



Supporting Evidence-based Action to
Counter Illicit Firearms Trafficking and related Forms of Crime

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Supporting Evidence-based Action to Counter Illicit Firearms Trafficking and related Forms of Crime



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Introduction

1. Countries and regions are exposed to multiple and oftentimes interconnected threats to peace, security, development and the rule of law, such as conflict, armed violence, drug and human trafficking, illegal mining, as well as terrorism and piracy. Illicitly trafficked, diverted and illicitly manufactured firearms and associated items often catalyze the exacerbation and magnification of these threats, constitute instrumentalities for committing related crimes and act as a lucrative trafficking commodity themselves.

2. The identification and monitoring of the extent, dynamics and actors involved in and affected by illicit firearms trafficking and its links to other forms of crime constitute crucial conditions for coordinated and effective crime prevention and criminal justice action against this phenomenon. Meeting these conditions relies on the systematic collection and analysis of data and information that can be transformed into an evidence base. This evidence base can in turn (1) inform decision making at strategic and operational levels; (2) enrich the intelligence base for tactical operations against firearms-related crime; and (3) help answer several related questions, such as: Were the recovered firearms illicitly trafficked into the country of recovery? Were they legally or illegally manufactured? In case of legal manufacture, did the diversion of these arms occur during a legal transfer or were they stolen afterwards, from national stocks or civilian households? Who are the individuals or groups involved in this illegal business? What are trending *modi operandi* to illicitly traffic firearms and associated items? What links exist between firearms criminality and other forms of crime such as organized crime or terrorism? What is the gender dimension of illicit firearms trafficking? Are there gaps in national legislation and operating procedures that facilitate or enable this illegal trafficking? Answering these questions may help national authorities to disclose this phenomenon and devise the most appropriate response to it.

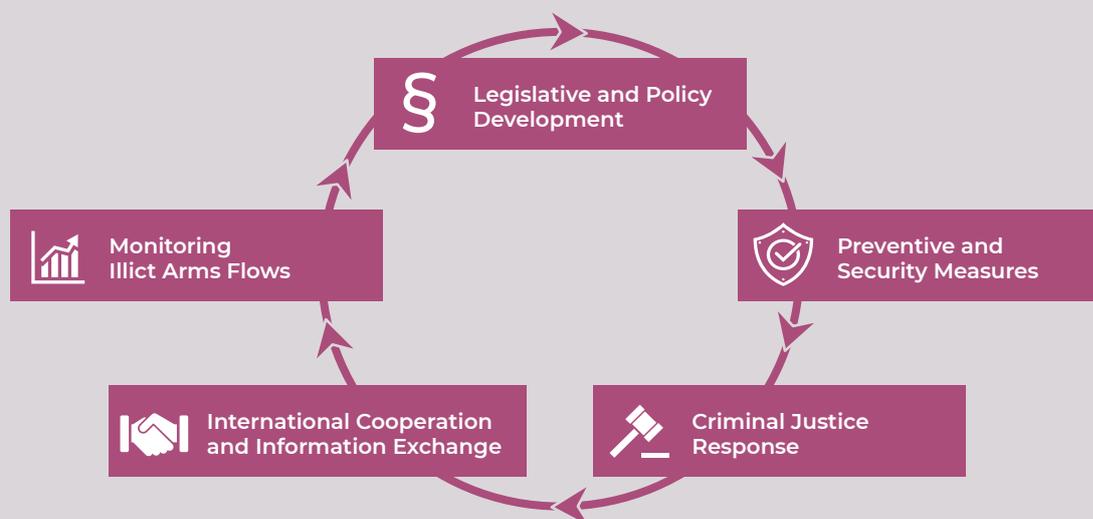
3. Depending on the type of stakeholder seeking to develop responses against illicit firearms trafficking and related forms of crime, a range of information sources are accessible, including official records on seized or otherwise recovered firearms by law enforcement authorities; case files containing information on the different steps of a criminal proceeding maintained by the criminal justice system; verdicts issued by courts; data aggregated by governments; analytical products published by international organizations, research or academic institutes; and interviews with various stakeholders.

4. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and its partner institutions have utilized all of these data and information sources in the context of the *Monitoring Illicit Arms Flows initiative*. This initiative is embedded in the UNODC Global Firearms Programme and aims to enhance the international community's understanding about illicit firearms flows and their links to various forms of crime. The text box below provides a summary of the initiative.

TEXT BOX 1: The Monitoring Illicit Arms Flows initiative

The Monitoring Illicit Arms Flows initiative was launched by UNODC to enhance understanding about illicit firearms flows and their links to various forms of crime. The initiative is an integral part of the UNODC Global Firearms Programme, along with legislative and policy development, preventive and security measures, strong criminal justice response and international cooperation. These five pillars constitute the foundation of the Programme's support to Member States to efficiently implement the Protocol against the *Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunition (Firearms Protocol)*, supplementing the *United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (Organized Crime Convention)*. Figure 1 illustrates this integrated approach.

FIGURE 1: UNODC integrated approach to preventing and combatting illicit firearms trafficking and related forms of crime



The publication of the *UNODC Study on Firearms 2015* was an initial milestone in UNODC's work on firearms data collection and analysis.¹ The study revealed persisting challenges in many countries to adopt evidence-based approaches against illicit firearms trafficking and related forms of crime and paved the way for Member States to acknowledge the need to conduct global data collection and analysis exercises on seized and trafficked firearms and associated items on a regular basis. Thanks to a renewed mandate by the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime², as well as to the financial support of the European Union, UNODC has been able to build upon this study and maintain, over the past three years, its efforts in building an evidence base on seized and trafficked firearms, their parts and components and ammunition with a view to supporting Member States in more efficiently preventing and countering illicit firearms flows and related crimes.

The Monitoring Illicit Arms Flows initiative includes three main areas of work:

- Development of Tools**
 - developing and implementing the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire, a standardized methodology on the collection of data on seized and trafficked firearms, their parts and components and ammunition;
- Technical Assistance**
 - raising awareness and strengthening the capacity of Member States in collecting and analyzing firearms-related data through regional meetings on firearms data collection and analysis; technical assistance activities; and the development of specialized tools to facilitate the collection and operational use of such data through, for example, guiding templates for firearms-related investigations; and
- Research and Analysis**
 - producing and supporting the drafting of analytical outputs at global, regional and national levels with the aim of bringing the data collected and analyzed by UNODC back to its Member States.

1 See <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/firearms-protocol/publications.html>.

2 See CTOC/COP/2016/15, Resolution 8/3, operative paragraph 28 and CTOC/COP/2018/13, Resolution 8/2, operative paragraph 32.

5. The core type of information that UNODC suggests as a comprehensive information base on illicit firearms trafficking and related forms of crime is reflected in the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire, a global data collection tool developed in the context of the above initiative, which was launched in June 2018 with the aims of collecting data on seized and trafficked firearms and facilitating the monitoring of indicator 16.4.2³ of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

6. This issue paper illustrates how data collection and analysis on firearms, their parts and components and ammunition at national and global scales can create an evidence base for decision making at policy and operational levels and promotes evidence-based action against illicit firearms trafficking and related forms of crime. The following chapters will explain the benefits of evidence-based action to counter illicit firearms trafficking and related forms of crime (Chapter 1), provide an overview and highlight the importance of the various data points set out in the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire (Chapter 2), suggest complementary data that stakeholders can leverage to build a comprehensive evidence base on firearms issues (Chapter 3), and describe practical steps to institutionalize evidence-based action to counter illicit firearms trafficking and related forms of crime (Chapter 4).

CHAPTER I: Benefits of evidence-based action to counter illicit firearms trafficking and related forms of crime

7. Evidence-based action to counter illicit firearms trafficking and related forms of crime has several policy-related and operational benefits, which can be further analyzed from a national and an international perspective. Figure 2 provides an overview of some of the key benefits identified in this paper.

FIGURE 2: Benefits of evidence-based action to counter illicit firearms trafficking and related forms of crime

POLICY-RELATED	OPERATIONAL
Accelerating the achievement and supporting the monitoring of target 16.4 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals	Fostering intelligence-based law enforcement operations and investigations
Informing roadmaps and action plans, legislative development, and policies on international cooperation and information exchange	Helping assess where additional efforts for investigation of illicit origin of a firearm is fundamental
Improving the information base for the allocation and targeted mobilization of resources	Supporting effective implementation of obligations stemming from international and regional instruments

3 This indicator looks at the “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” (see A/RES/71/313 entitled “Work of the Statistical Commission pertaining to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”), see also Chapter III of this paper on illicit arms flows for further information.

8. Prior to describing these benefits further, the text box below defines evidence-based action to counter *illicit firearms trafficking and related forms of crime*.

TEXT BOX 2: What is evidence-based action to counter illicit firearms trafficking and related forms of crime?

The concept of evidence-based action to counter illicit firearms trafficking refers to a culture of decision making at policy and operational levels, that is informed and guided by the results of an ongoing analytical process of systematic collection and analysis of firearms-related data and information.

The result of the analytical process—the evidence base—can (1) help various stakeholders to better assess the dynamics and impacts of illicit firearms trafficking and its links to other forms of crime, (2) enable the development of effective strategies to prevent and combat the phenomenon and (3) support intelligence-based investigations and law enforcement operations.

Evidence-based action generally builds from quantitative and qualitative data and information on illicit firearms. An important component of such an evidence base is the statistical information on seized and otherwise recovered firearms, their use in crime and their illicit origin.

A. Policy-related benefits of evidence-based action to counter illicit firearms trafficking and related forms of crime

9. By regularly collecting, analyzing, and comparing data, a country can see the evolution of potential issues regarding illicit firearms, their parts and components, and ammunition over time, and develop an understanding of the effectiveness of its responses. When there are empirical indicators that illicit trafficking in firearms or related crimes are increasing or stagnate, this circumstance can serve as a call to action within a country. Having the evidence-based analysis may help law enforcement officials or other stakeholders develop political will to address broader challenges related to these crimes.

10. **Accelerating the achievement and supporting the monitoring of target 16.4 of the Sustainable Development Goals:** With the adoption of target 16.4 of the Sustainable Development Goals, Member States acknowledged the negative impact of organized crime on peace, justice and, ultimately, development, and committed, among other things, to significantly reduce illicit arms flows by 2030.⁴ Systematically collecting and sharing, at national and international levels, data related to these illicit flows and crimes to which they relate helps national authorities as well as regional and international organizations to develop better approaches to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and to collect the data required for reporting on indicator 16.4.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Indicator 16.4.2 measures the achievement of the arms component of target 16.4 of the Sustainable Development Goals by looking at the “*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*”.⁵ As co-custodian for this indicator, UNODC is responsible for collecting the corresponding data from Member States and has embedded this data collection exercise within the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire. Moreover, the *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020*, which is largely based on this data, exemplifies how concerted efforts by Member States to share relevant data with the international community can help to increase the understanding about transnational aspects of illicit firearms trafficking and support the development

4 See A/RES/70/1 entitled “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”.

5 See A/RES/71/313 entitled “Work of the Statistical Commission pertaining to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”.

of appropriate responses. UNODC is committed to continuing the data collection exercise, strengthening the capacity of Member States to collect the required data and bringing the data back to its Member States through dedicated analytical reports and relevant meetings.

11. Informing roadmaps or action plans: The systematic collection and analysis of data on seized and trafficked firearms, their parts and components and ammunition; the criminal context of firearms seizures; and the individuals involved; as well as other socioeconomic, demographic and crime data assist countries in identifying and illustrating firearms-related challenges within their jurisdiction. Based on these efforts, policymakers can develop comprehensive roadmaps or action plans to effectively counter illicit firearms trafficking and related forms of crime and monitor their progress and impact.

The utility of strategic data collection exercises for the development of such frameworks is visible, for example, in the way in which a gender perspective was integrated in the *Roadmap for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) and their ammunition in the Western Balkans by 2024*.⁶ In 2016, the South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC) published a study entitled *Gender and SALW in South East Europe*⁷, which provided an evidence base on the gendered impact of small arms and light weapons in South East Europe that helped to mainstream gender issues into the regional roadmap.

12. Informing legislative development: Consolidated information about specific firearms challenges can allow policymakers to identify loopholes that require legislative and regulatory action.

The European Union (EU) has managed to close such loopholes related to convertible weapons. Police intelligence evidence showed an increase in the use of converted weapons — gas pistols, deactivated firearms, or imitation firearms converted to fire live ammunition — within the region; as a result in 2008 the EU harmonized its ‘firearm’ definition with the one provided by the Firearms Protocol by stipulating that “‘firearm’ means any portable barrelled weapon that expels, is designed to expel or may be converted to expel a shot, bullet or projectile by the action of a combustible propellant, unless it is excluded from that definition for one of the reasons listed in Part III of Annex I.”⁸ Conversion was also a key topic of the 2017 amendment to the Firearms Directive of the European Union, which acknowledged that “the risk of acoustic weapons and other types of blank-firing weapons being converted into real firearms is high” and underscored the importance of including those weapons in the scope of application of the Directive.⁹ In a similar vein, in 2019 the EU adopted technical specifications for alarm and signal weapons, which intend to increase the understanding of which of these weapons are capable of being converted to expel a shot, bullet or projectile by the action of a combustible propellant and are therefore considered a firearm. These normative developments help EU Member States to better implement regulatory frameworks and criminal justice responses to crimes related to convertible or converted weapons.¹⁰

13. Enhancing policies on international cooperation and information exchange: Targeted firearms-related data can help policymakers better understand the relation between their own country and other countries with regards to firearms-related criminality; such data includes information on transnational firearms trafficking routes, the illicit origin of seized items, countries of manufacture of seized firearms, parts and components, and ammunition, as well as

6 See Roadmap for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) and their ammunition in the Western Balkans by 2024.

7 See Gender and SALW in South East Europe at http://www.seesac.org/f/docs/Armed-Violence/Gender_and_SALW_publication_eng-web.pdf.

8 See Directive 2008/51/EC of the European Union.

9 See Directive 2017/853/EC of the European Union.

10 See “From Legal to Lethal: Converted Firearms in Europe” at <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/U-Reports/SAS-Report-Europe-Conversion.pdf> for further information on the response to converted firearms in the EU.

on links to other crimes of a transnational nature. Effective policies on international cooperation and information exchange require systematic knowledge development on transnational aspects of illicit firearms circulating in the country or being used in crime. International cooperation and information exchange drawn from the evidence base can include tracing the last legal record of a seized firearm, informal and spontaneous information exchanges that can enhance the intelligence picture and provide investigative leads, mutual legal assistance or cooperation with the private sector and weapons manufacturers.

In late 2018, authorities in the United States notified Argentina of falsely labelled shipments mailed from Miami to Buenos Aires. The packages contained rifle parts, rather than the athletic clothing listed on the label. The United States delivered the rifle parts to Argentina, and authorities replaced the real parts with fakes and a satellite tracker as part of Operation Arsenal Clandestino (Clandestine Arsenal). By following the tracker and conducting additional investigations, Argentina's authorities dismantled the illicit firearms trafficking network that was selling weapons to criminal organizations in Brazil and Paraguay. This cooperation illustrates how shared contextual information can provide investigative leads and result in effectively countering transnational illicit trafficking.¹¹

14. Improving the information base for the allocation and targeted mobilization of resources: Many countries across the globe face challenging decisions when it comes to allocating resources to the various law enforcement and judicial structures combatting illicit firearms trafficking and other forms of organized crime. In addition, countries often rely on technical assistance and financial contributions from the donor community to strengthen institutions as well as capacities to address and counter these crimes. An objective evidence base can help to identify technical areas to which resources should be allocated and where additional resources are required, thus allowing better matching a country's needs with available resources.

Following the logic of developing a national action plan to address illicit firearms trafficking, among other issues, and linking the plan to a resource mobilization strategy, the National Commission on the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons and the Reduction of Armed Violence of the Democratic Republic of Congo¹², published its action plan on the control and management of small arms and light weapons for the period 2018 to 2022. The action plan provides a situational analysis of the country, details a strategy and action points related to the fight against the illicit circulation of small arms and light weapons, and contains an indicative budget that can support resource mobilization efforts.¹³

B. Operational benefits of evidence-based action to counter illicit firearms trafficking and related forms of crime

15. Fostering intelligence-based law enforcement operations and investigations: Effective investigations into illicit firearms trafficking and related forms of crime build on a **strong** intelligence base, which in turn depends on the strategic and systematic collection and analysis of data. Besides the operational information related to a specific case or law enforcement operation, an evidence-based understanding of the larger issue of firearms-related criminality serves as a crucial information source that improves the contextual understanding of a case and can help determine the appropriate tactical approach.

11 See "Argentina Traffickers Buying US Arms for Sale to Brazil Gangs" at <https://www.insightcrime.org/news/brief/argentina-traffickers-buying-us-arms-sale-brazil-gangs/> and "Traían piezas de fusiles de asalto, los reensamblaban y los vendían a bandas de Brasil y Paraguay" at <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/seguridad/traian-piezas-de-fusiles-de-asalto-los-reensamblaban-y-los-vendian-a-bandas-de-brasil-y-paraguay-nid2236155>.

12 Commission nationale de contrôle des armes légères et de petit calibre et de réduction de la violence armée for its official title in French.

13 See <https://drcongo.un.org/fr/11701-elaboration-dun-nouveau-plan-daction-national-pour-la-gestion-et-le-controle-des-armes>.

Combining strategic data that is turned into an evidence base with operational data on suspected offenders and their *modi operandi* is an effective approach to devising efficient and targeted tactical approaches to address specific firearms-related crimes. An example of putting this approach into practice are the Joint Action Days (JADs) organized by Europol with its Member and partner States.¹⁴ During these law enforcement operations, a strategic analysis of the problem at hand is conducted by Europol and complemented with operational as well as tactical data on the actors involved and *modi operandi* used from the countries participating in the operation. This intelligence picture provides the basis for the ensuing operation.

16. Helping assess where further investigations into the illicit origin of recovered firearms are fundamental: While UNODC promotes the domestic and, if required, international tracing of each firearm seized and supports investigations into the illicit origin of all firearms not recovered from their legitimate owner, realities on the ground often force criminal justice practitioners to prioritize certain cases over others and to assess the predicted reliability of investigations into the illicit origin of seized firearms, taking into consideration available resources and capacities. Evidence-based understanding of the dynamics and impacts of illicit firearms trafficking, as well as its links to other forms of crime, can provide important indicators that help authorities determine which cases have a greater probability of success in identifying perpetrators involved in illicit trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition and/or the last legal record of a recovered firearm.

In a regional meeting on firearms data collection and analysis for Member and observer States of the Middle East and North Africa Region held in February 2019 in Vienna, Austria, a representative of the Spanish *Policía Nacional* explained that aggregated information on profiles and *modi operandi* used by individuals involved in illicit firearms trafficking provided important investigative leads in the international operation 'Alpes', which involved the illicit trafficking in essential firearms parts and components via parcel delivery services between Austria and Spain using straw purchasers.

17. Supporting effective implementation of obligations stemming from international and regional instruments: An evidence base on illicit firearms trafficking and related forms of crime further provides countries with augmented capabilities to fulfill obligations and commitments under multiple international and regional instruments. The international community has acknowledged the importance of the collection, exchange and analysis of information as a core element to prevent and combat organized crime, including the illicit trafficking in firearms, their parts and components, and ammunition and related forms of crime. The Organized Crime Convention as well as its supplementing Firearms Protocol provide a framework for information exchange as preventive and criminal justice measures and request States parties to exchange various types of information, such as on organized criminal groups taking part in illicit firearms trafficking, means of concealment used to illicitly traffic firearms and associated items, and trafficking routes.¹⁵ Similar commitments with a different scope of the information to be exchanged exist under the Arms Trade Treaty, the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects and various regional instruments.¹⁶

In the course of several regional meetings and technical assistance activities under the Monitoring Illicit Arms Flows initiative, several Member States representatives acknowledged the lack of systematic information on specific questions related to the illicit trafficking in firearms, ranging from tracing results to the actors involved in the crime and the amount and types of firearms trafficked or, in some instances, seized. This lack of evidence-based understanding impedes the effective implementation of international obligations to share and exchange information which can help countering illicit firearms trafficking and related forms of crime.

¹⁴ See <https://www.europol.europa.eu/operations/joint-action-days-jads>.

¹⁵ See for example Article 12 of the Firearms Protocol and Article 28 of the Organized Crime Convention.

¹⁶ See for example Article 11 paragraph 3 and Article 15 paragraph 7 of the Arms Trade Treaty; Paragraphs 6 and 11 of section III of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects; and Chapter VI of the Central African Convention for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons, their Ammunition and all Parts and Components that can be used for their Manufacture, Repair and Assembly.

CHAPTER II: Overview of the various data points set out in the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire

18. In order to help countries constructing an evidence base on illicit firearms trafficking and related forms of crime at the national level and connecting the dots at the global level, the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire was developed within the Monitoring Illicit Arms Flows initiative in consultation with Member States as well as firearms and statistical experts. The questionnaire pursues the dual purpose of enabling the identification of transnational firearms trafficking flows, trends and patterns and of supporting the monitoring of indicator 16.4.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals. Moreover, the questionnaire has become a valuable tool to help countries and authorities identify potential gaps in national firearms data collection and centralization protocols and practices. The questionnaire was launched in June 2018 and consists of two files, namely the data file and the metadata file.

19. This chapter describes the various data points set out in the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire and describes how the analysis of the corresponding data can provide governmental actors — ranging from front-line law enforcement authorities to policy-makers — with more accurate knowledge about the accessibility and impact of illicit firearms within their jurisdiction by offering evidence on which to ground operational and policy decisions. The chapter divides the data points into four different groups according to the different processes of the criminal justice chain in which the data typically becomes available. These include (A) the seizure or other form of apprehension of the firearm, their essential parts or components, or ammunition; (B) the in-depth analysis as well as the national and international ballistic comparison of the seized items by firearms/ballistic/forensic experts; (C) the tracing of the firearm (domestic and, if necessary, international); and, (D) the criminal justice response. It should be noted that these steps may vary from country to country and depend on national protocols and practices in place.¹⁷ A fifth group of data introduced in this paper provides an overview of additional types of information requested in the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire.

A. The seizure or other form of apprehension of the firearm, their essential parts or components, or ammunition

20. In line with indicator 16.4.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals, the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire collects data on seized, found and surrendered firearms. The text box below explains why UNODC focuses on data on firearms seizures as a core indicator to identify firearms trafficking flows, trends and patterns.

TEXT BOX 3: Why collect data on firearms seizures?

In the *Organized Crime Convention*, “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 of the Convention). Seizure can precede final confiscation or forfeiture, defined as “permanent deprivation of property by order of a court or other competent authority” (Article 2g of the Convention). ▶

¹⁷ For further information on these different processes and a comprehensive list of data points that should be collected in the first three steps, see the *UNODC Set of Guiding Templates for Firearms-related Investigations* available at <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/firearms-protocol/data-collection-and-analysis.html>.

Firearms seizures reflect the primary point of contact between an illicit phenomenon and the efforts of the government to counter it. Therefore, generating suitably disaggregated data on seizures is an important first step towards developing an understanding of firearms criminality, including illicit firearms trafficking. From a practical point of view, criminal justice authorities are more likely to collect and record data on firearms seizures than many other types of firearms-specific incidences, making this type of data more easily available in many countries and enhancing the comparability of the data among them.

However, when analyzing seizure data, several limitations must be accounted for since, independent of other indicators, firearms seizures represent an overlapping measure of firearms regulations, enforcement levels, and data reporting. First, seizures are initially temporary measures; depending on the circumstances, seized firearms may be returned to their owners. If the seizure data is not updated, it does not accurately indicate the number of firearms removed from circulation. Second, this data illustrates trafficking more or less comprehensively in different countries, due to differing enforcement and data collection priorities. Third, data on firearms seizures also reflect the variation in legal firearms frameworks at the national level.¹⁸ Therefore, considered in isolation, firearms seizure data is not sufficient to illustrate the actual nature and dynamics of firearms criminality. Nonetheless, this data is an important starting point for a comprehensive evidence base on illicit firearms. The context of firearms seizures allows for analysis of trends and more in-depth study of particular cases.

21. At the core of the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire are data on the **total number of weapons seized in relation to criminal offences as well as found or surrendered weapons**.¹⁹ While the total number of seized, found or surrendered firearms alone may not reflect particular firearms challenges a country may face, these figures can reveal insights into firearms cultures and potential challenges or links to other crimes when contextualized with demographic information on the population of the country, homicide data or data on seizures of other illicit commodities that are trafficked by organized criminal groups.

22. The data on total numbers of firearms seized is further compared to the **number of instances/cases of seizures**²⁰, which provides an indication of the typical number of weapons seized at a time. These data can reveal important information leading to further operational and policy decisions. For instance, a large number of firearms seized within a single seizure may indicate that the weapons came from the cache of a criminal group, other violent non-state actor, or a firearms collector, or that the firearms potentially connect to large-scale trafficking, any of which may require an adjustment of the investigative approach.

23. The data on seized weapons and, to a lesser extent, also on found and surrendered weapons, is further disaggregated in various ways, such as the type of weapon, its country of manufacture, the criminal context of the seizure, and the geographical information on the seizure.

24. Type of weapon: Data on the types of weapons seized, found and surrendered²¹ can provide information on the legal and/or illegal accessibility of certain categories of firearms in different jurisdictions. For instance, it is worth noting that increasing seizures of automatic rifles, submachine guns, and machine guns compared to seizures of pistols, revolvers, and shotguns may indicate a shift in the nature of organized crime or conflict within a country or existing supply channels. Systematically collected and analyzed data on types of weapons seized can further help in determining whether there are loopholes in the control regime or indications that portions of the regime — such as provisions on legal possession, legal transfers, security measures, etc. — are not restrictive enough.

18 See UNODC 2015 Study on Firearms, Appendix, page 86.

19 See questions 1.3 and 4.1 in the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire, available at <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/firearms-protocol/data-collection-and-analysis.html>.

20 See Question 1.2 in the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire.

21 See Questions 1.3 and 4.1 in the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire.

25. Country of manufacture: Information on the country of manufacture of seized, found and surrendered firearms²² provides a crucial starting point for international tracing in cases where the apprehended firearm is not recorded in national registries. The importance of this information is corroborated by the Firearms Protocol, which obliges State parties to mark all firearms upon manufacture and upon import in a way that permits the ready identification of the country of manufacture and the country of import (Article 8 of the Firearms Protocol). While aggregated information on the country of manufacture of seized, found and surrendered firearms does not imply the involvement of that country in any firearms-related crime, this information, when shared with the country of manufacture, can help the latter to efficiently implement its transfer control regime in the future and to improve or put in place preventive measures at the early stages of the supply chain.

26. Criminal context: In order to understand the illicit use of firearms within a country and the links between firearms and other forms of crime, it is important to look at the legal justification used to seize the weapon as well as other suspected offences related to the seizures.²³ Comparing the number of firearms seizures based on illicit possession with the number of investigations opened on the illicit origin of the firearm can also reveal potential needs for amending investigative strategies. Moreover, together with data on the criminal charge on which the indictment is based and the final verdict, this data can also help in understanding the flow of criminal proceedings and identifying investigative bottlenecks. Through the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire and other tools, UNODC therefore encourages authorities to systematically collect data on the criminal context of the seizure at the time of seizure and to make data on the criminal context of firearms seizures an integral information source for evidence-based action to counter firearms-related criminality.

27. Geographical information: Analyzing not just the number of seizures over time but also where these seizures take place is especially important for understanding the extent, nature and evolution of firearms-related issues within a country. To this end, the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire requests data on the type of location as well as the geographical area where the seizure occurred²⁴. For instance, a geographic concentration of seizures within a certain part of a country may indicate problems with illegal firearms holdings or illicit trafficking in that area. Seizures near or at border crossings, airports, or ports may indicate recent movement into the country or planned movement out of the country, highlighting the need for investigations with transnational dimensions.

28. Likewise, data on seizures of **parts and components**²⁵ of firearms as well as their **ammunition**²⁶ reveals important information on the dynamics of illicit firearms trafficking and on the *modi operandi* used by criminals. For instance, an increasing rate of seizures of ammunition may indicate increased demand and may be of particular concern if it correlates with increasing levels of armed violence. Parts and components of firearms, on the other hand, can not only be used to replace elements of firearms, but also to (illegally) modify weapons and to assemble them in their entirety. Challenges regarding the conversion of weapons, the illicit reactivation of firearms, and the delivery of firearms using postal and courier services are closely linked to control regimes on parts and components. It is therefore important to develop increased insights into their illicit circulation.

22 See Questions 1.6 and 4.3 in the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire.

23 See Questions 2.1 and 2.2 in the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire.

24 See Questions 3.1 and 3.2 in the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire.

25 See Question 7.1 in the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire.

26 See Questions 7.1 and 7.2 in the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire.

B. The in-depth analysis and ballistic comparison of the seized items by firearms, ballistic and forensic experts

29. Once firearms, their parts and components and ammunition are seized or otherwise apprehended by law enforcement authorities, forensic and ballistic analysis at the national and international level are often required to provide detailed information on the technical features of the weapon and to establish potential links to other crimes. The Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire sets a focus on questions related to the mode of manufacture of the seized firearm and the nature of its marking.

30. Data on the **condition or mode of manufacture of seized firearms**²⁷ gives insight into manufacturing modalities, may help detect legal loopholes and reveals new or trending *modi operandi* used by criminals within and across jurisdictions. Seizures of converted, assembled, reactivated, modified or otherwise illicitly manufactured arms may for instance indicate lack of access to commercially produced weapons. If authorities recognize any trends in the mode of manufacture of the firearms seized, they increase their understanding of new ways criminals arm themselves and can assess and improve the responsiveness of existing strategies and measures to prevent these types of illicit manufacture. Seizures of high numbers of parts and components of firearms may also indicate firearms being manufactured illegally.

31. Disaggregating seized firearms by **marking**²⁸ provides important information about the scope of illicit manufacture in a country, criminal intent and the efficiency of the investigatory process. For instance, a serial number that has been removed or altered helps establish criminal intent and a noticeable change in nature of the markings of seized firearms may give rise to increased efforts to understand the interests of different stakeholders in altering markings. Analyzing and comparing serial numbers of seized weapons, including across countries, may provide further investigative leads and potentially reveal links between arms that seem unrelated to each other at first sight. Moreover, comparing numbers of firearms seized with unique markings with the number of domestic and international tracing procedures initiated can reveal procedural bottlenecks that can hamper efficient investigations.

C. The tracing of the firearm

32. Another core section of the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire looks at tracing results and cooperation in tracing. The Firearms Protocol defines tracing as *“the systematic tracking of firearms and, where possible, their parts and components and ammunition from manufacturer to purchaser for the purpose of assisting the competent authorities of States Parties in detecting, investigating and analyzing illicit manufacturing and illicit trafficking”* (Article 3 f Firearms Protocol).

33. Tracing a firearm and, where possible, ammunition, to their illicit origin, point of diversion or last legal record provides crucial investigative leads regarding the individuals behind domestic as well as transnational illicit arms flows. In addition, the systematic analysis of tracing results further allows countries to develop an understanding about firearms trafficking flows, trends and patterns and henceforth helps build an evidence base that facilitates international cooperation. As a result, tracing of illicit firearms and the analysis of consolidated tracing results is a fundamental component of national, regional and international strategies and frameworks to identify and counter firearms trafficking and its links to other forms of crime.

27 See Question 1.4 in the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire.

28 See Question 1.5 in the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire.

34. The Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire seeks to collect data on **the proportion of recovered weapons for which the illicit origin was established**²⁹, **the kind of illicit origin**³⁰, **the key partners for cooperation in tracing**³¹, and **the most frequent trafficking routes**³². Weapons traced and found as recorded in a national registry as lost, stolen, deactivated, destroyed or otherwise not held by a legitimate owner have likely been diverted from the legal trade. A high number of firearms from any particular category (e.g. lost or destroyed) may highlight major sources of diversion that need to be addressed within the seizing country or a third country. Moreover, it is helpful to consider what percentage of seizures are actually traced domestically and, where necessary, internationally in order to develop an overall understanding of the responsiveness of countries to cases of firearms recoveries, identify potential bottlenecks in the investigating process and accurately infer what percentage of total firearms apprehended are diverted from other specific countries. This avenue is in line with indicator 16.4.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals and provides more context than simply making comparisons within the number of traced firearms. It may also be useful for countries to analyze bilateral gaps between tracing requests received and tracing requests sent in order to find ways for improved international cooperation. Lastly, the sharing of information on trafficking routes for firearms, their parts and components and ammunition enables the international community to identify global trends and patterns in illicit firearms trafficking in a way no country could accomplish by itself.

35. In order for authorities to distinguish illicit firearms from those that are legally held within their jurisdiction, they need to have readily available knowledge about which exact firearms, their parts and components and ammunition were legally manufactured or imported into the country and who the legal owner or guardian of each item is, including civilian and military owners. A comprehensive and, if possible, centralized recording-keeping system on legally held firearms and associated items, to which all relevant institutions have access, constitutes a crucial tool that helps to develop such knowledge. The text box below describes the record-keeping obligations under Article 7 of the Firearms Protocol.

TEXT BOX 4: Record-keeping obligations under the Firearms Protocol

The Firearms Protocol requests, in its Article 7, that *“Each State Party shall ensure the maintenance, for not less than ten years, of information in relation to firearms and, where appropriate and feasible, their parts and components and ammunition that is necessary to trace and identify those firearms and, where appropriate and feasible, their parts and components and ammunition which are illicitly manufactured or trafficked and to prevent and detect such activities. Such information shall include:*

*“(a) The **appropriate markings** required by article 8 of this Protocol;*

*“(b) In cases involving international transactions in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition, the **issuance and expiration dates of the appropriate licences or authorizations**, the **country of export**, the **country of import**, the **transit countries**, where appropriate, and the **final recipient** and the **description and quantity of the articles.**”*

This obligation underlines the importance of tracing seized firearms to their origin and constitutes a crucial measure of effective firearms control systems, that is also highlighted by other international and regional frameworks, including Article 12 of the Arms Trade Treaty, Paragraphs 11, 12 and 13 of the International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons, and Article 11 of the Inter-American Convention against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives, and other related Materials, among others.

29 See Questions 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3 in the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire.

30 *Ibid.*, this can relate for instance to legally manufactured and potentially transferred firearms diverted within the same country, legally manufactured and potentially transferred firearms diverted within another country or firearms illicitly manufactured.

31 See Questions 5.4 and 5.5 in the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire.

32 See Question 3.3 in the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire.

D. The criminal justice response

36. Countering the illicit firearms trafficking, their diversion and related forms of crime requires integrated approaches that do not only aim at preventing or addressing the illicit circulation of these items but also build on a proactive criminal justice response that aims to investigate, prosecute and adjudicate the individuals and groups behind these crimes.
37. To help countries detect potential bottlenecks in their criminal justice system, further enhance understanding between firearms trafficking and other forms of crime, and shed light on the gender-dimensions of illicit firearms trafficking, the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire enquires about the **number of individuals, disaggregated by gender, who are targeted in the various stages of the criminal justice system³³ and other offences³⁴** for which the respective individuals were suspected/arrested.

E. Additional types of information

38. Besides data relating to the above-mentioned processes of the criminal justice system, the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire collects a range of additional data points that help to increase the understanding of firearms-related issues. These include:
39. **Information on cases of significant arms seizures³⁵:** This type of information constitutes an important complement to aggregate data on firearms seizures as it helps both countries and the international community to gain more contextual understanding of illicit firearms trafficking and provides an important information source to draw lessons learned and best practices for detecting, investigating and prosecuting this type of crime.
40. **Legal and black-market prices for firearms³⁶:** At the national level or within particular locations within the country, this type of information, when put in relation to licit prices, helps interpret changes in supply and demand in the illicit market. Variations in the prices of firearms similar in type, age and functionality of the weapon over time and across countries may reflect changing demand for and access to specific types of firearms.
41. **Qualitative information on the illicit trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition, including trends, types of arms, and modi operandi employed³⁷:** This type of information, which may not always stem from statistical data but rather from experience and case-based knowledge constitutes another crucial complement to aggregate data on firearms seizures as it helps stakeholders to connect the dots between “theory” and “practice” and constitutes valuable information for information exchange and international cooperation at international level.
42. **Metadata³⁸:** Metadata constitutes information that helps analyze the data provided by countries through the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire. This information is equally important when authorities analyze national data with a view towards creating an evidence base for effective results against illicit firearms trafficking and related forms of crime. The Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire collects metadata on national definitions and key concepts related to firearms issues, the national regulatory and enforcement regime, concepts and authorities involved in tracing, and data sources.

33 See Question 8.1 in the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire.

34 See Question 8.2 in the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire.

35 See Question 6.1 in the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire.

36 See Question 9.1 in the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire.

37 See Question 9.2 in the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire.

38 See the metadata file of the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire.

CHAPTER III: Leveraging complementary data to build a comprehensive evidence base on firearms issues

43. Data requested through the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire allows the international community to develop an understanding about flows, trends and patterns of seized and trafficked firearms and associated items and their links to other forms of crime. At national level, there are complementary indicators and data sources that stakeholders can leverage to gain an even deeper understanding of the scope, dynamics and driving forces that shape the nature of illicit firearms issues within a country. This chapter provides an overview of additional data points and their sources and explains their importance particularly with regard to enhanced understanding of three key issues, including illicit arms flows; armed violence; and links between firearms, organized crime and terrorism.

44. Before looking into these three specific phenomena, it should be emphasized that national authorities should have comprehensive data on firearms held legally by different stakeholders within their jurisdiction. Such data constitutes the basis of any tracing effort and helps authorities to determine legal weapons from illegal ones. Shared with other stakeholders, such data may also provide a transparent reflection of the country's policy in regard to legal holdings of firearms, constitute an important confidence-building measure and supply helpful insights for analysis by the international community or research and academic institutes. Examples of such data points and indicators constitute the total number of legally held firearms for private use, the total number of government-held firearms, the number of firearms held by private security companies compared etc. These data can further be cross-analyzed and put in the context of other variables, such as the population size. Such data should be available to national authorities through comprehensive record-keeping system that builds on Article 7 of the Firearms Protocol (see text box 4 above).

A. Illicit arms flows

45. With the adoption of target 16.4 of the Sustainable Development Goals, Member States committed to *“by 2030, significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organized crime”*. To measure the arms component of this target, the UN Statistics Commission adopted indicator 16.4.2, defined by the Inter-agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goals Indicators as the *“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”*.³⁹ As any potential increase or decrease of total numbers of seized, found, and surrendered arms can be interpreted in several ways, such as an actual increase or decrease in the volume of illicit arms flows or fluctuations in the efficiency of law enforcement efforts in the area of combatting illicit arms flows, the indicator measures the responsiveness of Member States to detected cases involving potentially illicit arms and their efficiency in tracing them.

46. As its name suggests, the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire collects aggregate data that helps to understand the phenomenon of illicit arms flows along a number of crucial indicators, including the total number and types of firearms as well as associated items recovered (seized, found and surrendered), the criminal context of the seizure, the tracing outcome, the trafficking routes, the number of individuals targeted in the various stages of the criminal justice system, and prices for firearms in legal and black markets, among others.

39 See A/RES/71/313 entitled “Work of the Statistical Commission pertaining to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”.

47. There are several complementary indicators that can help authorities to further increase knowledge on illicit arms flows and to contextualize the seizure data explained above. Some of these indicators focus on the recovered firearm itself, while others on contextual circumstances that can help authorities to assess the comprehensiveness of the national control regime in place and identify related risks. These include, among others:

48. Number of firearms reported as lost or stolen from their legal owners: In regard to indicators with a focus on the firearms, an important question is the number of firearms reported as lost or stolen from their legal owners. As diversion from nationally owned holdings is a significant part of the supply that feeds illicit arms flows, data on the number of firearms that leak from government-owned holdings can help to delineate illicit arms flows, promote the adoption of sound record-keeping practices for arms and ammunition and the implementation of practical measures to strengthen physical security and stockpile management, and encourage transparent public audits as well as accountability.⁴⁰ Data on the number of firearms reported as lost or stolen from private holdings can further complement the understanding of illicit arms flows and provide an evidence base for governmental action on criteria for private individuals to possess firearms as well as on private storage and accountability regulations.

49. The number of firearms found and surrendered compared to the number of legally registered firearms: In addition to looking at total numbers of firearms reported as lost or stolen from their legal owners, analyzing data on the number of firearms found and surrendered compared to the number of legally registered firearms can help authorities to better understand the effectiveness of firearms control measures and policies in place. High percentages of firearms recorded as found or surrendered may reveal the need for more restrictive regulations on firearms possession by private individuals or increased analysis of the type and origin of surrendered weapons.

50. Number of firearms destroyed and deactivated: Moreover, the number of firearms either permanently taken out of illicit circulation through destruction, or for which the risk of diversion has been significantly reduced through specific measures such as destruction and deactivation, can enrich the understanding national authorities have of the reduction and prevention of illicit arms flows.

51. Proportion of legally held firearms marked and recorded in line with international obligations and standards: Data on the proportion of firearms that are held legally by governmental authorities or private users and that are marked and recorded in line with Articles 7 and 8 of the Firearms Protocol and international standards constitutes an important control measure that informs national authorities about the implementation rate of their national firearms control regime and the feasibility to conduct tracing as needed. Knowledge of this indicator further helps authorities to identify any potential challenges in terms of marking and record-keeping and to implement measures to overcome them.

52. Indicators related to contextual circumstances: A number of indicators on contextual circumstances that do not directly link to a firearm can help authorities to further assess the comprehensiveness of the national firearms control regime as well as crime prevention and criminal justice regimes in place, and to overcome identified challenges. These include, for example, whether or not standard operating procedures for the physical security and stockpile management of government-held weapons and associated items are in place, whether a comprehensive record-keeping system for legal as well as seized firearms and associated items exists, whether a tracing mechanism is in place, whether a database of the ballistic fingerprints of all governmentally and privately held firearms is in place, as well as, more generally, to what extent State parties enacted the required legislation and regulations to comply with international obligations under the Firearms Protocol and the Arms Trade Treaty.

⁴⁰ See Bromley and others in “Measuring Illicit Arms and Financial Flows: Improving the assessment of Sustainable Development Goal 16”, Sipri Background Paper, July 2019, available at <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2019/sipri-background-papers/measuring-illicit-arms-and-financial-flows-improving-assessment-sustainable-development-goal-16>.

B. Armed violence

53. Firearms are a key enabler of armed violence, both in conflict and non-conflict situations. Indeed, global firearms seizures in 2016 and 2017 occurring outside the context of pure violations of firearms regulations reveal that most firearms were seized in the context of armed violence.⁴¹ Firearms were involved in 54 per cent of all homicides worldwide in 2017⁴² and constitute the weapon of choice in several armed contexts. To develop further understanding of how firearms, and in particular illicit firearms, spur armed violence, the data collected on all types of armed violence, such as intentional homicides, assaults, intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and robberies, should specify whether firearms were used and, if so, other details on the weapon. Moreover, data on firearms seizures can be interpreted in the context of data on armed violence, providing important information to government officials on whether their country's illicit gun problem is worsening or improving. Data on firearms seizures help to more clearly depict the problem of armed violence by enriching the analysis with certain aspects, such as the mechanisms of armed violence perpetration or its links with other forms of crime. Analyzing the kinds of crimes that increase or decrease alongside seized firearms thus extends the context authorities have. Important indicators along which firearms-related data can be collected are, for example:

54. Indicators revealing the demography of the use of firearms in violent crime: Indicators providing important information about the demography of the use of firearms in violent crime provide authorities with crucial information about the extent and impact of armed violence. Besides the above introduced indicator looking at organized crime and terrorism, these include homicides by firearm per 100,000 population, firearm-related injuries per 100,000 population, use of firearms in interpersonal crime per 100,000 population, and use of firearms in robberies per 100,000 population. These indicators can be further disaggregated such as by type of firearm used, by geography, and by demographic background of victim (gender and age, ethnicity/religion, etc.).

55. Proportion of tracing procedures successfully completed for firearms seized in the context of armed violence: While authorities are often sensitized about the need to develop insights into the demography of the use of firearms in violent crime, there is less awareness about whether legal or illicit firearms were used in crime and, in the latter case, from where the illicit firearms originated. To enhance the understanding of the link between illicit firearms and armed violence, it is crucial that authorities systematically trace firearms seized in the context of armed violence to their potentially illicit origin. Analyzing the acquisition of firearms used in crimes allows for evaluating whether legal firearms were misused, which potentially speaks to the need for tightening regulations, or whether the firearms were acquired illicitly, which potentially indicates the need for increased enforcement and altered investigation style. When legal firearms are consistently misused in crimes, a country may want to consider whether or not its national control regime is strict enough. When illicit firearms are consistently used in similar types of crime, authorities may need to investigate the acquisition more closely.

C. Links between firearms, organized crime, and terrorism

56. Firearms can instigate and enable forms of crime beyond illicit firearms trafficking, such as organized crime and terrorism. Taking into account the impact of firearms that fall into the hands of organized criminal or terrorist groups and the increasing attention that the international community pays to the nexus between firearms, organized crime, and terrorism, this phenomenon deserves special attention.

57. The Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire helps to increase insights into the link between firearms seizures and committed offences, including organized criminal and terrorist

41 See UNODC, Global Study on Firearms Trafficking, 2020, page 34, available at <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/firearms-protocol/firearms-study.html>.

42 See UNODC, Global Study on Homicide 2019 (Vienna, 2019), booklet 3, page 77, available at <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/data-and-analysis/global-study-on-homicide.html>.

acts, by asking about the criminal context in which firearms were seized and the offences for which individuals were suspected/arrested in addition to illicit firearms trafficking. There are several other indicators that can help authorities better understand, prevent and address links between the different forms of crime, such as:

58. Organized crime or terrorism-related deaths by firearm per 100,000 population: The indicator can be further disaggregated, such as by type (organized crime, terrorism), by perpetrator, by geography, by demographic background of the victim (gender and age, ethnicity/religion, etc.), and by victim affiliation to any organized criminal or terrorist group, among other categories. Taking these levels of disaggregation and the related data into account, systematic data collection along this indicator can help authorities to understand the human toll of violence facilitated by firearms in countries affected by organized crime and terrorism over time and to develop appropriate responses that help to reduce this toll.

59. Proportion of tracing procedures successfully completed for firearms seized in the context of organized crime and terrorist acts: Countries around the world implement various measures to prevent organized criminal groups and terrorists from acquiring firearms, their parts and components and ammunition. Systematically tracing weapons involved in cases of organized crime or terrorism to their origin can help authorities to enhance understanding about illicit supply routes and channels and to halt these flows.

60. Indicators related to contextual circumstances: Similar to the phenomenon of illicit arms flows, there are several contextual indicators that can help to measure the capacity of authorities to prevent firearms falling in the hands of organized criminal and terrorist groups. In addition to the indicators listed in the section on illicit arms flows, the extent to which countries adopt legislative and regulatory frameworks to implement the common universal legal framework against terrorism⁴³ becomes particularly important.

CHAPTER IV: Ways to institutionalize evidence-based action to counter illicit firearms trafficking and related forms of crime

61. While the first two chapters looked at the benefits of evidence-based action to counter illicit firearms trafficking and related forms of crime as well as the main data points collected through the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire, this chapter aims to present practical steps that countries may follow when wanting to institutionalize evidence-based action against these crimes.

62. In the context of the Monitoring Illicit Arms Flows initiative, which included the development and implementation of the Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire, outreach and capacity building activities to improve national firearms data collection practices and the drafting of analytical reports, UNODC identified a number of challenges that several countries across the globe face when it comes to reporting within the questionnaire and building an evidence-based approach to counter illicit firearms trafficking and related forms of crime. Some of the key challenges include: the absence of comprehensive record-keeping systems on seizure data; the absence of templates to generate firearms related data by law enforcement officers in charge of the seizures that facilitate tracing and allow analyzing the data in a broader criminal context; insufficient exchange of information among the different national institutions recovering

⁴³ See the treaties database in the SHERLOC platform at <https://sherloc.unodc.org/cld/v3/sherloc/> and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

firearms (customs, police, border guard, rangers, the military etc.) to allow for the creation of a comprehensive dataset that covers all relevant institutions across the entire territory; and the lack of specific investigations on illicit firearms, their parts and components and ammunition, including by tracing seized items to their, potentially illicit, origin.

63. Building on these identified challenges, this paper recommends the following steps to countries wanting to institutionalize evidence-based action against illicit firearms trafficking:

64. Assess and, where necessary, reinforce the link between firearms data collection needs and practices

Countries should determine which types of firearms-related data they want to use as the basis for their national evidence base on illicit firearms trafficking and related forms of crime. Based on the determined needs, countries should assess and, where necessary, reinforce the practical link between existing data collection practices and the determined needs by, for example:

- ▶ Developing and maintaining comprehensive **record-keeping systems** — including on legal firearms, their manufacturing, possession and transfer, as well as on seized and otherwise apprehended firearms — and adapting their content to match the determined needs in line with standardized definitions introduced across the various structures dealing with firearms;
- ▶ ensuring **access to the record-keeping** system by all relevant stakeholders, including across different law enforcement and security structures;
- ▶ aligning **investigative protocols** with the determined needs by strengthening, for example, data recording practices and tracing procedures;
- ▶ adopting **specific templates** to be filled during firearms-related investigations that allow authorities to record the required data on a case-by-case basis during recovery, in-depth analysis of the recovered items, their tracing and corresponding judicial proceedings; and
- ▶ enable officers to follow new procedures and correctly use the newly developed tools through **training and capacity building** activities.

65. Assess and, where necessary, strengthen the institutional set up required to collect and analyze the required data

If countries want to implement evidence-based action to counter illicit firearms trafficking and related forms of crime at national level, it is of strategic importance to have a designated central body at the national level whose responsibility is to collect, aggregate, and analyze firearms-related data from different parts of government. Depending on the specific mandate of such a central body, which in some countries is referred to as “National Focal Point”, it could promote and facilitate ongoing data collection, collect and centralize disaggregated data from all relevant structures, streamline definitions and procedures across agencies, and produce relevant reports. Important roles in the collection and centralization of firearms-relevant data can also be assumed by dedicated observatories and civil society organizations, taking into consideration the type of data sources available to them.

66. Create appropriate mechanisms to ensure that the collected and analyzed data feeds back into strategy and policy development and further enriches the intelligence base for tactical operations against illicit firearms trafficking and related forms of crime

There are several ways in which countries can adopt a cycle that includes firearms data collection, data analysis, adjustment of policies and strategies, enrichment of the intelligence base, and operational action. The figure below reflects these steps of the cycle and highlights their interconnectedness.

FIGURE 3: Cycle to institutionalize evidence-based action to counter illicit firearms trafficking and related forms of crime



The mandating of appropriate institutions to coordinate the implementation of such a cycle, the continuous updating of the collected data and the production of periodic statistical and analytical reports for different target audiences help institutionalize the cycle.

67. Set firearms data collection, analysis and exchange as political priorities in the fight against firearms-related crime and seize opportunities to benefit from insights of others

Lastly, countries should set firearms data collection, analysis and exchange as political priorities in the fight against firearms-related crime. In doing so, they will help nurture a culture of making policy and operational decisions about illicit firearms trafficking and related forms of crime from an objective evidence base. In this context, countries should actively engage in intra- and international information exchange and seize these avenues of cooperation as opportunities to benefit from insights of others. The *UNODC Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020* resulted from such an opportunity.



UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

For more information on the work of UNODC to counter the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition, please contact:

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