

[unodc.org](https://www.unodc.org)

UNODC: War transforming Ukraine's criminal landscape, causing economic and social damage

5–6 Minuten

Criminal groups in Ukraine are shifting business models as the war, now in its fourth year, has driven up displacement, trafficking risks and demand for synthetic drugs such as methadone, says the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in a report launched today.

“The war has not only inflicted untold suffering on the Ukrainian people but has also triggered a marked evolution in organized crime – which can have profound implications on the country’s journey towards recovery and reconstruction,” said Angela Me, Chief of Research and Analysis at UNODC. “With this report, UNODC aims to provide practical recommendations to Ukraine and the international community on how to counteract and mitigate the impact of organized crime in the country.”

The report examines organized crime structures and their evolution, as well as five types of crime: drug trafficking and production; online scams and fraud; arms trafficking; economic crime; trafficking in persons; and the facilitation of illegal exit and draft evasion.

Since the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the trafficking of cocaine and heroin through Ukraine decreased drastically, in part due to the closure of all airports and seaports and the quadrupling of heroin prices in 2022. As in other parts of Eastern Europe, however, the production and trafficking of synthetic drugs, notably cathinones and methadone, increased. Most of the methadone produced in Ukraine is not trafficked out of the country, the report notes, as a result of the rising domestic demand for the drug and the closure of borders.

Large, structured organized criminal groups dominate the synthetic drugs market. These include groups like Khimprom, which has also expanded into cyberfraud. Cases of scams and online fraud more than tripled in 2023 compared to 2022 and are carried out via an estimated 1,500 call centres located throughout the country. Most of the victims are Ukrainians, including those who have been forcibly displaced, although people in other parts of Europe are also occasionally targeted.

The war has increased the availability of weapons since February 2022, resulting in a rise in arms seizures and violence among civilians, notably domestic and intimate partner violence. While there is no evidence to suggest large scale trafficking of arms outside of Ukraine, the report highlights the importance of monitoring given the sheer number of arms available, as well as the historic presence of criminal actors specialized in arms trafficking.

Customs fraud and the smuggling of tobacco may be costing Ukraine hundreds of millions of dollars, with smugglers avoiding or falsifying customs declarations.

About 14 million people, or 35 per cent of the population, have been forced to flee their homes in Ukraine. Displacement can increase the vulnerability of people to trafficking in persons. In Ukraine, some criminal groups have exploited these populations to take advantage of welfare subsidies intended for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees. Some other displaced populations in Ukraine are lured into shelters or accommodations disguised as humanitarian assistance providers, where they are then subjected to forced labour.

Intensified patrolling of the Ukrainian border and the near-complete closure of the Eastern and Northeastern borders have limited the smuggling of migrants through Ukraine. Migrant smugglers have instead turned to facilitating draft evasion by Ukrainian men.

The report includes several recommendations to help counteract and mitigate these crimes. These include establishing a centralized monitoring system and analytical reporting capabilities to prevent organized crime activity; strengthening a border control framework that can prevent and intercept drug trafficking in conflict and post-conflict scenarios; improving the monitoring of precursor diversion and trafficking; developing public-private partnerships with telecommunication and banking sectors to prevent cyber fraud; and more.

“Curtailling organized crime is a key requirement for achieving sustainable peace, justice, national recovery and the protection of human rights,” said Matthias Schmale, UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Ukraine. “This effort demands a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, supported by international partners. The United Nations in Ukraine, through

UNODC, stands ready to support this critical work.”

To read the full list of recommendations and the report, [click here.](#)