Countering Illicit Arms Trafficking and its Links to Transnational Organized Crime and Terrorism and Fostering International Cooperation

The GLOBAL FIREARMS PROGRAMME at a Glance

2011 - 2022
Illicit firearms trafficking and misuse continues to represent a major threat to peace, security and sustainable development. While the death toll in the context of armed conflicts is well known, even more lives are lost worldwide from non-conflict firearm events. The problems associated with firearms violence covers the whole spectrum of human security: ranging from high levels of individual physical insecurity (domestic violence and street, gang and criminal violence) with serious economic and social consequences for the society at large, to large scale armed conflicts.

Overcasting investment climates, aggravating poverty and inhibiting access to social services, armed violence has adverse consequences on sustainable development. Where the use of firearms becomes a means for resolving grievances and conflicts, legal and peaceful dispute resolution suffer, undermining the rule of law.

The linkages between illicit arms, organized crime, conflict and terrorism are multifaceted. Illicit firearms form a central element of the core business of many organized crime groups and are used to gain leverage in various forms of criminality, for intimidation, coercion and in gang violence. Furthermore, terrorists and non-state armed actors gain access to weapons, ammunition and explosives through organised crime networks and the black market. At the same time, diversion in the context of armed conflict is a source for illicit firearms.
The Firearms Protocol, UNODC and its Mandate

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime is the specialized body of the UN in charge of preventing and combating transnational organized crime. As the guardian of several international conventions on drugs, crime, corruption and terrorism, as well as international standards and norms on crime prevention and criminal justice, UNODC is well placed to address the transnational dimension of illicit firearms trafficking and its links to other forms of crime.

Among these frameworks, the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunition (Firearms Protocol) supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) is the principal global legal instrument to prevent and counter the illicit proliferation of firearms and ammunition. The Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice and the Conference of the Parties to the Organized Crime Convention repeatedly urged Member States to ratify and fully implement the Convention and its Protocols and requested UNODC to assist Member States in this endeavour. In addition, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, in 2022, adopted a resolution on strengthening international cooperation to address the links between illicit drug and firearms trafficking that mandated UNODC to specifically work on these linkages.

In various decisions and resolutions UNTOC COP further urged States Parties to consider acceding and implementing the UNTOC and the Firearms Protocol and further urged State Parties to strengthen their national legislation in a manner consistent with this instrument, and requested UNODC to support States and facilitate technical assistance for the implementation of the Protocol. UNODC was also mandated to develop and disseminate technical assistance tools, collect and analyse on a regular basis data to monitor illicit trafficking flows and to conduct a follow-up study on firearms trafficking taking into account the UNODC Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020 and Target 16.4 of the Sustainable Development Goals, to "significantly reduce illicit arms flows until 2030" (UNTOC COP Resolution 11/10).

**Accession to the Firearms Protocol per Region**

122 State Parties

- Africa: 38
- Asia and the Pacific: 16
- Eastern Europe: 23
- Latin America and the Caribbean: 29
- Western Europe and Other: 16

To better respond to the requests of Member States, in 2022, UNODC established the Firearms Trafficking Section (FTS) within the Organized Crime and Illicit Trafficking Branch. The Global Firearms Programme that was created in 2011 is the operational funding vehicle to support the work of the FTS in the Headquarters and around the globe.
UNODC’ S Approach in Countering Illicit Firearms Trafficking and their Criminal Use

Eleven years of action promoting an integrated tailored approach for a comprehensive response

UNODC is a global player with unique expertise and mandate in the field of drugs, crime and terrorism. Since 2011, the GFP’s has followed an integrated approach based on five interconnected pillars. Responses to the challenges caused by illicit firearms trafficking require integrated approaches tailored to the specific needs of a country and sub-regions. Each represents a specific area of actions needed to address the different aspects of the problem and corresponds to the five activity clusters that define until today the core of the GFP’s work.

Adequate legislative and institutional frameworks are needed to modernize and bring the firearms control regimes at international standards, including through harmonized criminalization and enforcement measures. It is a pre-requisite to promote long lasting and durable changes in beneficiary countries, which ultimately contributes to the promotion of the rule of law, and the prevention and counteraction of other forms of organized crime.

Comprehensive regulatory regimes on firearms and their effective implementation largely contribute to reduce the risks of theft, loss, diversion, and thus reduce illicit proliferation and misuse of these weapons, and thus their use in crime. The comprehensive recording and marking of firearms and where possible also their parts and components and ammunition, facilitates identification and tracing of such items and contributes also to enhance criminal investigations involving firearms offences.

Reducing the proliferation of illicit arms and raising awareness especially among vulnerable groups including women and youth, on the increased risks and impact of firearms and their criminal use, through eg. voluntary arms collection and destruction campaigns, active engagement and cooperation with civil society and academia, important crime prevention elements that can help build greater resilience to armed violence and foster Human Rights and victim-centered responses.

Effective criminal justice responses are essential elements necessary to close the circle, and to ensure adequate enforcement of the regulatory measures through criminalization, investigation and prosecution of related offences, with the aim to bring perpetrators to justice and dismantle criminal organizations and networks involved in these crimes.

Regular exchanges of information and enhanced channels of communication and cooperation among relevant state institutions and practitioners from different countries and regions are necessary to build confidence and overcome the traditional mistrust that surrounds often the issue of weapons control. Strengthening interstate cooperation, dialogue and exchange of good practices is therefore an additional element of this overall holistic approach.

Finally, by promoting enhanced data collection and analysis on firearms trafficking flows, their transnational dimension, trends and criminal context, the GFP is supporting a better understanding of this phenomenon and its links with other criminal modalities and activities. Increased knowledge on the extent and impact that the illicit circulation of firearms and ammunition have around the globe is crucial for Member States and regional organizations to make informed decisions, enact policies and better respond to the threats they face.

Through this integrated approach, the Programme also contributed to the promotion of the rule of law, and the prevention and counteraction of other forms of organized crime.
Moving forward in the fight against the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition

As we look to the next decade, there are significant challenges ahead for our society and planet. There are only seven years left to achieve the substance of the 2030 agenda. In the Decade of Action – an ambitious global effort to deliver the promise of the 2030 Agenda, UNODC decided to develop a 2023-2030 strategy against illicit firearms and its links to other crimes.

Today, States are facing the downside of globalization, with improved technologies and global connections, criminals can gain easier and faster access to illicit firearms and increase exponentially their power and influence; phenomena like 3D printed or modular weapons, so-called ghost guns, and increasingly the use of the internet and the darkweb have posed additional challenges to the already difficult task to detect and disrupt illicit arms flows. In this fast-changing context, where sudden external factors can have a major impact on the global dynamic of illicit arms flows, it is important to remain agile and to adapt fast, in order to better serve our Member States needs and expectations, and UNODC’s expectation of being a trusted and reliable partner.

Detection and disruptions of illicit arms flows will not be stopped if we don’t acknowledge the transnational nature of firearms trafficking, and the need to tackle emerging challenges through enhanced forms of cooperation among countries and international organizations, and if we don’t acknowledge the need to contextualize the threats and address the interlinkages between the illicit arms flows and related challenges.

The 2023-2030 Strategy currently underdevelopment aims at streamlining UNODC’s action against illicit firearms in the complex reality of countries and regions on the ground in combatting the negative impact of illicit firearms on peace, people, and ultimately on the planet, thus contributing to the common effort towards delivering the Goals by 2030. The Strategy is currently being elaborated around the below Theory of Change and will be presented during the first quarter of 2023:
In order to assist the target countries in facing the challenges to counter illicit firearms trafficking, concrete activities within each of the pillar have been identified and are conducted throughout the project implementation.

**PILLAR 1:**
Policy and legislative development

**ACTIVITIES:**

» Substantive support to intergovernmental processes that address illicit firearms, including in the General Assembly, Security Council and Human Rights Council;

» Coordinating policy developments with other UN-entities and civil society organisations

» Servicing the Conference of the Parties to the Organized Crime Convention and its Working Group on Firearms;

» Supporting the functioning of the Mechanism to Review the Implementation of UNTOC and its Protocols;

» Support for the adoption and implementation of national and regional Firearms Roadmaps and Action Plans;

» National and regional pre-ratification support to promote the Firearms Protocol;

» Support for the adoption and implementation of national and regional Firearms Roadmaps and Action Plans;

» Review of national legal and institutional frameworks and capacities to enforce effective firearms control regimes;

» Enhancement of Firearms Acts and criminal provisions through national and regional legislative harmonization workshops, tailored legislative advice and drafting support;

» Develop legislative and technical tools to support countries in the implementation of the Firearms Protocol;

» Raise knowledge and awareness through advocacy activities, seminars and workshops.

**Flagship products:**

» Mechanism for the Review of UNTOC and its Protocols, including the Constructive Dialogue with Civil Society

» Working Group on Firearms

» Inter-agency Coordination on Small Arms (CASA)

» Institutional Video on the 20th Anniversary of the Firearms Protocol

» Model Law Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition

» Model Firearms Act for the Caribbean region

» Legislative and Technical Guides for the Implementation of the Firearms Protocol

» Tailored methodology for legislative assistance and drafting support

» Issue Papers on the relationship and synergies between the Firearms Protocol and complementary arms control instruments

» Extensive firearms cases and legislation on SHERLOC Knowledge Hub SHERLOC
PILLAR 2: Implementation of comprehensive firearms control and regulatory frameworks

ACTIVITIES:

» Provide technical support for firearms recordkeeping systems, including standard template formats to strengthen or develop recordkeeping for seized and confiscated firearms, and to facilitate their tracing;

» Enhance the marking capacity of Member States, including import marking;

» Strengthen the national capacity of firearms control authorities to prevent theft, loss, diversion and illicit trafficking through transfer controls, risk indicators, and post-shipment verifications, inter alia;

» Support voluntary registration and collection programs for firearms and ammunition, in close cooperation with national authorities and civil society organizations;

» Enhance physical security and stockpile management capacity of depots for seized and confiscated weapons through the provision of technical support;

» Support the destruction of seized, found, and surrendered firearms and ammunition.

Flagship products:

» UNODC’s Integrated Firearms Registry (goIFAR)

» Support to marking of firearms including provision of equipment and training

» Collection campaigns

» SOP for management and disposal of seized and confiscated arms

» Education for Justice (E4J) Initiative
PILLAR 3: Ensuring effective criminal justice responses

ACTIVITIES:

» Provide modular comprehensive training curriculum, including eLearning materials, policy and issue papers, operating procedures, manuals, inter alia;

» Foster gender mainstreaming in the investigation and prosecution of firearms cases;

» Organize national and sub-regional operational training workshops for firearms control and criminal justice practitioners, customs, and other stakeholders on relevant aspects related to the detection, investigation, and prosecution of firearms crimes;

» Develop specialized training courses for target groups (policy and law makers, investigators and prosecutors, firearms export control authorities, CSO) to foster international cooperation arrangements in criminal matters, including on international tracing requests, and promote participation in relevant specialized networks or platforms on related matters, including terrorism;

» Provide capacity-building workshops for CSO and parliamentarians on monitoring and oversight of the implementation of firearms control regimes;

» Provide technical support to enhance forensic capacity for firearms-related investigations;

» Support the establishment and strengthening of specialized units within law enforcement and prosecution services, tracing centres and analytical units;

» Harmonizing and enhancing the adjudication of firearms offences through mentoring support and the development of case collections and analysis;

» Assessment of the criminal justice response capacities, inter alia.

Flagship products:

» Comprehensive Training Curriculum to Prevent and Combat Illicit Firearms Trafficking.

» In-depth training manual on investigating and prosecuting illicit firearms

» Training manual on Detection of Firearms, Ammunition and Explosives at Land Border Crossing Points

» Training manual on detection and on parcel service deliveries

» Guidelines on Investigation and Prosecution of the Illicit Firearms Trafficking related Crimes

» Digest of Organized Crime Cases

» Digest of Firearms Trafficking Cases

» Firearms Case Law Collections 2015-2019 for all six Western Balkan jurisdictions

» Trafficking and related offences e-learning platform

GLOBAL FIREARMS PROGRAMME

Cours pratique sur les investigations et poursuites pénales des infractions liées aux armes à feu

UNODC 2017

VOLUME 1 | 2015-2019

FIREARMS CASE LAW COLLECTION
PILLAR 4:  
International cooperation and information exchange

ACTIVITIES:

» Regional and cross-regional meetings to foster communities of firearms/criminal justice practitioners and support direct cooperation and exchange of good practices and experiences in the investigation and prosecution of firearms trafficking cases;

» Promote effective judicial and law enforcement cooperation by establishing joint investigation teams and informal coordination mechanisms, parallel to formal channels; particularly, sub-regional operational contact groups, composed of prosecutors and law enforcement officers;

» Operational support and advice to cross-border investigations, accompanied by capacity building activities for participating practitioners;

» Development of a digest of cases illustrating the criminalization, investigation, prosecution and legal experiences in dealing with illicit firearms trafficking and related crimes;

» Development of an online portal for the Community of Practitioners to share relevant information and best practices and to permit the direct exchange of information among practitioners;

» Exchange periodic on-line newsletters to facilitate the sharing of information and experiences, including relevant case law on firearms and organized crime/terrorism cases.

Flagship products:

» Community of Practitioners Against Illicit Firearms Trafficking, consisting of more than 1,000 practitioners

» Cross border operation KAFO to disrupt illicit arms flows in the Sahel region

» Regional meetings in Latin America and the Caribbean, Central Asia, Wester Africa and Western Balkans to discuss firearms trafficking cases and ongoing investigations
PILLAR 5:
Monitoring illicit trafficking: data, research and analysis

ACTIVITIES:
» Development and periodic review the IAFQ and related method for firearms data collection expanding the use of complementary information;
» Encourage the designation of National Firearms Focal Points to facilitate data collection and analysis;
» Raise awareness/knowledge on data collection and analysis and foster information exchange;
» Provide advisory services and technical assistance for data collection and analysis;
» Develop a Global Study on Illicit Firearms Trafficking;
» Conduct global, regional/sub-regional studies and analysis on firearms trafficking;
» Analyze the gender dimension of firearms criminality from regional and global perspectives;
» Research and develop a series of Issue papers on the links between firearms trafficking and other criminal activities/modalities (arms diversion, drugs trafficking, crimes that affect the environment, terrorism, corruption, economic crimes, etc.);
» Support global monitoring of SDG 16.4.

Flagship products:
» The Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire (IAFQ)
» 2015 Study on Firearms & Country Fact Sheets
» 2020 Global Study on Firearms Trafficking
» Regional Analysis Report on Illicit Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts, Components and Ammunition to, from and across the European Union.
» Issue paper: Supporting evidence-based action to counter illicit firearms trafficking and related forms of crime
» Guiding Templates for Firearms-related Investigations
» Video on monitoring illicit arms flows
» Information document on the role of focal points appointed for the IAFQ
» UNIDIR-UNODC Issue Brief on Addressing the linkages between illicit arms, organized crime and armed conflict
Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

Indicator 16.4.2: Proportion of seized, found or surrendered arms whose illicit origin or context has been traced or established by a competent authority in line with international instruments
Firearms leftover from the region’s numerous conflicts circulate throughout North and West Africa and the Sahel region with great ease over vast and porous borders and with limited checks. Following the armed conflict in Libya in 2011 and the crisis in Mali in 2012, countries in the region have faced growing dangers from trafficking in firearms. Proliferation into the Sahel-Saharan region has increased the terrorist threat; several countries have suffered high profile attacks utilizing firearms (including Côte d’Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Niger and Tunisia). Furthermore, various countries – such as Niger – are at crossroads for the interconnected trafficking in drugs, firearms, and persons, as well as the smuggling of migrants.
In Central Africa, countries like Chad and Cameroon are surrounded by violence and insecurity in neighbouring developing states. Political crises and armed uprisings in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic have contributed to the regional proliferation of firearms and led to the erosion of state authority in various territories, accompanied by the exploitation of natural resources and its subsequent commercialization. In Eastern Africa, the proliferation of firearms is the result of decades of violent conflict, piracy, “weak arms transfer controls and law enforcement and border control capacities that have perpetuated crime and undermined human security and development.” Strengthened national and regional efforts are needed to control the illicit trade and trafficking in firearms.

GFP has been supporting selected countries in Central and West Africa (Benin, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Côte d’Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Senegal, and Togo), the Sahel region (with a major focus on Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger, and Mali) and the Maghreb / MENA region (Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia primarily), in areas such as legislative assistance, technical support for marking, record keeping, collection and destruction of firearms, capacity building and operational support to national criminal justice systems to detect, investigate and prosecute firearms trafficking and related crimes, mentoring, fostering regional and international cooperation and information exchange including creation of Joint Investigation Teams, as well as strengthening data collection and analysis on illicit firearms trafficking flows and achievement of SDG 16.4.

GFP also continues to support a cross-border operation across West Africa codenamed “KAFO”, jointly coordinated with the INTERPOL Firearms Programme. The key objective of this operation is to provide training in the use of operational tools as well as techniques to support the fight against illicit firearms trafficking, including training on the detection of firearms trafficking at land border crossings; encouraging the use of the iARMS database and improving national and regional coordination and cooperation with the judiciary and prosecution services. In addition, the Programme, through its cooperation with ECOWAS and ECCAS, contributes to the implementation of the firearms component of the Pan-African “Silencing the Guns” Initiative.
The easy access to illicit firearms by criminals in Latin America and the Caribbean facilitates and aggravates the incidence of criminality in the region, including gang violence, drugs trafficking, human trafficking, illegal mining and many other violent crimes, hence posing an obstacle to the rule of law, security and development. The region suffers the highest levels of firearms-related violence in the world, with more than 70% of the homicides committed with firearms. Whilst Latin America has made significant progress in addressing the overarching challenges and threats to human security posed by decades of rampant drug trafficking, organized crime and armed conflicts, the region still faces serious challenges to tackle firearms trafficking. Hence, strengthening preventive and criminal justice responses as well as regional cooperation mechanisms is urgently needed to prevent and counter illicit firearms trafficking in the region.

In the framework two projects under the Global Illicit Flows Programme (GIFP) funded by the European Union, GFP supports most of South and Central American countries through regional activities that seek to promote legislative harmonization in line with international instruments on firearms, reinforce firearms control systems, capacity building, cooperation in criminal matters and information exchange and awareness raising, inter alia. Additionally, tailored technical advice has been provided to selected countries, including Bolivia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Paraguay.

Through the project DISRUPT, jointly implemented with INTERPOL since 2020, GFP is providing training on investigation and prosecution of firearms trafficking and has supported with INTERPOL the 'Operation Trigger VI' – a joint operation aimed at fostering regional and international cooperation among Latin American countries.

In addition, the Programme provides currently support to investigations in 23 cases of firearms trafficking, most of them of transnational nature. All the cases were identified together with the national authorities after a regional meeting. Informal contact groups as subregional forums to coordinate investigations and exchange intelligence are promoted. One of them is already working with participation of four South American countries.

Particularly, one of the projects running since 2019 has supported Bolivia’s ratification of the Firearms Protocol and strengthening of its legislative framework on firearms; it has contributed to arms control capacities of Bolivia and Paraguay through the delivery of firearms marking machines; delivered trainings on detection, investigation and prosecution to Bolivia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Paraguay; developed technical assistance tools to facilitate the investigation and prosecution of firearms related crimes; supports Paraguay in the establishment of a Firearms Integrated Centre within its institutional framework; promoted cooperation and information exchange through a number of regional meetings among criminal justice practitioners working against firearms trafficking; and has contributed to a better understanding on the illicit arms flows and its linkages to other crimes through research.
With the financial support of Germany, GFP has provided legislative advice to selected countries of the region (Barbados, Belize, Guyana, Saint Lucia and Trinidad and Tobago) to enhance their regulatory frameworks on firearms and facilitate the legislative harmonisation in the region. These efforts have materialised, in a new draft Firearms Bill in Guyana. GFP has also conducted comprehensive assessments in four countries and provided with tailored recommendations. It is worth mentioning, among them, that the assessment in Haiti has contributed to the recent UN Security Council discussions and resolutions on supporting Haiti.

Caribbean States have developed a Roadmap for addressing Caribbean priority actions on the illicit proliferation of firearms and ammunition across the Caribbean in a sustainable manner by 2030 (Caribbean Firearms Roadmap).

Since 2021, UNODC Global Firearms Programme has been assisting Caribbean countries in their efforts to implement the criminal justice components of the Caribbean Firearms Roadmap.

GFP is also participating in the Project SALIENT in Jamaica along with other United Nations partners and in collaboration with the Government of Jamaica, geared at reducing violence and the proliferation of illicit firearms. Specifically, GFP is supporting the country to enhance its legislative and policy frameworks related to firearms and strengthen the criminal justice capacities to detect, investigate and prosecute firearms trafficking.

GFP has achieved a great level of cooperation with the partners in the region, most notably CARICOM IMPACS, UNLIREC, UNDP and AIRCOP in the coordination of activities, whilst other partners like WCO, USA ATF, UK NABIS, Canadian RCMP, EUROPOL, FRONTEX, and Small Arms Survey, among others.

GFP has also provided training to strengthen national capacities to detect, investigate and prosecute firearms trafficking through national workshops and regional webinars, and a regional meeting to facilitate regional cooperation in criminal matters. Finally, GFP also supports collection and analysis of firearms-related data. Moreover, with Swedish and German funds, GFP is also researching on the gendered dimension of firearms criminality.

The Caribbean has experienced a surge of violence in recent years, which can be largely attributed to an escalation of organised crime and gangs. Armed violence rates in the region are almost three times higher than global average, with particularly high homicide rates in many of the islands and firearms involved in most of the homicides. The easy accessibility to illicit firearms is not only contributing to high levels of violence, but also exacerbating the impact of other forms of crime persistent in the region, such as drug and human trafficking, gender-based violence and gang criminality, as well other illegal income-generating activities, like burglaries, robberies, extortion, kidnapping for ransom, among others.

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In the Western Balkans, UNODC established together with UNDP a Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) for the implementation of the regional Roadmap for a sustainable solution to arms control. The Roadmap foresees the development of comprehensive and sustainable mechanisms to identify, prevent, prosecute, and control the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of firearms, ammunition and explosives.

UNODC implements three projects under the MPFT supporting the criminal justice response to counter firearms trafficking, detection of firearms, their parts and ammunition in Express Courier and postal parcels, and international cooperation in criminal matters. Main achievements include the development of legislative gap analysis of material and procedural criminal law and supporting the amendment of the Criminal Codes to harmonize them with the criminalization provisions of the UN Firearms Protocol; the development of Guidelines on the investigation and prosecution of firearms offences; and the development of Firearms Case Law collection and working with the judiciary to harmonize court practices. UNODC delivered specialized training on the identification and tracing of firearms and collection of electronic evidence across borders and works with the Training Centers and Judicial Academies to include capacity building in their curricula. UNODC supported the inter-institutional cooperation between law enforcement, customs and prosecutorial services on the application of the criminal procedure in firearms cases and the exchange of good practices.

UNODC developed a baseline assessment of firearms data collection and supported relevant authorities in their participation in the UN Monitoring Illicit Arms Flows initiative.

UNODC improved the capacity of Express Courier companies, designated Postal Operators and Customs to counter the trafficking of firearms by providing technical assistance, including delivery of X-ray scanners, development of standard operating procedures, and delivery of training, which resulted in increased detection rates.
UNODC supports since 2020 Ukrainian counterparts in the area firearms control. The main counterparts in Ukraine include the Prosecutor’s General Office, National Police, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Justice, State Customs Service and Security Service of Ukraine (SSU). UNODC’s international counterparts in relation to activities in Ukraine are FRONTEX, EUROPOL, European Union Border Assistance Mission to Ukraine and Moldova, and the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT- FIREARMS).

UNODC provided support for developing gap analysis on the harmonization of the criminal legislations with the UN Firearms Protocol and facilitated the process of preparing the amendment of the firearms offences in the Criminal Code of Ukraine. UNODC provided support to the State Customs Service (SCS) of Ukraine for detection of firearms in Express Courier and postal parcels, which resulted in the development of a needs assessment, a training tool for analysis of firearms x-ray images, and facilitated the participation of SCS in the EMPACT Firearms lead “Operation Armstrong” on detection of firearms in postal parcels.

The international community has increasingly acknowledged and expressed its concern at the nexus between terrorism and multiple forms of organized crime, including trafficking of firearms, as a serious threat to peace, security and an obstacle to sustainable development. In this context, Central Asian (CA) countries have affirmed their political engagement to fight against terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and to implement the UN Global Counter Terrorism Strategy and the UN Security Council resolutions against terrorism, including the UNSCR 2370 (2017) on preventing terrorists from acquiring weapons. To this end, CA countries developed and adopted, in November 2011, at a high-level meeting held in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, a Joint Plan of Action for the Implementation of the United Nations Global Counter Terrorism Strategy in Central Asia, which reflects the broad and comprehensive Global Strategy and explicitly recognizes the existence of interlinkages between terrorism and organized crime, money laundering, drug and human trafficking, which need to be addressed.

UNODC has been actively involved in the Central Asian region and in 2020 together with UNOCT started the implementation of a joint project on Addressing the terrorism-arms-crime nexus: Preventing and combatting the illicit trafficking of small-arms and light weapons (SALW) and their illicit supply to terrorists - Supporting the implementation of SCR.2370/2017 and the Madrid Guiding Principles. The Project is currently providing limited legislative assistance to review national legislative frameworks and institutions on firearms control matters and providing technical support to strengthen the strategic and operational capacities of the countries in the region to properly prevent, detect and counter firearms trafficking flows into, through and from the region, and consequently also address the associated activities of terrorism and organized crime. A sub-regional study, along with enhanced data collection, analysis and sharing capacity will contribute to enhance the intelligence picture and promote evidence-based approaches by practitioners. The project is currently in its second implementation phase and, to date, over 420 national experts benefited from capacity building and awareness-raising activities.
The change in the status-quo in Afghanistan opens the possibility to create risks and vulnerabilities that can spread at national and regional levels and beyond.

While drugs, organized crime and terrorism pose an intertwined, primary threat to stability in Afghanistan, the region and beyond, the uncontrolled proliferation of and access to firearms and other weapons acts is among the primary vehicles through which these crimes can flourish and their impact on peace and security significantly aggravate.

The UN Security Council has given mandate to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), to support – in cooperation with other UN agencies – regional and international efforts to prevent and address the illicit trade in and destabilizing accumulation of small arms and light weapons and their diversion in Afghanistan and the region.

UNODC is well suited to support this mandate, given its longstanding presence and work in the country and in the wider region on related themes such as drugs trafficking, opium production, drug abuse inter alia. UNODC is already working with the authorities in the five Central Asian states, and has initiated contacts with other strategic countries, such as Pakistan, Iraq, India, to respond to the concerns expressed by the national authorities for the increased risk of firearm diversion and trafficking in and through their region, and their request for assistance to UNODC in addressing the phenomenon and the associated risks in crime and terrorism.

UNODC will work in cooperation with relevant national and international partners on the ground. The project will directly contribute of the implementation of the SC mandate and the UNODC "Strategic Stability Grid - Monitoring, preventing and containing intersecting drug, crime and terrorism threats in and around Afghanistan to protect people and promote stability" providing the beneficiary states more effective frameworks to detect and interdict the flow of illicit firearms, their parts, components and ammunition across the region.

Since a United States-organized coalition invaded Iraq in 2003, the country was dragged into a spiral of war, instability, terrorist insurgency and civil unrest. Facing these security challenges, Iraqi security forces were supplied with vast amounts of small arms and ammunition. However, large quantities could not be accounted for and entered the illicit market where they continue to circulate, creating easy access to criminals, terrorists and insurgents. The Iraqi Government faces significant obstacles in enforcing an effective national arms control regime and tackling the illicit arms market.

In support of Iraq’s request for assistance in the field of firearms control, the Global Firearms deployed a scoping mission to Baghdad to get a better understanding of the factors that cause the market for illicit firearms in Iraq to strive and to discuss challenges and the response capacities with national stakeholders. Following the needs assessment mission UNODC GFP performed an in-depth analysis of the national legislation and institutional framework of Iraq in the field of firearms, organized crime and terrorism.

A follow-up assessment mission to Baghdad and Kurdistan-region will follow in 2023. Based on the findings of these assessment, UNODC together with the Governments of Iraq and Kurdistan will develop an Action Plan to prevent and combat firearms proliferation in Iraq, including Kurdistan. This Action Plan will serve as guidance for future implementation support of UNODC in Iraq, subject to the availability of extrabudgetary funding.
As part of its efforts to carry out its mandate in the best possible way, UNODC Global Firearms Programme encourages the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, gender mainstreaming, promoting human rights and victim-centred approaches, supporting the participation and oversight of civil society, as well as public awareness and visibility.

The new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has taken up the concern repeatedly expressed by the international community, for the threats posed by the illicit arms trafficking and its growing nexus to organized crime, acknowledging their negative impact on sustainable development. The UN Sustainable Development Goals clearly reflect this position by establishing target goal 16.4, calling upon States 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". By linking illicit financial and arms flows, the recovery and return of stolen assets, to the combat of all forms of organized crime, the new UNSDG also acknowledge the cross-cutting and pivotal importance that the reduction of illicit financial and arms flows play in the overall combat against organized crime. One of the pillars of the Global Firearms Programme is the monitoring of illicit firearms flows, essential for the global monitoring of progress on the SDG target indicator 16.4.2 – Proportion of seized, found or surrendered arms whose illicit origin or context has been traced or established by a competent authority in line with international instruments, for which the UNODC is a custodian jointly with UNODA. Monitoring and analyzing illicit arms flows is crucial to understand the extent and impact of these flows around the globe, allowing States to make informed decisions, develop policy and operational responses to the threat they pose.

The reduction of illicit firearms flows and the prevention of their misuse is also closely linked to other SDGs, such as ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, which helps to prevent engagement of children and youth in criminal activities and building social cohesion (Goal 4); achieving gender equality and empower all women and girls (Goal 5); making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable (Goal 11); as well as Goal 17, which aims at strengthening the means of implementation of Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.

**GENDER-SENSITIVE APPROACH**

UNODC Global Firearms Programme acknowledges that responses against firearms trafficking and related criminality should not be gender-neutral, recognising that both their causes and consequences are strongly linked to established gender norms, and they do not involve and affect men, women and people of other gender identities in the same way, neither it does to each of these groups based on other aspects such as age, ethnicity, education, religion or economic situation. All of these affected groups should be afforded solutions which properly address their specific plight, and be granted equal rights to participate in initiatives to control firearms and address related criminality.
GFP considers that mainstreaming the gender dimension in its work is therefore vital to define more effective responses, in line with UNODC Gender Strategy 2022-2027, Women Peace and Security Agenda and further international standards. To that end, GFP promotes the participation of relevant civil society and academia in legislative processes and sessions with parliamentarians to increase transparency, in capacity building workshops to share their knowledge, as well as in research to integrate grass-root information and community-based perspectives in the analysis.

Finally, in the context of the Review Mechanism for the implementation of UNTOC and its Protocols, GFP facilitates the participation of relevant stakeholders in constructive dialogues, as well as capacity building workshops on the implementation of the Firearms Protocol and its impact on the national firearms control strategies, which help to ensure accountability and transparency.

PROMOTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND VICTIM-CENTERED APPROACHES

Human rights are at the core of all work of the UN system and, together with peace and security and development, represent one of the three, interlinked and mutually reinforcing pillars of the UN as enshrined in the United Nations Charter. Bearing in mind the centrality of human rights to the aims of the UN, all technical assistance programmes’ policies aim at the realization of human rights. GFP particularly integrates human rights instruments and principles into the formulation, development and implementation of all its initiatives, training and technical assistance. In doing so, GFP places with careful attention to underscoring the respect for human rights within the criminal justice system, and reinforcing the importance of building the capacities of vulnerable and marginalized groups, while increasing levels of transparency and accountability among duty bearers.

PUBLIC AWARENESS AND VISIBILITY

In order to effectively tackle the firearms trafficking issue, it is essential to create awareness among both decision-makers, key stakeholders and the population on emerging trends in trafficking, linkages to other crimes, as well as the impact and threat that illicit firearms pose to security and related criminality. Adequate information and awareness is also crucial in the context of voluntary surrenders of firearms when this is appropriate. To this end, GFP organizes side events, develops awareness raising materials and publications, and uses media and social networks to shed light and increase the general knowledge on the issue.

CIVIL SOCIETY

UNODC promotes the participation and engagement of civil society organizations, academia and community workers to prevent and counter the root causes of firearm-related criminality and violence, especially among children and adolescents who are particularly vulnerable to recruitment into gangs and other forms of organized crime.
The project is executed by the UNODC Firearms Trafficking Section (FTS) through its Global Firearms Programme, which is part of the Organized Crime and Illicit Trafficking Branch (OCB). The FTS team is currently composed of 27 persons among international and national staff, of which 50% is placed in the local field Offices, and various short-term consultants. The project also counts on substantive input and support from other UNODC’s branches and sections and in cooperation with relevant UNODC Field Offices.

FTS has built close relationships with internal UNODC projects and external agencies to enhance project implementation and encourage synergies. Expanded use of partnerships will be key to implementing the 2023-2030 UNODC Strategy on illicit firearms and their criminal use.

FTS will better explore the interconnectedness between trafficking in and use of firearms and the illicit trafficking of other commodities such as drugs, as well as its links with other criminal areas such as terrorism, maritime crime, corruption and illicit financial flows, notably through research and monitoring. While implementing activities, whenever relevant, UNODC FTS will seek coordination and synergies with other relevant UNODC Global Programmes, projects, sections, and field offices.

FTS has built up a good working relationship with other parts of the United Nations system, as well as other international and regional organizations, based on the principle of complementarity, avoiding overlapping activities. Some traditional partners include inter alia the Office of Counter-Terrorism, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), the European Union Justice and Home Affairs Agencies (EUROPOL, EUROJUST, FRONTEX, CEPOL), EU Member States through EMPACT Firearms, ECOWAS, ECCAS, CARICOM, OAS, and OSCE. In the coming years, we will seek to deepen existing partnerships and various regional organizations working on our mandate areas. We will continue to facilitate multi-stakeholder engagement in the implementation of the Firearms Protocol, including constructive dialogues with civil society, academia, think tanks (such as CROSS, Flemish Peace Institute, GRIP, Small Arms Survey, inter alia). FTS will continue to develop its partnership framework to expand UNODC’s role as convener and facilitator of public/private partnerships in the areas of illicit firearms trafficking. Building on our success in partnering with the private sector in the area of fast postal parcel delivery, FTS will notably expand such private sector partnerships with railways and other types of public transportation companies.
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