



practical, cross-sectional, modular, authoritative  
guidance on security sector reform & governance

Series 10:  
SSR and wider challenges

## Module 10.7

# Transnational Organized Crime and SSR



**Integrity. Accountability. *Genuine security.***

United Nations action on security sector reform & governance



**“I have seen first-hand how civilians were maltreated by troops and police. People’s properties were not properly protected. It was an issue of lack of accountability on the side of the troops, a lack of oversight bodies and authorities that should be giving direction to the armed forces. Above all we did not respect the civilians amongst which we work. (...) This is why the military and other security institutions must see security sector reform as in fact in their own interest. Because it helps them put in place rules and proper control arrangements, (that) demonstrate to the civilian public that indeed they are responsive to them, and accountable to them – they’re there to provide the security that is required by the people.”**

Kellie Conteh, Minister of Defence, Sierra Leone

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**On each topic, CROSSROADS modules provide policymakers and practitioners with foundational understanding, with current good practices from around the world, and with step-by-step options for action.**

**These modules reflect the UN's collective, evolving knowledge on an essential concern when building peace: how to make security institutions function so that they serve the greater good. CROSSROADS enables the Organization to support nationally owned work on SSR&G coherently and authoritatively – thus contributing to saving lives and improving livelihoods.**

# 1. Introduction

Many activities can be characterized as transnational organized crime (TOC), including counterfeiting, drug trafficking, human trafficking, money laundering, trafficking in firearms, and even some aspects of cybercrime. Environmental crimes like illegal mining and logging are also among the highest-value crimes.

TOC poses a significant threat to global security, human rights, the rule of law, and economic development. Security sector reform & governance (SSR&G) can help address this multifaceted threat through both reactive and proactive strategies that strengthen security institutions.

This **CROSSROADS** module emphasizes the role of good governance of security sectors in preventing and combating these global threats. Furthermore, it seeks to promote collaboration – among government officials, oversight bodies, and civil societies. Security institutions, legislation processes and policies all need to be responsive to TOC threats. In any country, a comprehensive approach is essential: one that effectively addresses the interconnected challenges of TOC and the role of SSR&G in confronting them.

## Legal framework of TOC

To develop this module, we based our work on UN and international framework of TOC, such as:

- **The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC)** is the primary international instrument in combating TOC. UNTOC has three supplementary protocols focusing on trafficking in persons, smuggling of migrants, and illicit manufacturing and trafficking of firearms.
- **The United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC)** and the **United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances** address corruption and drug trafficking.
- The **United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons** and its **International Tracing Instrument**, are political instruments, as is the **Global Framework for Through-life Conventional Ammunition Management** ([A/78/111](#), annex).
- **Regional agreements**, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Convention on Counter-Terrorism, the Inter-American Convention against Corruption, the Organization of American States (OAS) Firearms Convention, and the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption.
- **International standards** are integral components of the legal framework, such as the global guidelines provided by the inter-governmental money laundering and terrorist financing watchdog Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

## 2. Why is this important?

Transnational organized crime threatens peace and security, leads to human rights violations, erodes justice, and undermines the economic, social, cultural, political, and civil development of societies around the world. The vast sums of money involved can compromise legitimate economies and have a direct impact on governance, such as through corruption and "buying" election results. TOC is big business: according to 2017 estimates, it generates between **\$1.6 trillion and \$2.2 trillion per year**, accounting for approximately **2.7% of global GDP** (Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, 2023). <sup>1</sup>

TOC not only undermines the enjoyment of all human rights and economic development but also, creating fragilities within societies. The proliferation of TOC poses substantial threats to the stability of nations and regions globally.<sup>2</sup> SSR&G programmes are crucial for enabling security institutions to combat organized crime and its links to terrorism, corruption, and trafficking, as well as to foster local and national ownership of programmes that fight TOC.

Strengthening the integrity and accountability of these institutions reduces the risk of collusion with criminals and fosters trust in law enforcement, empowering local populations to resist trafficking.

Addressing organized crime in SSR&G programmes requires a holistic, rights-based approach. A security-development-human rights framework targets root causes like inequality and weak rule of law while ensuring democratic oversight and accountability through parliament and civil society involvement, including women's organizations. Tackling international and regional dimensions is essential. Aligning with global norms, addressing demand-side drivers, and adopting gender-responsive approaches protect vulnerable groups and promote equity. Without coordinated efforts, national initiatives fall short, leaving gaps for organized crime to thrive.

**Peace operations** are key in tackling organized crime. They use a "spoiler management"<sup>3</sup> approach, balancing crime-fighting with stability and state-building. However, focusing too heavily on law enforcement risks overlooking political, economic, and social solutions. This could alienate local populations. Addressing Transnational Organised Crime in peacekeeping contexts requires combining law enforcement efforts with strategies that provide alternative livelihoods.<sup>4</sup>

### Operation KAFO

A recent evaluation of the UN's Global Firearms Programme underscored the need for more predictable and flexible funding sources. "Operation KAFO" in the Sahel region exemplified successful joint operations, where 850 officers from across relevant law enforcement agencies seized well over 500 firearms and thousands of rounds of ammunition. It involved police, gendarmerie, customs, anti-trafficking airport cells, maritime authorities, as well as border and prosecution units. The evaluation recommended **institutionalizing capacity-building** programmes, **enhancing cooperation with the UN and civil society**, and **mainstreaming human rights and gender equality**.

### 3. What we've learnt

Effective SSR&G and strategies against TOC adapt to contexts, use holistic approaches, raise public awareness, enact legal reforms, strengthen local and national institutions while promoting national ownership, enhance collaboration, and share technology/intelligence.

**Here are some specific initiatives that have worked.**

- **International cooperation:** To address TOC, collaboration between member states and international organizations is crucial. This can be formal – Mutual Legal Assistance via central competent authorities – or informal through exchanges of information and law enforcement cooperation. The UNODC's 2021 evaluation of its Global Firearms Programme highlights how effective cooperation can drive meaningful legislative reforms, enhancing efforts to combat illicit firearms trafficking and strengthen regulatory frameworks.<sup>5</sup>

However, funding fragmentation limited the programme's capacity to address emerging threats like cybercrime.<sup>6</sup> For examples of effective international cooperation, see e.g. the CariSECURE 2.0 and Infosegura programmes implemented by UNDP in Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean.<sup>7</sup>

- **Community involvement:** Engaging local communities in SSR&G and countering TOC fosters trust and empowers communities to resist criminal influence. Community-based programmes can provide information, support rehabilitation, and prevent recruitment into crime groups. Addressing human trafficking within indigenous communities, and enhancing support for victims through shelter and refuge services has demonstrated measurable benefits.<sup>8</sup> An OHCHR Report<sup>9</sup> highlighted that civil society organizations and representatives of affected groups play a significant role in analysing drugs issues, in delivering services and in evaluating the human rights impact of drug policies. The participation of civil society organizations should be encouraged and their capacities strengthened in order to implement the joint commitments of the outcome document. Civil society organizations should be protected from intimidation, threat, harassment or reprisal.
- **People-centered approaches** to security enhance the connection between communities and the state, fostering trust, representation, participation, and improving service effectiveness, equity, transparency, and legitimacy. These approaches empower communities and individuals to identify security threats and contribute to solutions.

For example, in Guinea Bissau, civil society plays a key role in monitoring human rights violations and organized crime impacts through early-warning systems. Grassroots organizations collaborate with national authorities to strengthen connections among judicial institutions, aiding the consolidation of the rule of law and public security. This partnership enhances transparency in investigations of human rights abuses and organized crime, including drug trafficking. Additionally, civil society organizations have been empowered with the support of UNDP and UNODC to help address money laundering and implement drug policies through community dialogue, capacity-building initiatives, and behavioural change communication.

- **Evidence and community-based crime prevention:** Crime prevention should not lose sight of addressing the root causes of organized crime, strengthening relationships between police and communities, and building local resilience. To assist States in tackling the growing threat posed by the links between organized crime and terrorism, a practical tool was developed to provide concrete, tailored solutions aligned with international best practices. By promoting a coordinated and comprehensive approach, the tool strengthens governments' ability to respond to these security threats effectively.<sup>10</sup> A similar approach was adopted by UNDP in Guatemala through the development of a Public Access Dashboard for Data and Statistics on Sexual Violence, Exploitation and Human Trafficking.

Through this support and continuous capacity building, UNDP has contributed to three national security and crime prevention policies, a national strategy for armed prevention, a municipal security policy, and three laws addressing violence against women and girls. UNDP and UNODA's Saving Lives Entity (SALIENT) Programme similarly relies on evidence-based crime prevention in tackling armed violence and the proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons, which exacerbate the fragility caused by TOC by strengthening effectiveness and accountability of criminal-justice systems, capacity development of border agencies and custom officials, data collection and analysis for policy and decision making, and whole-of-society engagement in reducing proliferation, use and impact of small arms and light weapons.

- **Integrated capacity building:** Strengthening the capacity of security institutions includes training law enforcement, judiciary, and other relevant agencies to effectively counter organized crime. UNODC's [evaluation](#) of "Countering Illegal Hazardous Waste Trafficking Through the Container Control Programme" in Southeast Asia is a good example of improving skills among the region's frontline officers in container inspection, leading to heightened seizures of illicit waste shipments.<sup>11</sup> In Jamaica, UNDP has supported a Multi-Agency Fisheries Crime Coordinating Mechanism to combat organized crime in the fishing sector.<sup>12</sup>

The digital dimension of TOC is also growing. Criminal groups increasingly use online tools for human trafficking, drug trade, and money laundering. Capacity-building must now include digital skills and involve tech companies and internet providers. The 2024 UN Convention on Cybercrime offers a basis for collective action in cyberspace.

- Building **technical skills and capacities** across the security sector is vital to harmonize efforts against transnational organized crime, guided by UN norms like UNTOC and UNCAC. A holistic approach addressing structural, social, economic, and political factors should inform TOC-sensitive SSR policies.
  1. **Strategic measures** include enhancing regional and multilateral technical cooperation through the UNTOC, promoting joint strategies, providing regional training for law enforcement, and facilitating information sharing and joint investigative teams.
  2. **Operational measures** include organizing confidence-building events, engaging border communities in TOC solutions, and integrating human rights into operations. They also focus on utilizing international legal instruments to improve national frameworks, ensure effective extradition and mutual legal assistance, and enhance victim protection. Further integrating targeted syllabi in academic institutions can systematize learning for newly trained security sector personnel.

For instance, programmes like "Coordinating Security Sector Responses to Counter Illegal Logging, 2023"<sup>13</sup> by the Africa Centre for Strategic Studies highlight the importance of fostering interagency collaboration, political economy analysis, and peer learning to enhance security sector coordination with societal actors.

- **Coordination through novel partnerships:** Through Project Hermes, UNODC tackled the illicit trafficking of firearms, parts, and ammunition in express courier and postal parcels in the Western Balkans. Partnerships engaged customs authorities, postal operators, courier companies, regulators, and law enforcement agencies. UNODC developed a manual for X-ray detection and trained authorities to analyze X-ray images, supported Memorandums of Understanding between customs and postal operators, and developed Standard Operating Procedures to counter firearms trafficking in postal parcels.
- **Legislative reforms to support TOC in the security sector:** The rise of TOC is often linked to legal gaps and poor implementation of national and/or international frameworks at national and international levels. Democratic oversight, civil society, and regional organizations play key roles in promoting compliance, awareness, and effective implementation of TOC conventions. UN agencies can assist in ratification, while regional bodies foster a collaborative approach to combating TOC.

1. Strategic measures focus on promoting international treaty adoption (e.g., UNTOC and UNCAC), harmonizing regional laws, enhancing regulatory systems, and upholding human rights and environmental standards.
2. Operational measures include strengthening national legal frameworks, capacity-building for legal actors, sharing best practices, supporting legislative reforms, and fostering regional prosecution aligned with international conventions.

### ***Typical challenges***

Getting the intersection between SSR&G and transnational organized crime right, requires a nuanced and adaptive approach. Continuous evaluation, learning from experiences, and international collaboration are key elements in overcoming these challenges. Here are some typical challenges along with examples.

**Corruption** is a spoiler of rule of law: corrupt officials may collude with organized criminal groups. Corruption in the military can negatively affect a State's ability to respond effectively to criminal groups.<sup>14</sup> In peacekeeping missions, tackling organized crime is often hindered by resistance from local actors, including corrupt officials and community members benefiting from such activities. Moreover, peacekeeping mandates, such as those of United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) in the Central African Republic, often prioritize maintaining peace and stability, limiting direct engagement with transnational crime. This dual constraint complicates efforts to combat criminal networks effectively. Improving the governance of the security sector will indirectly reduce the impact of these groups on the effectiveness of security forces in combating TOC.

A focus on increasing professionalism in security institutions can already assist greatly in countering corruption and links to transnational organized crime. Typical measures include:<sup>15</sup>

- Clear separation of political and civil service positions
- Recruitment and promotion based on merit and competition as a basis for professionalism
- A statutory salary system: transparency in assigning salary components to individual civil servants, coupled with restricted managerial discretion
- Managerial arrangements to ensure observance of common standards in all sections of the public administration
- A single governmental anti-corruption institution concentrating all or most powers is unlikely to cope effectively with all the aspects that need to be addressed. It could jeopardise the anti-corruption effort and facilitate the illicit capture of the anti-corruption struggle itself. A plurality of institutions acting in several fields (parliament, government, judiciary, public administration, and local governments) may prove to contribute better to the anti-corruption effort as a whole.

**Lack of funding and sustainability** are key issues in programming related to transnational organized crime and SSR&G, with significant ripple effects. Although transnational organized crime is widely recognized as a driver of conflict in multiple countries, responses to it are often framed as technical tasks for law enforcement or specialized agencies. UN entities such as United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), and International Organization for Migration (IOM) provide targeted interventions, yet the absence of a unified strategy and adequate resources limits their ability to address TOC's broader role in sustaining violence and financing armed groups.<sup>16</sup>

Regarding SSR&G, the [OECD 2025 States of Fragility](#) report highlights a shift in donor priorities from a development-driven approach, aligned with aid-effectiveness principles, to a more transactional model shaped by national security and geopolitical objectives. This shift is reflected in a **sharp decline in Official Development Assistance (ODA) for SSR&G** and a corresponding rise in security assistance funding. This decline contradicts the increasing needs in fragile states, where the lack of adequate, predictable, and sustained financing for SSR&G remains one of the biggest barriers to effective conflict prevention and long-term peacebuilding.

Weak or **outdated legal and policy frameworks**, including regarding mutual legal assistance treaties (MLATs) and lack of **disaggregated data**, may hinder the prosecution of transnational criminals and the implementation of effective SSR measures. This is the case e.g. in the rapidly evolving field of cybercrime and new psychoactive substances where the TOC groups are evolving faster than the corresponding legal frameworks.<sup>17</sup>

**Combining the need for robust security measures with respect for human rights and gender equality** can be challenging, especially in conflict zones. This is the case in contexts where there is a militarization of the response to transnational organized crime as well as in the context of counter-terrorism operations, with instances where security measures resulted in human rights violations, raising concerns about the balance between security and individual freedoms.

**Political instability, fragmentation, limited mandates, and unconstitutional changes of government** disrupt SSR initiatives, leading to inconsistent approaches. Post-Arab Spring nations like Libya face turmoil, hindering SSR and fostering transnational crime.<sup>18</sup> Peacekeeping forces often face restricted mandates, limiting their ability to tackle criminal activities beyond maintaining peace and stability. For instance, in post-conflict zones, weak or corrupt local institutions hinder cooperation on combating organized crime, leaving peacekeepers unable to address issues such as human trafficking or arms smuggling effectively.

**Increased use of modern technologies and cyberspace by Transnational Organized Crime** presents an extra challenge compounded by the critical scarcity of resources and the digital gap that developing and fragile countries continue to endure. Crime groups thus exploit governments' obsolete security systems and inadequate technological capabilities. Employing innovative technologies by security institutions like facial recognition at airports, drones for border control, and cybersecurity tools to combat digital crimes and illicit cryptocurrency transfers have proven effective in addressing TOC.<sup>19</sup> However, innovative technologies also pose risks to human rights and international law. Facial recognition can lead to privacy violations, drones may infringe on people's rights and freedom of movement, and cybersecurity tools risk overreach in financial surveillance. Without clear legal safeguards, transparency, and accountability, these technologies can undermine fundamental rights and freedoms.

The **complex and adaptive nature of transnational criminal networks** makes it difficult to predict and counter their activities effectively, posing a significant challenge to peacekeepers and other UN practitioners in conflict zones.

- Drug cartels in South and Central America adapt routes and methods in response to law enforcement, complicating disruption efforts.
- Illicit trafficking of firearms via express courier and postal parcels, coupled with online marketplaces, poses a growing challenge.
- The anonymity of online transactions and e-commerce growth aid traffickers' operations.

The World Economic Forum [Global Risks Report 2024](#) warns that TOC groups may shift focus to post-enforcement actions, necessitating coordinated, cross-border responses and international cooperation. Moreover, in response to enforcement action, such groups may shift focus towards other commodities, other forms of crime or other locations. Such “jurisdiction shopping” and “balloon effects” underscore the need for coordinated, cross-border responses and international cooperation.

**Legal gaps:** Despite progress in the legal framework to combat TOC, significant challenges remain. Criminal groups exploit jurisdictional gaps and weak legal systems, often targeting countries with limited enforcement capacity. Extradition and mutual legal assistance processes are frequently slow and inefficient, hindering international collaboration. While instruments like UNTOC exist, a lack of harmonization in laws persists, particularly in addressing cybercrime.

Many countries still lack comprehensive legislation for crimes like hacking, online fraud, and cyberterrorism. Additionally, challenges about data privacy, national security, and sovereignty often obstruct effective cooperation among law enforcement agencies and nations.

**Human rights impact:** Organized crime itself can be a violation of human rights. This is the case, for example, in relation to trafficking, contemporary forms of slavery, and forced labour. Increasingly, some other forms of organized crime, such as environmental crime, and trafficking of arms, are recognized for their impact on human rights. A series of High Commissioner reports to the Human Rights Council have outlined the many disparate impacts of the illicit arms trade on the right to information, the rights of women and children as well as the responsibilities of businesses involved in the arms trade, both legal and illicit. They have outlined the many disparate impacts of the illicit arms trade — including on the right to information; the rights of women and children; the responsibilities of businesses involved in both the legal and illicit arms trade; the right to life; the right to access to justice and truth; political participation; and the principle of non-discrimination.<sup>20</sup>

Organized crime has a detrimental impact on States' ability to fulfil economic, social and cultural rights. This can occur through the siphoning of resources from the public sector towards criminal interests, reducing the available resources for food, housing and social services, or it can be through the diversion of resources from social sectors to combat organized crime. At its worst, this creates further inequalities and a conducive environment for the recruitment of organized criminal gangs, as well as the exploitation of people and communities.

In some cases, people already in a marginalized or vulnerable situation can be disproportionately affected by organized crime, either as a result of their direct exposure to criminal activity, such as drug trafficking, or as a result of the withdrawal of social services.<sup>21</sup> This in turn can expose already vulnerable people to discrimination and exploitation, as well as other violations of their rights

## 4. Case Studies

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### **Case study 1: Peacekeeping responses to transnational organized crime and trafficking: the case of MINUSMA**

The UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA, 2013-2023) emerged in response to Mali's deepening instability, triggered in part by the 2012 crisis following the collapse of the Qaddafi regime in Libya. Mali's strategic location as a transit hub for drug, arms, and human trafficking fueled cycles of violence and instability. While MINUSMA initially focused on peacekeeping, its mandate expanded over time to address challenges like transnational organized crime, particularly arms trafficking. Counter-terrorism remained the mission's priority, often eclipsing efforts to tackle organized crime. During its mandate, MINUSMA encountered obstacles including the presence of state-affiliated actors in trafficking networks. Deteriorating security conditions and growing tension with the Malian government further constrained the mission's operations.

MINUSMA did make some strides by supporting specialized policing and judicial capacities, including a unit focused on terrorism and organized crime, and by establishing intelligence and analytical structures like the Joint Mission Analysis Centre (JMAC) and the All Sources Information Fusion Unit (ASIFU) to support mission planning and decision-making.

JMAC played a crucial role in providing strategic and operational analysis on security threats, including organized crime, by synthesizing intelligence from various mission components and external partners. Meanwhile, ASIFU, leveraging military intelligence capabilities, contributed by collecting, analyzing, and disseminating actionable intelligence to enhance situational awareness and support targeted responses to threats, including transnational organized crime.

These efforts complemented broader initiatives in SSR&G, as intelligence-driven approaches helped inform capacity-building efforts for national security institutions and guided policy recommendations to strengthen institutional responses to organized crime. Additionally, sanctions regimes and monitoring by the Security Council Panel of Experts provided further tools for addressing organized crime.

MINUSMA's efforts were ultimately limited by political and operational challenges, demonstrating the need for more integrated and politically supported approaches to counter transnational organized crime in future peacekeeping operations.<sup>22</sup>

## **Case study 2: SSR intersects with violent extremist groups engaged in transnational criminal activities**

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Boko Haram are notorious for their successful transnational fundraising. These funds are primarily used to finance terrorist activities, procure weapons, and sustain operations. Both groups are involved in human trafficking. They also engage in arms smuggling, acquiring weapons from various sources and trafficking them to support their insurgency. In response, countries in the Sahel region and the Lake Chad Basin have worked to strengthen security institutions, improve intelligence-sharing mechanisms, enhance border security, and rebuild security forces.

### Case Study 3: Combating Maritime Piracy in the Gulf of Aden and the Somali Basin

Transnational piracy syndicates have long posed a threat to maritime security in the Gulf of Aden and the Somali Basin, hijacking vessels, kidnapping crew members, and smuggling goods and weapons. Regional security cooperation initiatives, supported by international partners like the UN and the EU, are vital in tackling this menace. Operation Atalanta, led by European Union Naval Force (EU NAVFOR) since 2008, employs naval patrols and aerial surveillance to combat piracy. This operation, alongside SSR endeavours, has significantly reduced piracy incidents and facilitated pirate prosecutions, notably in Kenya, the Seychelles, and Mauritius, where UNODC-supported courts have handled transferred suspects under strengthened legal frameworks.

Despite successes, challenges endure. Effective maritime law enforcement, international cooperation, and legal frameworks are crucial. SSR&G should prioritize bolstering coastal states' capacity, fostering regional cooperation, and addressing socio-economic drivers of maritime insecurity. Coordination among regional states remains paramount in confronting maritime threats effectively. The Gulf of Aden and Somali Basin piracy case underscores SSR's importance in combating transnational crimes at sea and emphasizes the need for addressing the socio-economic factors that contribute to maritime insecurity.

#### **Case study 4: Strengthening regional cooperation to combat transnational organized crime: the case of the Western Balkans**

Transnational organized crime particularly the illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons, remains a major challenge in the Western Balkans, undermining security and governance. Addressing this issue requires a coordinated, multi-agency approach that strengthens institutional capacities, legal frameworks, and cross-border cooperation—key pillars of SSR&G. A notable initiative in this regard is the partnership between the UNODC Global Firearms Programme (GFP) and UNDP's South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC)<sup>23</sup> regional programme.

The UNODC GFP has played a critical role in assisting jurisdictions across the Western Balkans in strengthening their criminal justice response to firearms-related crimes. By supporting the alignment of national legal frameworks with international instruments such as the UN Firearms Protocol, the initiative has enhanced legal predictability, accountability, and transparency. In parallel, targeted training and technical assistance for law enforcement and judicial authorities have improved investigative and prosecutorial capabilities. This capacity-building effort has contributed to more efficient case management, adherence to due process, and the professionalization of security institutions, strengthening accountability within the security sector.

Complementing these efforts, UNDP SEESAC has enhanced regional cooperation and policy harmonization, facilitating intelligence-sharing and joint operations between jurisdictions. This has allowed governments to track and control illicit firearms more effectively while reducing jurisdictional gaps that criminals exploit.

The strengthened coordination between law enforcement agencies across borders has reinforced regional governance mechanisms and contributed to a more integrated security response. Additionally, the implementation of the Regional Roadmap for a Sustainable Solution to Illegal Trafficking of Slight Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) in the Western Balkans by 2024<sup>24</sup> has institutionalized long-term arms control policies.

The collaboration between UNODC and UNDP illustrates the value of integrated UN efforts in strengthening security governance. By combining legal, operational, and policy support, this initiative has enhanced institutional resilience, transparency, and accountability, contributing to a more effective and cooperative security sector.

## 5. Options for actions

In providing strategic and technical guidance for SSR in the service of countering organized crime, nuance, adaptability, and local ownership are essential. Recommendations may encompass the below elements, including a few examples from ongoing or past initiatives:

- **Research and analysis using an interdisciplinary approach:** Encourage a robust research and analysis component within technical guidance. This involves continuous monitoring of trends in transnational organized crime, understanding the current modus operandi of criminal networks, and leveraging intelligence for informed decision-making in SSR strategies. Foster an interdisciplinary approach including law enforcement, legal, human rights, technological, sociological and development perspectives.

For example, UNDP's Global Programme on Rule of Law and Human Rights has included work on citizen security<sup>25</sup> in Latin America and the Caribbean deemed crucial for human rights and public welfare, integral to institutional management and policy design. It fosters democratic citizenship and addresses insecurity by establishing safe environments for peaceful coexistence.

Organized crime also drains resources from small economies, diverting funds that could support social needs and economic rights. UNDP's [Business and Human Rights](#) agenda offers tools to mitigate these impacts and address related challenges effectively. UNODC, supported by various UN entities, leads the [UN Information Laboratory on Crime and Corruption for Latin America and the Caribbean \(LabCC\)](#), which provides UN Resident Coordinators and Country Teams with SDG 16-related tools, knowledge products, and e-learning on corruption and organized crime.

- Ensure **adequate and well-managed financial support** to advance the good governance and professionalism of security institutions.
- Focus wherever possible of **further professionalizing security institutions**, in order to make their staff less prone to corruption.
- Emphasize **effective stakeholder engagement strategies**. These should recognize the importance of collaboration between governmental agencies, international organizations, civil society organizations and local communities. Establish mechanisms for communication, trust-building, and collaboration to ensure the involvement of the public in security initiatives.

UNDP's support of the Citizen Security Knowledge Network (CONOSE) through the Infosegura Regional Project exemplifies stakeholder and community engagement strategies. CONOSE engages higher learning institutions, think tanks, NGOs, and governmental bodies, fostering collaborative research, capacity-building, and policy dialogue.<sup>26</sup>

- **Technology integration and data sharing:** Provide guidance on the integration of cutting-edge technology for intelligence gathering, data analysis, and communication. Develop secure platforms for information exchange between UN peace operations, host governments, and international partners. For instance, InnovAcción platform is a databank of over 100 innovative, tested experiences from all over the world that are used as the basis for discussion and for identifying solutions.<sup>27</sup> These tested experiences refer to concrete initiatives, tools, and practices that have been successfully implemented in different contexts, demonstrating measurable impact and effectiveness. They serve as proven models that can be adapted and scaled to address similar challenges in security governance.

- **Promotion of human rights and gender-sensitivity:** Adopting a human rights-centered approach in security sector reform and interventions targeting transnational organized crime is vital to mitigate the risks inherent in criminal justice strategies. The contrary examples have been the ‘war on drugs’ and the ‘war on terrorism’, which have demonstrated how harsh State responses to organized crime can have severe impact on human rights (extrajudicial killings, torture and ill-treatment, affronts to liberty and security of person and so on). Such approaches fail, while human rights compliant responses have greater chances of success.<sup>28</sup> Peacekeepers must receive robust training in legal frameworks and human rights principles to ensure operations are conducted ethically and responsibly. Additionally, gender sensitivity training is critical to addressing the unique needs, vulnerabilities, and contributions of diverse populations.
- **Mainstream an age-responsive perspective:** TOC groups often target children and youth for recruitment and exploitation. Children, defined as persons below the age of 18, are particularly vulnerable and require specific protection measures, as they are recognized as a special category of victims with unique needs and rights. Meanwhile, youth, defined by the Security Council<sup>29</sup> as individuals aged 18-29, face distinct challenges, including exclusion from political and security processes, which can serve as a major driver of conflict and fragility. [The Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security, the Missing Peace](#) found that youth across the world often fear interactions with law enforcement, perceiving police forces as a source of violence rather than protection. Exclusion of youth from participation in political and security processes is a major conflict driver and source of fragility.

- **Continuous learning platforms, lessons learned sharing, adaptive planning, monitoring and evaluation methodologies:** Develop ongoing learning platforms, including online courses, webinars, and communities of practice, to ensure practitioners stay informed about emerging trends and best practices. Encourage adaptive planning methodologies that enable flexibility in addressing shifting security challenges. Establish comprehensive evaluation and feedback mechanisms to measure the impact and effectiveness of technical guidance. Implement regular feedback loops to promote continuous improvement and ensure interventions remain relevant and responsive to evolving needs. For instance, [DatAction](#) community of practice provides specialists and decision-makers a platform to discuss, share knowledge, and enhance capacities in citizen security analysis and management.<sup>30</sup> Another example would be the [TrainAction digital platform](#), which strengthens technical competencies in designing, evaluating, and managing evidence-based citizen security.<sup>31</sup>
- **Capacity development:** Focus on enhancing the capacities of intelligence services, criminal justice and law enforcement actors, including border control entities, customs, police, judiciary, and prosecution services. Provide specialized training to equip these actors with the skills needed to effectively investigate, prosecute, and adjudicate cases related to transnational crime. Focus on capacity building for local security and justice institutions. Strengthen the capacity of host government institutions in their ability to combat TOC. Prioritize institutional capacity building by focusing on strengthening the capabilities of local security and justice institutions. Technical guidance should address gaps in expertise, resources, and infrastructure to enhance the overall effectiveness of SSR and TOC responses. These trainings should use practical case studies and scenario-based learnings.

- **Interagency collaboration and promoting partnerships (NGOs, academic institutions, public private partnerships):** Highlight the significance of national interagency collaboration. Facilitate coordination among governmental agencies, law enforcement, intelligence services, and relevant ministries for a unified approach. Collaborate with academic institutions to integrate relevant content into academic programs, enriching security strategies. Foster interagency coordination between peace operations and special political missions, host government, international partners, and relevant agencies. Explore public-private partnerships to leverage resources, expertise, and technology in combating transnational crime and supporting SSR initiatives. The United Nations should work with civil society organizations combatting organized crime, and advocate clearly and strongly for their protection, including from reprisals.
- **Tailored recommendations for peace operations:** These include developing integrated training modules on conflict resolution, rule of law, conflict prevention, and countering organized crime, fostering cross-disciplinary expertise through trainers from SSR, TOC, and peacekeeping backgrounds with scenario-based learning exercises to enhance practical skills. Peacekeepers should receive cultural sensitivity, legal and human rights training, and community engagement strategies to build trust and collaborate with local populations. Joint exercises with local authorities, risk analyses, and mitigation training tailored to organized crime challenges, along with coordination with international agencies, are essential. Additionally, gender sensitivity training, adaptability and flexibility in response to evolving security dynamics, and providing psychosocial support services for peacekeepers are crucial for ensuring effective and ethical operations. Capturing lessons from interventions should happen on a regular basis, including through after action reviews and lessons learned exercises.

# 6. How to Measure Progress

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Regularly collecting and analyzing data based on these indicators and methodologies will provide a comprehensive understanding of progress in implementing technical guidance for SSR and TOC. It is essential to establish a feedback loop, allowing for continuous improvement and adaptation to emerging challenges. Measuring progress involves a comprehensive evaluation framework. Here are key indicators and methodologies for assessing progress that need to be adapted to each context:

| #  | Criteria                        | Indicator                                                                                                                                                                 | Methodology                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|----|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. | Policy and Legislative Changes  | The enactment of new policies, strategies or laws or amendments to existing policy or legislation related to SSR&G and transnational organized crime.                     | Regularly review and analyze policy and legislative changes at the national level, ensuring alignment with the guidance provided.                                                                                                                  |
| 2. | Institutional Capacity Building | Enhanced capabilities of security and justice institutions.                                                                                                               | Conduct assessments of institutional capacities through performance metrics, training records, and feedback from practitioners. Development of SOPs, establishment of specialized units, bigger cases instead of focus on small scale criminality. |
| 3. | Technology Adoption             | Integration of advanced technology in SSR and TOC operations.                                                                                                             | Monitor the adoption and utilization of technological tools, assess their effectiveness, and gather feedback from practitioners on their experiences.                                                                                              |
| 4. | Interagency Collaboration       | Increased collaboration and coordination among relevant agencies. Number of meetings/ agreements or partnerships held by each relevant institution in a specific context. | Evaluate the frequency and effectiveness of interagency meetings, joint exercises, and information-sharing mechanisms.                                                                                                                             |

|    |                                       |                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|----|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 5. | Community Engagement and Awareness    | Improved community engagement and awareness levels.                        | Conduct surveys, focus group discussions, and assess the reach and impact of public awareness campaigns. Increased reports via hotlines or similar (though more relevant for other crime types and not TOC) |
| 6. | Training and Professional Development | Increased participation in and completion of relevant training programmes. | Track the number of individuals trained, assess their performance, and gather feedback on the applicability of training content.                                                                            |
| 7. | Operational Effectiveness             | Improved success rates in SSR and TOC operations.                          | Analyze operational data, such as the number of successful investigations, arrests, and convictions related to TOC.                                                                                         |
| 8. | Cross-Border Cooperation              | Strengthened collaboration with neighboring countries.                     | Evaluate the frequency and effectiveness of cross-border meetings, joint operations, and information-sharing mechanisms.                                                                                    |
| 9. | Public-Private Partnerships           | Increased engagement and collaboration with the private sector.            | Assess the number and effectiveness of public-private partnerships formed and their contributions to SSR and TOC efforts.                                                                                   |

|     |                                    |                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-----|------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 10. | Research and Analysis Capabilities | Enhanced research and analysis capabilities within the security sector.                      | Evaluate the quality and relevance of research outputs, and assess the integration of research findings into operational.                                        |
| 11. | Human Rights Compliance            | Adherence to human rights principles in SSR and TOC activities                               | Monitor and assess compliance with international human rights standards through periodic reviews, audits, and feedback mechanisms.                               |
| 12. | Gender Mainstreaming               | Incorporation of relevant gender and intersectionality dimensions in SSR and TOC activities. | Monitor and assess meaningful integration of gender and intersectionality-related considerations in law, policy and operational responses in SSR and TOC fields. |
| 13. | Evaluation Mechanisms              | Regular and thorough evaluations of SSR and TOC interventions.                               | Implement a systematic process of evaluating the impact of interventions, including lessons learned sessions and feedback from stakeholders.                     |

## Further reading

[A/RES/65/289 - The Rule of Law at the National and International Levels](#)

[A/RES/72/243 - United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel](#)

[A/RES/70/303 - The Review of the United Nations Peacebuilding Architecture](#)

[A/RES/70/127 - The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy](#)

[A/RES/72/180 - The Comprehensive Review of the Whole Question of Peacekeeping Operations in all their Aspects](#)

[A/RES/67/93 - Strengthening the Effectiveness of the Security Council in the Maintenance of International Peace and Security](#)

[A/RES/70/1 - Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) [A/RES/65/230 - Strengthening the United Nations Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Programme](#)

[A/RES/58/4 - United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime](#) [A/RES/53/111 - United Nations Convention against Corruption](#)

[A/RES/49/159 - Strengthening the United Nations Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Programme](#)

[A/HRC/RES/53/17 – The negative impact of corruption in the enjoyment of human rights](#)

### Guidelines

[UN Guidelines on Justice in Matters involving Child Victims and Witnesses of Crime](#)

[UN Guidelines on Crime Prevention](#)

[UN Handbook on Restorative Justice Programmes](#)

[UNODC Organized Crime Strategy Toolkit for Developing High-Impact Strategies](#)

[UNODC Toolkit on Mainstreaming Gender and Human Rights in the Implementation of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime](#)

## Document management and control

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## End notes

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