



**UNODC**

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

**Informal Expert Group Meeting on Data Collection and  
Analysis on Illicit Trafficking in Firearms, Taking into  
Account the UNODC Study on Firearms 2015 and Target  
16.4 of the Sustainable Development Goals**

**15 - 16 September 2016**

**Vienna, Austria**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In 2015, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) published its first Study on Firearms, based on data and information on seized firearms from Member States. The Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) took note with appreciation of the Study and requested UNODC to continue gathering information from States parties on illicit trafficking in firearms on a regular basis (res.7/2).

The Working Group on Firearms, invested by the Conference with the task to consider the outcome of the Study and its possible future, welcomed the Study, and recommended that UNODC continue its data collection effort and provide technical assistance to Member States to strengthen their national capacities in this field. The Working Group further recommended “*to consider requesting the Secretariat to produce a biennial study on the dimension, patterns and flows of trafficking (...), in close cooperation and collaboration with Member States, and to share and disseminate its findings, best practices and lessons learned on a regular basis*” (rec. 18 WG/2015). At its subsequent session, in 2016, the Working Group recommended that UNODC continue to collect and analyse data on firearms and ammunition trafficking, its dimensions and its patterns, “*taking into account the UNODC Study on Firearms 2015 and target 16.4 of the SDGs*” (Recommendation 32 WG2016). It also recommended to “*encourage efforts to improve the methodology of the Study through extra-budgetary voluntary contributions, to improve national capacities in collecting, researching and analysing trafficking in firearms based on data derived from firearms markings, and to ensure the complementarity of methodologies for data collection to enhance Member States’ capacities to exchange information on that form of crime*” (rec. 33 WG/2016).

From 15 to 16 September 2016, UNODC organized the “*Informal Expert Group Meeting on Data Collection and Analysis on Illicit Trafficking in Firearms, Taking into Account the UNODC Study on Firearms 2015 and Target 16.4 of the Sustainable Development Goals*” in Vienna, Austria. The meeting was jointly organized by the Global Firearms Programme (Implementation Support Section/Organized Crime Branch) and the Research and Trend Analysis Branch (Division for Policy Analysis and Public Affairs).

The objective of the meeting was to seek the support from experts from different regions and backgrounds on the implementation of UNODC’s mandate to collect and analyse data and information of firearms trafficking and related themes, and facilitate the development of a solid methodology for ongoing and standardised data collection from Member States, enhance cooperation and coordination with regional and international partners, and facilitate the provision of related technical assistance to requesting countries.

Drawing from the experience of the UNODC Firearms Study and taking into account Target 16.4 of the Agenda for Sustainable Development and the proposed indicator 16.4.2, the

meeting also created a platform to explore synergies and a way to harmonise both data collection efforts.

The meeting was attended by a wide range of governmental representatives as well as national and international experts on firearms data collection, including representatives of Brazil, Côte d'Ivoire, Germany, Ghana, Guatemala, Iraq, Mexico, Niger, Nigeria, Philippines, Republic of Macedonia, Romania, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as representatives of the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), the European Union, EUROPOL, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control on Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC). Represented non-governmental institutions and research institutes included Conflict Armament Research, the Flemish Peace Institute, the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), the Research Centre on Transnational Crime (Transcrime) and Small Arms Survey.

## 2. HIGHLIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The main focus of the expert meeting was set on reviewing the methodology adopted for the 2015 UNODC Study on Firearms. The review and the corresponding discussions and proposals were inspired by lessons learned in the context of the 2015 UNODC Study on Firearms as well as the national experience and practices in data collection on firearms seizures and illicit firearms trafficking shared by Member States. Discussions on the review of the data collection methodology were guided by a table of topics to be potentially included in a revised questionnaire.

The following is a list of main highlights and recommendations expressed by the experts:

### General comments

- Referring to the recommendation of the 2016 Working Group to improve the methodology of the 2015 UNODC Study on Firearms, the group welcomed UNODC's initiative to organize the expert meeting and **reiterated the relevance and importance** of collecting and analysing data on seized and trafficked firearms, their parts and components and ammunition.
- The group acknowledged that establishing an internationally harmonized mechanism for periodic data collection on seized and trafficked firearms is a **long-term process** as national data collection mechanisms, experience and capacities may differ among Member States.
- Agreeing that some Member States may not immediately be in a position to provide all requested data, several experts noted that a global and regular data collection work can contribute to set **common standards in international and national data collection and analysis**, and might provide a good opportunity to guide and support States in building

commitment and generating support for improving or establishing national data collection mechanisms.

- The group recommended that the **objective of the data collection exercise** be further elaborated and mentioned in the questionnaire.
- Experts acknowledged that a **large number of firearms transfers are legal**, that **not every firearm is seized in a criminal context** and that **not all instances of firearms seizure result in a trace**. Considering that the scope of the questionnaire is to describe illicit flows, experts discussed approaches to clearly separate seizures which are associated with criminal activities from other types of seizures. Many argued that reporting the circumstances and the context of the seizures can achieve this aim, few others suggested to focus on firearms recovered by law-enforcement or official authorities and/or firearms that have been traced.
- The group recommended to formulate questions in a concise and fact-focused manner and to **avoid, where possible, the need for interpretation** of the questions. It was suggested that, where necessary, interpretative aids be provided, including through the introduction of asterisks, footnotes and brackets. The group welcomed also the development of appropriate **guiding tools** including e-learning modules to facilitate reporting and enhance the capacity of focal points.
- The experts underlined that **simplicity and user-friendliness** should be taken into account in the revision of the methodology of the data collection questionnaire.
- The group recommended also to keep the (duly adapted) **significant seizure questionnaire** as an important complement to **the questionnaire on annual seizures and trafficked firearms**.
- The experts further stressed the importance of **collecting relevant background information and meta data** on terms, definitions, including national laws and current marking, record keeping, seizure and tracing practices, as well as national data collection and analysis practices, in order to better understand and contextualize the national responses to the questionnaires.

### **On links with existing reporting and data collection mechanisms and the Sustainable Development Goals**

- The group recommended to further **enhance cooperation and coordination with international and regional organizations engaged in facilitating arms tracing** including, inter alia, Interpol and Europol, with a view to ensure complementarity of methodologies.

- The experts emphasized the need for UN Agencies to cooperate and coordinate with a view to **ensure harmonized approaches within UN-led data collection and reporting mechanisms on firearms / small arms and light weapons (SALW) including in the context of the Target 16.4 of the Sustainable Development Goals**, in line with internationally agreed terms and concepts approved by the UN Statistical Commission. It recommended to this end that the revised questionnaire and other existing survey and reporting mechanisms such as the UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (UNPoA), the International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons (International Tracing Instrument), the United Nations Surveys on Crime Trends and the Operations of Criminal Justice Systems and others, be aligned and duly coordinated among each other.
- The group recommended also to **strengthen cooperation and coordination with other organizations engaged in data collection and analysis** linked to firearms / SALW trafficking and related themes, including non-governmental organizations and research institutes, within their respective areas of mandate and expertise.
- The experts acknowledged the opportunity to review UNODC's data collection efforts in the light of the indicator on arms trafficking proposed to measure progress in achieving **Target 16.4 of the Agenda for Sustainable Development**.
- With a view to facilitating harmonization of answers provided to different reporting mechanisms, some experts proposed to **highlight questions** relating to matters addressed in other questionnaires and reporting mechanisms or which answers could be used to track progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

### On the scope and structure

- The group agreed that the questionnaire be kept **simple and user-friendly**. Some experts emphasized that **differences in national mechanisms or capacities** on data collection on seized and trafficked firearms could impact on their ability to identify, collect and analyse data on trafficking, but that such difficulties can be overcome over time and should therefore **not affect the ultimate goal of establishing a solid reference for data collection**.
- The experts recommended that the revised questionnaire collect **disaggregated data on firearms (and small arms), their parts and components and ammunition**, by year.
- Experts also considered that Member States should have the **possibility to provide information on light weapons**, as well as on “**other weapons**” such as gas and air pistols, reconverted and reactivated arms etc.

- As regards terminology and categorization, the group recommended to refer where possible to **internationally agreed terms and categories**.
- The group discussed and agreed also on the usefulness of maintaining **data on craft production**, and to consider including **data on reactivated and converted weapons**.
- With a view to obtain comparable and harmonized results of the data collection effort, the group recommended to develop a **table of equivalences** which could address topics such as terminology (including in different languages), classification and categories of arms and items as defined by different data collection mechanisms at the national and/or regional level and categories of grounds of seizure and to provide examples for each type or category (e.g. consider establishing an equivalence with the terms used by other organizations).
- The usefulness of collecting **data on seizures on both administrative and criminal grounds** was acknowledged, in order to distinguish and quantify how many of those are crime related and may be suspected of having been illicitly trafficked.
- Some experts discussed the relevance of collecting information on firearms that may not necessarily be linked to illicit flows, including firearms that were **recovered, confiscated, forfeited or abandoned**. With a view of facilitating and interpreting the reporting from conflict or post-conflict countries, the group suggested to allow States, where appropriate, to provide also information on firearms recovered in conflicts (“conflict-guns” as opposed to “crime guns”) and voluntarily surrendered weapons (notwithstanding the fact that the latter may not be linked to criminal conducts).
- The group acknowledged the importance of linking data on seizure with data on the criminal context of the seizure, and agreed to use **internationally agreed categories of crimes** as defined by the UNODC international classification of crimes for statistical purposes and endorsed by the United Nations Statistical Commission.
- Underlining the usefulness of gaining a better understanding of national seizure patterns and the context of the seizure of firearms and other items, the group recommended that Member States provide **additional qualitative information on the seizure context**, including on the location of the seizure.
- Following extensive discussions on the collection of data on tracing, tracing of trafficked arms and international cooperation in tracing, experts recommended that Member States provide **background information on national tracing practices as well as quantitative and qualitative data on the outcomes of internationally and domestically traced arms and items**.

- As regards the **indication of entities which cooperated in tracing**, the group recommended to provide Member States the possibility to list all States and other entities, including regional and sub-regional organizations, which cooperated in tracing.
- In order to understand whether trafficked arms influence market prices, the group recommended to include questions on the **costs of firearms** in the questionnaire.
- The group suggested that due consideration be given to categorizing the questions according to their importance, e.g. by tagging them as “**essential/additional information**” or “**core/complementary data**”.

### On the data collection process

- Regarding the **periodicity** of the data collection exercise, the group acknowledged the work load related to regular reporting.
- A number of experts proposed an **annual distribution and collection of the questionnaire**, as this would allow for the identification of patterns and trends, and avoid the need for Member States to produce a set of data which spans over several years and might be too complex. In this context, it was noted that in the 2015 Firearms Study, several States had provided cumulative data for 2010-2013 instead of data disaggregated by each year, which made analysis per year difficult.
- The group highlighted the need for Member States to designate **national focal points** who will be mandated to compile relevant information and submit the filled in questionnaire. In this context, the group recommended to **reinforce reach out and communication**, including provision of individual guidance and assistance, with the designated focal points.
- Acknowledging existing differences and capacities in collecting the requested data, the group suggested that Member States which do not have the mechanism or capacity in place to respond to certain questions have the possibility to **leave those questions unanswered** and are invited to gradually improve or establish their national data collection mechanism.
- With a view to facilitate the reporting by Member States that face challenges in providing quantitative data, experts recommended to include, where appropriate, **complementary text boxes for additional qualitative information** or comments on the requested statistical data.
- The experts highlighted that multiple national authorities may be involved in the seizure and tracing of firearms and other items. Considering that designated focal points might have to request and compile information from different sources, the group recommended that Member States be given **sufficient time to respond to the questions**.

- The group agreed that the revised questionnaire on seized and trafficked firearms be **pilot tested** among a group of voluntary countries.
- The group stressed that a number of Member States may require **technical assistance** and **capacity building** in establishing, reforming and/or operationalizing national data collection mechanisms on seized and trafficked firearms and other items. The group further noted that the ability to provide accurate information on seized and trafficked firearms and other items largely depends on the **quality of national record-keeping systems**. In this context, the group recommended UNODC to provide assistance.

### **Topics to be included in the questionnaire**

- Drawn from the above highlights and recommendations, the revised questionnaire may include the following list of topics:
  - **QUANTITATIVE DATA**
    - **Data on instances of seizure** (*e.g. below or above a certain amount*);
    - **Seizure data**, including number and type of seized firearms/ country of manufacture of firearm/ make of the seized firearm/ location of the seizure, by year;
    - **Seizure context**, to distinguish administrative from criminal seizures, and associated crimes;
    - **Tracing**, including tracing number and tracing outcome;
    - **International cooperation** in firearms tracing, including international cooperation in your country/ international cooperation in foreign country/ countries to which tracing requests were sent/ countries from which tracing requests were received;
    - **Trafficking routes** including country of departure/ country of transit/ country of intended destination;
  - **ADDITIONAL QUALITATIVE INFORMATION ON FIREARMS SEIZURE, TRACING AND TRAFFICKING**
    - **Mode of transportation**, including seizure by mode of transportation;
    - **Traffickers**, including trafficker profile;
    - **Trafficking groups**;
    - **Trafficking routes**, trends and patterns, including trends and patterns/ routes and modus operandi/ costs of illicit firearms;
    - **Additional items**, including list of most frequently seized items together with firearms;
    - **Additional information on national tracing practices** as well as quantitative and qualitative data on the outcomes of internationally and domestically traced arms and items.

○ **BACKGROUND INFORMATION, METADATA ON TERMS, DEFINITIONS, LAWS AND NATIONAL PRACTICES**

- **Types and categories** of arms used;
- **Criminalization** provisions for illicit manufacturing, trafficking, and other associated offences;
- **Definitions** of organized crime groups, illicit trafficking tracing etc.;
- **National practices and competent authorities** involved in marking, record keeping, tracing, seizure and confiscation as well as data collection.

3. **WAY FORWARD**

UNODC will revise the questionnaire of the 2015 UNODC Study on Firearms in line with the conclusions and recommendations extracted from the discussions of the expert meeting. A revised questionnaire will be shared with the experts in due course.

UNODC will organize a side event at the forthcoming eighth session of the Conference of Parties to UNTOC, to share the findings and brief Member States on its future plans with regard to the data collection and analysis work.

In line with the recommendation from the expert group, UNODC will test the revised questionnaire among a group of voluntary States, including States represented during the expert group meeting.

To address existing capacity gaps and the potential lack of conditions to compile and provide data requested in the questionnaire, UNODC plans to develop tools and to provide needs-based technical assistance to requesting Member States. UNODC's efforts are an integral part of its upcoming project on supporting data collection and analysis and promoting information sharing and cooperation on firearms trafficking and related crimes which will be funded by the EU.

## **ANNEX 1: Agenda of the Meeting**

**Informal Expert Group Meeting on data collection and analysis on illicit trafficking in firearms,  
taking into account the UNODC Study on Firearms 2015 and target 16.4 of the Sustainable  
Development Goals**

**Vienna, Austria, 15-16 September 2016  
VIC, C6 (7<sup>th</sup> Floor), C building**

**Thursday, 15 September 2016**

### **Morning**

***8.00 – 9.00: Registration at the gate***

***9.30 – 10.00: Opening session***

- Opening remarks:
- Introduction of the participants

***10.00 – 11.00:***

- **Lessons learned from the UNODC Firearms Study and data collection methodology,**  
Simonetta Grassi, Head Global Firearms Programme

Group Discussion

***11.00 – 11.30***

Coffee Break

***11:30 – 13:00***

- **National experiences and practice in data collection on firearm seizures and illicit firearm  
trafficking**  
Group Discussion

***13.00 – 14.00***

- Lunch Break

**Afternoon**

***14.00 – 15:30***

- **Review of the Methodology for Firearms Data Collection – General Discussion on the  
Content**

***15.30 – 16.00***

- Coffee Break

*16.00 – 17.30*

- Review of the Methodology for Firearms Data Collection – General Discussion on the Content (cont.)

### *Friday, 16 September 2016*

#### *Morning*

*09.30 – 11.00*

- Review of the Methodology for Firearms Data Collection – General Discussion on the Collection Process

*11.00 – 11.30*

- Coffee Break

*11.30 – 13.00*

- Review of the Methodology for Firearms Data Collection – General Discussion on the Content (cont.) - Integrating SDG indicator 16.4.2 in collection efforts

*13.00 – 14.00*

Lunch Break

## Afternoon

*14.00 – 15.30*

- **Harmonization and Synergies between existing data collection mechanisms –Coordination and Cooperation**
  - UNODC data collection
  - UNODA biannual reporting on PoA and ITI
  - International /regional law enforcement organizations (Interpol, Europol)
  - Other regional organizations
  - Data collection conducted by Non-governmental entities:
    - Conflict Armament Research; Flemish Institute; Norwegian Peace and research; Institute PRIO; Small Arms Survey, Transcrime,

*15.30 – 16.00*

- Coffee Break

*16.00 – 17.30*

- **Moving forward: UNODC's upcoming project on monitoring and mapping illicit firearms trafficking and plans for the monitoring of UNSDG target 16.4**  
Leonardo Lara, Global Firearms Programme  
Group Discussion
  
- **Wrap-up next steps and conclusions**

**Close of meeting**

## ANNEX 2: List of Participants

Informal Expert Group Meeting on Data Collection and Analysis on Illicit Trafficking in Firearms				
Vienna, Austria 15-16 September 2016				
No.	NAME	INSTITUTION	FUNCTIONAL TITLE	CONTACT DETAILS
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