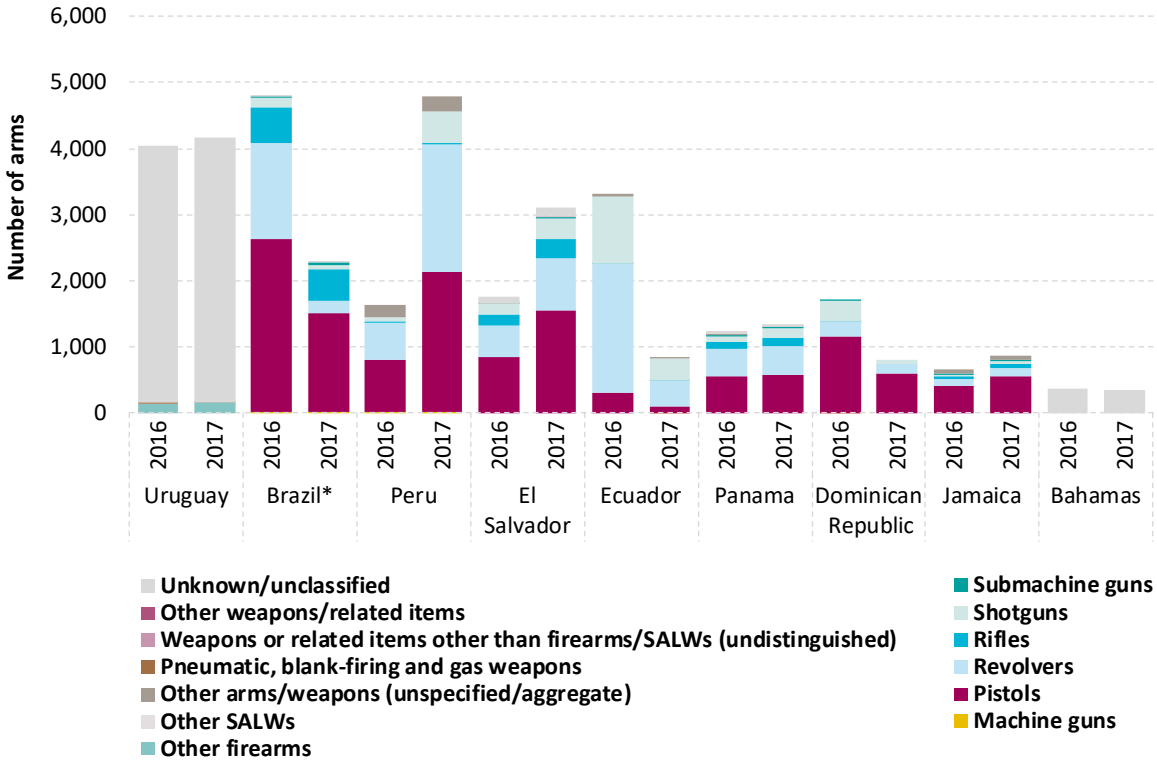


* Includes firearms submitted for tracing to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives by a law enforcement agency, resulting from seizure as well as abandonment, buy-back program, or other recovery method. Moreover, only seized firearms submitted for tracing are included. Firearms submitted for tracing after recovery do not represent the entire set of all seized firearms.

[1] Data for Canada were available for 2016 only.

Sources: UNODC IAFQ and other official sources.

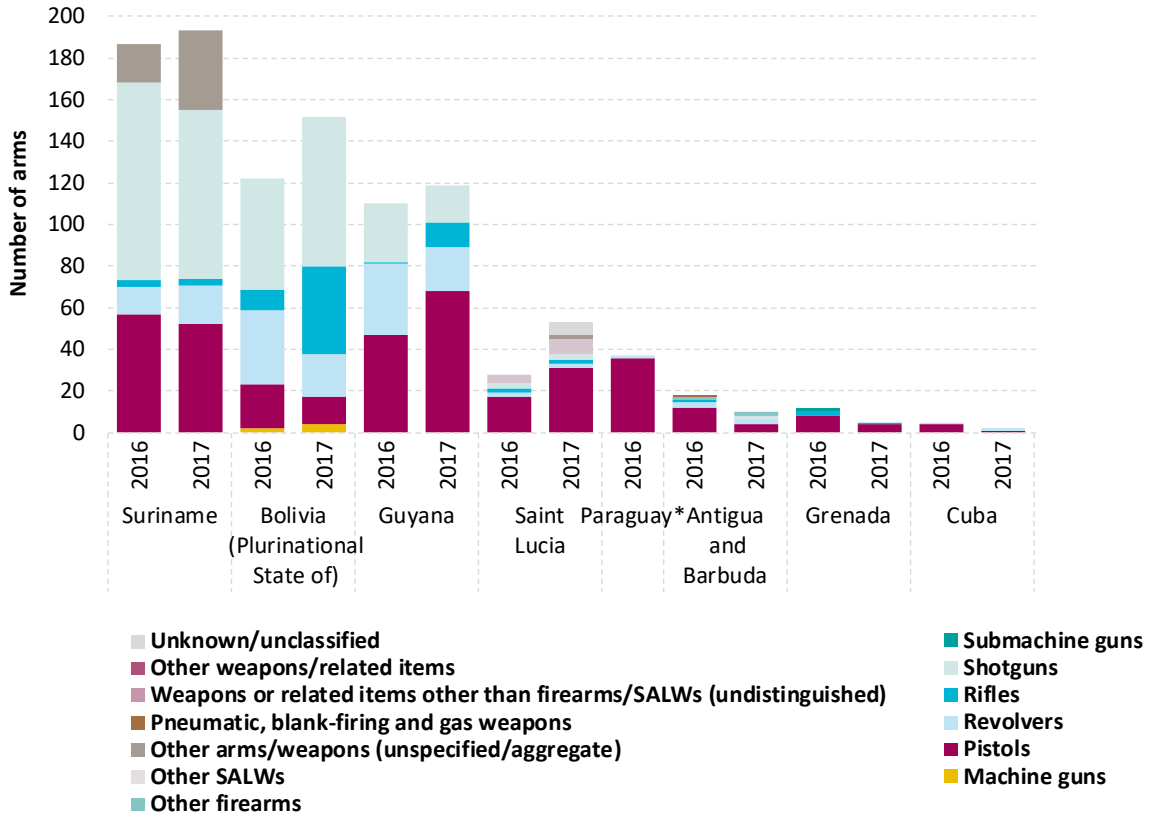
FIG. 15 Arms seized by countries in the Americas, by type, 2016-17 (9 countries with intermediate quantities seized)



* Includes only seizures in the records of the Federal Police Tracing Centre of Brazil.

Sources: UNODC IAFQ and other official sources.

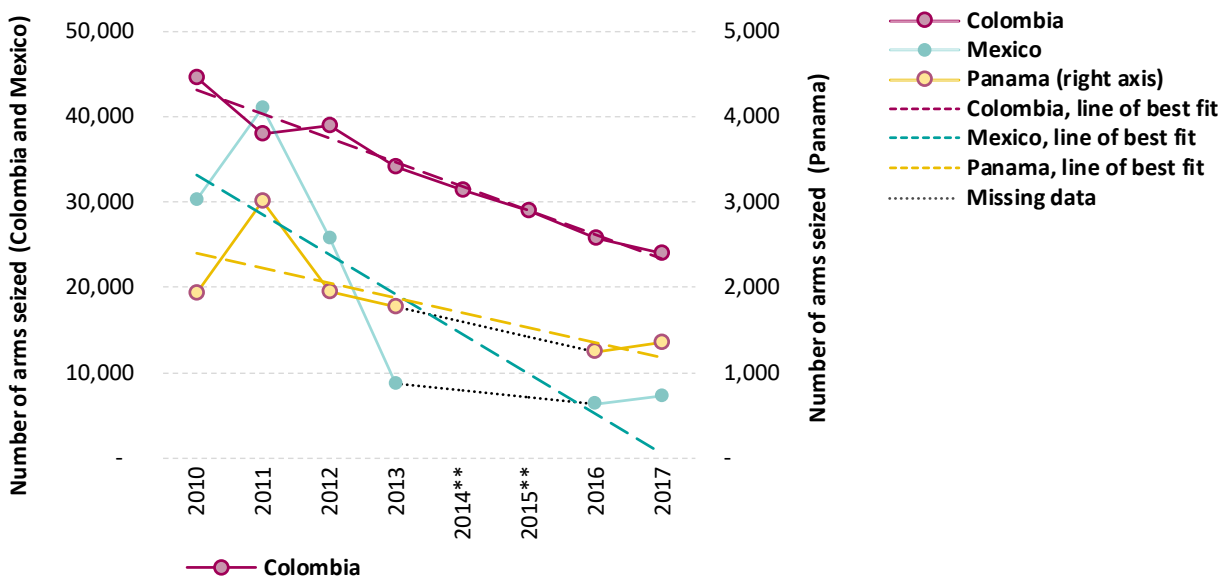
FIG. 16 Arms seized by countries in the Americas, by type, 2016-17 (9 countries with lowest quantities seized)



*Data for Paraguay were available for 2016 only.

Sources: UNODC IAFQ and other official sources.

FIG. 17 Significant* longer-term trends in the number of arms seized by countries in Latin America, 2010-2017

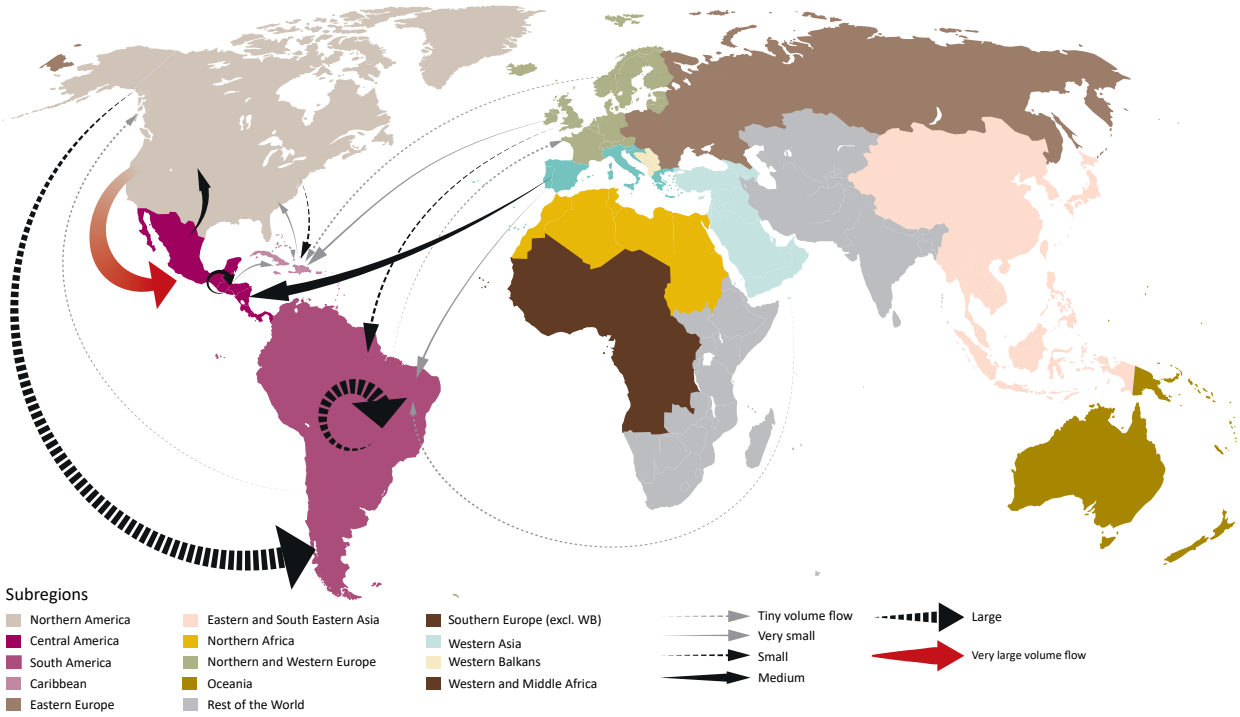


* Due to a revised data collection instrument, data prior to 2016 are not guaranteed to be comparable to data for 2016-17, with the exception of updated historical data. This graph shows only countries for which at least 5 datapoints were available over the period 2011-2017 and the corresponding simple linear regression model yielded p-values that were significant at the 90% level.

** For 2014 and 2015, no data were available for Mexico and for Panama.

Sources: UNODC IAFQ and other official sources.

MAP 4 ____ Transnational firearms trafficking flows affecting Latin America and the Caribbean (as defined by routes of seized firearms), 2016-17



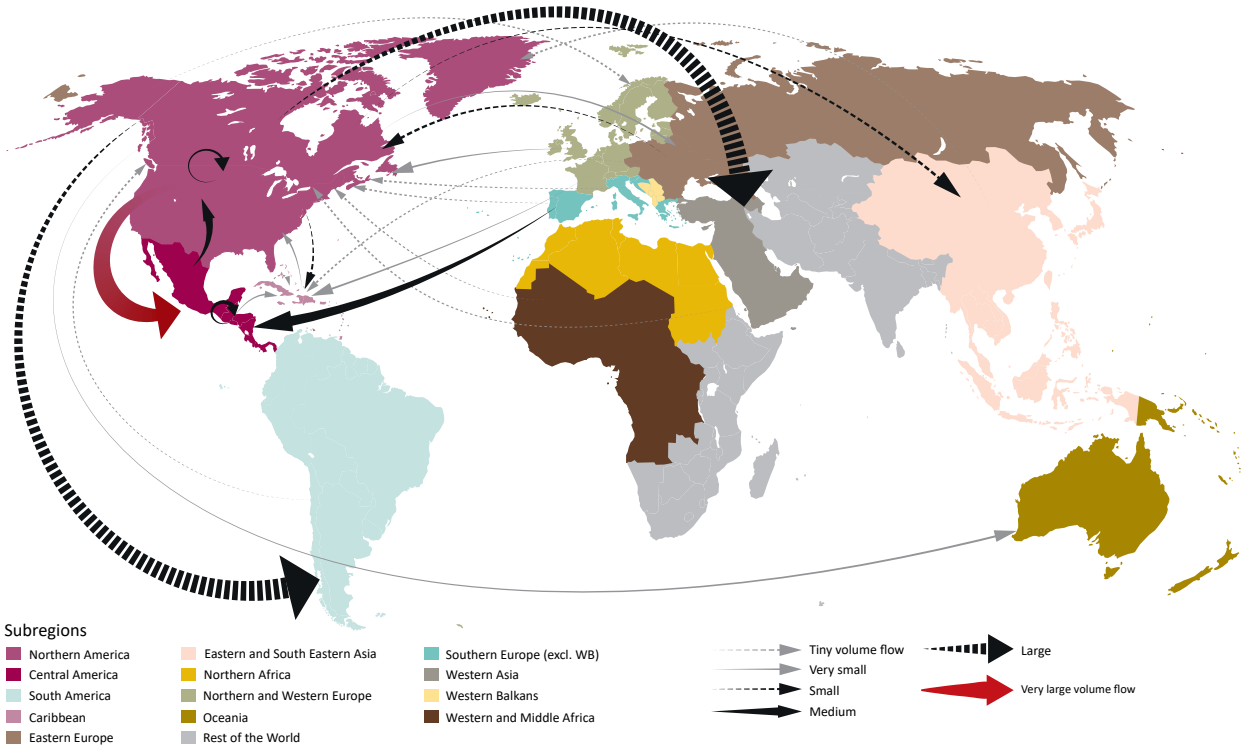
The breakdown into subregional groupings is based on the standard UN classification (M49), adapted to take into account the availability of data and regions of special interest of the study. Please see Methodological Annex for details.

Arrows represent flows between subregions (not specific countries).

Source: UNODC elaboration of data from Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire and World Customs Organization.

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties. A dispute exists between the Governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland concerning sovereignty over the Falkland Islands (Malvinas).

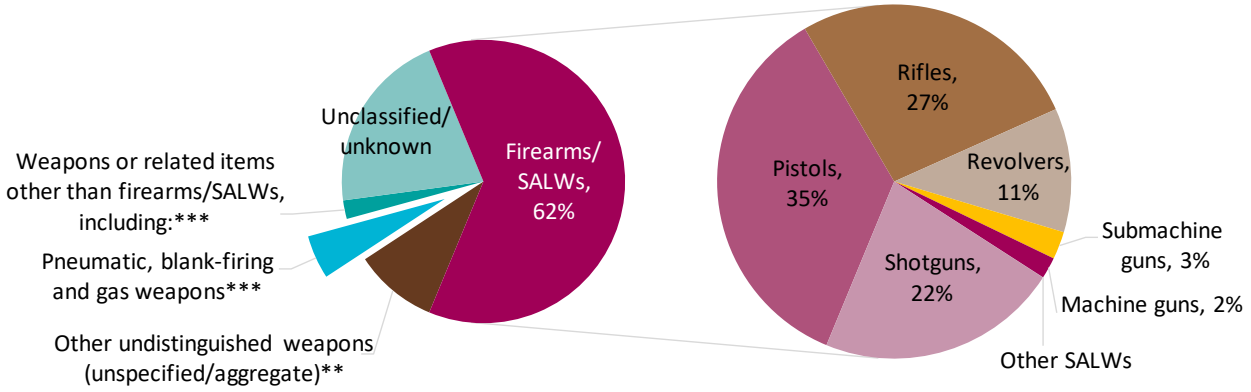
MAP 5 ____ Transnational firearms trafficking flows affecting Northern and Central America (as defined by routes of seized firearms), 2016-17



Europe

Among all regions, the types of weapons seized in Europe were the most diversified. Among weapons which could be clearly classified as firearms and SALWs, pistols accounted on average for 35 per cent of seizures, followed by rifles (27 per cent), shotguns (22 per cent) and revolvers (11 per cent), with submachine guns and machine guns accounting for most of the remainder (4.5 per cent).[1] Moreover, on average Europe registered the highest proportions of miscellaneous types of weapons – this may be related to the prominence of conversion and other forms of improvisation as ways to obtain illicit firearms.

FIG. 18 Average distribution* of reported seized arms in Europe, 2016-17



* Simple average based on data for 26 countries.

** Includes weapons reported under "Other" without sufficient information to allow further classification; some of these weapons may be firearms or SALWs.

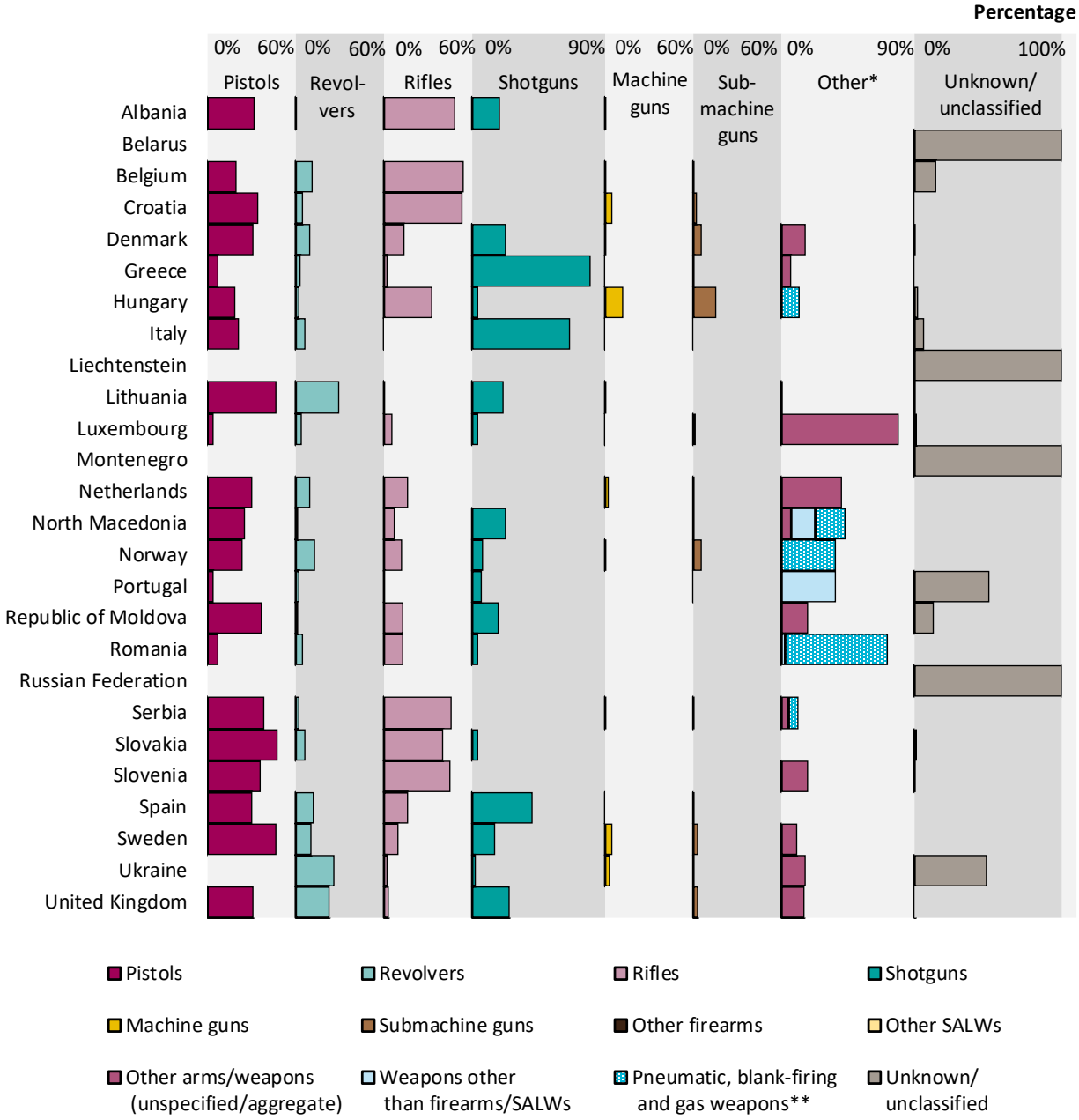
*** For some countries, the reported seizure data included weapons other than firearms/SALWs; however data on such weapons were not explicitly requested by the questionnaire. Hence the share of such weapons is subject to variations in the reporting practice across countries.

Sources: UNODC IAFQ and other official sources.

As for the Americas, in the case of Europe it was also possible to identify some statistically meaningful longer-term decreasing or increasing trends, namely in the cases of Spain, Lithuania and Romania.

Historical data were also available for countries in the Western Balkans; however, in this case, no statistically significant increasing or decreasing trends were identified.

FIG. 19 Distribution of seized arms by type, countries in Europe, 2016-17

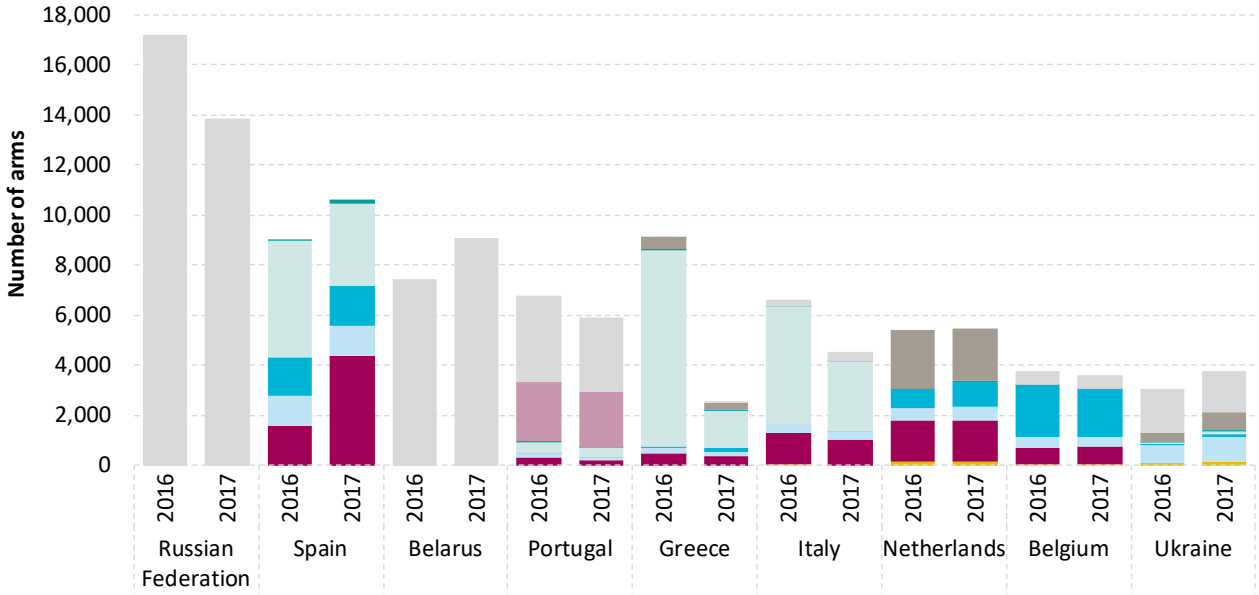


* Includes other firearms, other SALWs and other weapons. Also includes weapons reported under "Other" without sufficient information to allow further classification or disaggregation; some of these weapons may be firearms of the six foregoing standard types.

** Pneumatic, blank-firing and gas weapons fall under the preceding designation "Weapons other than firearms/SALWs", but are distinguished whenever the available data allows.

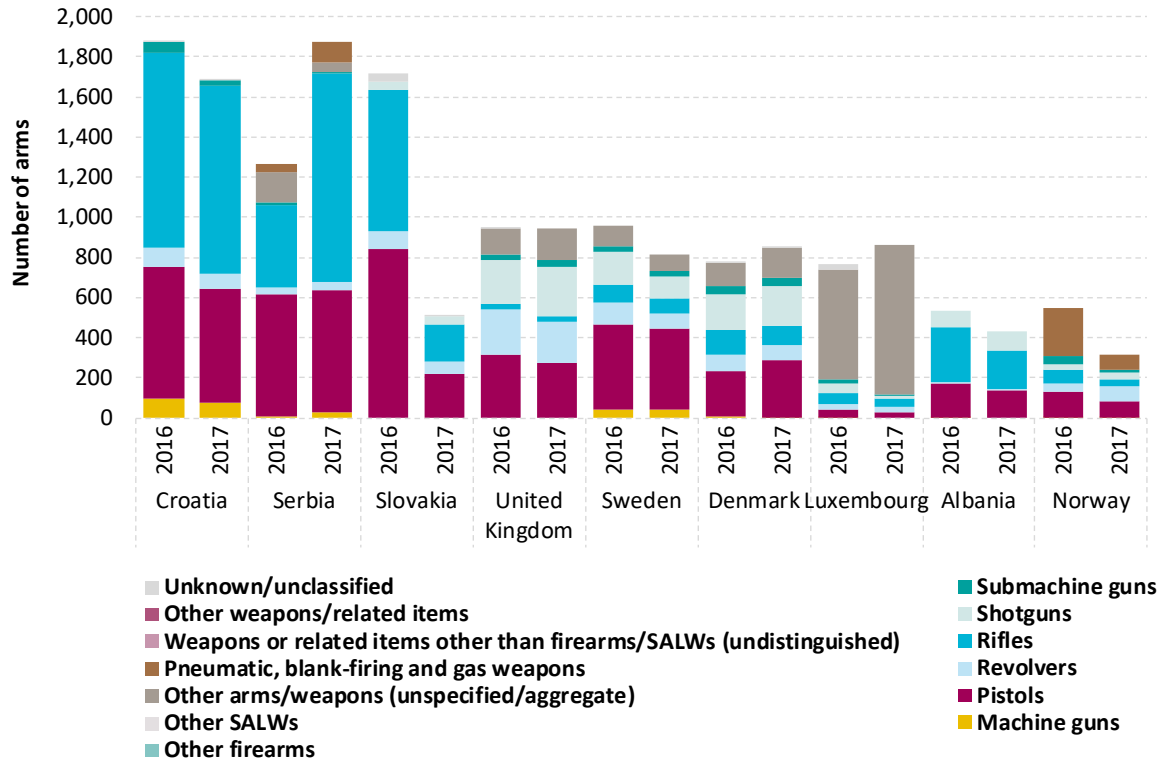
Sources: UNODC IAFQ and other official sources.

FIG. 20 Arms seized by countries in Europe, by type, 2016-17 (9 countries with largest quantities seized)



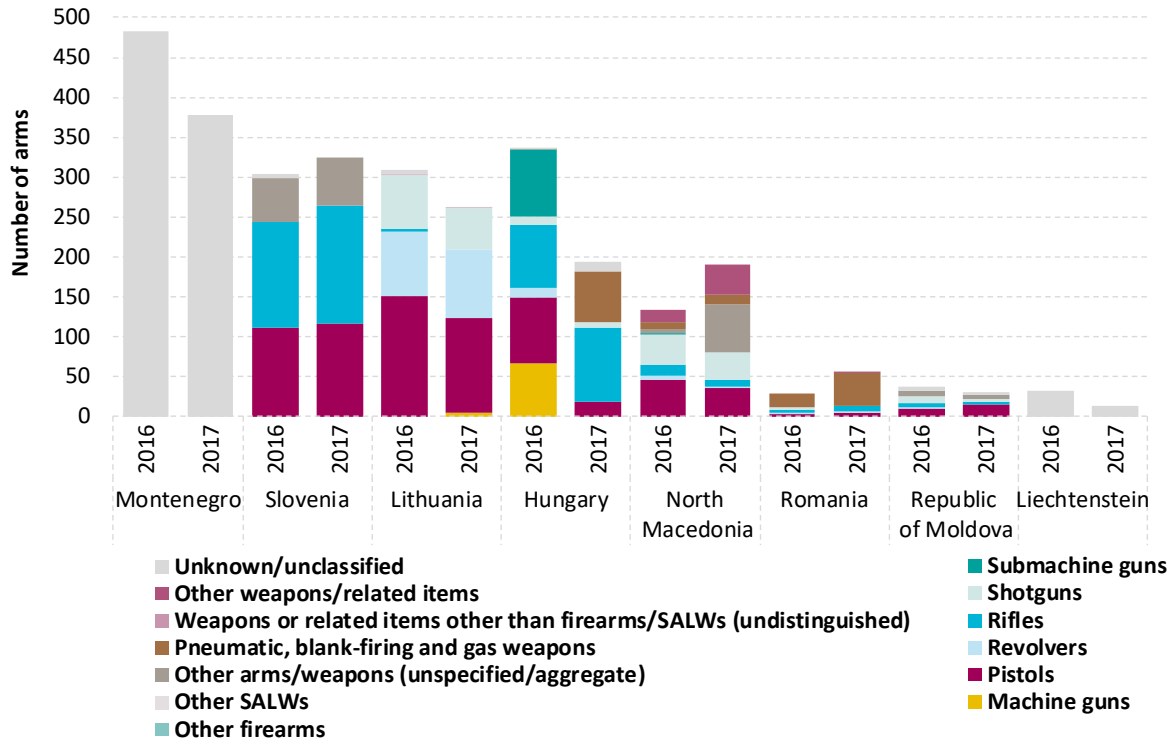
Sources: UNODC IAFQ and other official sources.

FIG. 21 Arms seized by countries in Europe, by type, 2016-17 (9 countries with intermediate quantities seized)



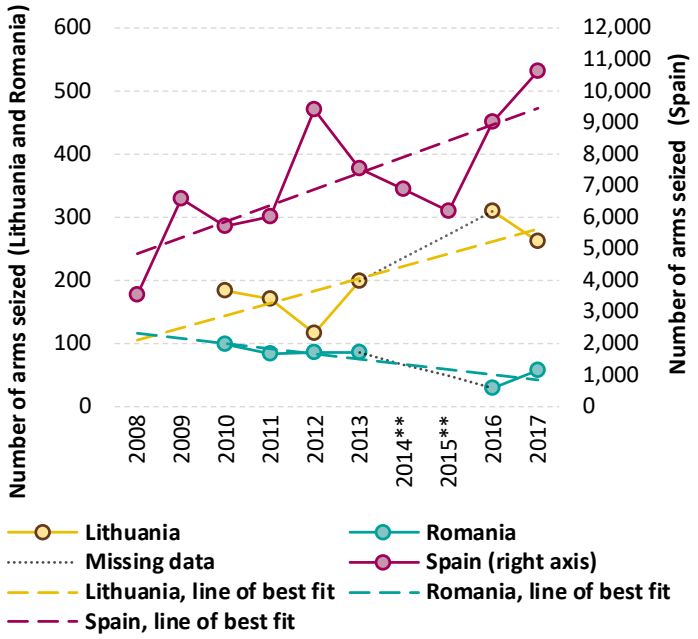
Sources: UNODC IAFQ and other official sources.

FIG. 22 Arms seized by countries in Europe, by type, 2016-17 (8 countries with lowest quantities seized)



Sources: UNODC IAFQ and other official sources.

FIG. 23 Significant* longer-term trends in the number of arms seized by countries in Europe, 2010-2017

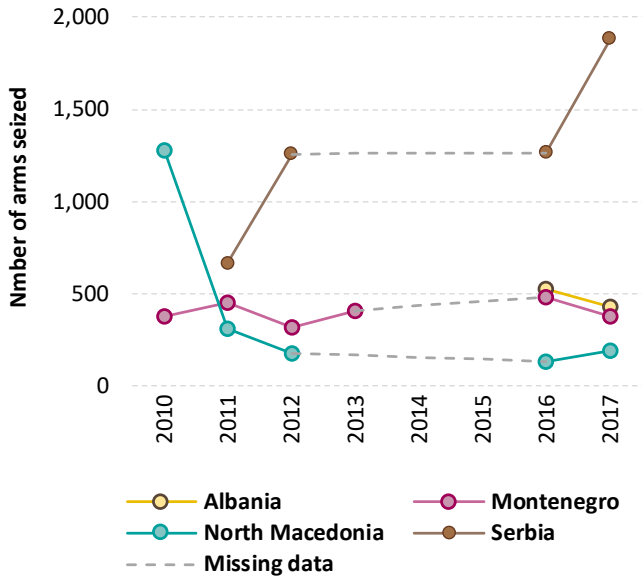


* Due to a revised data collection instrument, data prior to 2016 are not guaranteed to be comparable to data for 2016-17, with the exception of updated historical data. This graph shows only countries for which at least 5 datapoints were available over the period 2011-2017 and the corresponding simple linear regression model yielded p-values which were significant at the 90% level. The Russian Federation was also excluded due to the fact that data prior 2016 covered customs seizures only.

** For 2014 and 2015, no data was available for Lithuania and Romania.

Sources: UNODC IAFQ and other official sources.

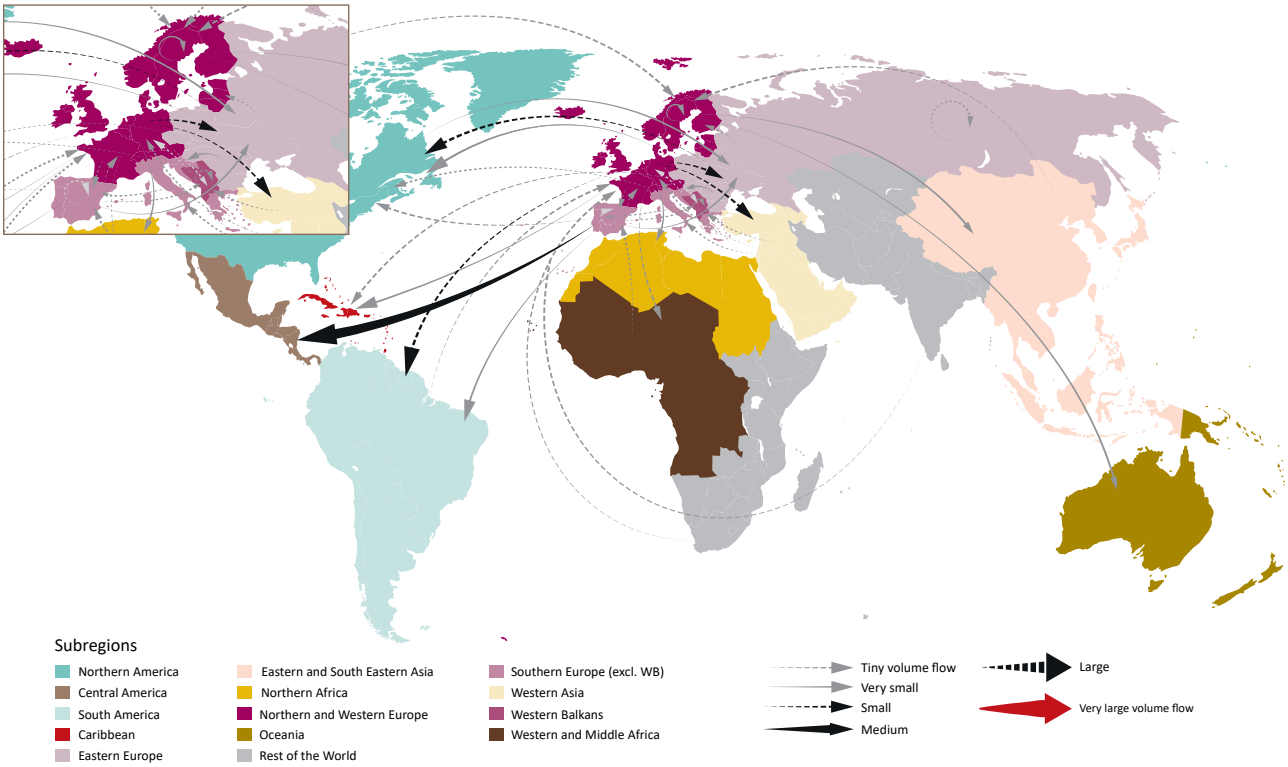
FIG. 24 Seizures of arms in the Western Balkans, 2010-2017



Note: Due to a revised data collection instrument, data prior to 2016 are not guaranteed to be comparable to data for 2016-17. Therefore, the comparison needs to be made with caution.

Sources: UNODC IAFQ and other official sources.

MAP 6 ---- Transnational firearms trafficking flows affecting Europe (as defined by routes of seized firearms), 2016-17



The breakdown into subregional groupings is based on the standard UN classification (M49), adapted to take into account the availability of data and regions of special interest of the study. Please see Methodological Annex for details.

Arrows represent flows between subregions (not specific countries).

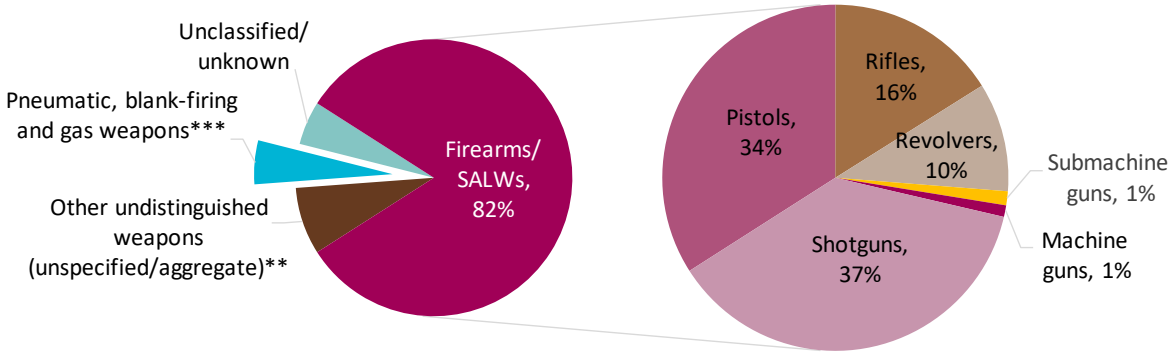
Source: UNODC elaboration of data from Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire and World Customs Organization.

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on these maps do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties. A dispute exists between the Governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland concerning sovereignty over the Falkland Islands (Malvinas).

Asia and Oceania

In Asia and Oceania, coverage was rather limited; hence representative patterns cannot be reliably elucidated. The number of seized weapons was very high in Australia, but this included seizures of an administrative nature. The relative importance of shotguns was similar to that in Africa, with relatively high proportions of this type of weapon being registered in the neighbouring countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, as well as Lebanon.

FIG. 25 Average distribution* of reported seized arms in Asia, 2016-17



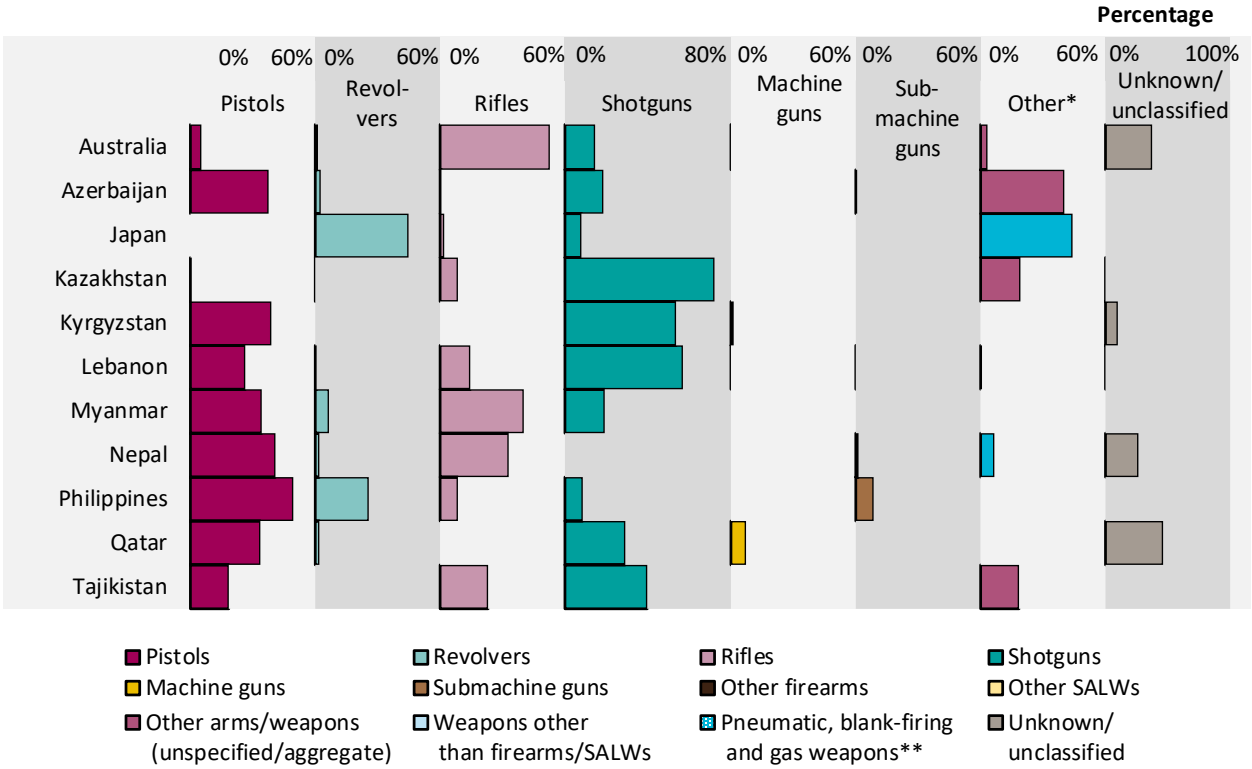
* Simple average based on data for 10 countries.

** Includes weapons reported under "Other" without sufficient information to allow further classification; some of these weapons may be firearms or SALWs.

*** For some countries, the reported seizure data included weapons other than firearms/SALWs; however, data on such weapons were not explicitly requested by the questionnaire. Hence the share of such weapons is subject to variations in the reporting practice across countries.

Sources: UNODC Illicit Arms Flows Database (IAFQ and other official sources.)

FIG. 26 Distribution of seized arms by type, countries in the Asia and Oceania, 2016-17

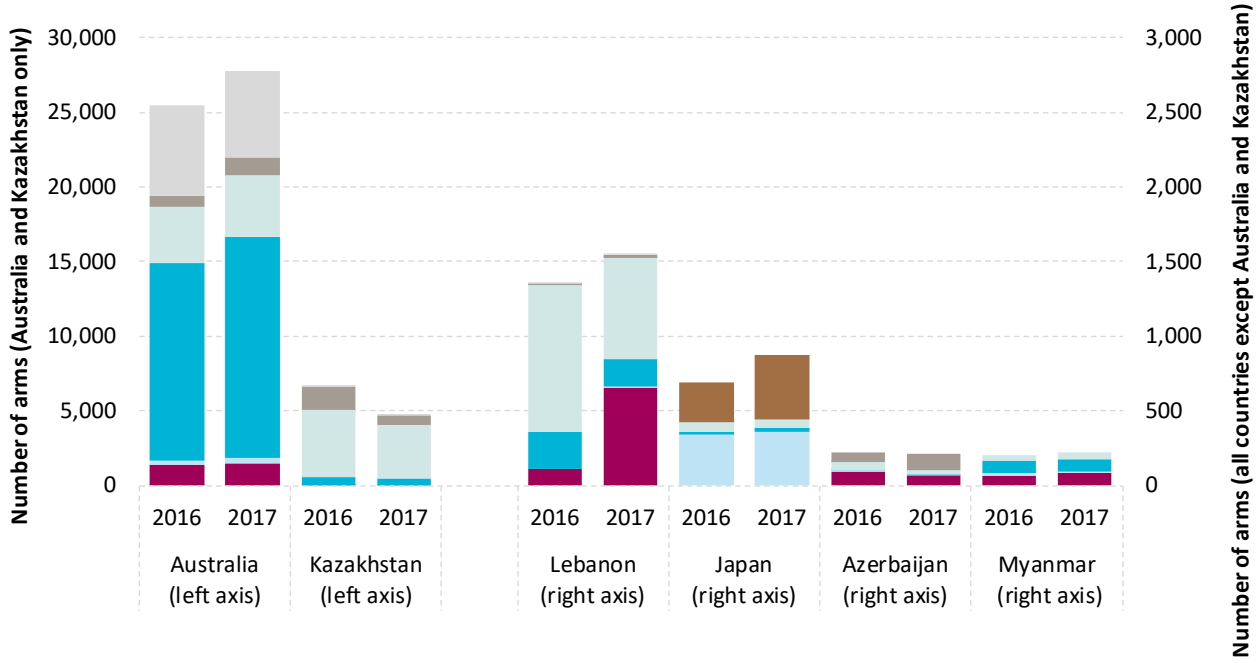


* Includes other firearms, other SALWs and other weapons. Also includes weapons reported under "Other" without sufficient information to allow further classification or disaggregation; some of these weapons may be firearms of the six foregoing standard types.

** Pneumatic, blank-firing and gas weapons fall under the preceding designation "Weapons other than firearms/SALWs", but are distinguished whenever the available data allows.

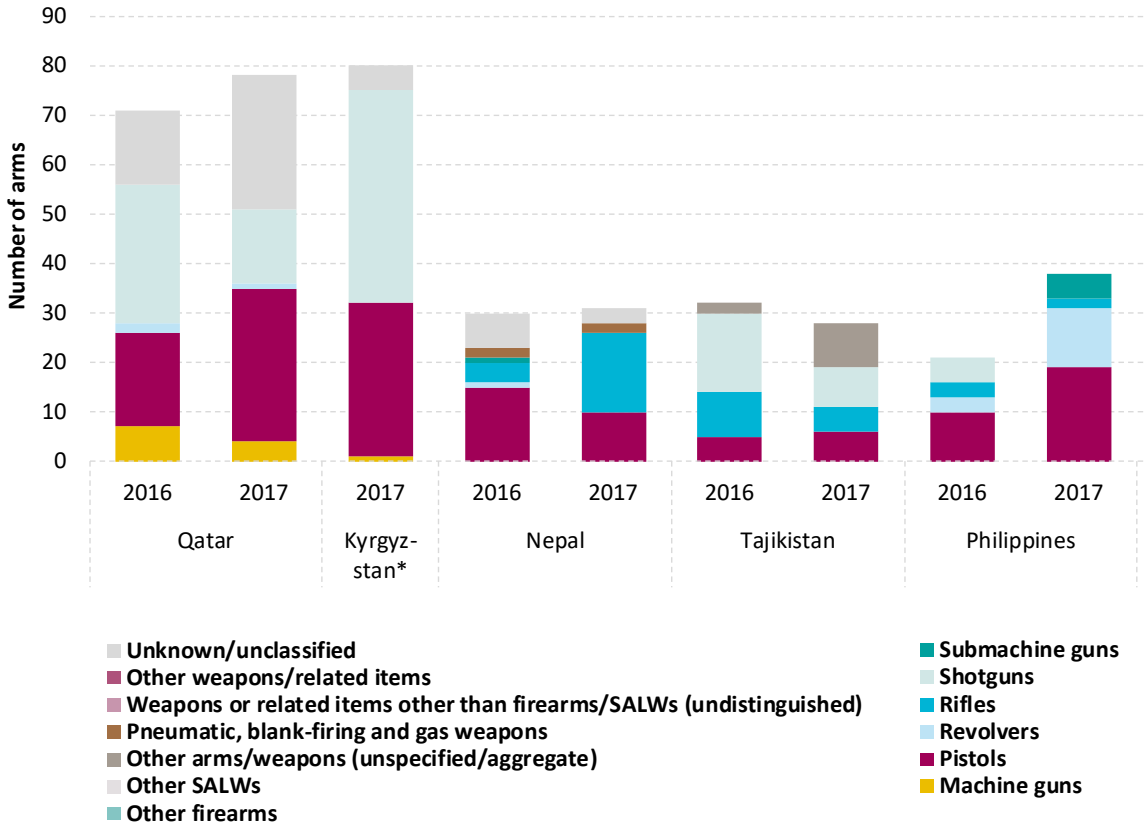
Sources: UNODC Illicit Arms Flows Database (IAFQ and other official sources.)

FIG. 27 Arms seized by countries in Asia and Oceania, by type, 2016-17 (6 countries with largest quantities seized)



Sources: UNODC Illicit Arms Flows Database (IAFQ and other official sources.)

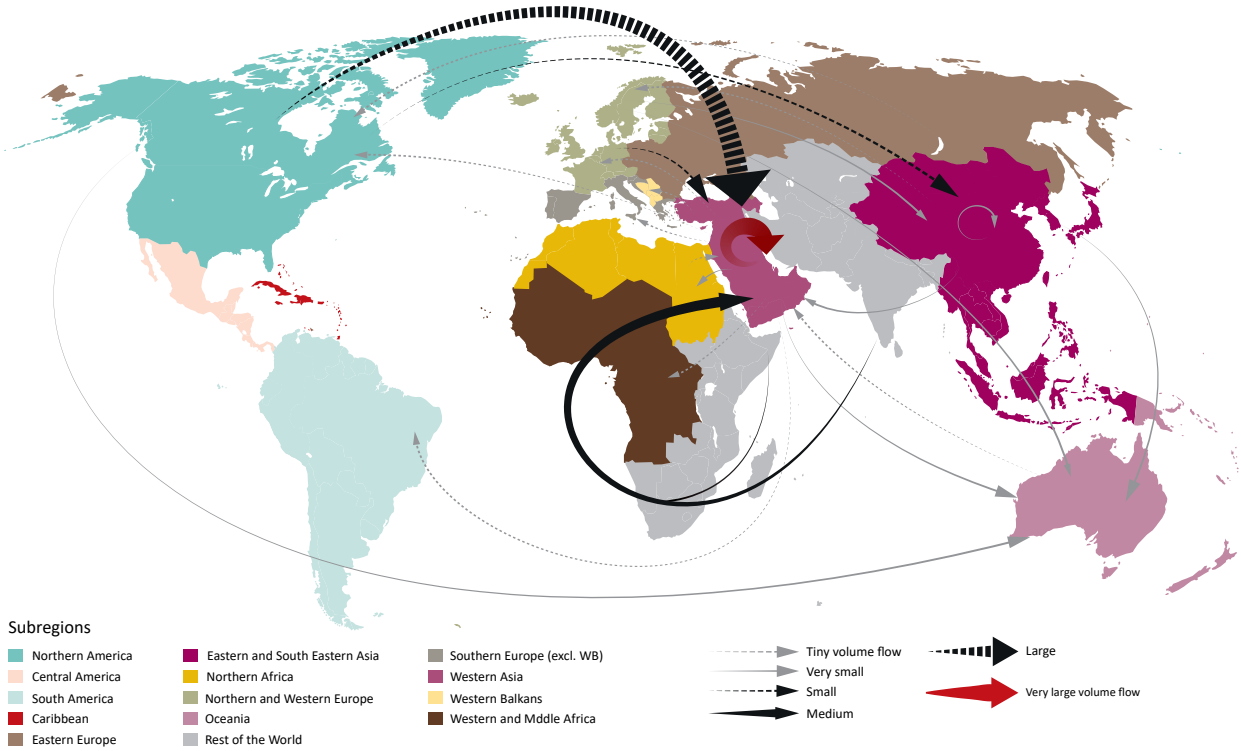
FIG. 28 Arms seized by countries in Asia, by type, 2016-17 (5 countries with lowest quantities seized)



*Data for Kyrgyzstan were available for 2017 only.

Sources: UNODC Illicit Arms Flows Database (IAFQ and other official sources.)

MAP 7 ---- Transnational firearms trafficking flows affecting Asia and Oceania (as defined by routes of seized firearms), 2016-17



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