

Firearms theft in the European Union

Findings from Project DIVERT

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Presentation

- **Project DIVERT**
- **Scope of firearms theft in the EU**
- **Characteristics of firearms theft in the EU**
- **Policies to combat firearms theft in the EU**
- **Next steps**

Project DIVERT (1)

➤ Context

- ❑ Illicit firearms trafficking generally involves diverted weapons
- ❑ Long lifecycle: many potential points of diversion from legal possession
- ❑ Use of stolen firearms and ammunition for criminal and terrorist activities
- ❑ Preventing diversion is key priority in 2020-2025 EU Action Plan

➤ Objectives

- ❑ Improve intelligence picture on diversion of live-firing firearms, components and ammunition within the EU:
 - ❑ Firearms theft
 - ❑ Firearms fraud
 - ❑ Non-regularised firearms
- ❑ Cooperation between research community and law enforcement actors
- ❑ Dissemination of results to all actors involved

Project DIVERT (2)

➤ Partnership

- ❑ Flemish Peace Institute (coordinator)
- ❑ SIPRI
- ❑ Operational partners:
 - ❑ CITCO
 - ❑ Europol
 - ❑ Belgian Federal Police

➤ Co-funded by DG Home of European Commission (ISF-P)

Project DIVERT (3)

➤ Research design

- ❑ 28 country mappings
- ❑ In-depth studies in 8 EU MS
- ❑ Comparative analysis
- ❑ EMPACT Firearms meetings
- ❑ 6 digital expert meetings (July & October 2020)

➤ Research in 2019-2020

- ❑ 2021: Finalizing publications and dissemination of results

Scope of firearms theft (1)

➤ Previous research

- ❑ Project FIRE (2017): *"thefts from legitimate and illegal civilian owners, as well as from manufacturers, constitute one of the most common supply channels for illicit firearms trafficking"*
- ❑ Project SAFTE (2018): *"firearms thefts are a primary source of firearms that end up on illicit firearms markets in several EU Member States and that the majority of such thefts occur in the private homes of legal gun-owners"*

➤ Challenges with available data

- ❑ Different recording methods
- ❑ Unreported thefts
- ❑ Undetected thefts
- ❑ False declarations of thefts

Scope of firearms theft (2)

	Theft declarations	Firearms stolen	Year
France	10,572		2015
Germany		5,249	2018
Greece		4,374	2018
Spain		1,784	2015
Belgium		827	2015
UK		635	2015
Ireland		355	2013
Finland	2,700 (stolen/lost)	350	2009
Bulgaria		237	2003
Sweden	189		2018
Portugal	188		2018
Czech Republic		160	2018
Netherlands		146	2010
Poland	108		2018
Lithuania		76	2018
Austria	61		2017
Latvia		17	2018
Luxembourg	13		2018
Denmark		6	2018
Estonia	6	ca. 110 (stolen or lost)	2018

Sources include official statistics (publicly available or released to the research team), official press releases, and when not available, media sources

Scope of firearms theft (3)

➤ Quantitative data from 20 EU MS

- ❑ At least 20,000 stolen firearms annually in the EU
- ❑ Large national differences
 - ❑ Number of stolen firearms
 - ❑ Importance of theft as diversion method
- ❑ In most EU MS a decrease in firearms thefts

➤ Contextual factors for firearms thefts

- ❑ High (legal) possession rates
- ❑ Safe storage rules
- ❑ Criminal demand
- ❑ Pressure on other sources of (national) illicit firearms market
- ❑ ...

Characteristics of firearms theft (1)

- **Qualitative analysis of 185 identified cases of firearms theft from 28 countries**
- **Wide variety of targets of theft**
 - ❑ **Mainly private gun-owners**
 - ❑ **State actors**
 - ❑ Armed forces
 - ❑ Law-enforcement agencies
 - ❑ Customs organisations
 - ❑ ...
 - ❑ **Commercial actors**
 - ❑ Gun-manufacturing facilities and gunsmiths
 - ❑ Authorised arms dealers
 - ❑ Shooting ranges
 - ❑ Private security companies
 - ❑ Transporting companies
 - ❑ ...
 - ❑ **Other: vehicles, destruction sites, museums, ...**

Characteristics of firearms theft (2)

➤ Targeted versus non-targeted thefts

☐ Differences in:

- ☐ Targets of theft
- ☐ Amount of stolen firearms
- ☐ Types of stolen firearms
- ☐ Modus operandi
- ☐ Perpetrators

➤ Non-targeted thefts

- ☐ Firearms are not priority, but by-product
- ☐ Opportunism
- ☐ Victims are mainly private gun owners
- ☐ Generally 1-5 firearms
- ☐ Perpetrators are both professional and non-professional criminals
- ☐ Negligence

Characteristics of firearms theft (3)

➤ Targeted thefts

- ❑ Especially government and commercial stockpiles
- ❑ Targets usually contain large numbers or specific types of firearms
 - ❑ Wide variety of types of targets
- ❑ More sophisticated organization
- ❑ Often insider knowledge to circumvent more restrictive safe storage measures
 - ❑ Employees
 - ❑ (un)intentional negligence
- ❑ Also spontaneous thefts (opportunism)

Law enforcement stockpiles

- **Different types of thefts**

- Service firearms stolen from: physical stockpiles; in action; at home

- **Quantities**

- Potentially high

- **Type of firearm stolen**

- Typically handguns

- **Perpetrators**

- Criminals, inside jobs or combination

Law enforcement stockpiles



Armed forces stockpiles

- **Different types of thefts**

- Military bases; military warehouses; military vehicles

- **Quantities**

- Risk of high quantities

- **Type of firearm**

- Wide range, including military grade firearms

- **Perpetrators**

- Criminals, inside jobs or combination

Armed forces stockpiles



Armed forces stockpiles



Firearm dealers

- **Different types of thefts**

- Shops outside of opening hours, warehouses, shipping containers

- **Quantities**

- Risk of high quantities

- **Type of firearm**

- Firearms sold legally on national level (various types)

- **Perpetrators**

- Continuum ranging from highly professional to amateur theft

Firearm dealers



Policies to prevent firearms theft (1)

- **Interviewed experts highlight the importance of strict safe storage rules**
- **The EU Firearms Directive – Article 5a**
 - ❑ The person lawfully possessing the firearm, or the ammunition concerned must have control over it during its transportation and use
 - ❑ Firearms and their ammunition shall not be readily accessible together
 - ❑ The level of scrutiny of proper storage arrangements shall reflect the number and category of the firearms and ammunition concerned.
- **National implementation of Article 5a (in December 2019)**
 - ❑ Almost all EU have safe storage rules, but minority of MS is fully compliant with EU Firearms Directive
 - ❑ Reflection of number of firearms
 - ❑ Reflection of category of firearms
 - ❑ Not readily accessible together

Policies to prevent firearms theft (2)

- **Different types of verification mechanism (for private gun owners)**
 - ❑ Unannounced at any time
 - ❑ With prior announcement (or without announcement with court order/ reasons for suspicions activity)
 - ❑ In regular intervals (every 5 years,)
- **Verification with dealers and manufacturers**
 - ❑ Generally much stricter than for private citizens
- **Challenge: lack of personnel to implement regular verification of safe storage rules**

Policies to prevent firearms theft (3)

- Reducing surplus weapons and securing decommissioned weapons
- Preventing access to firearms by unauthorized persons
 - ❑ Shooting ranges
 - ❑ Manufacturing sites
 - ❑ ...
- Sanctioning targeted persons and companies
- Digital record-keeping and management of firearms
- Improving intelligence picture
 - ❑ Tracing for operational and strategic intelligence

Next steps

➤ Publication of three thematic reports

- ❑ “Forgotten weapons? Non-regularised firearms in the European Union”
- ❑ “Stealing precious steel: Firearms theft in the European Union”
- ❑ “Trick and treat: Firearms fraud in the European Union”

➤ Publication of country studies

- ❑ Baltic States, Belgium, Croatia, Germany, Spain & Sweden

➤ Three webinars to launch the thematic reports

- ❑ 28 April: Non-regularised firearms
- ❑ 26 May: Firearms theft
- ❑ 23 June: Firearms fraud

➤ EMPACT Firearms Meeting to support operational actions (Op. TITAN)

➤ Project TARGET

Thank you for your attention!

More information?

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