



**REGISYNC**

# International Exchange of Information in the Context of Firearms Control

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Policy Paper  
October 2023

# CREDITS

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This report was funded by the European Union's Internal Security Fund — Police

Cover design:

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ISBN: 978-954-477-473-8

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>CFRT</b>	Canadian Firearms Reference Table
<b>CT</b>	Counter-Terrorism
<b>DMG</b>	Dealers, manufacturers, and gunsmiths
<b>FRONTEX</b>	European Border and Coast Guard Agency
<b>EIS</b>	Europol Information System
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>EU SOCTA</b>	European Union Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment
<b>FRT</b>	Firearms Reference Table
<b>iARMS</b>	Illicit Arms Records and tracing Management System
<b>IFRT</b>	INTERPOL Firearms Reference Table
<b>IMI</b>	Internal Market Information (System)
<b>LEA</b>	Law enforcement agency
<b>NFFP</b>	National Firearms Focal Point
<b>OLAF</b>	European Anti-Fraud Office
<b>RCMP</b>	Royal Canadian Mounted Police
<b>SIENA</b>	Secure Information Exchange Network Application
<b>SIS</b>	Schengen Information System
<b>SOC</b>	Serious and Organised Crime
<b>UNODC</b>	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
<b>UNODC-IAFQ</b>	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire





# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Background, scope and aim

This policy paper discusses the importance of exchanging information among European law enforcement agencies to trace firearms effectively. Tracing firearms helps with solving crimes, identifying traffickers, and preventing illegal firearm circulation. This policy paper highlights challenges in international information exchange on firearms data and provides insights on issues observed at the international and the domestic level. The paper, ultimately, provides recommendations to improve information exchange both domestically and internationally.

The [REGISYNC](#) project serves as the basis for this policy paper. This project ran from October 2021 to October 2023. This paper particularly highlights insights gained from workshops in June 2023, attended by representatives from 21 national jurisdictions, including EU and non-EU countries, as well as international organisations including INTERPOL, OSCE (Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe), and DG HOME. The geographical scope of REGISYNC covers all European Union (EU) Member States as well as Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Ukraine, and Moldova.

## Key challenges in international information exchange

Several challenges in international information exchange in firearms tracing have been identified. First, the existence of multiple platforms utilised by different collections of participating jurisdictions poses a difficulty, as certain exchange platforms are prioritised by one jurisdiction at the expense of other exchange platforms. This is typically the situation regarding the platforms operated under the auspices of the EU (SIS II and IMI), which are compulsory for the EU Member States to use. Also, two (SIS II and IMI) out of the four platforms reviewed in detail in this paper are exclusive to the EU, hence inaccessible for law enforcement agencies outside the EU. This structural limitation will remain in place, making these platforms essentially closed to third countries.

On the operational side, challenges mostly stem from underutilisation of the platform due to effort of use (iARMS), difficulties in retrieving information (SIENA), and technical issues regarding working with the platform and its user-friendliness (IMI).

## Key challenges in domestic information collection

Furthermore, various challenges in domestic information collection, storage, analysis and dissemination were identified. First, data and information are not entered in a uniform, standardised manner into national firearms registries.

This is, in part, a consequence of the use of different types of standards across countries (i.e., varying use of firearms reference tables) and the use of different definitions (i.e., definitions for seizure). The lack of standardised information further fuels firearms seizure reports being inaccurate or lacking in detail. These are also not always recorded in a centralised manner, such as within the national firearms registry. In addition, the varying alphabets in which firearms are marked and then subsequently recorded in national registries pose a challenge in information exchange when tracing firearms.

Furthermore, countries design their national registries in different ways, meaning that each national registry is unique. Ideally, the national firearms registry includes a lost/stolen and found/seized firearms registry, in addition to automated links to international information exchange platforms. However, this is not the case in many countries. As a result, law enforcement officers must manually query various databases when tracing firearms, thereby substantially impacting the efficiency of their work.

## Recommendations

### Develop an Application Programming Interface to Automate Firearms Information Exchange Between SIS II and iARMS

EU Member States use SIS II, while non-EU Member States largely rely on iARMS for international firearms information requests. These platforms are not integrated, resulting in information being dispersed between those two (and other) platforms. Automatic integration between the platforms would benefit the effectiveness and efficiency of information exchange on firearms tracing.

### Encourage jurisdictions to extend direct SIENA access to all relevant departments

Expanding SIENA access beyond national Europol contact points (i.e. National Firearms Focal Points (NFFP) if available) would allow for more independent queries and quicker responses.

### Establish lost/found firearms registries

Creating national databases for lost and found firearms is crucial for improving firearms tracing. Such databases should ideally be linked to national firearms registries for easy querying. Automating connections between these databases and national registries would also enhance international firearms tracing. The European Commission could strongly promote the establishment of these databases in all EU Member States and provide technical assistance to establish direct links between them and SIS II, further boosting the effectiveness and efficiency of firearms tracing.

### Facilitate standardised data and information entry into national firearms registries and international information exchange platforms

Standardising data entry through firearms reference tables in national registries and international platforms is essential. Making technical adjustments, such as replacing free text with selectable drop-down menus, can aid law enforcement in accurate and consistent data entry, improving the quality of information. This enhances data integrity and usability in firearms-related databases.

### Standardise the collection of accurate and detailed information on firearms seizures to improve the intelligence picture and encourage MS to empower NFFPs to manage this process

It would be beneficial to address disparities in collecting and recording seized firearm information through implementing common definitions and standard procedures. Centralising records in a national database, connected to the national registry, would further facilitate this. Additionally, empowering NFFPs to manage seizure data and investigate firearm origins is essential for accurate and detailed data collection, improving investigative opportunities related to crime guns.

### Encourage countries to fully utilise iARMS for reporting lost/stolen and found/seized firearms

EU Member States, among others, currently underutilise iARMS. It is recommended to encourage them to report lost/stolen and found/seized firearms in a more comprehensive manner in iARMS. This would boost the data available in iARMS, improving the effectiveness of firearms tracing and providing a more accurate understanding of firearm trafficking into the EU from external sources through systematic data recording.

### Provide training and awareness raising on international information exchange platforms

To enhance the utilisation of international information exchange platforms for firearms tracing, it is recommended to provide training and awareness activities for law enforcement officers. These activities would educate users on how to effectively use the platforms, address data disparities, and ensure data insertion and querying are optimised. Combining this training with standardised data entry processes and improved evidence logging and seizure reporting is advisable. Additionally, training officers on the interconnectedness of firearms with other criminal activities, such as drug trafficking, is crucial.

# INTRODUCTION

## Background and aim of this policy paper

This paper synthesises the research conducted as part of the REGISYNC project regarding the exchange of information between national law enforcement agencies in the tracing of firearms in Europe. Tracing is particularly important as it helps law enforcement agencies track the life-cycle of firearms used in crimes, potentially leading to the identification of perpetrators and conducting subsequent criminal and judicial proceedings. Furthermore, tracing firearms can assist in the identification of trafficking routes and methods used to smuggle firearms. It can also play an important role in crime prevention by acting as a connecting point between risk analysis and management and detection and seizures. This all together contributes to developing the bigger intelligence picture, which, in turn, allows for evidence-based policy development. It is safe to say that the international exchange of information on firearms is an essential component in tracing firearms and contributing to these goals at a more international level.

In this paper, firearms tracing, refers to the systematic tracking of illicit firearms from their point of manufacture or most recent import through the lines of supply to their last legal owner to determine when and where they became illicit.<sup>1</sup> This is fundamental to addressing the illicit proliferation of firearms, and identifying the point of a firearm's diversion is crucial to preventing future diversions of firearms from legal ownership into illicit circulation. For example, tracing the origin of firearms that are used in crime enables law enforcement officials to develop investigative leads that may link a weapon to a suspect in a criminal investigation, understand the mechanisms through which they were diverted, and identify suspected arms traffickers or detect patterns of intra-state and international arms trafficking.<sup>2</sup>

Law enforcement agencies in Europe face a variety of challenges in exchanging information in the tracing of firearms, both at the domestic and international levels. Examples of key challenges include access to international information exchange platforms, the quality of the data input to information exchange platforms and the speed at which information exchange requests on tracing firearms are answered (see Chapter 2 for a more elaborate analysis). These challenges directly affect the efficiency of information exchange between law enforcement agencies and, as a result, impact the effectiveness of information exchange on tracing firearms. Consequently, the challenges can have a negative impact on the success of police investigations when tracing firearms is necessary.

This policy paper highlights the challenges law enforcement agencies experience in exchanging information on a national and international level when tracing firearms and provides recommendations to address these challenges. In doing so, it provides recommendations to the European Commission and national authorities on how to enhance information exchange in firearms tracing between national law enforcement agencies.

This paper consists of three main chapters. This chapter provides a short introduction to the background and scope of the paper and the key concepts used therein. The second chapter describes key findings on the use of and challenges experienced in international information exchange platforms and domestic information exchange with regard to tracing firearms. In the final chapter, recommendations are presented. In the annexes to this policy paper, the bibliography and applied methodology can be found.

## Scope

The specific focus of this paper is on the exchange of information of firearms data, as opposed to personal data, specifically in regard to international firearms tracing. International firearms tracing concerns international information exchange requests to trace a particular firearm and its essential components.<sup>3</sup>

It is important to note that international information exchange in the tracing of firearms consists of both **incoming** and **outgoing tracing requests, which both involve the exchange of information at the domestic level and at the international level.**<sup>4</sup> An incoming international tracing request refers to when law enforcement officials receive a tracing request from another national jurisdiction. Typically, this asks the recipient to investigate, within their domestic records, the origins of a firearm that was found in the requesting state's jurisdiction. Occasionally, it may refer to circumstances where the requesting officials find the firearm in their jurisdiction but believe the firearm was unlawfully manufactured or assembled in the state to whom they make the request.

An outgoing request includes when law enforcement officials send a tracing request to another national jurisdiction, seeking to establish the origins of an illicit firearm which does not appear within domestic records that is suspected to have entered their jurisdiction via illicit trafficking. Whilst this is the "other side of the coin" to an incoming tracing request, both aspects need to be managed and monitored properly.

Crucially, both incoming and outgoing international tracing requests require accurate, secure and timely information exchange to occur at both the domestic and international levels for tracing to be effective. Information on firearms found at the domestic level, particularly regarding the life cycles of legally held firearms within a jurisdiction, is vital for informing law enforcement officials of if the traced firearm has been diverted within their own jurisdiction. If no domestic records can be found, this then indicates that a found firearm has either been illicitly manufactured or has entered the jurisdiction by illicit means<sup>5</sup>.

Specifically focusing on the international information exchange platforms which facilitate firearms tracing, this includes both querying data (i.e., searching for firearms data in international information exchange platforms such as SIS II and iARMS) and providing data (i.e., uploading data onto such platforms), of which this policy paper addresses both. It should be noted,

however, that international information exchange in the tracing of firearms also occurs outside the framework of international information exchange platforms, i.e., bilaterally between countries (see Chapter 2 for a more detailed analysis).

The geographical scope of the research, which forms the basis of the present paper, covers all European Union (EU) Member States as well as Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Ukraine, and Moldova.<sup>6</sup>

### Key concepts

This policy paper addresses the ‘exchange of information’ in tracing firearms in the context of criminal investigations at the international level. The paper takes the terms of Intelligence-led Policing as a starting point, which includes data, information, knowledge and intelligence. For the purposes of this policy paper, the term ‘information’ will collectively refer to data, information, knowledge, and intelligence.<sup>7</sup>

### Methodological approach

This policy paper is based on the inputs that REGISYNC collected throughout the duration of the project (October 2021 – October 2023). Whilst 21 national jurisdictions have participated in the project, the workshops with law enforcement officers that took place in June 2023 have been particularly valuable in identifying challenges and opportunities for innovation. In total, 20 representatives of 18 national law enforcement agencies were present. Six participants represented the EU Member States, and two participants represented countries outside the EU. In addition, representatives from Interpol, OSCE and DG HOME attended. Annex II provides a more elaborate overview of the composition of the group.

Throughout the project and in the workshops, the focus has been on the most frequently used platforms for international information exchange to trace firearms. Hence, this policy paper only provides in-depth reflections on those and omits analysis on the less prevalent platforms.

Finally, as a limitation of this paper, it is relevant to reiterate that the usability and application of international information exchange platforms is, in part, tautological. Platforms that are used only to a limited extent are also likely to contain and produce much more limited information and data. Simultaneously, platforms that contain and produce limited information and data are more likely to only be used to a limited extent. This nuance ought to be considered when digesting this policy paper.

# CHALLENGES IN EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION ON FIREARMS

This chapter first presents the international information exchange modalities, first focusing on bilateral information exchange and then on platforms relevant to firearms tracing. The chapter will elaborate on their features and the challenges users face when working with the platforms. Then, the national registries will be touched up, and a further elaboration on challenges in collecting and recording data on firearms at the national level is presented.

## International Information Exchange

International information exchange in relation to tracing firearms takes place either through international platforms (some specifically focused on firearms) or through bilateral exchanges between two law enforcement agencies. While the international information exchange platforms facilitate sharing information for the purposes of tracing firearms, they exist in parallel to the bilateral exchange of information that takes place between national law enforcement agencies.

Therefore, before describing the main features and specific challenges faced by law enforcement agencies using a specific international information exchange platform, it is important to note the modalities of bilateral information exchange. Bilateral information exchange is a common practice and forms a key component in international information exchange. Hence, the following paragraphs outline the ways in which this type of information exchange occurs and its associated challenges.

### Bilateral Information Exchange

During the workshops with law enforcement representatives, it was frequently mentioned that law enforcement officers rely largely on bilateral information exchange between equivalent agencies in other national jurisdictions using their law enforcement contacts. Rather than formally launching a tracing request through one of the platforms detailed below, information is therefore also exchanged via phone, email or through other channels.<sup>8</sup> Some participants in the workshops shared that bilaterally contacting counterparts in other countries is common practice in their (national) working culture (both within and outside law enforcement). Hence, they feel more comfortable exchanging information bilaterally via phone or email compared to launching formal requests through designated platforms. Others indicated that their primary reason for contacting counterparts bilaterally is because it is easier and faster to obtain an answer in this manner. Rather than formally launching a request and waiting for the outcome, a counterpart might be able to provide answers (nearly) immediately when contact is made via phone or email.



However, while bilateral communication is experienced as being very effective when sharing information internationally, it does pose a challenge. Namely, there is [limited record-keeping](#) when communication occurs via phone or email. This negatively impacts the build-up of so-called 'institutional memory' because information is exchanged from person to person rather than via the 'institutionalised processes'. As a result, there is a risk that the data and information shared with a respective counterpart remains only with the respective counterpart without being further disseminated in the organisation (i.e., to relevant colleagues). In addition, bilateral communication often does not leave an "audit trail" which makes it difficult to track which communication took place between which counterparts and at what point in time, information which might be relevant at a later point in time.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, it is evident that bilateral information exchange is more effective when a National Firearms Focal Point (NFFP) is in place.<sup>10</sup> One of the primary roles of the NFFP is to facilitate and coordinate international information exchange on firearms (tracing) between countries. The NFFP serves as the key go-to contact point within a specific jurisdiction, and, in principle, all tracing requests are received by the NFFP.

However, not all countries have installed such a focal point, and this hampers international information exchange. In the [absence of an NFFP](#), it is sometimes unclear for law enforcement officers exactly whom to contact in another jurisdiction concerning firearms. Different countries have mandated different departments, ministries, or organisations to work on firearms. In jurisdictions where an NFFP is in place, it might be located only in one agency and not connected to the entire law enforcement system. Consequently, it is not always evident which part of an administration to target when a jurisdiction has a firearms-related question (such as a tracing request). Moreover, even if it is known which body and department the question or request should be targeted at, the contact details of the respective department (and account holder) are not known to other countries. In sum, the absence of an NFFP hampers the smooth international exchange of information, both bilaterally and through international information exchange platforms.

Furthermore, it should be noted that [divergence between national legal frameworks and definitions](#) of firearms negatively impacts the effectiveness and efficiency of international law enforcement cooperation and, therefore, international information exchange.<sup>11</sup> Differences in legal frameworks and definitions impact the flow of information in various ways, meaning jurisdictions do not always 'speak the same language' when exchanging information about firearms. These challenges, however, persist regardless of whether information is shared bilaterally or through any of the international information exchange platforms presented below.



Finally, **language** poses a challenge in international information exchange, as officers in different countries often do not speak the same language. This challenge is particularly prominent in the light of bilateral international information exchange but also occurs in information exchange via international platforms. For example, a firearm might be marked with information spelt in Cyrillic, Greek, or Latin alphabets. Moreover, language also plays a role in the way data is entered into national registries (see section 2.2).

Since the bilateral exchange of information is still perceived by law enforcement agencies as a highly flexible and easy modality to request information, it is a common practice in various countries. This potentially disincentivises law enforcement officials from using international information exchange platforms to their full extent.

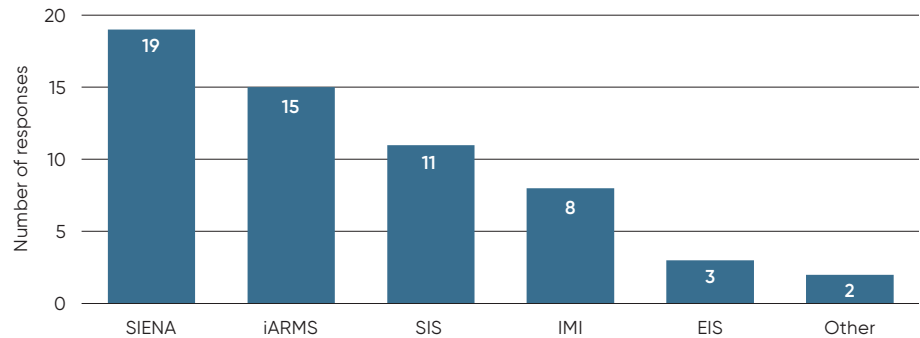
## International Information Exchange Platforms

Besides bilateral exchanges of information in tracing firearms, exchanges can also occur through international information exchange platforms. This policy paper focuses on the most used platforms. The platforms covered in this policy paper are:

- The Illicit Arms Records and tracing Management System (iARMS) of INTERPOL;
- The Secure Information Exchange Network Application (SIENA) of Europol;
- Schengen Information System II (SIS II) of the EU;
- Internal Market Information System (IMI) of the EU (mandatory for EU Member States).

Other international, regional or national record-keeping systems that facilitate firearms tracing may fall outside the scope of this paper. Examples of such platforms include FireCycle<sup>12</sup>, GoIFAR<sup>13</sup>, ArmsTracker<sup>14</sup> and TRAFFIC.<sup>15</sup>

Before further detailing the features of each of the international information exchange platforms, the following figure indicates the use of these systems in comparison to each other. This figure is based on one of the questions posed to law enforcement representatives during the REGISYNC workshops held in June 2023. The figure shows that iARMS and SIENA are most frequently used in firearms tracing, followed by SIS and IMI. The Europol Information System (EIS) is used to a much lesser extent for firearms purposes, but EIS offers a broader range of criminal information and intelligence, which is less specifically focused on firearms. In interpreting these numbers, it should be noted that not all participants of the workshops have access to each of the platforms, and this impacts the statistics on the use of these platforms.<sup>16</sup>

**Figure 1. Most used international information systems (N = 25)**

Source: REGISYNC, based on workshops with law enforcement (2023).

## iARMS

iARMS was launched in 2013 by INTERPOL with financial assistance from the European Union.<sup>17</sup> It is the only global database for illicit firearms. The platform is divided into three components:

- Firearms Records Module, which hosts a database that contains firearms reported as lost, stolen, or smuggled in another jurisdiction.<sup>18</sup>
- Trace Requests Module, where law enforcement agencies can send tracing requests to 195 member countries. This can help in gaining information to identify potential firearms traffickers, detect firearms crime trends and link suspects to a firearm in a criminal investigation.<sup>19</sup>
- Statistics Reports Module, which entails operational and strategic analytics which can assist countries in strengthening their intelligence at national and international levels.<sup>20</sup>



Direct access to iARMS can be granted to police services, customs agencies, border protection agencies and regulatory authorities of INTERPOL member countries. Non-INTERPOL members may negotiate indirect access to iARMS via INTERPOL liaison officers.

## Challenges Regarding iARMS

Participants of the workshop listed a series of challenges they face using iARMS in their daily operations related to firearms tracing. A key concern lies with the **lack of an automatic connection** between iARMS and national registries and databases. In practice, this means that information that a law enforcement officer inserts into the respective national registry, e.g., that a firearm has been stolen, must then also be manually inserted into iARMS. This requires a duplication of effort, which substantially affects the efficiency of this officer. It also disincentivises the officer to input data and information into the iARMS Records Module. Hence, the lack of an automatic link was also highlighted as one of the primary reasons why **the data uploaded to iARMS is sometimes absent or minimal**. The additional

effort required to use iARMS makes it less attractive and self-evident for law enforcement officers to upload detailed information beyond the minimum requirements that are mandatory to use iARMS.<sup>21</sup> This, in turn, impacts the usefulness of the platform for tracing firearms. It should be noted, however, that INTERPOL is currently developing iARMS features that would facilitate simultaneous queries.<sup>22</sup> It is worth noting here that information entered into iARMS suffers from a more general issue of inaccurate or minimal information.

In addition, not all countries make use of firearms reference tables (see section 2.2) or the IFRT built into iARMS, which also impacts the quality (and subsequent usability) of the information uploaded to iARMS. As a result of these factors, information uploaded to iARMS is sometimes absent, inaccurate or limited, thereby impacting the effectiveness of the platform for the purpose of firearms tracing.

Another facet discussed in the workshops was that **iARMS only requires firearm identification information to be included** when a firearm is uploaded to the records module. The mandatory fields include the serial number, make, model, calibre, jurisdiction of manufacture or jurisdiction of legal import, official record ID, reason trace initiated, urgency, crime type, contact details, and recipient countries). Other information, such as contextual information and pictures, can be uploaded optionally. Contextual information can be highly valuable in investigating firearms, and when such information is not always available, it impacts the quality of the investigation.

Another challenge participants in the workshop reported when using iARMS pertains to the **responsibility to respond to requests to trace a firearm**. Currently, it is not obligatory for authorities to answer tracing requests. Therefore, tracing requests sometimes remain unanswered. Moreover, when answers are provided, they are not always sufficiently detailed. This hampers the speed and quality of investigations on the side of the requesting authority. As a result, law enforcement officers confirm that they resort to bilateral exchanges when seeking to trace a firearm (if possible), as these generally provide answers to their questions in a timelier fashion. INTERPOL recognises this challenge and has a dedicated unit working at speeding up the responses to tracing requests.<sup>23</sup>

Ultimately, the quality of input and level of engagement with iARMS impacts the effectiveness of the platform. Addressing this **collective action problem** depends on the resources and time constraints that law enforcement officers work with, in addition to the degree to which they are familiar with the platform and aware of its benefits. **Training** on the value and correct use of the platform is essential, both to improve the quality of data and to address the collective issue of underutilisation. In past years, the majority of the iARMS training INTERPOL provided was targeted at countries outside the European Union (due to external funding). Consequently, some EU Member States are less familiar with the platform and its features. In some EU Member States, for example, uploads of lost and stolen weapons are recorded only in SIS but not in iARMS. This impacts iARMS' overall use, as non-EU jurisdictions do not have access to SIS. INTERPOL is planning to provide more training on iARMS in EU Member States in the near future.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, [access to iARMS is restricted to certain jurisdictions](#). Naturally, this impacts the usability of the platform as exchanges with those countries that do not have access require the use of other platforms or bilateral exchanges.

## SIENA

SIENA has been developed by Europol to facilitate secure and quick exchange of sensitive and restricted crime-related information and data.<sup>25</sup> It was launched in 2009. The main features of SIENA include<sup>26</sup>:

- Messaging to other SIENA users, in addition to a direct inbox to the Europol team.
- Secure exchange of data, information, and intelligence on previous and ongoing cases.
- Operational support provided by the Europol team via SIENA.
  - Cross-check of Europol systems (EIS, on Serious and Organised Crime, on Counterterrorism and external repositories).
  - Firearms tracing by Europol officers.
  - Reporting.

Access to SIENA is mainly granted to Europol's liaison officers, analysts and experts, EU Member States and third parties who have a cooperation/working arrangement with Europol.<sup>27</sup> It is also used by Eurojust, European Border and Coast Guard Agency (EBCGA, commonly referred to as Frontex), OLAF and INTERPOL, as well as cooperating states outside of the EU (Australia, Canada, Norway, Liechtenstein, Moldova, Switzerland and the United States). The platform also has a connection to 49 counter-terrorism authorities under a specific framework.



## Challenges Regarding SIENA

SIENA is one of the most used platforms for international information exchange on firearms, and under Council Conclusions 10726/21, SIENA is the only information platform that is recommended as mandatory for EU Member State NFFPs.<sup>28</sup> However, some participants at the workshops experience [issues accessing the platform](#).

Access to SIENA is often organised in a siloed way whereby only specific sub-units within a law enforcement agency have access to SIENA (often only the national Europol contact point(s) has or have access). In practice, other units that would benefit from access to SIENA must go through the designated unit that holds access. Regarding firearms tracing, this means that SIENA is only accessible by the national Europol contact point. Therefore, all searches on firearms in SIENA must be sent to and executed by this contact point. As all SIENA activity must be executed by the national Europol contact point, the speed at which information can be exchanged is hindered, thereby impacting the effectiveness and efficiency of firearms tracing.

## Schengen Information System II

Since 1995, SIS has been used for information sharing on security and border management in the EU's Schengen Area.<sup>29</sup> In 2013, SIS II was introduced. SIS II is a centralised system which provides alerts on both people and objects. These can be located anywhere in the EU and Schengen area during border and police checks. The alerts become available in real-time across the 29 EU and Schengen countries. SIS II consists of a central system, national SIS systems in all countries using SIS II and a network between the systems.

Firearms registration services have access to the following when checking the legal status of objects presented to them for registration:

- Alert for arrest for surrender or extradition;
- Alerts for discreet, inquiry and specific checks;
- Alerts on firearms for seizure or use of evidence.

SIS II is used in 25 EU countries<sup>30</sup> and the Schengen-associated countries (Switzerland, Norway, Liechtenstein, and Iceland). The competent national authorities can enter and consult alerts in the database. Each jurisdiction is responsible for all tasks (e.g., the setup, maintenance and operation) of its system. Additionally, Europol has access to alerts in SIS II and exchanges additional information with countries regarding alerts related to crimes within its area of operations.



Participants at the workshop were generally positive about the use of SIS II in firearms tracing. Although it is mandatory for EU Member States to utilise SIS II, the system offers integration between SIS II and national registries to automate the upload and querying of firearms data, thereby facilitating exchange and decreasing the workload of law enforcement. Because of this approach, the collective use of the exchange platform is promoted and facilitated, with the effect of increasing the amount of firearms data entered into the system, which in turn bolsters its effectiveness in supporting firearms tracing.

## Challenges Regarding SIS II

SIS II is exclusively used by the EU Member States and associated countries participating in the Schengen Area. Accordingly, many **non-EU Member States do not have access to SIS II for the purposes of firearms tracing**, which is not foreseen to change soon. This is particularly impactful due to the compulsory nature of SIS II. EU Member States actively use the system whilst focusing much less on the use of the other international information exchange platforms that non-EU MS might have access to (i.e., iARMS).

Workshop participants indicated that this is partially because there are no automated connections between SIS II and other platforms, such as iARMS, meaning that utilising both platforms would require firearms tracing information to be entered twice, effectively doubling the workload of law

enforcement officers. In practice, the mandatory use of SIS II, therefore, effectively disincentivises EU MS from using other platforms such as iARMS. This was reflected in the workshops, where EU MS were frequently found to rank iARMS as low in use within their jurisdiction, particularly in contrast to SIS II, on the grounds of the required effort and resources to use both systems.

Despite its benefits, as SIS II is unavailable to most non-EU states, records of firearms which were reported as lost/stolen in jurisdictions outside the EU are absent from the system. Therefore, through indirectly disincentivising EU MS to use other platforms which are more heavily used by third states, such as iARMS, the knock-on effect is the potential hindrance of firearms tracing in instances where weapons have been illicitly trafficked into the EU from beyond its borders.

### Internal Market Information System

IMI has been operational since 2008 and is managed by the European Commission.<sup>31</sup> It facilitates the exchange of information between public authorities entrusted with the implementation of the EU law in their Member States. IMI supports the authorities of EU Member States to fulfil their cross-border administrative cooperation obligations in various Single Market policy areas. In the field of firearms, IMI is used for electronic notifications of transfer authorisations of firearms from one Member State to another as well as refusals to grant authorisation to acquire or possess firearms.<sup>32</sup> IMI offers machine translation of free text fields, but not attachments, into all official European languages.



In addition, Member States are able and required to upload a list of firearms which may be transferred to their territory without prior consent. This can only be done by a single entry, either creating the list manually in the system or by attaching a document detailing the firearms.

The search functionality allows the user to search existing entries and includes a filter option for specifying the search criteria. The published notifications are open for comments and attaching additional documents until their expiry date.

### Challenges Regarding IMI

Beneficiaries identify two key challenges in relation to IMI. First, like SIS II, *non-EU Member States do not have access to IMI*, whereas the system is mandatory for EU Member States. This structural limitation of IMI arises from it being tied to the single market of the EU, where all internal barriers to trade have been abolished. As a result, EU Member States rely relatively heavily on IMI (and SIS II), and this might disincentivise them to make use of other international information exchange platforms to which non-EU Member States do have access. The European Commission has recognised the issues of access to IMI and SIS II among non-EU Member States in its Report



on the application of the Firearms Directive<sup>33</sup> and concluded that there might be a need to assess the impact of creating an express legal basis for the use of the IMI system in the Firearms Directive itself to allow access for non-EU Member States.

In addition, participants of the workshop generally did not find the IMI system to be **user-friendly and that it could be further automated**. For example, IMI requires users to scan paper documents and then upload them manually. Direct links to electronic format documents are not possible, with scanning and manual upload requiring substantial effort from users. As a consequence, keyword searches are not always possible.

EU Member States that have already moved towards e-governance can perceive the manual processes required to use IMI as burdensome. Therefore, some participants in the workshop stated that they refrain from using IMI as it places unnecessary administrative burden on law enforcement officials. This, in turn, impacts the quantity of information exchanged internationally via IMI.

### Summary of challenges

Based on the above, the following challenges common to the international information exchange platforms for firearms tracing can be identified.

First, the existence of multiple platforms utilised by different collections of participating jurisdictions poses a difficulty, as certain exchange platforms are prioritised by one jurisdiction at the expense of other exchange platforms. This is typically the situation regarding the platforms operated under the auspices of the EU (SIS II and IMI), which are compulsory for the EU Member States to use. Also, two out of the four platforms reviewed above are exclusive to the EU, hence inaccessible for law enforcement agencies outside the EU. This structural limitation will remain in place, making these platforms essentially closed to third countries.

On the operational side, challenges mostly stem from underutilisation of the platform due to effort of use (iARMS), difficulties in retrieving information (SIENA), and technical issues regarding working with the platform and its user-friendliness (IMI).

## **Domestic Information: Collection, Storage, Analysis and Dissemination**

International information exchange in firearms tracing is impacted by the way information is collected, stored, analysed and disseminated at the domestic level. Typically, the national firearms registry stores information on the life cycle of civilian possession of firearms, which can be queried when an international tracing request is received. The more accurate and comprehensive the information recorded on the firearm (via e.g., markings<sup>34</sup>) is in national registries (such as life cycle and licensing data), the more effective domestic investigation, and therefore international information exchange, will be. Timely and accurate data input is required from when a firearm is imported or manufactured to its eventual destruction or export. By tracking the life cycles of firearms, national registries provide valuable information to investigators throughout the life cycle, such as if a firearm is lost/stolen, when a firearm is recovered/seized, or if the firearm is modified or deactivated.

Certain characteristics regarding the national registries will predicate how efficiently and effectively information will be exchanged. For example, the use of a firearms reference table, the implementation of a centralised lost/stolen and/or a 'found and seized firearms' registry, or direct links to systems such as IMI or SIS II. Through centralising firearms life cycle information, these registry features reduce the need for law enforcement officers to query multiple databases, thereby improving their efficiency.

In this section, national registries are first discussed, with a specific emphasis on how issues surrounding the use of custom firearms reference tables or none at all, hamper information exchange from the start. Then, the discussion moves to the challenges observed regarding national recording and information sharing of firearms.

### **National Firearms Registries**

Firearms registries on the national level serve primarily to collect, analyse, and manage all information in relation to firearms possession in a jurisdiction. In broad terms, the national registry can contain information on the firearm, the essential components, the ammunition, and information on natural and legal persons or dealers, manufacturers, and gunsmiths. The system allows authorities to keep track of civilian-possessed firearms within its jurisdiction. As such, the national firearms registries play an essential role in (international) firearms tracing because through tracing requests, jurisdiction A can query national firearms registries in jurisdiction B.

The following table, included in the REGISYNC publication *Effective and Innovative Practices among European Civilian Firearm Registries*, provides an overview of types of information generally recorded in a registry.



Table 1. Types of information recorded in a registry

Firearm *	Ammunition**
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Manufacturer</b></li> <li>• <b>Country of manufacture</b></li> <li>• <b>Type</b></li> <li>• <b>Make</b></li> <li>• <b>Model</b></li> <li>• <b>Calibre</b></li> <li>• <b>Serial number</b></li> <li>• <b>Unique marking</b></li> <li>• Category and subcategory</li> <li>• Date of sale, receipt, repair, transfer</li> <li>• Method of acquisition</li> <li>• Proof house</li> <li>• Proof mark</li> <li>• Additional calibre(s)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manufacturer</li> <li>• Place of manufacture</li> <li>• Calibre</li> <li>• Lot/batch numbers</li> <li>• Quantity</li> <li>• Photographs</li> <li>• Bullet nature (e.g., FMJ)</li> <li>• Bullet weight</li> <li>• Propellant weight</li> <li>• Nature of propellant</li> <li>• Additional markings</li> <li>• Images</li> </ul>
Individual	Legal person or DMGs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First name and last name</li> <li>• National id number</li> <li>• Date of birth</li> <li>• Place of birth</li> <li>• Address</li> <li>• Citizenship</li> <li>• Gender</li> <li>• Names of parents</li> </ul> <p><b>Document</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The type, number, date of issue, and validity of the weapons document,</li> <li>• The name of the issuing authority. Information relating to changes and data relating to the transfer of ownership (type of change, date)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uniform identification number</li> <li>• Company name</li> <li>• Registered address</li> <li>• Business activity</li> <li>• Date of commencement of activity or date of issuance of authorisation</li> <li>• First name and surname of the representative or responsible person</li> <li>• Data relating to changes (type of change, date)</li> <li>• Data on entry (authority, date, reference number)</li> </ul>

\*Bold typeface represents the minimum information requirements set out in the EU Firearms Directive.

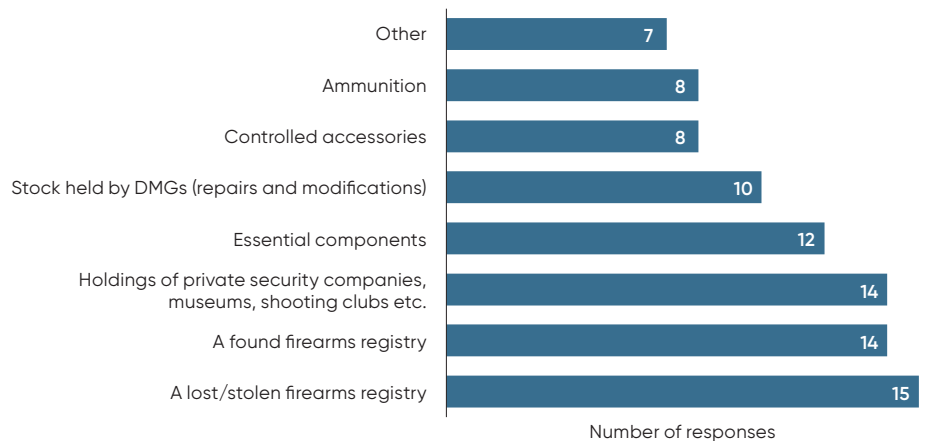
\*\* Recording details on ammunition is unusual and was found in only one beneficiary's registry.

Source: REGISYNC, Effective and Innovative Practices among European Civilian Firearm Registries, 2023.

Although there are some rules within the EU Firearms Directive governing what the registry should achieve, there is no international standard for national firearms registries. Therefore, countries are largely free to implement their national registry as they see fit. As a result, countries can develop systems which are appropriate to their local contexts and specific requirements, which is considered a good practice.<sup>35</sup>

During the REGISYNC workshops with law enforcement representatives, participants were requested to indicate which features are included in their respective national firearms registry. The following visualisation illustrates that most participants indicated that their national firearms registry includes a registry of lost and stolen firearms and a registry of found firearms. Many representatives also indicated that their respective national registry includes a feature on holdings of private security companies, museums, sports shooting clubs, etc. Slightly less common was a feature on stock held by dealers, manufacturers, and gunsmiths (DMGs). Only a select group of participants indicated that their registry also includes records of ammunition and/or controlled accessories.

**Figure 2. Features included in national firearms registry (N=17)**



Source: REGISYNC, based on workshops with law enforcement (2023).

In addition, the registry can also be linked to other national databases, such as criminal records systems, police event and case management systems, and electronic health records systems.<sup>36</sup>

A key challenge in relation to the national firearms registries in tracing firearms is that many of them are, to a certain extent, *standalone databases without automatic integration with other databases*. This then impacts the utilisation of SIS II and iARMS in identifying trafficked firearms and the accurate life cycle management in the national registry.

Often, records of found/seized firearms are kept separate from the national firearms registry; therefore, when a law enforcement officer inserts data into one system, it is necessary to manually check (and update) other relevant systems, including the national firearms registry. When this is

not done, a seizure will be recorded as such, but it will not be marked as seized in the national firearms register. The absence of links between systems impacts the international tracing of firearms. Moreover, many countries do not keep a centralised database with records on seized firearms. The absence of such a database, in turn, impacts the successful tracing of seized firearms.

Furthermore, the different approaches to the design and implementation of national firearms registries result in [discrepancies between countries with regard to the way in which data on firearms is entered into databases](#). This lack of harmonisation hampers international tracing of firearms because different countries record firearms in different ways, making querying other jurisdiction's databases challenging. Moreover, at the domestic level, data on firearms might not be recorded in a unified way, which further hampers tracing.

## Firearms Reference Tables

To respond to the need to have harmonised and reliable data on firearms, firearms reference tables (FRTs) were developed to facilitate the standardisation of data collection and data sharing on firearms. The use of such tables is beneficial for the international tracing of firearms because they ensure countries use identical language for firearms and essential components.

However, although international FRTs such as the Canadian FRT (CFRT) and the INTERPOL FRT (IFRT) offer the benefit of standardisation, many jurisdictions utilise a custom FRT or do not use a reference table at all. This poses a challenge as FRTs predicate the way data is entered into national registries (and international information exchange platforms).<sup>37</sup> This is further compounded, where registries lack an FRT, by the incidence of typos and errors made in free text fields within registries. Given their impact at the domestic level, FRTs, therefore, impact international information exchange in firearms tracing. Having briefly discussed the benefits and current challenges regarding FRTs, this section will outline the IFRT and CFRT in further detail.

## INTERPOL Firearms Reference Table (IFRT)

INTERPOL's Firearms Reference Table (IFRT) is one of the more widely used. IFRT<sup>38</sup> is an interactive tool which supports law enforcement officers in clean data entry by identifying the technical characteristics of firearms. This, in turn, facilitates the tracing of firearms and related investigations. IFRT contains thousands of firearms references and images, offered as a standalone service, as well as being integrated within the iARMS platform. The information included in the IFRT includes over 165 000 individual firearms references, over 51.000 firearms, information on markings of firearms, including manufacturers' markings, proof marks, importation and deactivation markings, definitions and terms of firearm parts, accessories, functions and processes, company histories, acronyms, and manufacturers' codes.

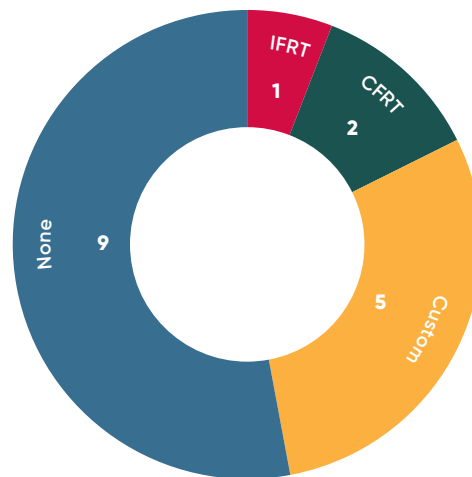
Access to IFRT is granted to authorised users in INTERPOL's member countries. The IFRT is based on the CFRT (see below). INTERPOL regularly updates the IFRT when new entries are added to the CFRT.

### Canadian Firearms Reference Table (CFRT)

Besides IFRT, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) reference table has also been made recourse to by many law enforcement authorities-. The RCMP maintains the Canadian Firearms Reference Table (CFRT)<sup>39</sup> in real-time, based on the Canadian Regulations and amendments as well as technical assessments of firearms. CFRT is an administrative document that aids domestic and international law enforcement officers in identifying and defining firearms. CFRT includes approximately 190,000 individual records. Only authorised users have access to the online CFRT; this includes the 194 INTERPOL member countries. There is also a public version of the CFRT with more limited information.

The following chart illustrates the use of the different firearms reference tables, and is based on information gathered by REGISYNC through questionnaires by REGISYNC to National Firearms Focal Points.<sup>40</sup> It illustrates how different countries make use of different types of firearms reference tables.

**Figure 3. Overview of the use of firearms reference tables based on REGISYNC findings (N=17)**



Source: REGISYNC, based on workshops with law enforcement (2023)

### Further challenges

Whereas each national firearms register differs in design, functionalities, and links to external databases, law enforcement representatives generally experience similar types of challenges in tracing information on firearms and in collecting information about firearms seizures. The most prevalent ones that impact the collection and sharing of data on firearms on the national level are mapped out in the following paragraphs.

An operational challenge that users of the national registries are facing is the use of [different alphabets and languages](#) used to describe firearms. To illustrate, information is sometimes uploaded in one alphabet (e.g., Cyrillic) while the user of the registry is searching for this information using another alphabet (e.g., Latin). This poses problems for matching the information that is searched for. The challenge arises at the national level with firearms data entered into the national registry (e.g., the choice of entering a firearm of Russian origin using the Cyrillic alphabet or in the alphabet used in the respective jurisdiction) and is intensified when exchanging data internationally on firearms tracing between countries. Similar challenges are observed in relation to inserting and querying data using the same alphabet but in different languages.

Furthermore, workshop participants indicated that EU Member States and jurisdictions outside the EU had [differing definitions of a firearm's 'seizure'](#), in addition to differing standards regarding under what instances seizures of firearms are recorded, as well as varying breadth and depths of seizure data recorded on firearms and the circumstances of their seizure. For example, in some cases, the term "seizure" is regarded as applying only where law enforcement officers have used a legal power to take possession, for example, through confiscation. This approach can exclude firearms handed in voluntarily, where no seizure power was exercised. In other jurisdictions, the term "seizure" applies to all firearms coming into the possession of law enforcement, whether a power to take possession was proactively exercised or not. It was also underlined in the workshops that this is sometimes coupled with the unclarity of (technical) terms and knowledge of patrol officers conducting the seizures. Consequently, the variety of (technical) terms used between and within jurisdictions, such as "seized", "surrendered", "found", and "recovered", creates a lack of clarity for information exchange.<sup>41</sup>

In practice, where the NFFP is not fully implemented within a jurisdiction and vested with the necessary data access, people, technology, and framework to function effectively, the information contained within the initial seizure report might not be corrected following expert analysis of the weapon by firearms examiners. Additionally, the information contained in the seizure report might not be recorded centrally, nor might further investigation, analysis, and the subsequent development of strategic and tactical intelligence regarding seized firearms and their origins occur in some countries. This hampers international tracing of firearms substantially because information on seized firearms is not always centrally available to national law enforcement agencies and, therefore, even less so for countries sharing international tracing requests.

Due to these factors, collected [information on seized firearms might be incorrect, incomplete, or under-utilised by law enforcement](#), ultimately hindering international information exchange regarding firearms in law enforcement. At the same time, this also has a negative effect on the dissemination of information regarding seizures to initiatives which untimely inform security policy strategies, such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire (UNODC-IAFQ) and Europol's European Union Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment (EU SOCTA).

The challenges outlined above result in a **lack of harmonised and reliable data** on firearms in the national registries and any other associated record-keeping systems concerned with illicit firearms.<sup>42</sup> The absence of standardised information severely impacts the chances that a hit is received when searching for a firearm, thereby also impacting the effectiveness and efficiency of law enforcement in firearms tracing.<sup>43</sup>

### Summary of challenges

Based on the above, the following challenges common to the design, functioning and use of national firearms registries in firearms tracing can be identified.

First, data and information are not entered in a uniform, standardised manner into national firearms registries. This is, in part, a consequence of the use of different types of standards across countries (i.e., varying use of firearms reference tables) and the use of different definitions (i.e., definitions for seizure). The lack of standardised information further fuels firearms seizure reports being inaccurate or lacking in detail. These are also not always recorded in a centralised manner, such as within the national firearms registry. In addition, the varying alphabets in which firearms are marked and then subsequently recorded in national registries pose a challenge in information exchange when tracing firearms.

Furthermore, countries design their national registries in different ways, meaning that each national registry is unique. Ideally, the national firearms registry includes a lost/stolen and found/seized firearms registry, in addition to automated links to international information exchange platforms. However, this is not the case in many countries. As a result, law enforcement officers must manually query various databases when tracing firearms, thereby substantially impacting the efficiency of their work.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents recommendations that contribute to addressing the challenges identified in relation to international information exchange in firearms control. From the REGISYNC findings and the suggestions for innovation collected through the law enforcement workshops, many recommendations can be distilled. This policy paper highlights the most relevant ones.

## **Recommendation 1: Develop an Application Programming Interface (API) to Automate Firearms Information Exchange Between SIS II and iARMS**

Whereas EU Member States frequently use SIS II for international information requests on firearms, non-EU Member States rely more heavily on iARMS. The two platforms are currently not integrated, which results in information being scattered between the two. Automatic integration of the two platforms would contribute to more data being recorded and exchanged in one integrated system, thereby positively impacting the changes that a query results in a hit. INTERPOL is currently working on the development of functionalities that would facilitate simultaneous queries. Support from the European Commission and national authorities in these developments is recommended.<sup>44</sup> Whilst being set up, this could be supported by Europol, and information on lost, stolen and seized firearms could be automatically sent to Europol.

## **Recommendation 2: Encourage jurisdictions to extend direct SIENA access to all relevant departments**

Extending access to SIENA beyond the limited number of departments (i.e., national Europol contact points) that have access to SIENA in EU Member States would benefit the international information exchange on firearms tracing. When a larger group of law enforcement officers have direct access to SIENA, they can run queries and answer tracing requests more independently and without the assistance of a designated Europol national contact point. For countries that have a NFFP, it is recommended to prioritise access of the NFFP to SIENA. Having direct access to SIENA means that queries can be run with fewer delays and, therefore, extending access to SIENA would positively impact the information exchange in relation to firearms tracing on the international level.



### **Recommendation 3:** **Establish lost/found firearms registries**

National databases on lost and found firearms contain information that can be extremely valuable in tracing firearms. Hence, it would be highly recommended for national authorities to develop such a database. Ideally, these national databases on lost and found firearms would be linked to the national firearms registries to facilitate queries on the national level. Automated connections between the national database of lost and found firearms and the national firearms registries would also benefit the international tracing of firearms. The European Commission should strongly encourage the establishment of national databases on lost and found firearms for all EU Member States. In addition, it would be worthwhile to provide support in the shape of technical assistance to Member States in developing direct links between the national databases on lost and found firearms, the national firearms registries and SIS II. This automated integration would further benefit the effective and efficient tracing of firearms.

### **Recommendation 4:** **Facilitate standardised data and information entry into national firearms registries and international information exchange platforms**

Firearms reference tables standardise the data entry on firearms in national firearms registries and, therefore, into international information exchange platforms. To facilitate the accurate and correct entry of this standardised data into national and international databases, technical adjustments to systems could be made, which would aid law enforcement officers in entering data. For example, instead of allowing data to be entered in a free text format, it could be entered using a selectable drop-down menu from which the officer would have to select. Searchable free text fields could then remain in support of the drop-down menus.

### **Recommendation 5:** **Standardise the collection of accurate and detailed information on firearms seizures to improve the intelligence picture and encourage MS to empower NFFPs to manage this process**

The discrepancies between countries in the collection and recording of information on seized firearms can be addressed by introducing common definitions and standard operating procedures. Standardisation will ensure that seizure data is comparable across jurisdictions.

The standardisation of record keeping on seized firearms can be further facilitated by centralising the records in a national database (e.g., a lost/found registry, see recommendation 3), which can be linked to the national registry. Furthermore, countries should be encouraged to position and equip NFFPs in such a way that they can play a tactical role in managing the process of recording and collating seizure data. This is in addition to investigating the origins of every seized firearm to ensure collected data is accurate and detailed next to fully exploiting all available investigative opportunities presented by crime guns.<sup>45</sup>



**Recommendation 6:**  
**Encourage countries to fully utilise iARMS**  
**for reporting lost/stolen and found/seized firearms**

Countries, in particular EU Member States, currently do not use iARMS to its full potential. It is recommended to encourage countries to enhance their use of iARMS for reporting lost/stolen and found/seized firearms as this would substantially increase the data available in iARMS, thereby also positively impacting the effectiveness and efficiency of firearms tracing. Moreover, when countries record data and information on lost/stolen and found/seized firearms in iARMS more systematically, it would also allow for the development of a more accurate intelligence picture on the trafficking of firearms into the EU from external sources.

**Recommendation 7:**  
**Provide training and awareness raising**  
**on international information exchange platforms**

One way to increase the use of international information exchange platforms is to train law enforcement officers in how to use the platforms and to raise their awareness on how and when the platform can be useful for them. Training users in the adequate use and added value of the platforms will, subsequently, also help to address the issue of disparity of data. Therefore, it is recommended to invest in training and awareness activities targeted at law enforcement officers working with international information exchange platforms in relation to firearms tracing. The purpose of these activities would be to educate users of the platforms on how to best insert data and query for data. This training could be combined with the standardisation of processes to insert information and training on improving the initial logging of evidence and seizure reporting (see recommendation 4). Lastly, it is important to train law enforcement officers on the cross-cutting links between firearms and other forms of criminality, such as drug trafficking.

## ANNEX I – BIBLIOGRAPHY

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## ANNEX II – METHODOLOGY

This policy paper is written based on information collected throughout the lifespan of the REGISYNC project (i.e., October 2021 – October 2023). In particular, the workshops with law enforcement officers, targeted desk research and the REGISYNC publication ‘Effective and Innovative Practices among European Civilian Firearm Registries’ have been useful in writing this paper.

### Workshops with law enforcement officers

The two workshops (in Brussels and Vienna) with law enforcement officers that were held in June 2023 have been highly relevant to this policy paper. The following table provides an overview of the representatives of national law enforcement agencies, EU institutions and international organisations that were present at the workshops. In total, 20 representatives attended the workshops.

**Table 2. Overview of participants in the workshops**

Countries and organisations represented at workshops
Belgium
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Bulgaria
Cyprus
Czechia
Estonia
France
Germany
Kosovo
Lithuania
Moldova
Portugal
Romania
Serbia
Slovenia
Spain
Sweden
Ukraine
Interpol
DG HOME
OSCE

During the workshops, the following topics were discussed:

- Introduction of REGISYNC and presentation of initial results;
- Presentations of international information exchange platforms, their role, and functionalities;
- Use of and challenges experienced in working with international information exchange platforms;
- Design of and challenges experienced in working with national firearms registries;
- Opportunities for innovation in information exchange.

### Targeted desk research

Complementary to the findings stemming from the focus groups, targeted desk research was conducted. This activity served two purposes. It helped to verify and expand on information collected at the workshops. Secondly, it served to link challenges and recommendations to existing publications and guidelines, thereby ensuring the integration of this policy paper with other available documentation.

Finally, the REGISYNC publication 'Effective and Innovative Practices among European Civilian Firearm Registries' served as a particularly relevant starting point for this policy paper. This publication outlines good practices which helped shape the recommendations presented in Chapter 3.

# ENDNOTES

- [1] UNODA, Tracing Illicit Small Arms & Light Weapons, 2018. Available [here](#).
- [2] Ibid.
- [3] In this policy paper, a firearm is defined in line with the definition in the EU Firearms Directive 2021/555, namely: a firearm is any portable barrelled weapon that expels, is designed to expel, or may be converted to expel a shot, bullet, or projectile by the action of a combustible propellant. It should be noted, however, that not all countries apply controls to certain accessories. For readability purposes, this policy paper refers to 'firearms' while referring to firearms and their essential components.
- [4] INTERPOL, Firearms Recovery Protocol, 2023. Accessed [here](#).
- [5] UNODA, Tracing Illicit Small Arms & Light Weapons, 2018. Available [here](#).
- [6] References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999). For readability purposes, this policy paper refers to 'jurisdictions'.
- [7] OSCE, OSCE Guidebook Intelligence-Led Policing, 2017. Available [here](#).
- [8] Although, there are national legal provisions which regulate this type of bilateral and spontaneous exchange.
- [9] Subject to national legal provisions on bilateral and spontaneous exchange also plays a part here, as it might be difficult to establish whether the type and extent of information shared is according to national law.
- [10] European Commission, 2020-2025 EU action plan on firearms trafficking, 2023 (COM(2020) 608 final). Available [here](#).
- [11] European Commission, 2020-2025 EU action plan on firearms trafficking, 2023 (COM(2020) 608 final). Available [here](#).
- [12] See: <https://arquebus.uk/products/firecycle/>
- [13] An integrated firearms registry developed by UNODC and piloted in 2023.
- [14] See: <https://armstracker.org/>
- [15] French Ministry of Interior, Presentation du Plan Armes, 2015. Available [here](#).
- [16] For example, the non-EU Member State representatives do not have access to IMI.
- [17] See: <https://www.interpol.int/Crimes/Firearms-trafficking/Illicit-Arms-Records-and-tracing-Management-System-iARMS>
- [18] Firearms Records Module further entails 1, the creation, management and sharing of records, 2. notification of countries when a recorded firearm is seized, and 3. the generation of reports and analysis on lost, stolen, or trafficked/smuggled firearms.
- [19] Trace Requests Module includes also 1. the submission of Trace Requests and updating their statuses, 2. reading, monitoring, and exporting of incoming and outgoing Trace Requests 3. responding to or commenting on an incoming Trace Request and 4. the generation and analysis of reporting on incoming and outgoing Trace Requests.
- [20] Statistics Reports Module can also generate tailored reports on firearms-related crime.
- [21] It is mandatory to fill at least one of these fields when querying iARMS: make, calibre, type, jurisdiction, model, manufacturer. Europol, interview in framework of REGISYNC, 2022.
- [22] Europol, based on enquiry REGISYNC, 2023.  
In addition, links between national databases and iARMS are currently being tested at least in the Western Balkans. This information has been shared by SEESAC based on enquiry REGISYNC, 2023.
- [23] INTERPOL representative during presentation at REGISYNC workshops, 2023.
- [24] INTERPOL representative during presentation at REGISYNC workshops, 2023.
- [25] See: <https://www.europol.europa.eu/operations-services-and-innovation/services-support/information-exchange/secure-information-exchange-network-application-siena>
- [26] Europol has plans of introducing new features such as, a specific firearms message inbox, machine translations, entity extraction and SIENA application for mobile devices. See: <https://www.europol.europa.eu/operations-services-and-innovation/services-support/information-exchange/secure-information-exchange-network-application-siena>
- [27] SIENA usage by FFPs is mandatory under the EFE's (2018) Best Practices Guidelines. Although this is a recommendation, the 10726/21 Council Conclusions advises the MS to fulfil all the EFE guideline (i.e., the use of SIENA, therefore, is practically obligatory).
- [28] Council Conclusion 10756/21. Available [here](#).

- [29] See: [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/schengen-borders-and-visa/schengen-information-system\\_en](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/schengen-borders-and-visa/schengen-information-system_en)
- [30] Austria; Belgium; Bulgaria; Croatia; Czech Republic; Denmark; Estonia; Finland; France; Germany; Greece; Hungary; Italy; Latvia; Lithuania; Luxembourg; Malta; the Netherlands; Poland; Portugal; Romania; Slovakia; Slovenia; Spain; Sweden.
- [31] See: [https://ec.europa.eu/internal\\_market/imi-net/index\\_en.html](https://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/imi-net/index_en.html)
- [32] IMI has separate functions for uploading a Notification of Prior Consent and a Notification of an Authorization to Transfer. In the former case, a Member State authority has granted a dealer or an individual prior consent to acquire a firearm from another Member State. In the latter case, a Member State authority has issued an authorisation to transfer firearms to another EU Member State and needs to inform the other Member State (and any other transit EU Member States) of the respective transfer. The supporting documents need to be submitted manually in a PDF format.
- [33] European Commission, Report on the application of Directive (EU) 2021/555 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 March 2021 on control of the acquisition and possession of weapons, 2021. COM(2021) 647 final. Available [here](#).
- [34] Marking (at minimum) according to the United Nations Firearms Protocol when importing firearms to the EU from non-EU jurisdictions is known to be important in speeding up the tracing process and tracing back to last legal import.  
This information has been shared by SEESAC based on enquiry REGISYNC, 2023.
- [35] As noted in the REGISYNC publication Effective and Innovative Practices among European Civilian Firearm Registries (p. 27): *“Stakeholders were generally aware that civilian firearm registries are unique to each jurisdiction and that customisability around national capabilities and needs was essential. For example, a country with an established arms industry has different needs than one without domestic production. Therefore, equipping the registry with different features from its counterparts may be necessary, such as those allowing manufactures and other facilities to upload inventory data in bulk. Similarly, more than one official language in a jurisdiction may prompt the authorities to develop a multilingual registry. Overall, it was important for stakeholders to have a registry relevant to their domestic context and to have the ability to customise it in terms of content and format.”*
- [36] Please refer to the REGISYNC publication Effective and Innovative Practices among European Civilian Firearm Registries for more detailed descriptions of such examples,
- [37] For example, a 9mm calibre pistol could be displayed as: ‘9x19’, ‘9 x 19’, ‘9 x 19 mm’, ‘9mm luger’ or ‘9mm parabellum’, and so on.
- [38] See: <https://www.interpol.int/en/Crimes/Firearms-trafficking/INTERPOL-Firearms-Reference-Table>
- [39] See: <https://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/en/firearms>
- [40] The questionnaire was shared with 34 respondents. Thirteen respondents did not reply and four of the submitted questionnaires did not provide answers on the question which firearm reference table they use.
- [41] Regarding technical knowledge of patrol officers, best practices are flash reports to the NFFP, including pictures, and the NFFP will correct the information. If the firearm has been modified, the patrol officer will describe the firearm. This information has been shared by SEESAC based on enquiry REGISYNC, 2023.
- [42] European Commission, 2020-2025 EU action plan on firearms trafficking, 2023 (COM(2020) 608 final). Available [here](#).
- [43] An additional challenge should be noted regarding tracing firearms in conflict settings, as recording systems might be destroyed or damaged due to looting.
- [44] Europol, based on enquiry REGISYNC, 2023.
- [45] This recommendation is in line with the EU action plan on firearms trafficking. European Commission, 2020-2025 EU action plan on firearms trafficking, 2023 (COM(2020) 608 final). Available [here](#).

