

Illicit firearms trafficking is one of the EU's priorities in the fight against serious and organised crime as part of [EMPACT 2022-2025](#).

Recent terrorist attacks in Europe have spurred initiatives to crack down on the illegal trade in firearms, a relatively small market under the control of organised criminal groups.

Organised criminal groups often rely on the availability of weapons to carry out their activities. However, the market for firearms in the EU remains modest in size. Trafficking occurs on a small scale, and the weapons trafficked are intended for either personal use or to meet specific orders.

Weapons trafficking is almost exclusively a supplementary rather than a primary source of income for the small number of organised criminal groups involved. Most groups enter the weapons-trafficking business through other criminal activity, which may offer contacts, knowledge of existing routes and infrastructure related to the smuggling of weapons.

The weapons and organised criminal groups involved in weapons trafficking primarily originate from the Western Balkans (the weapons will typically have been held illegally after recent conflicts in the area) and the former Soviet Union. [Outlaw motorcycle gangs](#) are also involved in the trafficking of weapons, and have opened chapters in the Western Balkans. Organised criminal groups use existing criminal routes to traffic weapons.

The main sources of illegal weapons are:

- › the reactivation of neutralised weapons;
- › burglaries and thefts;
- › the embezzlement of legal arms;
- › the selling of legal arms on the illegal market, including the Darknet;
- › the reactivation of decommissioned army or police firearms;
- › the conversion of gas pistols.

In 2014, Europol estimated that there were almost half a million lost or stolen firearms in the EU.

The relatively high risks associated with weapons trafficking act as a disincentive for organised criminal groups. However, where demand exists, criminals will exploit vulnerabilities in legitimate supply chains to obtain weapons and ammunition.

A [2016 investigation](#) by Italian law enforcement, in cooperation with Europol, underlined the latter's importance as an intelligence provider and its capabilities in detecting connections between seemingly unconnected cases in France, Italy, Malta and Slovakia, with possible links to Egyptian migrant smuggling gangs.

INCREASING COOPERATION

Europol plays a key role in supporting Member States fight criminal networks involved in illegal weapons and explosives trafficking. As part of a wider strategy to identify the criminal networks supplying terrorist groups with firearms and ammunition, Europol experts work closely with counter terrorism experts on international investigations. Moreover, Europol specialists and analysts combine efforts to assist Member States in developing their own resources to monitor and tackle the Darknet phenomenon.

The agency's [Analysis Project \(AP\) Weapons and Explosives](#) deals with criminal organisations and individuals involved in the illegal manufacturing, possession and trafficking of

- › small arms
- › light weapons
- › ammunition, parts and components
- › explosives (military, commercial, pyrotechnics and improvised/homemade)
- › explosives precursors
- › improvised explosive devices (parts and components)
- › military ordnance (parts and components)
- › chemical biological radiological and nuclear (CBRN) materials
- › other dangerous substances that could be used as weapons.

Europol's [European Counter-Terrorism Centre \(ECTC\)](#) supports Member States in information-sharing and operational cooperation with regard to monitoring traffic in illegal firearms in the context of anti-terrorism.

In addition, Europol's [European Migrant Smuggling Centre \(EMSC\)](#) is seeking to identify and analyse links between the [facilitation of illegal migration](#) and other crime areas, including firearms trafficking.

In April 2017, over 578 firearms and 776 pieces of ammunitions were seized as part as a [joint operation](#) targeting the illegal movement of firearms, explosives, chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear material through the Ukraine–Moldova border. Five pieces of explosives and one package of radioactive material were also seized at the border as part of this operation.

Co-ordinated by the European Union Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine (EUBAM), this operation involved Europol, Frontex, the Southeast European Law Enforcement Centre (SELEC) and law enforcement agencies in Ukraine, Moldova, Greece, Romania and Spain.

NUMBER OF ITEMS FOUND: 60

SEARCH



TYPE

Article/Story, Event, How-To Guide, Landing Page, Multimedia, News/Press Release, Operation, Page, Publication/Document

TARGET GROUP

SEARCH

CLEAR ALL



12 DETAINED IN POLAND IN GUN SMUGGLING CRACKDOWN

NEWS/PRESS RELEASE



800 CRIMINALS ARRESTED IN BIGGEST EVER LAW ENFORCEMENT OPERATION AGAINST ENCRYPTED COMMUNICATION

NEWS/PRESS RELEASE



EUROPEAN UNION SERIOUS AND ORGANISED CRIME THREAT ASSESSMENT

PUBLICATION/DOCUMENT



SERIOUS AND ORGANISED CRIME IN THE EU: A CORRUPTING INFLUENCE

07
Dec
2020

GLOBAL ACTION AGAINST MAIL ORDER GUN TRAFFICKERS

NEWS/PRESS RELEASE

16
Nov
2020

1 776 FIREARMS SEIZED IN INTERNATIONAL SWEEP AGAINST ILLEGAL TRAFFICKING OF MANUFACTURED WEAPONS

NEWS/PRESS RELEASE

30
Sep
2020

166 ARRESTED IN INTERNATIONAL CRACKDOWN AGAINST CRIME IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE

NEWS/PRESS RELEASE

12
Mar
2020

6 ARRESTED AND SCORES OF WEAPONS SEIZED IN RAIDS ACROSS SLOVAKIA

NEWS/PRESS RELEASE

28
Feb
2020

MEXICO AND EUROPOL BEGIN CONSULTATIONS TO STRENGTHEN COOPERATION ON SECURITY AND ILLICIT FLOW OF ARMS, AMMUNITION AND EXPLOSIVES

NEWS/PRESS RELEASE

17
Jul
2019

NUMEROUS WEAPONS CONFISCATED DURING THE EU-COORDINATED JOINT OPERATION "ORION"

NEWS/PRESS RELEASE

17
Jun
2019



COLOMBIAN AUTHORITIES SEIZE OVER 19 TONS OF COCAINE IN OPERATION TAYRONA

NEWS/PRESS RELEASE

10
Apr
2019



WEAPONS REACTIVATION SPECIALIST ARRESTED IN SPAIN

NEWS/PRESS RELEASE

1 2 3 4 5

NEXT ›

LAST ›

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