



to ratify, accept, approve or accede to and implement the Firearms Protocol. While the Office's work and thematic expertise to support the ratification and implementation of the Firearms Protocol is centralized within its Firearms Trafficking Section and Global Firearms Programme, numerous UNODC global and regional programmes, as well as dedicated projects, complement these efforts.

4. During the reporting period, the Firearms Trafficking Section conducted activities and implemented projects in six subregions: West and Central Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, Central Asia and the Western Balkans; as well as national projects in Iraq, Pakistan, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. In total, the Section is currently implementing eight projects in 46 partner countries, with 22 staff members deployed in 9 of those countries.

5. Key achievements during the reporting period included the following:

(a) Collaborative efforts were undertaken with authorities from 64 jurisdictions to raise awareness, provide policy and legislative advice, strengthen national capacities and foster international cooperation in the context of the implementation of the Firearms Protocol;

(b) Over 1,300 national stakeholders were reached, including more than 650 practitioners provided with capacity-building activities in the detection, investigation, prosecution and adjudication of firearms trafficking cases;

(c) Legislative reviews of 11 countries were conducted and shared, two firearms bills were drafted in close collaboration with national drafting committees and, with UNODC support, two countries reinforced their criminal codes by bringing them into line with the Firearms Protocol;

(d) A total of 21 comprehensive scoping missions were conducted to assess both the capacity of countries to respond to firearms trafficking and related forms of crime, and their related technical assistance and equipment needs;

(e) Manuals for the X-ray detection of firearms, their parts and components and ammunition in postal and express parcels were developed and translated;

(f) Operational support was provided, in cooperation with the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) and the European Multidisciplinary Platform against Criminal Threats (EMPACT) priority action on firearms, through the coordination of two cross-border law enforcement operations and onward criminal investigations to dismantle firearms trafficking networks in West and Central Africa and in Latin America; the operations and investigations brought together hundreds of police officers and led to the seizure of more than 9,000 firearms, and 307,581 rounds of ammunition;

(g) Mentoring support to countries in Latin America and West and Central Africa for the investigation, prosecution and adjudication of firearms trafficking cases was enhanced, leading to the establishment of two joint investigation teams and one informal contact group;

(h) The Community of Practitioners against Firearms Trafficking and Related Crimes, which promotes the exchange of information, good practices and lessons learned among practitioners in relation to the investigation and prosecution of firearms-related cases, was expanded, and held two regional meetings for Central Asian countries and one cross-regional meeting for African and Latin American countries;

(i) Continued assistance was provided to target countries to support data collection and analysis on firearms through the illicit arms flow questionnaire;

(j) The development of an integrated firearms record-keeping software application, entitled "goIFAR" was concluded and scoping missions to two countries to customize the software were organized;

(k) Three issue papers exploring the interlinkages between the trafficking and misuse of firearms and other serious crimes were under development and contributions were made to several threat assessments;

(l) Flagship tools, including the case-based *Guidelines on the Investigation and Prosecution of Firearms Offences* and the *Digest of Firearms Trafficking and Related Crimes Cases 2023: A Review of Cases and Good Practices Emerging from National Jurisprudence*, were developed.

6. However, despite the above-mentioned achievements, the Firearms Trafficking Section faced the following key challenges during the reporting period:

(a) Owing to its lack of dedicated regular budget positions, the Section faced constraints in fulfilling its mandated normative and secretariat functions for intergovernmental processes related to the Firearms Protocol, including the servicing of meetings of the Working Group on Firearms and the Conference of the Parties;

(b) The lack of predictable, multi-year funding and being restricted to the use of strictly earmarked funds further limited the Section's ability to respond to changing dynamics, emerging needs and increasing requests for assistance, especially in firearms trafficking hotspots. A flexible funding facility dedicated to efforts to counter firearms trafficking could serve to support the monitoring of emerging threats and spillover risks and the rapid deployment of resources, thereby supporting those countries that most require the assistance of UNODC.

## **II. Five-pillar approach of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in supporting the ratification and implementation of the Firearms Protocol**

7. The Firearms Trafficking Section, through the Global Firearms Programme, follows an integrated, gender-responsive and human rights-based approach that builds on five interrelated pillars: (a) enhancing policy and normative development through awareness-raising and legislative assistance to support the ratification and implementation of the Firearms Protocol; (b) providing technical support for the implementation of preventive and security measures; (c) strengthening criminal justice responses to detect, investigate and prosecute the illicit manufacturing and diversion of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition; (d) fostering and promoting international cooperation and information exchange to address the transnational dimension of firearms trafficking and related issues; and (e) mapping and monitoring illicit firearms flows by means of global data collection and analysis and strategic research, to enhance the collective understanding of trends and patterns in trafficking and its criminal context. In doing so, the Section actively contributes to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular target 16.4 (by 2030, significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows and combat all forms of organized crime). The Section's commitment to gender mainstreaming, human rights and civil society participation and oversight cuts across all five pillars, and those elements of its commitment are streamlined into the activities of the Section.

## Integrated five-pillar approach of the Firearms Trafficking Section



8. Building on the findings of the independent in-depth evaluation of the Global Firearms Programme, which was finalized in 2021, the Firearms Trafficking Section initiated, in April 2022, the development of the UNODC Global Strategy against Illicit Firearms 2024–2030. The strategy is aimed at streamlining and reshaping the Office’s vision and response regarding new and emerging technological and geopolitical challenges and enhancing its result-based intervention logic to address the problem of illicit firearms and its links to transnational organized crime and terrorism. Following a broad consultation process within the Office and with external partners and stakeholders, the strategy is in the stage of being finalized and is to be launched in the second half of 2024.

9. Furthermore, the Firearms Trafficking Section conducted an in-depth review of the Global Firearms Programme with a view to streamlining its areas of intervention, aligning it with the new strategy and strengthening its gender-responsiveness aspects. The Firearms Trafficking Section team, together with gender and firearms control experts, identified gaps in the gender-responsiveness of the Programme and opportunities to increase it across all pillars of intervention of the Programme; those opportunities included the development of a dedicated training module on the gender dimensions of the criminal justice response to firearms trafficking and the provision of specialized training on gender mainstreaming to all staff members of the Firearms Trafficking Section.

### III. Activities to assist States in the implementation of the Firearms Protocol

10. During the reporting period, the Firearms Trafficking Section carried out more than 100 intergovernmental, awareness-raising, and legislative and technical assistance activities through donor support,<sup>1</sup> bringing together more than

<sup>1</sup> Activities carried out during the reporting period were funded through voluntary contributions from Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Sweden, the European Union, the United Nations Development Programme office in Jamaica, the United Nations multi-partner trust fund in support of the implementation of the road map for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of small arms and light weapons and their ammunition in the Western Balkans by 2024, the Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Saving Lives Entity trust fund.

1,300 national stakeholders from 64 jurisdictions to promote accession to and the full implementation of the Firearms Protocol.

11. UNODC also acted as an implementing partner for two regional road maps on firearms: the Roadmap for Implementing the Caribbean Priority Actions on the Illicit Proliferation of Firearms and Ammunition across the Caribbean in a Sustainable Manner by 2030 and the road map for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of small arms and light weapons and their ammunition in the Western Balkans by 2024 (the Western Balkans small arms and light weapons control road map). Assistance by UNODC was focused on supporting participating States in the implementation of the criminal justice components of those road maps.

## **A. Support to intergovernmental bodies and processes**

### **1. Conference of the Parties and the Working Group on Firearms**

12. At its eleventh session, the Conference of the Parties adopted resolution 11/6, in which it welcomed the eighth and ninth meetings of the Working Group on Firearms and invited States parties to consider, as appropriate, applying the relevant and applicable recommendations and discussion points resulting from the Working Group meetings, in order to contribute to the strengthening of international cooperation against the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition.

13. In the same resolution, the Conference requested UNODC to continue to assist requesting States in their efforts to ratify, accept, approve or accede to and implement the Firearms Protocol, and encouraged those Member States in a position to do so to make available extrabudgetary resources to enable the Office to better implement its mandate in that regard. In particular, the Conference requested UNODC to develop a new study on firearms trafficking, as well as regional studies and analyses; to continue to provide technical assistance and capacity-building related to mechanisms and strategies for border control and to strengthening early-detection capacities through the use of new technological tools; and to continue to assist States parties in their efforts to strengthen their firearms control regimes, in particular in the areas of legislative assistance, the development of technical and operational tools and support for firearms identification, seizure, confiscation and disposal, and technical support for marking, record-keeping and tracing, as well as training and capacity-building in the investigation and prosecution of related crimes. Lastly, the Conference requested UNODC to continue fostering the collection and sharing of information on trends, effective responses and related experiences among practitioners.

14. On the margins of the eleventh session of the Conference of the Parties, the Global Firearms Programme held two side events, one on the topic “Responding to the threats of firearms trafficking in a changing world: towards a new UNODC strategy on firearms”, and the other on the topic “Practical approaches to strengthen comprehensive criminal justice responses to firearms trafficking”. Furthermore, the Programme co-organized two side events, one with the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), on the topic “Deadly linkages: the arms-crime-conflict nexus”, in which a joint issue paper<sup>2</sup> on that topic was launched; and one with IM Swedish Development Partner and the non-governmental organization Humanium Metal on the topic “Exploring firearm destruction and its relevance for affected communities in practice”.

15. The Office also provided secretariat support for the tenth and eleventh meetings of the Working Group on Firearms, held in Vienna on 3 and 4 May 2023 and on 3 and 4 April 2024, and the ensuing second and third constructive dialogues with relevant stakeholders on the review process related to the Firearms Protocol, held in Vienna

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “Addressing the linkages between illicit arms, organized crime and armed conflict” (2022).

on 5 May 2023 and on 5 April 2024. For the tenth meeting of the Working Group, the secretariat prepared two background papers, entitled “Strengthening international and inter-agency cooperation and coordination mechanisms in accordance with the Firearms Protocol and the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime” (CTOC/COP/WG.6/2023/2) and “Implementation of articles 3 (Use of terms) and 4 (Scope of application) of the Firearms Protocol” (CTOC/COP/WG.6/2023/3). For the eleventh meeting, the secretariat prepared a background paper entitled “Operationalizing the Firearms Protocol in view of technological developments relating to the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition” (CTOC/COP/WG.6/2024/2) and a second paper focused on the implementation of article 5 (Criminalization) of the Firearms Protocol (CTOC/COP/WG.6/2024/3). Furthermore, for both of the meetings, the secretariat prepared an additional background paper, each entitled “Status of the functioning of the Mechanism for the Review of the Implementation of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols thereto” (CTOC/COP/WG.6/2023/4 and CTOC/COP/WG.6/2024/4). Notably, at its eleventh meeting, the Working Group recommended that UNODC, inter alia, update several of its technical assistance tools and develop technical standards and/or guidelines on the implementation of the Firearms Protocol in the light of technological developments. The reports of the Working Group on Firearms on its tenth and eleventh meetings (CTOC/COP/WG.6/2023/5 and CTOC/COP/WG.6/2024/5) – each containing, with regard to the respective meetings, the recommendations adopted by the Working Group, a summary of its deliberations and an outline of the organization of the meeting – and the summaries by the Chair of the Working Group of the second and third constructive dialogues on the review process related to the Firearms Protocol, will be before the Conference of the Parties at its twelfth session.

## 2. Support for and cooperation with other intergovernmental bodies

16. During the reporting period, the Firearms Trafficking Section also raised awareness of the issue of firearms trafficking and related forms of crime among various other intergovernmental bodies.

17. The Office contributed to reports to the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Human Rights Council that focused on firearms. They included the 2023 report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on small arms and light weapons (S/2023/823), the 2023 and 2024 reports of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly on assistance to States for curbing the illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons and collecting them and the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects (A/78/126 and A/79/77) and the reports of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to the Human Rights Council on the impact of the civilian acquisition, possession and use of firearms (A/HRC/53/49) and on the impact of arms transfers on human rights (A/HRC/51/15 and A/HRC/56/42). Furthermore, pursuant to paragraph 9 of Security Council resolution 2692 (2023), UNODC has, since October 2023, submitted quarterly reports to the Security Council to brief its members on sources and routes of illicit arms and financial flows in relation to Haiti, and on relevant United Nations activities and recommendations.<sup>3</sup>

18. Furthermore, through the Firearms Trafficking Section, UNODC hosted two side events on the margins of the thirty-second session of the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice. During the first side event, UNODC launched the *Guidelines on the Investigation and Prosecution of Firearms Offences*. The second side event, organized jointly with the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Conflict Armament Research and the Government of Germany, was aimed at promoting a joint project to implement the Mission’s mandate of preventing and addressing the destabilizing accumulation of arms and their diversion in Afghanistan and the region.

<sup>3</sup> S/2023/780, S/2024/79 and S/2024/320.

19. During the sixty-seventh session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, held in Vienna from 14 to 22 March 2024, the Firearms Trafficking Section hosted a side event to present its issue paper, jointly developed with the Flemish Peace Institute, entitled *Firearms and Drugs: Partners in Transnational Crime*.

20. Lastly, UNODC continued to engage in regional and global policy-making processes in relation to firearms. That included the Office's active role in the inter-agency Global Symposium on Weapons and Ammunition Management: Frameworks, Policies and Practices, organized by UNIDIR and held in Geneva in November 2023, and its participation in two conferences, one on the threat of firearms trafficking and possible measures to enhance cooperation between customs authorities and the other on the use of additive manufacturing (3D printing) for the illicit manufacture of firearms, held in the framework of the Spanish and Swedish presidencies of the Council of the European Union.

## **B. Technical assistance**

### **1. Comprehensive assessments of needs and response capacities, and development of joint road maps or action plans**

21. In the reporting period, UNODC conducted assessment missions to Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Honduras, Iraq, Mali, Montenegro, Pakistan and Senegal, as well as all jurisdictions in the Western Balkans, to analyse response capacities and technical assistance needs in relation to effectively preventing, detecting, investigating, prosecuting and adjudicating firearms trafficking and related forms of crime.

22. The findings of those country visits were shared with the respective authorities and led, in several cases, to the development or updating of jointly agreed road maps or action plans and the identification of priority areas for mutual engagement and cooperation to address identified needs. Such findings have also formed the basis for technical assistance proposals developed by UNODC and shared with its donor community.

### **2. Policy and normative development**

23. The Office continues to advocate for the universalization of the Firearms Protocol and provides pre-ratification support to States that are considering becoming parties to the Protocol. During the reporting period, UNODC assisted five countries in that process, including by drafting legal memorandums on the interpretation and implementation of provisions of the Protocol.

24. Developing effective national firearms control strategies and strengthening national legal frameworks on firearms is at the core of the Office's mandate and remains a key focus area of the work of the Firearms Trafficking Section to promote sustainable changes in beneficiary countries. The tailored and progressively engaging and participatory process starts with a legislative and institutional assessment, in which UNODC experts assess compliance with regional and international instruments and the inherent consistency of national firearms acts and regulations. In subsequent inter-institutional workshops, the findings and recommendations of the assessments are discussed, resulting in tailored legal drafting support, where needed.

25. In relation to policy development, in 2023, Honduras, with the support of UNODC, updated a national action plan that had been agreed with UNODC in 2019 aimed at preventing and combating firearms trafficking and related forms of crime.

26. In Africa, consultations were undertaken with the Governments of Angola and Ghana with a view to conducting legislative assessments to identify potential gaps between existing firearms legislation and the countries' regional and international commitments. Furthermore, UNODC provided legislative advice and drafting support to Chad and the Niger. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, following the provision of extensive legislative assistance, the Office, in close collaboration with

the country's National Commission for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons, supported the Government in the development and submission of a draft firearms bill, which, at the time of writing the present report, was under consideration by competent authorities of that country.

27. In Latin America, UNODC conducted desk reviews of the national legal frameworks on firearms of Brazil, Costa Rica and Ecuador, and advised the Governments and legislative bodies of the latter two countries on urgent measures to contain the increasing threats posed to the two countries by the diversion of and trafficking in firearms, and their use by criminal gangs.

28. In Central Asia, UNODC continued to conduct gap analyses and delivered legislative workshops in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The Office also provided pre-ratification support to several countries in the region that were considering accession to the Firearms Protocol.

29. In 2023, the Firearms Trafficking Section launched a new project in the Western Balkans entitled "Project Justitia". The project builds on previous work carried out in the region, with the aim of enhancing the ability of criminal justice institutions to develop legislation and conduct investigations and prosecutions of cases involving illicit firearms and related organized crime. In the context of the project and its predecessor, UNODC supported national working groups, in all jurisdictions in the Western Balkans, that had been established for the purpose of amending the respective criminal codes of those jurisdictions. As a result, Montenegro and North Macedonia updated their laws in 2023, introducing the criminal offence of trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition. With those changes, the Criminal Code of North Macedonia became one of the first laws in the world to criminalize the possession of blueprints with the intention of illicitly manufacturing firearms using 3D-printing technology. Furthermore, a regional meeting on legal harmonization was organized in North Macedonia.

30. In the Caribbean, UNODC continued to review and develop national legislative frameworks on firearms. In 2023, desk reviews of national firearms acts were conducted for the Bahamas and Belize. Furthermore, the Firearms Trafficking Section organized several legislative workshops, including a legislative assessment workshop in Saint Lucia, and three legislative drafting workshops, one in Guyana and two in Trinidad and Tobago, to further elaborate and to validate draft firearms bills that had been developed with legal drafting support from the Office. The work directly contributes to achieving Goal 1 of the Roadmap for Implementing the Caribbean Priority Actions on the Illicit Proliferation of Firearms and Ammunition across the Caribbean in a Sustainable Manner by 2030 (Caribbean Firearms Roadmap), which is to reinforce regulatory frameworks governing firearms and ammunition.

31. Lastly, in Ukraine, UNODC supported the work of a working group on developing a new criminal code in reviewing the draft provisions on firearms trafficking. That support included a comparative analysis of the draft provisions and the country's international commitments with regard to firearms trafficking.

### **3. Technical support for the implementation of preventive and security measures**

32. The Office continued to provide technical support and advice to Member States in the implementation of preventive and security measures under the Firearms Protocol, in particular for marking and record-keeping, the storage of seized and confiscated firearms and ammunition, and the collection, management and disposal of illicit firearms. Such technical advice is often provided as a follow-up to comprehensive assessment visits conducted by UNODC in beneficiary countries, which include site visits to, inter alia, offices, storage facilities, forensic laboratories, licensing authorities and investigation and prosecution offices.



**(a) Marking and record-keeping of firearms**

33. Comprehensive records that cover the full life cycle of a firearm are an important precondition for ensuring traceability and, ultimately, accountability in firearms control efforts. In that connection, UNODC finalized the development of an integrated firearms registry system entitled “goIFAR”, in the form of a record-keeping software application that can be tailored to the specific needs of States and that enables them to maintain comprehensive information and records on firearms, their parts and components and ammunition, and on their acquisition, movement and disposal, in line with international instruments. The Office will support the implementation, tailoring and maintenance of the software, and countries that use goIFAR will have full and exclusive ownership of the data and information maintained in the system. Currently, the Office is testing a beta version of the software and has organized two missions aimed at customizing it, in Honduras and Senegal. Other countries have also expressed an interest in adapting and customizing goIFAR.

34. The unique marking of firearms and, where appropriate and feasible, their parts and components and ammunition, is a precondition for their identification, recording and tracing. Moreover, the Firearms Protocol requires States parties to apply, *inter alia*, import marking on firearms. To that end, during the reporting period, UNODC continued to support national marking capacities, including by providing marking machines to Paraguay, and by training national authorities of the Niger, which had previously received marking machines, and Paraguay in their use and the immediate recording of the markings.

**(b) Physical security and stockpile management**

35. The Office continued to support countries in ensuring the proper storage and management of firearms. The lack of sufficient security measures poses a challenge for countries, in particular those that face the threats of theft and leakages from their storage facilities and problems in relation to securing the chain of custody required to produce valid evidence in court. In 2023, the Office handed over a refurbished warehouse for storing seized arms and ammunition to the National Gendarmerie of the Niger.

**(c) Collection, management and disposal of firearms**

36. Voluntary arms surrender campaigns and arms collection and destruction campaigns reduce the risk of the uncontrolled proliferation of firearms, including as a result of theft and diversion. Although the risk of diversion might decrease while seized, recovered and surrendered arms are kept in official custody, standardized and systematic procedures for final disposal and destruction are crucial if such risks are to be fully eliminated. A train-the-trainer course on firearms destruction was organized in Senegal in February 2024, aimed at ensuring that seized firearms are properly destroyed and do not fall into the hands of criminals.

**4. Strengthening criminal justice responses to detect, investigate, prosecute and adjudicate the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition**

37. Detecting illicit trafficking movements, dismantling the criminal networks or groups involved and bringing the perpetrators to justice are essential preconditions for reducing illicit arms flows and combating all forms of organized crime. In practice, however, criminal investigations of firearms trafficking offences are rare and complex. Too often, criminal justice practitioners face difficulties in expanding the scope of their investigations and focus their efforts on the offence of illicit possession, instead of on investigating the possible trafficking networks behind the illicit arms transfers and the arms dealers operating in the shadows.

38. UNODC has developed specialized training courses on the detection, investigation, prosecution and adjudication of firearms trafficking cases and related crimes. Once developed, such courses are gradually translated and adapted to the

context and needs of different target countries and regions. During the reporting period, UNODC delivered more than 28 specialized training courses to officers from approximately 30 countries in West and Central Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Central Asia, the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe. The training courses strengthened the capacities of more than 650 criminal justice practitioners in the detection, identification and classification of firearms, crime scene management, the management of electronic evidence, investigative techniques and firearms tracing, joint investigation teams, international cooperation and information exchange. The courses were also aimed at keeping practitioners abreast of technological developments in the manufacturing and trafficking of firearms, such as the use of dark web marketplaces and additive manufacturing (3D printing). Where possible, courses delivered at the national and subregional levels followed a progressive approach. To leverage the full expertise of UNODC in preventing and combating organized crime, some of the training courses involved close cooperation between the UNODC Firearms Trafficking Section, the UNODC Global Maritime Crime Programme and the Airport Communication Programme, a multi-agency programme implemented by UNODC, INTERPOL and the World Customs Organization.

39. Integrated firearms centres and national firearms focal points have proved to play an important role in enhancing the intelligence picture, initiating proactive and intelligence-led investigations, improving operational cooperation at both the international and inter-agency levels, and better informing stakeholders in order to target firearms trafficking at the national, regional and international levels. In the reporting period, UNODC supported steps towards the establishment of inter-agency coordination mechanisms in the form of integrated firearms centres in Paraguay, Saint Lucia and Trinidad and Tobago.

40. In the Western Balkans, following the conducting of needs assessments with national customs authorities, public postal operators and private courier companies, UNODC identified the issue of firearms trafficking through postal and express courier parcels as a priority issue, subsequently delivering specialized national and regional training programmes for practitioners, as well as train-the-trainer courses, on that issue. Also following the assessments, UNODC facilitated the establishment of partnerships between customs authorities, postal service providers and regulators, law enforcement authorities and prosecutorial services, and supported the development and adoption of memorandums of understanding and standard operating procedures to guide the work of and cooperation between those entities in firearms detection efforts. Furthermore, to strengthen the capacities of X-ray equipment operators in the detection of firearms, their parts and components and ammunition in parcels and luggage, UNODC developed an X-ray detection manual and a training software program for X-ray equipment operators and provided equipment, including X-ray scanners, to national authorities in the Western Balkans. Following the installation of the equipment, UNODC delivered training courses and facilitated study visits to Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport. With a similar focus, in 2023, UNODC initiated a project in Ukraine to support the railway security service of Ukraine in increasing civilian security by enhancing its capabilities to detect illicit firearms and explosives through the use of X-ray scanners.

41. Following the positive results in the Western Balkans and Ukraine, UNODC extended its support in relation to strengthening the capacities of X-ray equipment operators to detect firearms, their parts and components and ammunition to Latin America and the Caribbean, where the Office delivered related training and donated equipment.

42. Furthermore, UNODC expanded its work with judicial authorities to support the effective adjudication of firearms offences. Two regional meetings in the Western Balkans were aimed at harmonizing judicial practices in firearms cases through the development of second editions of firearms case law compendiums and through training for judges. In Africa, magistrates from Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania and Senegal received training, mentoring and support for ongoing investigations through workshops and online and in-person

consultations. As a result of those efforts, some cases have been adjudicated and some suspects have been convicted. In addition, a formal mentoring programme for practitioners involved in ongoing cases was established in the Niger.

## 5. Fostering international cooperation and information exchange

43. International cooperation in criminal matters is a fundamental part of the fight against trafficking in firearms, including the regular sharing of information among practitioners, pursuant to article 12 of the Firearms Protocol. The Office fostered international cooperation and information exchange through a series of subregional, regional and cross-regional meetings and cross-border law enforcement operations, as well as through its Community of Practitioners against Firearms Trafficking and Related Crimes.

44. The Community of Practitioners is an informal group of specialized criminal justice practitioners dealing with firearms matters. The initiative is aimed at fostering regional and interregional cooperation to counter trafficking in firearms and its links to other forms of organized crime through the regular exchange of information, case-based experiences and good practices among criminal justice, law enforcement and firearms control practitioners. On the margins of a cross-regional meeting held in February 2024, UNODC launched the Community of Practitioners web portal, a password-protected portal designed to connect practitioners across the world. It also serves as a knowledge hub and permits direct, secure communication and the exchange of good practices and information. With over 2,000 practitioners registered, the Community of Practitioners network is aiming to expand its membership and scope and to connect firearms practitioners from around the globe.

45. During the same cross-regional meeting, which was part of a joint project of UNODC and INTERPOL, UNODC brought together practitioners from Latin America and West and Central Africa to discuss relevant firearms trafficking cases. The event involved more than 50 participants, attending both in person and online, and also represented an opportunity to discuss the results emerging from cross-border law enforcement operations in those regions, as well as findings, lessons learned and challenges in relation to firearms trafficking.

46. Another meeting of the Community of Practitioners was held in the framework of a joint Office of Counter-Terrorism-UNODC project in Central Asia. The meeting brought together participants from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Türkiye, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, as well as experts from INTERPOL and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, to discuss the collection, sharing, analysis and operational use of data in firearms trafficking cases.

47. With a view to strengthening operational cooperation, UNODC coordinated two cross-border operations, code-named Operation KAFO IV (in coordination with INTERPOL) and Operation Armstrong (in cooperation with EMPACT and the Governments of Austria and Spain) in West and Central Africa and in Latin America, respectively, in December 2023. Operation KAFO IV mobilized more than 700 law enforcement officers from Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Guinea, Mali and Mauritania and led to the seizure of dozens of weapons and thousands of rounds of ammunition, including from suspected terrorists, and the arrest of 20 persons suspected of trafficking in firearms. The operation was accompanied by a planning and pre-operational meeting that included a training session for national experts and a debriefing meeting. Operation Armstrong, which was carried out in Latin America, mobilized more than 1,500 officers from Brazil, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Panama and Spain, and led to the seizure of more than 600 firearms and thousands of rounds of ammunition. The success of the operation was facilitated by the use of X-ray and high-resolution scanners, which accelerated the inspection of containers, parcels and luggage. In addition to focusing on the immediate disruption of illicit arms flows, the operations included an important training component aimed at strengthening detection and post-seizure investigative and prosecutorial capacities.

48. Furthermore, following two regional meetings on disrupting illicit arms flows held in Buenos Aires and Dakar in 2022, UNODC paved the way for the establishment of joint investigative teams and informal contact groups to facilitate transnational investigations into firearms trafficking cases. In Africa, the Office supported the establishment of two joint investigative teams between Benin and Burkina Faso and between Guinea and Mali. Both joint investigative teams immediately started their work, which included the sharing of evidence, the development of investigative and prosecutorial strategies and the submission of mutual legal assistance and extradition requests. In addition, the four countries established police and judicial cooperation and information exchange mechanisms to address the transnational aspect of firearms trafficking cases and related crimes, including terrorism.

49. In Latin America, UNODC organized two inception workshops, one for Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Paraguay and one for Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), to provide assistance in the establishment of informal contact groups, which will facilitate cross-border investigations and strengthen judicial and police cooperation. The inception workshops included a substantial capacity-building component on international judicial and law enforcement cooperation, and provided a platform for discussing open cases and ongoing investigations.

## **6. Monitoring illicit arms flows through global data collection and strategic analysis**

50. In the context of its initiative to monitor illicit arms flows, UNODC continued to promote the generation, collection and analysis of firearms data in order to identify trends and patterns in firearms trafficking. An enhanced understanding of the issue contributes to proactive, intelligence-led investigations and provides an evidence base for decision-making at the policy and operational levels. The efforts of UNODC follow a three-pronged approach, which includes the annual dissemination by the Office's Research and Trend Analysis Branch of the illicit arms flows questionnaire, strengthening the capacity of Member States to collect and analyse firearms-related data, and producing analytical outputs on firearms trafficking at the global, regional and national levels, with a view to providing the data collected and analysed by UNODC to Member States.

51. The Conference of the Parties has repeatedly acknowledged the need to conduct, on a regular basis, global data collection and analysis exercises on seized and trafficked firearms. As a result of the Conference's mandate in this regard, each year since 2018, the Office has sent out the illicit arms flows questionnaire, a standardized data collection methodology, including for the purpose of monitoring progress towards achieving target 16.4 of the Sustainable Development Goals. The data collected provide the basis for a comprehensive global data set on seized and trafficked firearms, their parts and components and ammunition, which UNODC makes available to the international community through its data portal.<sup>4</sup> On the basis of those data, the Office is developing a new edition of the Global Study on Firearms Trafficking, which is to be published in 2026.

52. With a view to strengthening national capacities to systematically collect and analyse seizure data and submit such data through the illicit arms flows questionnaire, UNODC held two workshops on data collection in 2023, in the Dominican Republic and Saint Lucia, as well as a regional sensitization workshop for Benin, Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea, Mali, the Niger, Senegal and Togo. In a joint effort by the Firearms Trafficking Section and the Research and Trend Analysis Branch, a similar regional workshop was held, in online format, for countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus.

53. At the same time, the Firearms Trafficking Section, together with the Research and Trend Analysis Branch, started the development of a web-scraping model, using artificial intelligence, which gathers data on firearms seizures from open sources. The

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<sup>4</sup> See <https://dataunodc.un.org/dp-firearms-arms-seized>.

data are combined with official data submitted by Member States through the illicit arms flows questionnaires.

54. In the reporting period, the Office continued to develop and draft thematic and regional issue papers focusing on exploring existing links between firearms trafficking and other related criminal manifestations and determining the involvement of organized criminal groups and whether common trafficking methods are used. The Office worked jointly with UNIDIR to develop and publish a policy paper entitled “Addressing the linkages between illicit arms, organized crime and armed conflict”. The findings contained in the paper were presented in a side event held on the margins of the eleventh session of the Conference of the Parties. In 2024, the Office published, in collaboration with the Flemish Peace Institute, a study entitled *Firearms and Drugs: Partners in Transnational Crime*. That issue paper was launched and presented during a side event organized on the margins of the sixty-seventh session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, held in Vienna in March 2024. The Office also developed a third issue paper, entitled “Illicit firearms trafficking: addressing the criminal side of diversion”, which unpacks the issue of the diversion of firearms, their parts and components and ammunition, and their potential subsequent trafficking, and explores the criminal dimension of diversion, including the relevance and use of the Firearms Protocol for addressing that issue.

55. With regard to national and regional analyses, the Office published the report entitled *Impact of Transnational Organized Crime on Stability and Development in the Sahel: Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment – Sahel*, which is one of a series of research reports that provide an in-depth analysis of the main criminal markets in the Sahel; the series also includes the report entitled “*Firearms Trafficking in the Sahel: Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment – Sahel*”.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the Office published a report entitled “Haiti’s criminal markets: mapping trends in firearms and drug trafficking”, in which it was concluded that increasingly sophisticated and high-calibre firearms and ammunition are being trafficked into crisis-affected Haiti. At the time of writing the present report, reports containing regional analysis relating to West and Central Africa, the Western Balkans and Central Asia were in various stages of preparation.

### C. Development of tools

56. Several tools and publications have been developed by UNODC to provide practical guidance to Member States and support the delivery of technical assistance.

57. Following a two-year preparation process, which included three expert group meetings involving a total of 70 practitioners, UNODC launched the *Guidelines on the Investigation and Prosecution of Firearms Offences* in May 2023. The *Guidelines* are based on the collective experience and knowledge of law enforcement and customs officials, prosecutors and judges from different countries, regions and legal systems, and represent the state of the art in integrating firearms trafficking-related investigations into broader investigative processes, or in carrying out such investigations as self-standing, often parallel, lines of investigation, with a view to disclosing and prosecuting firearms trafficking cases and related offences that would otherwise risk going undetected and not being prosecuted. The *Guidelines* have been translated into French, Russian and Spanish and are currently being tailored and customized for jurisdictions in the Caribbean and the Western Balkans through a series of workshops. The customized version for the Western Balkans has been translated into Albanian, Bosnian, Croatian, the Macedonian language, Montenegrin and Serbian.

58. In a similar, parallel process, on the basis of six regional and cross-regional meetings, UNODC developed the *Digest of Firearms Trafficking and Related Crimes*

<sup>5</sup> Available at [www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tocta\\_sahel/TOCTA\\_Sahel\\_firearms\\_2023.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tocta_sahel/TOCTA_Sahel_firearms_2023.pdf).

*Cases 2023: A Review of Cases and Good Practices Emerging from National Jurisprudence.* The *Digest* was launched and distributed at a side event held during the eleventh meeting of the Working Group on Firearms, in April 2024. The *Digest* contains a compilation of illustrative cases of firearms trafficking from around the globe and related good practices in criminalization, investigation and prosecution, as well as legal experiences in dealing with firearms trafficking in its various forms and manifestations, and related crimes. The *Digest* is based on its predecessor, the *Digest of Organized Crime Cases: A Compilation of Cases with Commentaries and Lessons Learned*, and is aimed at identifying, through concrete and completed cases, current investigative and prosecutorial practices and challenges. At the national level, the Office developed six firearms case law compendiums containing in total more than 120 firearms-related cases from the Western Balkans, some of which are also referenced in the *Digest of Firearms Trafficking and Related Crimes Cases*.

59. Pursuant to a recommendation made by the Working Group on Firearms at its fifth meeting, in May 2017, UNODC continues to collect and analyse relevant judicial cases and good practices related to the investigation and prosecution of firearms trafficking offences. The cases are disseminated through the Office's Sharing Electronic Resources and Laws on Crime (SHERLOC) knowledge management portal, which currently features 247 cases on firearms trafficking and related crimes. The most illustrative cases, expert commentaries and emerging good practices have also been included in the *Digest of Firearms Trafficking and Related Crimes Cases*, with a view to providing criminal justice officials and investigators with practical insights and perspectives on how to best address the pitfalls, challenges and opportunities in bringing perpetrators to justice in line with the Firearms Protocol.

60. Lastly, the Office developed a manual for the analysis of X-ray images to detect firearms, their parts and components and ammunition. The manual was distributed to practitioners in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Ukraine to support capacity-building in the detection of trafficking in firearms, including their parts, components and ammunition.

## **D. Coordination with other relevant international and regional organizations and with civil society and the private sector**

### **1. Cooperation within the United Nations**

61. The Office continued to contribute to the work of the United Nations Coordinating Action on Small Arms (CASA), the system-wide coordination platform established by the Secretary-General to promote the exchange of information and coordination among United Nations entities on the issue of small arms. This included participation in the meeting of CASA principals held in June 2024, to exchange views on recent decisions of United Nations principals regarding small arms and light weapons, and to endorse the revised terms of reference of CASA and the CASA concept note on operationalizing national ownership in mainstreaming United Nations small arms and light weapons support. Furthermore, the Office participated in an informal dialogue on strategic weapons and ammunition management for United Nations entities, organized by UNIDIR and the Office for Disarmament Affairs and held in New York, and the Global Symposium on Weapons and Ammunition Management: Frameworks, Policies and Practices, organized by UNIDIR and held in Geneva.

62. At the operational level, UNODC continued to coordinate its activities and cooperate with relevant United Nations agencies and offices, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the South-Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons, the Office for Disarmament Affairs and its regional centres, and the Department of Peace Operations and its Mine Action Service. In the Western Balkans, UNODC and UNDP continued to engage in the United Nations multi-partner trust fund in support of the implementation of the road map for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession,

misuse and trafficking of small arms and light weapons and their ammunition in the Western Balkans by 2024. As a result, several projects in the region, including four UNODC projects, received donor support through the trust fund. Furthermore, the Office continued its cooperation with the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre of the Office of Counter-Terrorism in the implementation of a joint project to address the links between terrorism and firearms trafficking in Central Asia. In addition, representatives of the Firearms Trafficking Section participated for the first time in country visits organized by the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, to Ecuador and Thailand, analysing the respective situations in those countries with regard to small arms and light weapons and contributing to the recommendations made to their Governments. The findings and recommendations from the two country visits will be duly considered when UNODC delivers technical assistance relating to firearms to those countries.

63. The Firearms Trafficking Section continued to collaborate with other UNODC global programmes, branches, sections, units and teams, including the Organized Crime and Illicit Trafficking Branch, in particular the Conference Support Section, the Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Section, the Global Programme against Money-Laundering, Proceeds of Crime and the Financing of Terrorism, and the Global Programme on Cybercrime; the Terrorism Prevention Branch; all programmes of the Border Management Branch, in particular the Passenger and Cargo Border Team, the Global Maritime Crime Programme and the Global Programme on Criminal Disruption; the Research and Trend Analysis Branch; the Corruption and Economic Crime Branch; the Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Section; the Civil Society Unit; and the Gender Team, as well as relevant regional programmes located in regional and field offices, thereby allowing the Firearms Trafficking Section to reach new audiences and exploit synergies.

## **2. Cooperation with other international and regional organizations**

64. In the reporting period, UNODC continued to expand, at both the operational and strategic levels, its cooperation with national, regional and international organizations, including the Economic Community of Central African States, the Economic Community of West African States, the Group of Five for the Sahel, the Caribbean Community's Implementation Agency for Crime and Security, INTERPOL, the European Union, the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), the EMPACT priority action on firearms, the Organization of American States, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the World Customs Organization.

65. For instance, in Latin America in December 2023, the Office coordinated Operation Armstrong, organized jointly with EMPACT and the Governments of Austria and Spain.

66. Furthermore, UNODC maintained its cooperation with INTERPOL through multiple joint projects referred to in the present report, including in the Western Balkans, West and Central Africa, and Latin America.

67. In the Caribbean, the Office continued cooperation with the Caribbean Community's Implementation Agency for Crime and Security and the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean in the implementation of the Caribbean Firearms Roadmap.

## **3. Cooperation with civil society and the private sector**

68. The Office has actively engaged with civil society organizations in various contexts, from multi-stakeholder engagement in regard to legislative development to training activities and collaboration in the implementation of advocacy materials.

69. The Office has also remained engaged with key non-governmental organizations working in the area of arms trafficking, such as the Alliance of NGOs on Crime

Prevention and Criminal Justice, Conflict Armament Research, the Flemish Peace Institute, the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, the International Action Network on Small Arms, Instituto Sou da Paz, Kennis: Knowledge for Safety and Good Governance, the Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons, the Peace Research Institute Oslo (through its Small Arms Survey), the Small Arms Survey of the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies and the Joint Research Centre on Innovation and Crime (Transcrime). In cooperation with Conflict Armament Research and UNAMA, the Office organized two briefings for Member States to present a concept note regarding a joint project to prevent and address the destabilizing accumulation of arms and their diversion in Afghanistan and the region.

70. The Firearms Trafficking Section, in cooperation with the Civil Society Unit, organized consultations with civil society in June 2023 to present and discuss a draft outline of the UNODC Global Strategy against Illicit Firearms 2024–2030.

#### **IV. Priority areas for further action**

71. Integrated approaches to countering illicit firearms remain crucial for addressing the interconnected aspects of the problem. The Office is currently in the process of finalizing the development of the UNODC Global Strategy against Illicit Firearms 2024–2030, on the basis of its five-pillar approach and a comprehensive consultative process within UNODC and with Member States, United Nations entities, civil society organizations and other stakeholders. The strategy is aimed at consolidating the current five-pillar approach and further expanding efforts in the areas of crime prevention and awareness-raising, with a view to better addressing technological challenges, emerging threats and cross-cutting aspects such as gender and human rights, and building more resilient and peaceful communities, focusing in particular on vulnerable groups such as women and young people.

72. Strengthening efforts to support lifelong and effective firearms control regimes remains a crucial precondition to preventing diversion and trafficking. The deployment and efficient maintenance of the goIFAR software will remain a central undertaking of UNODC to ensure the full traceability of a firearm and to permit the identification of its last legitimate holder.

73. With the aim of promoting proactive investigative and prosecutorial approaches to firearms trafficking, UNODC will scale up its capacity to provide high-quality training and operational support to Member States, including through the establishment of joint investigative teams, integrated firearms centres and joint law enforcement operations.

74. The situations in firearms trafficking hotspots such as Afghanistan, Haiti, Libya, Ukraine and the Balkan region are of particular concern as they can create a significant source for illicit arms flows towards other countries and regions at risk. UNODC will continue to engage with the international community and neighbouring countries to develop pathways for curbing the risk of diversion and trafficking through preventive measures accompanied by effective criminal justice responses, namely, detecting, investigating and prosecuting embargo-breaking arms transfers and maritime firearms trafficking more broadly.

75. A firearms hotspot is a country or a specific geographical area facing significant security challenges owing to a proliferation of illicit firearms and related trafficking activities that surpasses its capacity to respond, and which has therefore become, or is at risk of becoming, a source of or destination for illicit firearms and ammunition or a transit or diversion point for the transfer of illicit arms and ammunition, owing to the fragility of institutions and the lack of governmental control over territory and borders. Addressing these factors requires rapid responses and long-term measures against illicit firearms and organized criminal and terrorist groups. The Firearms Trafficking Section aims to establish a global hotspot facility on firearms and related organized crime and terrorism threats in order to monitor the evolution of and interlinkages between threats linked to illicit firearms, and to allow for early



warning mechanisms and timely, innovative and tailored interventions that support medium- to long-term responses to those threats.

76. The cascading effects of climate change exacerbate tensions and contribute to conflict. Climate change, by contributing to the deterioration of livelihoods, creates a fertile ground for armed and organized crime groups to extend their influence and territory. The availability of firearms and ammunition, together with the limited access of local communities to natural resources, often escalates long-standing intercommunal conflicts. UNODC will support national efforts in preventing the outbreak of armed violence in the affected regions through the development of tailored prevention and arms control strategies.

77. The Office will continue to support efforts to systematically collect and report seizure data and aims to publish a new edition of the Global Study on Firearms Trafficking, a recurring flagship publication of UNODC, in cooperation with the Research and Trend Analysis Branch.

78. The Office will also continue to undertake strategic research on regional dynamics and linkages with other areas of criminality. It is currently working on the development of four subregional studies for Central Asia, West and Central Africa, the Western Balkans, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

79. In his report to the Security Council on conflict-related sexual violence (S/2021/312), the Secretary-General recognized the role played by the proliferation and illicit circulation of small arms in facilitating violence against civilians, including rape. By supporting countries in preventing, combating and eradicating firearms trafficking, UNODC is contributing to the fight against sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict zones. The Office continues to promote the mainstreaming of an intersectional gender perspective into efforts to prevent and counter firearms trafficking and related criminality and to support States in collecting sex- and age-disaggregated data on firearms trafficking.

## V. Conclusions

80. The illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms and their links to organized crime, terrorism and other serious crimes remains a pressing problem in many countries and regions. During the reporting period, the Office continued to promote the ratification and implementation of the Firearms Protocol and to assist Member States in its implementation through integrated and cross-cutting approaches and partnerships.

81. However, the lack of sustainable and predictable funds, including the absence of funding from the regular budget, impairs the capacity of the Firearms Trafficking Section to provide core services and limits the possibility of expanding its geographical and thematic scope and presence to respond to the growing number of requests for assistance in countering the increasingly global and transregional threat of firearms trafficking and its devastating impact on peace, human safety and security, and development.