



Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime

Distr.: General
15 July 2022

Original: English

Eleventh session

Vienna, 17–21 October 2022

Item 2 (d) of the provisional agenda *

**Review of the implementation of the United Nations
Convention against Transnational Organized Crime
and the Protocols thereto: Protocol against the
Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in
Firearms, Their Parts and Components and
Ammunition**

Activities of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to promote and support the implementation of the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime

Report of the Secretariat

I. Introduction

1. The present report was prepared pursuant to resolution 10/2 of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, entitled “Strengthening international cooperation against the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition”. In that resolution, the Conference reaffirmed that the Convention and its supplementary Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition were among the principal global legal instruments to combat the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition.
2. During the reporting period, three States – Comoros (June 2021), Germany (October 2021) and Luxembourg (May 2022) – acceded to the Firearms Protocol, bringing the total number of parties to 122. While the number of parties is increasing slowly but steadily, more sustained efforts are needed to achieve universal adherence and full implementation.
3. The purpose of the present report is to inform the Conference about the activities carried out by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), through its Firearms Trafficking Section, to promote the ratification and implementation of the Firearms Protocol during the reporting period, from August 2020 to July 2022.

* [CTOC/COP/2022/1](#).



4. During the first year of the reporting period, the impact of the unprecedented global coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic put a serious strain on the capacity of Member States and the international community to continue standard operations. In close cooperation with national stakeholders and donors, UNODC put in place a contingency plan and alternative working methods to ensure that core work and services in supporting Member States in countering illicit firearms trafficking were not entirely disrupted and could in part be transferred to a remote working environment. From September 2021 onwards, UNODC resumed in-person activities, while continuing the use of hybrid and virtual formats, where appropriate. This combination of working modalities allowed UNODC to remain responsive to States' needs, enabling the broader participation of experts, including in remote regions, and taking budgetary restrictions and environmental considerations into account.

5. During the reporting period, the Firearms Trafficking Section was also able to extend its geographical scope to the Caribbean and to Iraq and is now implementing projects in eight regions: West and Central Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, Central Asia, Asia (Iraq), the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe (Ukraine). Through the project in the Caribbean, launched in 2021, UNODC supports, in cooperation with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the implementation of the criminal justice component 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. In March and April 2022, UNODC conducted a country visit to Iraq to engage with the Government on the development of a national action plan on firearms, and participated in an inter-divisional assessment mission to Haiti to explore potential areas of cooperation and technical assistance. During the reporting period, the Section also tightened its cooperation with the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) through two joint projects, one in the Western Balkans, the other in Western Africa and Latin America. In total, the Section is currently implementing 14 projects in 44 partner countries, with 25 staff members deployed in 11 countries.¹

6. Key achievements during the reporting period include the following:

(a) Over 6,400 national stakeholders from more than 70 countries were reached, including 1,220 practitioners provided with capacity-building activities in the detection, investigation and prosecution of firearms trafficking cases;

(b) Legislative reviews of 28 countries were conducted and shared; three countries developed and adopted new firearms acts with UNODC support; in the Western Balkans and Ukraine, UNODC compiled firearms case law collections and analysis, supporting the harmonization of judicial practice;

(c) More than 20 comprehensive assessments of technical assistance and equipment needs were conducted, including seven assessments for detection of trafficking in postal and fast parcel services, jointly with private courier companies;

(d) More than 1,000 high quality X-ray pictures of firearms, parts and components and ammunition were taken and compiled in a specialized training package for firearms detection;

(e) The Community of Practitioners against Firearms Trafficking and Related Crimes, which promotes exchanges of information, good practices and lessons learned among practitioners on investigation and prosecution of firearms cases, was expanded;

(f) Operational and mentoring support was scaled up through the coordination of cross-border law enforcement operations and onward criminal investigations to dismantle criminal networks behind firearms trafficking in West Africa and South America;

¹ Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Niger, North Macedonia, Senegal, Serbia, Trinidad and Tobago, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

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

(h) For the second half of 2022, UNODC has planned the launch of an integrated firearms registry system (goIFAR) and its implementation in two pilot countries, as well as the launch of guidelines for the investigation and prosecution of firearms offences.

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

7. As part of an internal process to restructure UNODC, effective 1 April 2022, the Firearms Trafficking Section was created as a new section within the Organized Crime and Illicit Trafficking Branch. The Section supports the intergovernmental and normative work related to the Firearms Protocol and related instruments and assists Member States in promoting the full and effective implementation of the Firearms Protocol with a view to preventing and countering the illicit manufacturing, trafficking and misuse of firearms, their parts and components and ammunition, and their links to related crimes. The Section is entirely funded from extrabudgetary resources and does not receive any regular budget or project support funds for the implementation of its mandates.

8. Continuing the work of the Global Firearms Programme, which was established in 2011, the Section follows an integrated approach based 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 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 illicit 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 also 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 approach is complemented by a number of cross-cutting elements, such as gender mainstreaming, human rights and civil society participation and oversight, which are streamlined into the activities of the Section.

Integrated five-pillar approach of the Firearms Trafficking Section



9. Building on the findings of the independent in-depth evaluation of the Global Firearms Programme, the Firearms Trafficking Section initiated in April 2022 the development of a global UNODC strategy against illicit firearms for 2022–2030, aiming at streamlining and reshaping the Office’s vision and response to 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. The strategy will be developed through a broad consultation process within UNODC and with external partners and stakeholders.

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

10. During the reporting period, the Firearms Trafficking Section carried out approximately 200 intergovernmental and technical assistance activities through donor support,² bringing together more than 6,400 national stakeholders from more than 70 countries to promote accession to and the full implementation of the Firearms Protocol.

A. Support to intergovernmental bodies and processes

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

11. At its tenth session, the Conference of Parties adopted resolution 10/2, in which it welcomed with appreciation the results of the Working Group on Firearms at its seventh meeting and invited States parties to take measures, as appropriate and consistent with their domestic laws, to implement the recommendations and discussion points resulting from the Working Group meetings.

12. In the same resolution, the Conference noted with appreciation the assistance provided to requesting States, including by the Global Programme on Firearms, and requested UNODC to continue to assist requesting States in their efforts to adhere to and implement the Protocol. The Conference also encouraged those Member States

² Activities carried out during the reporting period were funded through voluntary contributions from France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Sweden, the European Union, the Office of Counter-Terrorism, the multi-partner trust fund for the Western Balkan road map on small arms and light weapons, as well as from the Saving Lives Entity.

to make available extrabudgetary resources to enable the Office to implement its mandate in this regard.

13. The Conference requested UNODC to continue to assist requesting States in their efforts to strengthen their firearms control regimes, in particular in the areas of legislative development, firearms identification, seizure, confiscation and disposal, technical support for marking, record-keeping and tracing, and training and capacity-building in the investigation and prosecution of related crimes. Furthermore, the Conference invited States parties to foster and harmonize, with the support of UNODC, their responses to threats related to technological developments and changing *modi operandi*, such as modular weapons and 3D printing of firearms, the conversion of firearms, trafficking through postal services and the use of the darknet and cryptocurrencies, and requested UNODC to continue developing legislative and operational tools and to collect and share information on trends and effective responses.

14. The Conference invited States, UNODC and other relevant stakeholders to further analyse and disseminate information on the impacts of arms trafficking as an illicit market and its relation to violence and crime, to facilitate the production of standardized and comparable data, and to address armed violence against women and hate crimes related to the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition, and encouraged UNODC and other relevant organizations to develop synergies among the distinct reporting obligations of States parties. It also encouraged States parties and UNODC to mainstream gender and age perspectives in firearms policies and programmes, including in the areas of programme design, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation and encouraged the sharing of national experiences, lessons learned and best practices.

15. In the margins of the Conference, a side event to celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of the entry into force of the Firearms Protocol called for its universalization and effective implementation, reaching 180 participants.

16. The Office also provided secretariat support for the eighth and ninth meetings of the Working Group on Firearms, held in Vienna in a hybrid format from 10 to 12 May 2021 and on 4 and 5 May 2022, respectively. For the eighth meeting, the Office prepared two background papers, entitled “Reducing illicit financial and arms flows to achieve target 16.4 of the Sustainable Development Goals” ([CTOC/COP/WG.6/2021/2](#)) and “From arms transfers to firearms trafficking: application of the Firearms Protocol in the context of diversion” ([CTOC/COP/WG.6/2021/3](#)). For the ninth meeting, the Office prepared a background paper on preventing and combating the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in ammunition ([CTOC/COP/WG.6/2022/2](#)) and another paper containing a proposal for a multi-year workplan for the Working Group ([CTOC/COP/WG.6/2022/3](#)). The Working Group adopted the workplan, which will now guide its work until 2026. The reports of both meetings ([CTOC/COP/WG.6/2021/4](#) and [CTOC/COP/WG.6/2022/4](#)), containing a summary of their deliberations, the adopted recommendations and the adopted multi-year workplan, will be transmitted to the Conference of the Parties at its eleventh session.

2. Support for and cooperation with other intergovernmental bodies

17. During the reporting period the Firearms Trafficking Section supported the work of various other intergovernmental bodies that addressed the issue of firearms.

18. At its sixty-fifth session, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs adopted resolution 65/2, entitled “Strengthening international cooperation to address the links between illicit drug trafficking and illicit firearms trafficking”, in which the Commission acknowledged the efforts carried out by UNODC to analyse and address the links between illicit drug and firearms trafficking and requested UNODC to continue providing assistance to requesting Member States with regard to data collection, research, intelligence- and analysis-sharing to disclose the extent of the links between drug and firearms trafficking and to foster cooperation to address these links. The Commission also requested the Executive Director of UNODC to make the

resolution available to the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice and to the Conference of the Parties.

19. UNODC also contributed to reports to the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Human Rights Council. These included the 2021 report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on small arms and light weapons ([S/2021/839](#)), the 2021 and 2022 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/76/284](#) and [A/77/77](#)) and the reports of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to the Human Rights Council on the impact of the civilian acquisition, possession and use of firearms by children and youth ([A/HRC/49/41](#)) and on the impact of arms transfers on human rights ([A/HRC/44/29](#)). Moreover, in September 2021, the Office briefed the Security Council in an Arria formula meeting on the threat posed to peace and security by illicit arms flows, including in the context of peace operations and arms embargoes. Following two discussions on small arms and light weapons in October and November 2021, the Security Council, in December 2021, adopted resolution [2616 \(2021\)](#), focusing on the illicit transfer, destabilizing accumulation and diversion of arms and related materiel in violation of Council-mandated arms embargoes.

20. In the margins of the seventh biennial meeting of States on the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, UNODC, in cooperation with the Office for Disarmament Affairs, organized a high-level side event entitled “A double anniversary: the Firearms Protocol and the Programme of Action on Small Arms turn 20”. The event, which focused on the continued importance of the two instruments and their complementarity, welcomed more than 120 participants from around the world.

B. Technical assistance

1. Policy and normative development

21. UNODC continued to raise the awareness of policymakers and members of parliament on the illicit firearms issue, current trends and patterns in firearms trafficking and its linkages to other forms of crime. For instance, in a regional seminar on small arms in June 2022 organized by the Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Inter-Parliamentary Assembly for Parliamentarians of South-East Asian countries, UNODC promoted the ratification and implementation of the Firearms Protocol in a region with low ratification rates.

22. The strengthening of national legal frameworks on firearms is at the core of the UNODC mandate and remains a key focus area of work of the Firearms Trafficking Section in promoting sustainable changes in beneficiary countries. The tailored and progressively engaging and participatory process starts with a legislative and institutional assessment, for 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.

23. In Africa, UNODC provided tailored legislative advice to Cameroon, Chad, the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Mauritania, the Niger and Senegal and continued to work closely with the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) on regional legislative harmonization. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in April and July 2022, the Office organized inter-institutional workshops to support the drafting of a new law on the general regime of arms, in close cooperation with the Congolese National Commission on Small Arms and Light Weapons. Following extensive legislative assistance provided

by UNODC, during the reporting period, Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic and Mali adopted national laws on firearms.

24. For all five Central Asian countries, UNODC developed legislative assessment and gap analysis reports and conducted, in cooperation with the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre of the Office of Counter-Terrorism, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and the Office for Disarmament Affairs, virtual national capacity consultations on the institutional, legislative and operational framework. Following these consultations, the inter-agency project team conducted virtual legislative workshops in Kazakhstan (May 2021), Kyrgyzstan (June 2021) and Tajikistan (December 2021) and is currently planning the remaining two workshops.

25. In the Western Balkans and Ukraine, UNODC supported national working groups established for the amendment of their respective criminal codes. In Ukraine, in 2021, UNODC conducted a legislative review and held a legislative workshop on the harmonization of national criminal law provisions with the Firearms Protocol and the Convention. For all six jurisdictions of the Western Balkans, UNODC developed legislative assessment reports and issue papers on the use of special investigative techniques, analysing material and procedural criminal law related to firearms and firearms investigations. Subsequent legislative workshops were organized in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia to align firearms-related criminal offences and procedural law with the criminalization and investigative provisions of the Firearms Protocol and the Convention. The legislative support also included meetings with members of the legal committees of the parliaments of Montenegro and North Macedonia to raise awareness among members of parliament of the changes required in domestic legislation.

26. In Latin America, UNODC continued its support to several Latin American countries, including in the area of legislative assistance. The Office conducted a legislative assessment of the Firearms Act of Honduras and provided tailored recommendations for its enhancements and for the drafting of accompanying regulations. Other countries have expressed interest in receiving legislative advice. UNODC plans to conduct additional legislative assessments in the coming reporting period and provide, where appropriate, tailored legal drafting support.

27. In the Caribbean, UNODC conducted legislative assessments of six Caribbean countries (Barbados, Belize, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Lucia and Trinidad and Tobago). Legislative workshops were conducted in Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago. Following UNODC advice, Guyana decided to adopt a new firearms act. In the subsequent months, UNODC worked closely with a national drafting committee on the development of a new act and accompanying regulations. The first draft of the bill was discussed with national authorities and the private sector during an inter-institutional workshop held in April 2022. At least four additional legislative assessments and, where appropriate, accompanying legislative workshops are planned in 2022. Following the assessments, UNODC plans to conduct a regional legislative harmonization workshop to promote the further harmonization of national firearms control regimes in the region.

2. Technical support for the implementation of preventive and security measures

28. UNODC continued to provide technical support 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.

(a) Marking and record-keeping of firearms

29. Comprehensive records that cover the full life-cycle of a firearm are an important precondition to ensure traceability and, ultimately, accountability in firearms control. Against this backdrop, UNODC continued to develop goIFAR – a record-keeping software that can be tailored to the specific needs of States and allows

them to maintain comprehensive information and records on firearms, their parts and components and ammunition, and their acquisition, movement and disposal, in line with international instruments. While UNODC will support the implementation, tailoring and maintenance of the software, countries that use goIFAR will have full and exclusive ownership of data and information maintained in the system. Currently, the Office is testing a beta version and will soon start deploying it in the pilot countries Bolivia (Plurinational State of) and Senegal.

30. 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 State parties to apply, among other measures, import marking on firearms. To that end, UNODC continues to support national marking capacity by providing marking machines to Bolivia (Plurinational State of), the Central African Republic, Chad and Paraguay, and training national authorities in their use and the immediate recording of the markings. With a view to supporting the actual use of the machines, in March 2022, UNODC supported national authorities in the Niger in marking more than 6,500 weapons in national stocks through various marking campaigns, bringing the total of weapons marked in the subregion with UNODC support to more than 90,000.

(b) Physical security and stockpile management

31. UNODC 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 thefts and leakages from their storage facilities and problems in relation to securing the chain of custody required to produce valid evidence in court. Following requests received from the Central African Republic and the Niger, the Office supports the establishment of storage facilities for the safe and secure management of seized, recovered and surrendered arms and ammunition. A transit stockpiling site for seized and confiscated firearms was built in the Niger, and discussions are ongoing with the Central African Republic and the Niger to identify new sites.

(c) Collection, management and disposal of firearms

32. Voluntary surrender and arms collection campaigns reduce the risk of the uncontrolled proliferation of firearms, including through 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. In the Niger in March 2022, UNODC supported the second phase of a sensitization and firearms collection campaign, which resulted in the collection of more than 500 firearms, bringing the total number of weapons collected in the country with UNODC support to more than 1,300. A similar campaign is scheduled in the Central African Republic in July 2022. UNODC is currently exploring the possibility of supporting selected Latin American countries in similar ways.

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

33. Detecting illicit trafficking movements, dismantling involved criminal networks or groups 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 investigating the possible trafficking networks behind the illicit arms transfers and the arms dealers operating in the shadows. In Latin America, UNODC continued to support selected countries in the development and implementation of joint national road maps to frame their cooperation with UNODC in the area of

preventing and countering illicit trafficking and related crimes. Following the official launch of the Paraguayan Roadmap on Preventing and Countering Illicit Firearms Trafficking and Related Crimes, in September 2020, UNODC continued to support the implementation of its distinct components. Upon request of the Government of Argentina, the Office held a meeting with national authorities to assist the country in developing a similar road map.

34. UNODC has developed specialized training courses on the detection, investigation, prosecution and adjudication of firearms trafficking and related crimes. The 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 50 specialized training courses to 10 countries in West and Central Africa, 8 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, 5 countries in Central Asia and to the Western Balkans and Ukraine. The courses strengthened the capacities of more than 1,200 criminal justice practitioners in the detection, identification and classification of firearms, crime scene management, electronic evidence, investigative techniques and firearms tracing, joint investigation teams, international cooperation and information exchange. Where possible, courses followed a progressive approach at the national and subregional levels. While basic level courses were delivered mostly in online format, advanced level courses were delivered, where possible, as in-person courses.

35. In Latin America, for example, following the online courses delivered to El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, UNODC organized in November 2021 in Antigua, Guatemala, a subregional course focusing on strengthening cooperation among the three countries. Similarly, the national training courses delivered to Paraguay in 2020 and 2021 were complemented by a subregional course, held in Asunción in March 2022, to foster cooperation between Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay. Both meetings aimed at promoting and supporting subregional judicial and police cooperation and the establishment of joint investigative teams to more effectively investigate firearms trafficking across borders. Furthermore, in Paraguay, UNODC is currently supporting the establishment of an integrated firearms centre, including through assistance in the development of the institutional framework and the delivery of technical equipment.

36. In the framework of the Caribbean Firearms Roadmap, in June 2021, UNODC organized, in cooperation with the Implementation Agency for Crime and Security of CARICOM and relevant partners, two back-to-back virtual regional meetings, on illicit firearms trafficking and related criminal justice responses and on data collection for monitoring illicit firearms flows, which were attended by more than 150 national experts, respectively, and also promoted the establishment of integrated firearms centres through a virtual regional meeting in January 2022, all using the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative Connect platform.

37. In the period from August 2021 to March 2022, UNODC conducted six assessment missions to Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, Trinidad and Tobago and Haiti and delivered three training courses in Saint Lucia, Guyana and Barbados, respectively, on detecting firearms trafficking through postal and fast parcels and at land and maritime borders. In June 2022, UNODC organized a virtual regional meeting to present the UNODC investigative and prosecutorial guidelines for firearms trafficking and related offences, developed in the course of three expert group meetings throughout 2021 and 2022, and discussed possible customization needs for the region.

38. UNODC also organized a series of regional webinars, which were delivered jointly for the Caribbean and the Latin American regions and included participants from 36 countries. The three webinars covered the following topics: (a) the use of the Internet and darknet as facilitators of trafficking in firearms; (b) the detection of firearms trafficked by aerial and maritime means; and (c) new trends in firearms trafficking.

39. In the Western Balkans and Ukraine, following needs assessments with national customs authorities, public postal operators and private courier companies, UNODC identified the issue of firearms trafficking through postal and fast courier parcels as a priority issue and started the development of specialized tools and training courses for practitioners. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, UNODC developed standard operating procedures as well as a training course and a train-the-trainers concept for designated customs trainers to support the full institutionalization of the standard operating procedures. Furthermore, in a series of seven trainings, customs authorities and public postal operators of Bosnia and Herzegovina strengthened their capacities on the analysis of X-ray images to detect firearms, and in particular their parts and components and ammunition, in packages. Both in Ukraine and the jurisdictions of the Western Balkans, UNODC, in cooperation with the European Multidisciplinary Platform against Criminal Threats (EMPACT), organized a workshop and a regional meeting with representatives from customs, law enforcement, border guards and prosecutors to support their participation in Operation Armstrong together with European Union member States. Operation Armstrong focused on controls of suspicious parcels and postal shipments in order to detect and combat firearms trafficking.

40. To support inter-institutional and regional coordination and strengthen capacities to detect, investigate, prosecute and adjudicate firearms trafficking and related forms of crime more broadly, UNODC organized more than 30 national training activities in the Western Balkans. These included 13 inter-institutional meetings on criminal procedural aspects of firearms cases with 151 experts, and seven judiciary meetings with 64 judges from Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia, as well as from Kosovo.³ These meetings focused on effective criminal justice responses, including investigation and tracing, special investigative measures, harmonization of firearms-related case law and collection of seizure data. Finally, through in-house cooperation between the Firearms Trafficking Section and the Terrorism Prevention Branch, UNODC translated the *Practical Guide for Requesting Electronic Evidence Across Borders* into the official languages of the Western Balkans jurisdictions and organized one regional webinar on collecting electronic evidence in firearms cases and six training sessions for 185 prosecutors.

41. Since 2020, UNODC has supported Ukraine in the implementation of the Firearms Protocol and conducted an assessment to identify gaps and needs in strengthening the detection, investigation and prosecution of illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition. On the basis of the analysis and two drafting workshops held in October and December 2021, UNODC developed methodological recommendations to support investigative processes and evidence production and provide recommendations for action. It also provided specialized equipment and two training sessions on the investigation and prosecution of firearms trafficking in Ukraine in September and December 2021, and one training session dedicated to female criminal justice practitioners. Furthermore, UNODC facilitated encounters among criminal justice practitioners from Ukraine and experts from the European Union and other regional organizations to discuss firearms-related investigations and cases involving Ukraine and neighbouring States. In addition, partnering with the European Union Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine, the Office organized a webinar on investigating illicit firearms trafficking on the dark web.

4. Fostering international cooperation and information exchange

42. International cooperation in criminal matters is a fundamental part of the fight against illicit trafficking in firearms, including the regular sharing of information among practitioners, pursuant to article 12 of the Firearms Protocol.

³ References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

43. UNODC continued to engage with an informal network of specialized criminal justice practitioners dealing with firearms matters, referred to as the Community of Practitioners against Firearms Trafficking and Related Crimes. 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. In the margins of the tenth session of the Conference of the Parties in October 2020, UNODC organized an online side event to promote the Community of Practitioners. The event, which was attended by more than 70 practitioners and representatives of international and regional organizations, presented the Community of Practitioners and enabled a fruitful discussion between practitioners in order to shape and adapt it to their needs and interests. UNODC is completing the development of a dedicated website for the Community of Practitioners, including a password-protected portal to permit access to specialized tools and materials and facilitate direct contact, exchange of information and secure communication among practitioners across regions.

44. In the framework of the Community of Practitioners, two regional meetings were organized in December 2021 for experts from more than 30 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. The purpose of the meetings was to discuss and analyse firearms-related cases and investigations to identify and exchange best practices and lessons learned as well as to identify common pitfalls. Relevant cases will also be included into the firearms trafficking case digest that is currently being developed by UNODC.

45. In July 2022, in the context of the joint UNODC/INTERPOL project Disrupt, UNODC organized two regional meetings of practitioners from 12 countries in West and Central Africa and 16 countries in Latin America. The purpose of the meetings was to analyse relevant cases and exchange expertise and advice, with a view to addressing the transnational dimension of these cases, fostering international cooperation and providing support, where possible and feasible, for the establishment of joint investigation teams. Upon request, UNODC will provide follow-up support to selected cases through technical advice, tailored mentoring support and capacity-building and by facilitating direct cooperation with the countries and entities involved.

46. In the framework of the implementation of the joint Office of Counter-Terrorism/UNODC project in Central Asia, the project team organized a virtual regional workshop on fostering judicial and law enforcement cooperation and information-sharing, in March 2021, and three national inter-institutional cooperation workshops in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in 2021, while two more national workshops in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are planned for 2022.

47. With a view to strengthening operational cooperation in West Africa, UNODC coordinated two cross-border operations, code named “KAFO II” (in coordination with INTERPOL) in 2020 and “KAFO III” (in cooperation with the Group of Five for the Sahel) in 2021. While KAFO II mobilized 260 officers from Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Mali and the Niger, KAFO III was further extended to Chad, Guinea and Senegal, bringing together more than 850 officers. Both operations were accompanied by a planning and pre-operational meeting that included a training with national experts as well as a debriefing meeting. In total, more than 600 firearms, several thousand rounds of ammunition, explosives, drugs and other contraband were seized. UNODC has developed an action plan to support countries in following up on open cases, including through mentoring support of prosecutors and judges and training sessions on the investigation and prosecution of firearms trafficking cases and related crimes. In addition to the immediate disruption of illicit arms flows, the operations included an important training component to strengthen post-seizure investigative and prosecutorial capacities.

48. In South America, UNODC provided support to INTERPOL-led Operation Trigger VI, which targeted firearms trafficking across South America. The operation

led to the arrest of almost 4,000 suspects across all 13 South American countries and the seizure of some 200,000 illicit firearms and several thousand rounds of ammunition.

5. Monitoring illicit arms flows through global data collection and strategic analysis

49. 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 firearms trafficking trends and patterns. The 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 consisting of the annual dissemination of the illicit arms flows questionnaire; the strengthening of the capacity of Member States to collect and analyse firearms-related data; and the production of analytical outputs on firearms trafficking at the global, regional and national levels, with a view to bringing the data collected and analysed by UNODC back to Member States.

50. Repeatedly, the Conference of the Parties has acknowledged the need to conduct, on a regular basis, global data collection and analysis exercises on seized and trafficked firearms. As a result of this mandate, every year since 2018 UNODC has sent out the illicit arms flows questionnaire – a standardized data collection methodology – including for the purpose of monitoring target 16.4 of the Sustainable Development Goals. The data collected builds 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 UNODC portal. On the basis of that data, UNODC launched the *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020*, providing important insights into the magnitude and extent of illicit firearms trafficking and its links to other forms of crime. The launch was accompanied by a series of regional webinars for Europe, Latin America, West and Central Africa and East and Southern Africa to present the main findings of the Study and examine more in-depth regional patterns, flows and specificities. With a view to achieving broader distribution, during the reporting period the executive summary was also made available in English, French, Russian, Spanish and Ukrainian.

51. Furthermore, using global data and complementary regional qualitative and quantitative analysis, UNODC started developing regionalized studies. In 2020 the Office published, in collaboration with the Flemish Peace Institute, a regional analysis report, *Illicit Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts, Components and Ammunition to, from and across the European Union*. Similar regional studies will be developed in the second part of 2022 for Western Africa (UNODC is drafting a chapter on illicit firearms for the Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment for the Sahel subregion), Latin America and the Caribbean, Central Asia (including its links to neighbouring Afghanistan) and the Western Balkans. UNODC is also aiming at conducting similar analysis for the Mediterranean region. In 2022, the Regional Office for Eastern Africa, in cooperation with the Firearms Trafficking Section, published an issue paper entitled “Firearms and ammunition trafficking in Eastern Africa”, examining the current dynamics of firearms trafficking and principal actors in the region.

52. With a view to strengthening national capacities to systematically collect and analyse seizure data and submit the data through the UNODC illicit arms flows questionnaire, UNODC organized workshops (online and in person) in 15 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean and East and South-East Europe, as well as one regional workshop in the Caribbean, with more than 150 participants. As a result, Ukraine established a working group on firearms data collection with the overall objective of improving its collection, analysis and sharing of seizure data. UNODC provided tailored advice and supported the development of standard operating procedures for the collection and sharing of firearms data at national level. In the Western Balkans, the Office developed a comparative analysis of the data collection procedures with the aim of identifying and disseminating best practices for the

collection and processing of firearms data. A new joint project with INTERPOL will focus on developing a regional study and enhancing data collection capacities in the region.

53. In the context of its initiative to monitor illicit arms flows, UNODC produced several technical assistance, outreach and visibility tools. An issue paper entitled “Supporting evidence-based action to counter illicit firearms trafficking and related forms of crime”, published in 2020, promotes evidence-based action against illicit firearms trafficking and related forms of crime. The Office also produced a video promoting data collection and analysis, as well as “Guiding templates for firearms-related investigations”. The templates provide guidance to law enforcement and judicial officers on the type and scope of information to record during investigations. They are available on the UNODC website in English, French, Russian, Spanish and Ukrainian (www.unodc.org/unodc/en/firearms-protocol/publications.html).

54. In addition, UNODC continued to develop issues papers that examine the specific linkages between firearms trafficking and illicit arms more broadly. They include a research brief on the arms-crime-conflict nexus, jointly developed with the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), and a paper on the application of the firearms trafficking offence to cases of arms diversion. Both papers are expected to be published in the third quarter of 2022. In the second half of 2022, UNODC will also continue to develop research papers on the linkages between firearms trafficking and other forms of organized crime, including drug trafficking, human trafficking and the smuggling of migrants, crimes that affect the environment and links between illicit financial and arms flows.

C. Development of tools

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

56. Beginning in September 2021, UNODC worked on the development of “Guidelines on the investigation and prosecution of firearms offences”, which are expected to be published in the second half of 2022 and subsequently translated and tailored to different regional contexts. The guidelines were developed with the support of more than 50 experts from approximately 30 countries, as well as international and regional organizations, which exchanged experiences on current investigative and judicial practices during three expert group meetings held in Vienna in September 2021 and in January and June 2022, respectively.

57. Pursuant to a recommendation made by the Working Group on Firearms at its fifth meeting, UNODC continues to collect and analyse relevant judicial cases and good practices related to the investigation and prosecution of firearms trafficking. The cases are disseminated through the knowledge management portal known as Sharing Electronic Resources and Laws on Crime (SHERLOC), which currently has 66 cases on illicit firearms. Many more cases collected in the framework of the delivery of legislative assistance are currently being analysed before they can be made public. The collected cases, expert commentaries and emerging good practices will be published in a firearms trafficking case digest, 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. The development of the digest has benefited from the substantive exchanges and discussions held during several regional meetings of the UNODC Community of Practitioners. Additional expert group meetings are planned for 2022 to support the finalization and validation of the digest. UNODC also developed seven case law compendiums in the six jurisdictions of the Western Balkans and in Ukraine, which analyse 211 court decisions linked to firearms offences, thereby establishing a first baseline for the harmonization of national court practices in these countries and jurisdictions.

58. In 2021, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) published a handbook on firearms for border guards and customs officers, which was jointly developed by national and international experts, including UNODC, and builds on the UNODC manual for the training course on the detection of firearms, ammunition and explosives at land border crossing points. The manual has been translated into French and Spanish and applied in various training activities. UNODC further contributed to the development of a global version of the handbook and is currently exploring the possibility of supporting its translation into Russian and its dissemination among Central Asian countries.

59. Also in 2021, the Office developed a catalogue of more than 1,000 high-quality X-ray images of firearms and their parts and components for training purposes to enhance the detection skills of X-ray scanner operators working with customs services and private courier companies.

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

1. Cooperation within the United Nations

60. UNODC has continued to contribute to the work of the United Nations Coordinating Action on Small Arms, the system-wide coordination platform established by the Secretary-General to promote exchange of information and coordination among United Nations entities on the issue of small arms.

61. 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 (particularly the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa and the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean) and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, including the Mine Action Service. In the Western Balkans, UNODC and UNDP established a joint multi-partner trust fund to support the implementation of the road map for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of small arms and light weapons by 2024. As a result, several projects in the region, including four UNODC projects, received donor support through the trust fund. In the Caribbean, UNODC supports the criminal justice component of the Caribbean Firearms Roadmap, which is coordinated through the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean and CARICOM, and launched, in June 2022, an inter-agency project under the Saving Lives Entity Fund, in cooperation with UNDP, the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to reduce firearms trafficking in Jamaica. Furthermore, UNODC continued its cooperation with the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre and the Office of Counter-Terrorism in the implementation of the second phase of its joint project to address the links between terrorism and illicit firearms trafficking in Central Asia, promoting a one-United Nations approach in cooperation also with the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and the Office for Disarmament Affairs. Together with UNIDIR, UNODC is working on the development of a joint publication on the arms-crime-conflict nexus.

62. The Firearms Trafficking Section continued to collaborate with other UNODC global programmes, branches, sections and units, including the Organized Crime Branch (the Conference Support Section, the Human Trafficking and Smuggling of Migrants Section and the Cybercrime and Anti-Money Laundering Section), the Terrorism Prevention Branch, all global programmes of the new Border Management Branch (the Airport Communication Project (AIRCOP), the Container Control

Programme, the global programme on strengthening criminal justice cooperation along trafficking routes (CRIMJUST), the Global Maritime Crime Programme, the global programme against transnational organized crime and the Environmental Crime Programme); the Research and Trend Analysis Branch; the Corruption and Economic Crime Branch; the Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Section (the Urban Safety and Good Governance Initiative and the Global Programme on Violence against Children in the Field of Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice), the Civil Society Unit and the Gender Unit, as well as relevant regional programmes located in regional and field offices, allowing to reach new audiences and exploit synergies.

2. Cooperation with other international and regional organizations

63. In the reporting period, UNODC continued to expand its cooperation with national, regional and international organizations, both at operational and strategic level, including ECCAS, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Group of Five for the Sahel, the Implementation Agency for Crime and Security of CARICOM, INTERPOL, the European Union, the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol), Frontex, EMPACT Firearms, the Organization of American States, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the World Customs Organization.

64. Following the decision taken in December 2020 to extent the African Union Master Roadmap of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns in Africa by Year 2020 until 2030, UNODC organized, together with ECOWAS in June 2021, a regional meeting aimed at identifying specific technical support needs of criminal justice systems in West Africa to fight illicit firearms crime and its links to other serious organized crime.

65. UNODC has also engaged in various round tables with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), OSCE and the European Union in order to share views on containing the risks of arms proliferation in and around hotspots including Afghanistan, Ukraine, Libya and Iraq.

66. Finally, UNODC maintained its cooperation with INTERPOL through multiple joint projects referred to in the present report: in West Africa and South America, UNODC coordinated with INTERPOL in the cross-border operations code-named KAFO II and Trigger VI, VIII and IX, and is currently implementing joint projects in Latin America, West and Central Africa (project Disrupt) and in the Western Balkans.

3. Cooperation with civil society and the private sector

67. UNODC has actively engaged with civil society organizations at various levels, from legislative development to training activities and collaboration in the implementation of advocacy materials.

68. UNODC has remained engaged with key non-governmental organizations working on illicit arms trafficking, such as Conflict Armament Research, the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, the Small Arms Survey, as well as think tanks and research entities, and participated in the Wilton Park dialogue on the United Nations multilateral process on conventional ammunition in May 2022.

69. The Firearms Trafficking Section, in cooperation with the Conference Support Section and the Civil Society Unit, also actively supported the participation of civil society in the Constructive Dialogue on the Review Mechanism of the Organized Crime Convention following the ninth meeting of the Working Group on Firearms.

70. In the private sector, UNODC has supported four private courier companies in Bosnia and Herzegovina through the development of standard operating procedures and training on detection of firearms trafficking in fast parcels.

IV. Priority areas for further action

71. Integrated approaches to countering illicit firearms remain crucial if the interconnected aspects of the problem are to be addressed. UNODC is currently developing a new UNODC strategy against illicit firearms that is based on its five-pillar approach. The aim of the strategy is to consolidate the current five-pillar approach and expand into the fields 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 to building more resilient and peaceful communities, focusing especially 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 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 hotspots such as Afghanistan, Libya, Ukraine and the Balkans are of particular concern, as they can create a significant source for illicit arms flows towards other countries and regions at risk, notably the Mediterranean region and beyond. 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, in detecting, investigating and prosecuting embargo-breaking arms transfers and maritime firearms trafficking more broadly.

75. The cascading effects of climate change exacerbate tensions and contribute to conflict. Climate change, by contributing to deteriorating 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 limited access to natural resources for local communities, often exacerbates ancient 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.

76. UNODC will continue to support efforts to systematically collect and report seizure data and aims to make the Global Study on Firearms Trafficking a recurring flagship publication of UNODC. The Office will also continue to undertake strategic research on regional dynamics and linkages with other areas of criminality.

77. In his most recent 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. UNODC will also continue to promote the mainstreaming of an intersectional gender perspective into efforts to prevent and counter firearms trafficking and related criminality and will support States in collecting sex- and age-disaggregated data on firearms trafficking.

V. Conclusions

78. The problem of 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. UNODC 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.

79. 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 in terms of the provision of core services and limits the possibility to expand its geographical and thematic scope and presence to respond to the growing requests for assistance to counter the increasingly global and transregional threats of illicit firearms trafficking with its devastating impact on peace, human safety and security, and development.
