Organized crime is crime that is planned and performed by multiple people, often with an established infrastructure or power system that enables them to subvert authority and avoid detection. Common examples include gangs, cartels, mafias, counterfeiters, and trafficking or smuggling rings that circulate anything from weapons and wildlife to organs and, most importantly, people. Today, these types of crimes are increasingly being organized by complex networks that span across multiple countries, making them harder to track and leading to significant negative impacts on all parts of society. Its global presence and strong adaptation capacity affects not only governments’ capacity to function properly but also derails economic growth and stability, impacts peace and reconciliation efforts, and threatens daily lives of communities and the strength of their social tissue.

Due to its complexity and multitude of actors involved, efforts to combat organized crime face many challenges and cooperation between countries encounters many obstacles due to the mutating nature of these crimes.

Combating transnational organized crime requires cooperation at every level. To facilitate effective international and multi-stakeholder global efforts against organized crime, it was necessary for governments to agree on an instrument that would guide their efforts and foster international cooperation to counter transnational organized crime. To this end, they agreed to establish the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC).
The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC), also known as the Palermo Convention, adopted by General Assembly resolution 55/25 of 15 November 2000, is the main international instrument in the fight against transnational organized crime, providing a legal and criminal justice framework for combatting it. UNTOC reached nearly universal adherence with its 191 States parties (August 2023), making it an effective tool for combatting organized crime beyond national borders.

States that ratify UNTOC commit themselves to taking a series of measures against transnational organized crime, including i) the creation of domestic law and jurisdiction against criminal offences (participation in an organized criminal group, money-laundering, corruption, and obstruction of justice); ii) supporting extradition, mutual legal assistance, and law enforcement cooperation; and iii) providing training and technical assistance to develop or improve the capacities required by national authorities.

The Convention represents a major step forward in the fight against transnational organized crime and signifies the recognition by Member States of the seriousness of the problems posed by it, as well as the need to foster and enhance close international cooperation to tackle those problems. The Convention is further supplemented by three Protocols, which target specific areas and manifestations of organized crime: the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children; the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air; and the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunition.

The UNTOC is legally binding, which means that the States that ratify it agree to be bound by its provisions and to take the necessary measures to ensure the implementation of their obligations under the Convention.
Although it is a responsibility for States parties to implement the provisions of the UNTOC, the Convention also mandates the cooperation of governments with non-governmental stakeholders including civil society organizations, academia and the private sector, on areas such as prevention of organized crime (UNTOC Art. 31 (2a)), improving the capacity of governments to combat organized crime (UNTOC Art. 32 (3c)) prevention, assistance, and protection of victims of trafficking in persons, (TIP Protocol Art. 6(3) and 9(3)); and training and technical assistance for protecting the rights of migrants (SoM Protocol Art. 14 (2)). This highlights the importance of the participation of non-governmental stakeholders in the implementation of UNTOC and recognizes them as valuable partners in the global fight against organized crime.

“Civil society is an essential partner for the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in our work to deliver for the people who need us most. The United Nations has dedicated its 75th anniversary year to involving as many people around the world as possible in shaping the future of global cooperation. We need to further strengthen engagement with non-governmental organizations, academia, the private sector, and other stakeholders if we are to address common challenges effectively and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).”

Ghada Waly, UNODC Executive Director
THE UNTOC REVIEW MECHANISM

In order to support States parties to the Convention and the Protocols in the effective implementation of these instruments, as well as helping them to identify and substantiate specific needs for technical assistance and promoting international cooperation, a Mechanism for the Review of the Implementation of UNTOC (henceforth Review Mechanism) was adopted at the 9th session of the UNTOC Conference of the Parties (COP) in 2018 through Resolution 9/1.

While the Review Mechanism is a government led peer review process, Resolution 9/1 recognized the importance of non-governmental stakeholders in countering transnational organized crime and mandates and encourages their involvement in the UNTOC Review Mechanism. Hence, in accordance with the Procedures and Rules of the Review Mechanism, an important role was given to all relevant stakeholders, including non-governmental organizations, to engage in the review process.

Given the context in which they are operating, and the diverse range of expertise, data, and insight that they have, non-governmental stakeholders can and are making distinct contributions to the fight against transnational organized crime, enhancing the success of the UNTOC Review Mechanism. These contributions include improving the performance of the UNTOC review process, building partnerships with governments, building evidence and best practices for wider benefit, and impacting policy recommendations at the national and international levels.

Non-governmental stakeholders have two main entry points for their engagement in the review process: contributions to the self-assessment questionnaire, and Constructive Dialogues. In addition, through Voluntary Pilot Initiatives, non-governmental stakeholders engage with government focal points on country-specific priorities to address transnational organized crime in support of the review.

The Self-Assessment Questionnaire of the UNTOC Review Mechanism is a tool for States parties to self-evaluate their implementation of UNTOC which is then reviewed by two other States. In paragraph 23 of the Procedures and Rules for the UNTOC review, State parties are encouraged to prepare their responses to the self-assessment questionnaire through broad consultations at the national level with all relevant stakeholders, including, where appropriate, the private sector, individuals and groups outside the public sector, non-governmental organizations and academia [...].

Constructive Dialogues are mandated in paragraph 53 of the Procedures and Rules for UNTOC review. They are dialogues between relevant non-governmental stakeholders (Civil Society Organizations, academia and the private sector) and States parties to UNTOC as well as signatories, non-signatories, entities and intergovernmental organizations.

To facilitate the engagement of non-governmental stakeholders in the above-mentioned areas, UNODC is implementing the SE4U project since October 2019.
Project “Stakeholder Engagement for the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, its Review Mechanism and Related Activities” or SE4U, in short, was initiated in October 2019 by the UNODC Civil Society Unit (CSU) with the financial support from the Government of the United States’ Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL).

The main objective of the SE4U Project is to facilitate the engagement of non-governmental stakeholders in the UNTOC, its Review Mechanism and related activities. Implemented by the UNODC CSU, the SE4U project increases non-governmental stakeholders’ (CSOs, academia and the private sector) capacity to engage in the implementation of the Convention, fosters constructive contributions to its Review Mechanism, facilitates collaboration between State parties and non-governmental stakeholders, and enables stakeholders to promote the application of UNTOC at global, regional, national, and local levels.

The SE4U Project is implemented around four pillars of activities.
Pillar 1: Capacity Building

To ensure meaningful engagement of non-governmental stakeholders with governments, building their capacity on UNTOC and its Review Mechanism is a fundamental basis for creating trust.

Through in-person regional workshops and online courses, non-governmental stakeholders are equipped with knowledge about the UNTOC and its supplementing Protocols as well as its Review Mechanism, and acquire practical information about entry points and tools for engagement. At the same time, stakeholders are provided space to share experiences, network, and collaborate in initiatives aimed at addressing organized crime at global, regional, and national levels.

The SE4U online self-paced courses serve as fundamental tools to introduce non-governmental stakeholders to the UNTOC and its Review Mechanism and avenues of civil society engagement, in their own time during a given period. The courses are open to anyone with or without knowledge on organized crime.

The virtual workshops and in-person regional trainings are advanced opportunities for stakeholders with knowledge and experience in aspects of UNTOC. These trainings guide participants through the practical application of the UNTOC review process; help them to prepare to participate and contribute to the general review during the Conference of the Parties to UNTOC; support them in their involvement in the country review at national level, including supporting States parties in the completion of the Self-Assessment Questionnaire and engaging in Voluntary Pilot Initiatives; and prepare them for Constructive Dialogues with government representatives following the conclusion of UNTOC Working Group meetings.

Increasing the technical capacity of non-governmental stakeholders is done in close collaboration with UNODC Organized Crime Branch and UNODC field offices, and in partnership with umbrella organizations.
Pillar 2: Knowledge and Coordination Hubs

WhatsOn
UNODC’s Multistakeholder Database and Knowledge Hub – WhatsOn – was launched in 2021 as part of the SE4U project to ensure that non-governmental stakeholders working to fight against transnational organized crime and corruption have a safe and secure platform to exchange information, access and share knowledge, and network with each other.

Members of WhatsOn can create blog entries and share their events in the event calendar to promote their work with other members and the wider public. Furthermore, the ‘impact story’ section of WhatsOn allows members to showcase their impactful work in the fight against organized crime and corruption. The UNODC CSU constantly engages with WhatsOn members to learn about their diverse activities on the ground. The WhatsOn knowledge hub contains a wide range of UNODC resources on counter-organized crime and anti-corruption, which allow members to remain updated and informed about new and existing tools in the fight against these crimes. WhatsOn is also a useful tool for Member States interested to know about non-governmental stakeholders working to combat organized crime and corruption in their countries and/or elsewhere.

Civil Society Regional Networks
To facilitate cooperation between non-governmental stakeholders regionally and to support their contribution to the review process, Civil Society Regional Networks for UNTOC Implementation are established through the SE4U project. Four Regional Networks are planned to be launched by the project which, after the initial support of the SE4U project, work independently to coordinate the efforts of their members and their engagements in support of the implementation of UNTOC.

The aim of the Civil Society Regional Networks is to facilitate the coordination of non-governmental stakeholders and their contributions into the UNTOC and its Review Mechanism, while serving as a discussion and networking platform to encourage their engagement with governments in the fight against transnational organized crime. Their main objective is to serve as a platform for discussion and promotion of the work of their members, benefiting from collective knowledge sharing, and to coordinate and encourage their participation in different UNTOC review opportunities. The Regional Networks are independent spaces for the members, and they coordinate themselves with the support of UNODC as feasible through the SE4U project.
Pillar 3: International Collaboration Opportunities (The Constructive Dialogues)

In line with paragraph 53 of Resolution 9/1, annual meetings called "Constructive Dialogues" bring together representatives of States parties to the Convention and non-governmental stakeholders to foster information exchange on UNTOC review.

Convened after the conclusion of the meetings of the Working Groups of the Conference of the Parties to UNTOC (COP-UNTOC), and presided by the chairs of each Working Group, Constructive Dialogues promote fruitful engagement between non-governmental stakeholders and States parties on the UNTOC review process. The UNODC CSU through the SE4U Project, the UNTOC Review Mechanism Team and the secretariats of the Working Groups work together to facilitate the participation of non-governmental stakeholders in five Constructive Dialogues that take place during the year on:

- Firearms
- Technical Assistance
- Trafficking in Persons
- International Cooperation
- Smuggling of Migrants

The Constructive Dialogues constitute the main engagement avenue through which relevant non-governmental stakeholders can present and discuss their points of view with States parties. The objectives of these sessions are to: i) brief participants on the development and outcomes of the review process; ii) collect inputs and suggestions from participants, including their contributions on ways to improve the implementation of the Convention and its Protocols, and iii) enhance cooperation with non-governmental stakeholders to combat transnational organized crime.

The outcome of the Constructive Dialogues is a written summary prepared by the Chair of the Working Group with the support of the Secretariat and made available to the working group at its next session. The summary captures the main outcomes of discussions, including inputs and suggestions/recommendations from participants on ways to improve the implementation of the Convention and its Protocols.

Participants of the Constructive Dialogues are relevant stakeholders, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with and without consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), representatives of the private sector and academia, States parties and signatories, non-signatories, entities and intergovernmental organizations.

More information on Constructive Dialogues can be found at the UNODC dedicated webpage: https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/organized-crime/intro/review-mechanism-untoc/home.html.
Pillar 4: National Collaboration Opportunities
(The Voluntary Pilot Initiatives)

One of the key outcomes of the SE4U project is to support voluntary country-specific “Pilot initiatives” by interested Member States, aimed at strengthening cooperation between the government focal points and experts for the review, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), academia and the private sector at the national level. Since the Constructive Dialogues envisaged in Resolution 9/1 only take place following the conclusion of the Working Group sessions, the Voluntary Pilot Initiatives (VPIs) are a unique opportunity to provide space for dialogue between the concerned government and relevant stakeholders in preparation for the Working Group meetings. This enables representatives of governments, civil society, academia and the private sector to exchange views on how to work together on country-specific transnational organized crime priorities to ensure an effective review process. VPIs also allow non-governmental stakeholders to form an Alliance through which they can contribute to the responses of the Self-assessment Questionnaire. The VPIs are tailored to the needs and requirements of the requesting State party to ensure an effective and beneficial cooperation.

Upon agreement with an interested State party, the UNODC consults with relevant stakeholders and assists in designing a roadmap to conduct a VPI tailored to the priorities of that country.

As an outcome, the Pilot Initiatives:
- Provide space for cooperation between CSOs, governments, academia, and the private sector with a view to address transnational organized crime and to support the UNTOC review process, including responding to the Self-Assessment Questionnaire.
- Produce lessons learned, best practices and recommendations which form the basis for collaboration.
- Foster constructive cooperation between the government review team, CSOs, academia and the private sector at the national level.

Due to their voluntary nature, VPIs are led by interested governments. The role of UNODC is to support the process through the following activities:
- Conducting a mapping exercise to identify relevant non-governmental stakeholders to engage in the process.
- Facilitate “scoping meetings” to assess the gaps, challenges and needs prevalent in that country in the context of UNTOC implementation.
- Based on the outcomes from the “scoping meetings”, facilitate a joint “Pilot Initiative” between the government review team and non-governmental stakeholders to agree on the priorities for collaboration.
- Produce a report of the Pilot Initiative in consultation with the concerned government’s UNTOC review team.
- Organize briefing sessions for States parties, civil society, academia and the private sector in the margins of relevant sessions of COP-UNTOC to present the experience from the VPIs.
- Facilitating the creation of national Civil Society Alliances to foster local engagement and action between government review teams and non-governmental stakeholders on the implementation of the UNTOC. This helps to ensure operational sustainability of the outcomes of the VPIs.

Given the positive outcomes of the first Voluntary Pilot Initiatives, the SE4U project will continue to offer its support to interested States parties, while also continuing to help build momentum for a global, multi-stakeholder approach to the systematic eradication of transnational organized crime.
UNODC
The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime implements the United Nations drug and crime programmes in an integrated manner, addressing the interrelated issues of drug control, crime prevention and international terrorism in the context of sustainable development and human security.

UNTDOC
The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime adopted in 2000 by the General Assembly is the main international instrument in the fight against transnational organized crime. It is further complemented by three Protocols targeting specific areas and manifestations of organized crime on Trafficking in Persons, Smuggling of Migrants, and Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms.

Conference of the Parties to the UNTDOC
Set up by Article 32 of the UNTDOC, COP–UNTDOC is a biannual meeting convening all signatories of the UNTDOC to improve the capacity of States parties to combat transnational organized crime and to promote and review the implementation of the Convention.

UNTDOC’s Review Mechanism
The UNTDOC Review Mechanism is a peer review process that supports States parties to the UNTDOC in its effective implementation. It also supports them to identify and substantiate specific needs for technical assistance and to promote international cooperation.

Resolution 9/1
This resolution adopted in 2019 during the 9th session of the UNTDOC Conference of Parties formally established the UNTDOC Review Mechanism and provides avenues for the participation of non-governmental stakeholders. The SE4U Project was established and operates under this legal framework.

Working Groups
Established by the Conference of the Parties to the UNTDOC, five Working Groups, composed only of States parties representatives, meet every year to discuss specific areas of the Convention’s work. They cover international cooperation, technical assistance, trafficking in persons, smuggling of migrants, and firearms.

The Civil Society Unit
Based at the UNODC’s headquarters in Vienna, this unit is the main entry point for non-governmental stakeholders and serves as a bridge between these stakeholders and UNODC substantive offices, field offices and the Member States. The SE4U project is implemented by the Civil Society Unit.

Civil Society
For the purpose of this booklet, civil society refers to non-governmental stakeholders as described in paragraph 53 of resolution 9/1, namely Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), academia and the private sector.
In order to build capacity of stakeholders for the implementation of UNTOC and the Review Mechanism, the SE4U project also develops knowledge tools and audio-visual materials including a Toolkit used for workshops and online courses, and a Civil Society Guide (developed together with the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime) which provides useful tools and tips on civil society engagement in the UNTOC review process.

**Resources produced through the SE4U project, and available at its website in Arabic, English, French and Spanish include:**

- **Toolkit on stakeholder engagement: implementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.** It addresses the question of what the Convention and the Review Mechanism are.

- **Guide for civil society community engagements with the UNTOC Review Mechanism.** It addresses the how to engage with these instruments with concrete steps to take such as the sample letter to a State Party’s focal point.

- **Audio-visual materials on the SE4U Project.** The materials serve as additional learning resources for interested stakeholders and available in multiple languages.

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For more information on the

SE4U Project

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