

PROJECT DIVERT: REPORT

Stealing precious steel: **Firearms theft** in the European Union



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Colophon

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Executive Summary

Background

Project DIVERT is an international research project to contribute to the fight against illegal firearms markets in Europe. To this end, the project has investigated various methods by which legal firearms are diverted and become illegal. Because most illicitly held firearms in the European Union have a legal history, generating a better intelligence picture on firearms diversion is critical. It can help better understand the original transition of weapons into the illegal cycle and develop effective tools to stop such spillovers.

This report examines firearms diversion through theft. It is part of a three-part series exploring previously under-researched diversion methods in the EU. Two additional studies deal with firearms diversion through fraud and non-regularization. We define the theft of firearms or ammunition as *the deliberate act to take and remove firearms and/or ammunition of personal property with intent to deprive the legal owner from it.*

Process

The Flemish Peace Institute coordinated Project DIVERT and carried it out in partnership with the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). In addition, researchers from Arquebus Solutions contributed extensively to the first two research phases. Operational partners in this project were the Intelligence Centre Against Terrorism and Organized Crime (CITCO) of the Spanish Ministry of Interior Affairs, the Central Directorate for the Combat of Organised Crime (DJSOC) of the Belgian Federal Police and Europol. Project DIVERT was co-funded by the Internal Security Fund – Police of DG Migration and Home Affairs of the European Commission.

In the first phase of the project, 28 country mappings were conducted through desk research to explore the scope, characteristics and dynamics of firearms diversion in all EU Member States. In the second phase of the project, in-depth analyses of eight EU Member States were undertaken to deepen our understanding of theft and analyse policy initiatives developed to prevent it. These studies included extensive field research. In the third phase of project DIVERT, the Flemish Peace Institute's research team conducted a systematic and comparative analysis of the studies carried out in the first and second phase of the project and organised six expert meetings to discuss the findings and identify good practices. The results of the comparative analysis form the basis of this report. With the assistance of the operational partners, the research partners were able to collaborate extensively with numerous national law enforcement agencies during three EMPACT Firearms meetings and at other moments during the project.

Findings

Theft is an important diversion method in the EU and statistical evidence shows that large quantities of firearms are diverted through theft each year. It is difficult to estimate the exact scope of these thefts, because comprehensive and aggregated data is lacking at an EU level. This is because data on firearms thefts are collected at a national level and with different methods. Therefore, they are difficult to compare. Another issue is that a 'dark figure' of thefts is not covered in these statistics. These refer to thefts which are not declared to the authorities, not detected by their owners, or faked. Especially the theft of certain components and ammunition can be difficult to detect, and it is likely that many cases go undetected or unreported.

Our analysis suggests annually between 20,000 to 25,000 firearms are registered as stolen in the EU and we can expect a rather high dark number of stolen firearms which are either not noticed or not declared to the authorities. It also unknown how many declarations of firearms thefts are fake. Our analysis further demonstrates significant national differences exist in the number of registered stolen firearms. These differences tend to reflect differences in the level of legal firearms holdings, but also other contextual factors such as the dynamics of illicit gun markets seem to play a role. In addition, the number of firearms thefts seems to be decreasing in most Member States.

While all actors who are authorised to possess or carry firearms can be targeted by thieves, private individuals are most often targeted in the EU. As a result, the characteristics of the firearms stolen in a country generally reflect the types of firearms in legal national holdings. Several factors can explain why private gun owners are the main targets of firearms thefts: they are not only the largest group of firearm owners in most EU Member States, but generally less restrictive safe storage measures apply to private individuals than to other types of actors. Private homes of gun owners are also more often the target of general burglaries where thieves are looking for all kinds of valuable goods. During such burglaries, firearms are not necessarily targeted, but they may be stolen as part of the loot. In that sense, opportunism is considered an important driver of firearms thefts from private citizens. Other types of actors are less frequently targeted, but when they are these are generally targeted burglaries with the aim of stealing larger numbers of firearms, ammunition or components or specific types of firearms, including sometimes firearms prohibited to civilian users. These actors include various governmental or commercial actors such as authorized arms dealers, shooting ranges, police and military stockpiles. Since these actors tend to have higher security standards than private gun owners, insider knowledge or the negligence of security personnel is often a facilitating factor in such thefts.

Stolen firearms have seized in various criminal circles, including organised crime groups including the drug milieu. In several EU Member States stolen firearms have been used in criminal acts and shootings, sometimes used to commit murders, mass shootings and terrorist attacks. Yet, in most Member States stolen firearms are not the primary types of firearms possessed in the criminal underworld.

Policy recommendations

The first step to prevent and address firearms thefts is to build a comprehensive intelligence picture of the phenomenon in the EU and to develop a more proactive approach against it. It is crucial to improve the quality of databases by updating most recent data on legal holdings and thefts. In addition, we recommend disaggregating data in order to build a more precise and accurate picture of firearms thefts. Training staff on how to record good and accurate data and harmonizing practices of data collection can also contribute to enhance the intelligence picture of firearms thefts. This is not only important for analytical purposes, but also for operational purposes. Indeed, better data can improve the traceability of stolen firearms and help connect cases of thefts to criminal activities, possibly uncovering trafficking schemes. In that sense, systematizing and harmonizing data collection on stolen and seized firearms, as foreseen in the EU Action Plan 2020–2025, can help to combat firearms thefts. For example, the digitalization of databases can provide smoother and more systematic information-sharing. In the same vein, the EU should continue its efforts to interconnect databases at an EU level in order to support investigations on illicit trafficking in stolen firearms. In addition, to reduce the ‘dark number’ of firearms thefts Member States could enhance investigations and encourage firearms owners to declare cases of thefts.

More cooperation and coordination are needed to assist the operational work of practitioners. There is a need for a more proactive approach to fight against the multifaceted phenomenon that is firearms diversion. This is valid both at national level, where certain units and agencies work on different aspects of the phenomenon, and at EU level, where Member States sometimes work on transnational cases of illicit firearms trafficking (including of stolen firearms). The role of a national firearms focal point as a coordinator of all actors involved in the field of illicit firearm trafficking is crucial here. It can not only contribute to share more information, but also to train and equip staff with the right skills and tools to prevent and investigate firearms thefts. It is important to continue previous efforts in connecting databases and automating data-sharing on ongoing investigations.

Finally, this report shows that the existing tools to prevent theft are not used to their full extent. To start with, there is a lack of harmonization of existing rules in the EU. It is necessary to upgrade the regulations and policies to prevent firearms thefts. A starting point would be to monitor and enhance the implementation of the EU Firearms Directive into national law. Second, monitoring and reducing decommissioned stockpiles to a minimum and keeping accurate records as foreseen in multiple international frameworks would prevent the disappearance of firearms from such stockpiles. Putting efforts in more frequent physical controls, either systematic or based on risk analyses, could be another solution to secure firearms and prevent thefts.

1 Introduction

Several of the recent public mass shootings which have occurred across the EU (including terrorist attacks) have been committed with firearms which had previously been legally owned but entered the illicit sphere after a burglary or a robbery.¹ For example, the deadly shootings against a cultural centre and against a synagogue in Copenhagen that occurred on 14 and 15 February 2015 were committed with an automatic firearm which had been stolen from a voluntary military organisation. As a result of the attack, three people including the perpetrator were killed and five police officers were wounded.²

To respond to recent shootings and terrorist attacks, the EU has been reinforcing previous efforts against illicit firearms trafficking and diversion. Firearms trafficking has been identified as a priority crime area under the 2018–2021 EU policy cycle.³ The 2020–2025 EU Action Plan to combat firearms trafficking includes the priority to safeguard the licit market and limit the diversion of firearms. In this Action Plan the European Commission further reiterates its recommendation to Member States to systematically feed the Schengen Information System (SIS II) with information on lost and stolen firearm. It also recommends that stolen and lost firearms be recorded systematically in iARMS in order to build a better intelligence picture on firearms thefts.⁴ The iARMS database contains data on illicit firearms which have been seized by national authorities worldwide.⁵ In addition, the 2017 amendments of the Firearms Directive 91/477/EC included changes to the required safe storage requirements of EU Member States.

However, the statistics available on the licit and illicit firearms market currently do not allow the scope of firearms thefts in the EU to be reliably quantified, or to provide a credible estimation of the extent to which thefts contribute to fuel gun-related crime. Although firearm thefts are often mentioned as a source of illicit firearm markets in the EU, very little is known about the various types of firearm theft, the types of firearm most often stolen, and the different actors involved in these crimes.

This report focuses on the theft of firearms and ammunition in the European Union. We define the theft of firearms or ammunition as *the deliberate act to take and remove firearms and/or ammunition of personal property with intent to deprive the legal owner from it*. This is different from armed robberies, which are a form of theft that involves the use of a firearm – and may – but do not necessarily target firearms. Stolen firearms can be misused to commit different kinds of crimes. The theft of firearms can happen in several ways, for instance through robberies (stealing firearms in the presence of the owner) or burglaries (breaking into a dwelling to steal weapons).

In this report we analyse the relative importance of the theft of firearms and ammunition in the EU as well as the nature and dynamics of the phenomenon. To do so, we review quantitative data on firearm thefts to determine the scope of the phenomenon in each Member State and identify possible influencing factors. In theory, the endeavour to grasp the scale of firearms and ammunition thefts in the EU is facilitated by the fact that thefts must be recorded by the authorities of each Member State. In certain, but not all, Member States, such data is made public. However, each Member State has its own method of collecting data. As a result, data are not easily comparable, which makes the task of assessing the scale of theft at an EU level close to impossible. To complement this fragmented picture, we also consider non-numerical data and anecdotal evidence that provide insight into the targets and perpetrators of thefts. Finally, to determine the security impact of the theft of firearms in the EU, we review how stolen firearms have circulated among illicit firearms trafficking networks and have been misused to commit crimes.

Box 1: Research design

The findings of this report are based on three distinct research phases of Project DIVERT.

In the **first phase** of the project, 28 country mappings were conducted through desk research to explore the scope, characteristics and dynamics of firearms diversion in all EU Member States.¹

In the **second phase** of the project eight in-depth country studies were produced to analyse diversion further and the policy initiatives that have been developed at national level to prevent and combat diversion. The eight countries were selected to ensure a representative geographical spread across the EU. The studies were undertaken by country teams comprising experts with significant policy-oriented research experience on international firearms trafficking and specific knowledge of the situation in the eight selected EU member states (see table 1). The methodological approach of these country studies combined a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods and sources, including a literature review, media analysis, analysis of national statistics and semi-structured interviews with national experts.

Table 1: Overview of the country research teams

Country report	Organisation	Research team
Belgium	Flemish Peace Institute	Quitterie de Labbey Nils Duquet
Croatia	Flemish Peace Institute	Quitterie de Labbey Nils Duquet
Estonia	Arquebus Solutions	Paul James Declan Hillier
Germany	Flemish Peace Institute	Matteo Dressler
Latvia	Arquebus Solutions	Paul James Declan Hillier
Lithuania	Arquebus Solutions	Paul James Declan Hillier
Spain	Flemish Peace Institute	Matteo Dressler
Sweden	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)	Mark Bromley Giovanna Maletta

In the **third phase** of Project DIVERT the research team conducted a systematic and comparative analysis of the results of the country studies that were carried out in the first and second phases of the project. The aim of this third research phase was to integrate the broad findings from 28 country mappings with the specific insights of the eight country studies and to combine them into a final report. In absence of extensive quantitative data, the research teams created a large database of 184 cases of theft that proved invaluable for the analysis. This database can be found in Annex 1 to this report.

Throughout the project the research team disseminated its findings on the characteristics, scope and policy responses on theft in the EU, to a community of practitioners. This contributed to share information among the participating experts and to receive their critical feedback. This included three EMPACT meetings and six electronic workshops. This approach maximized a comprehensive integration of the perspectives of the EU and Member States on the realities of firearms diversion and best practices to combat them.

This report on the theft of firearms and ammunition in the EU is divided in four sections. The following section provides an overview of the quantitative data on firearms thefts and aims to assess the scope of the problem at an EU level. Given the limitations of this quantitative approach, another section focuses on a qualitative analysis of the database of cases collected throughout project DIVERT. This section provides deeper insight into the different types of firearm theft, the different types of actors targeted, the perpetrators of thefts as well as the end-use of stolen firearms. The following section analyses the policies that have been developed to prevent the theft of firearms can contribute to reduce firearms thefts such as international safe storage requirements and their implementation at national level. The final section summarizes our findings by focusing on best practices and recommendations to mitigate the problem.

¹ At the starting date of the project, the United Kingdom was still an EU Member State EU and therefore included in the phase of the country mappings.

2

The scope of firearms theft in the European Union

This section endeavours to respond to a research gap and to grasp the scope of the problem of firearm thefts in the EU. To do so, we combine quantitative and qualitative approaches to the phenomenon. We first review and compare the number of thefts of firearms declared each year to national authorities (section 3.1.). This section shows important disparities in these numbers. There are some limitations to compare such data since reporting the theft of firearm is a national competency and the modalities of reporting, collecting, harmonizing and disseminating data are different in each Member State. Several contextual factors may play a role in the numbers of thefts. To complement the collected quantitative data, we then look at the problem with a qualitative approach and analyse the impact of several contextual factors (such as the general firearm availability, the criminal demand in firearms, or the presence of alternative sources of supply) on the levels of thefts (section 3.2.).

Bearing in mind the above mentioned methodological and contextual precautions, we can conclude that in various Member States the problem of firearms theft is rather limited compared to other sources of illicit firearms, even in Member States where large numbers of thefts have been recorded. Two reports reviewing firearm thefts in Sweden, for example, have highlighted the low risk of stolen firearms ending up in criminal circles, although, exceptionally, stolen weapons have been used to commit murders or manslaughters. In addition, some firearms which had been stolen previously have been used to commit armed robberies (although not necessarily targeting other firearms).⁶ It is clear, however, that the theft of firearms can potentially have far-reaching societal consequences if the firearms end up in the wrong hands. This has been confirmed when weapons retrieved from violent crime scenes have been traced back to cases of theft, such as in the case of the lethal school shooting in Winnenden (Germany) in 2009, the terrorist attack in Toulouse (France) in 2012, the terrorist attack in Copenhagen (Denmark) in 2015, and the murder of a British Member of Parliament in 2016.

2.1 Review of available quantitative data

Previous studies have shed some light on the scope of the theft of firearms, ammunition and firearm components in the EU. According to Project FIRE, “*thefts from legitimate and illegal civilian owners, as well as from manufacturers, constitute one of the most common supply channels for illicit firearms trafficking*”,⁷ but this study does not include an estimate of the number of stolen firearms. Based on a comparison of in-depth country studies, the results of Project SAFTE indicate that 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.⁸ A similar picture emerged from a study on the illicit trafficking of ammunition in the Netherlands. That study indicates that the theft of ammunition from state stockpiles, authorised gun dealers and shooting clubs is exceptional. Theft from authorised private persons happens more frequently, but each case generally involves a small number of firearms.¹⁹ Over the years, several studies have also identified the theft of firearm components from firearm-manufacturing companies. According to a 2005 study on illicit firearm trafficking in Bulgaria, for example, components have been stolen from firearms manufacturing companies by employees and sold to local handymen,¹¹ who have used them to assemble firearms illegally.¹⁰ Project SAFTE further noted that “*from a historical perspective, (...) thefts have been a vital element in the firearms acquisition patterns of separatist terror groups in Europe, but such thefts have decreased in recent years. Firearms that were (...) stolen have only been encountered among jihadi networks in exceptional cases.*”¹¹

In the following paragraphs we analyse the scope of firearm theft by reviewing the available quantitative data on this phenomenon. Some EU Member States seem more affected than others by thefts. Indeed, there are significant disparities in the number of firearms stolen each year across the EU: in some Member States only a few dozen firearms are reported stolen annually, whereas in others these annual numbers are much higher. Yet, we have to interpret the findings from this review carefully as it is very difficult to compare national data on firearm theft, for several reasons. First, quantitative data is not available for each EU Member State. Some of the available data is also relatively old and may therefore not reflect the current situation. Secondly, not every Member State reports the same type of data. The data collected at the national level is computed using a variety of methods. Some Member States, for example, do not differentiate between lost and stolen firearms. This concerns Estonia, Finland and Czechia. In Luxembourg, it is unclear whether figures include only stolen firearms or also lost firearms. In addition, the United Kingdom does not differentiate between firearms that have been lost, stolen or misappropriated. Thirdly, very often, few or no details of the types of stolen firearm are available. In Austria, for example, the official crime statistics report only the number of stolen ‘weapons’ and do not specify the types

¹ According to this study, the main method of domestic diversion of ammunition in the Netherlands concerns the illicit transfer of ammunition from legal gun-owners, such as sport shooters, to criminals. These transfers are believed to be motivated by high profit margins and facilitated by a lack of controls on the actual use of ammunition by legal gun-owners.

¹¹ According to this report, barrels in particular were often stolen before they were marked plus components labelled as ‘defective’. It is believed that these components were sold for 10–50 euros per piece.

of weapon involved (firearms, ammunition, essential components, explosives, etc). These differences in availability, detail and quality of data render comparisons between Member States very difficult.

Project DIVERT collected quantitative data on firearms theft in 20 EU Member States.¹ For the eight remaining Member States, we calculated estimates of firearms thefts with a computation method explained in box 2 below. Table 2 below presents a compilation of data released by state officials or found in the press, and of the estimates. Methodologically, this implies that certain sources (official statistics) are more reliable than others (media articles). When several sources provided data on firearms theft, government data (such as police statistics on firearms theft, loss and misappropriation) was favoured. For example, government sources were favoured over media sources. And when several sources were available for one country, priority was given to the most recent one, except if this was an unofficial source and if older but official sources were available.

Depending on their availability, the data collected in these 20 Member States refer either to theft declarations or to the number of firearms stolen. It is important to keep in mind that one declaration of theft may cover the theft of several firearms. In addition, in certain Member States, for example in Sweden, one declaration of theft can capture cases where valuables were stolen from a facility that also stored weapons, but during which no weapons were stolen.¹² We can therefore assume that the actual numbers of stolen firearms in a country are higher than the number of theft declarations in that country. For more readability, in table 2, we provide a number of firearms thefts per 100,000 firearms registered.

¹ In eight countries, the research team did not have access data on firearms theft (Croatia, Cyprus, Hungary, Italy, Malta, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia). For example, the Inter-forces Investigations System database (Sistema d'Indagine Interforze, SDI) in Italy collects statistics on firearms theft but does not make them available publicly. In Romania, statistics do not differentiate between thefts of objects and thefts of firearms. In Croatia, statistics were not released to the research team and cases of theft were rarely publicised in the media. In some countries, the research team had access to statistics through media sources only (France) or through official sources publicly available (Germany, Sweden). In other countries data were not publicly available but were released to the research team (Belgium, Latvia, Lithuania, Spain, Estonia) through verbal or written communication.

Box 2 Calculation method of the estimates of firearms thefts in the EU

Data on the number stolen firearms or theft declarations was missing for eight Member States. For these Member States, we provide estimates of the levels of firearms thefts. These are based on the number of firearms in legal holdings in these eight Member States and the rate of firearms thefts per firearms registered in the 20 other Member States in which we had data on firearm thefts. We calculated an average rate of firearms thefts per firearms registered in these 20 Member States. To do so, we divided the number of firearm thefts with the number of firearms registered to the authorities.

$$\text{rate of firearms thefts} = \frac{\text{number of firearms thefts registered}}{\text{number of firearm registered}}$$

This gave very contrasted results, ranging from 7 to 433. This means that in certain Member States, only 7 in every 100,000 registered firearms get stolen each year, whereas in other Member States, 433 in every 100,000 registered firearms get stolen each year. For each of the eight Member States where we did not have data on firearm thefts, we calculated a 'high estimate rate' and a 'low estimate rate' based on the number of firearms registered in civilian hands (as estimated by a 2018 study by Small Arms Survey). Because of the high contrast in firearms thefts rates, we calculated the 'high estimate rate' by taking the average rate of firearms thefts in the 10 countries with the highest rates (140 firearms thefts per 100,000 registered firearms) and calculated the 'low estimate rate' by taking the average rate of firearms thefts in the 10 countries with the lowest rates (17 firearms thefts per 100,000 registered firearms).

Table 2: Firearms thefts in the EU^I

	Registered number of theft declarations	Registered number of firearms stolen	Lower estimate thefts	Higher estimate thefts	Registered firearms 2017 (SAS) ^{13 II}	Annual number of firearm thefts per 100,000 registered firearms
France (2015)	10,572 ¹⁴				4,501,235	235
Greece (2018)		4,374 ¹⁵			1,010,000	433
Italy (estimate)			344	2,802	2,000,000	
Spain (2019)		1,279 ¹⁶			2,683,542	48
United Kingdom (2015)		635 ¹⁷			2,210,735	29
Germany (2019)	633 ¹⁸				5,830,000	11
Belgium (2018)		624 ¹⁹			426,939	146
Croatia (estimate)			67	546	390,000	
Slovakia (estimate)			48	392	280,000	
Sweden (2018)	381 ²⁰				1,955,478	19

^I Data cover the most recent years for which data were available (indicated in parenthesis) in 20 Member States. In the eight remaining Member States, we calculated two estimates of firearm thefts.

^{II} The number of registered firearms as reported by Small Arms Survey in 2017 should be read with caution. The reported figure for Belgium (426,939), for example, is not correct. According to the Belgian Federal Police 781,419 firearms were registered in the CWR in Belgium in 2017 (Cops, D and Duquet, N (2020) De invoer van vuurwapens en munitie in Vlaanderen. Evoluties, verklaringen en uitdagingen voor controle. Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute.)

Ireland (2013)		355 ²¹			200,000	178
Finland (2009)		350 ²²			1,542,396	23
Netherlands (2012)		ca. 300 ²³			205,347	146
Hungary (estimate)			36	296	211,300	
Romania (estimate)			36	294	210,000	
Bulgaria (2003)		237 ²⁴			345,733	69
Cyprus (estimate)			27	216	154,327	
Denmark ^I (average 2012-2016)		200 ²⁵			340,000	59
Portugal (2018)	188 ²⁶				1,400,000	13
Slovenia (estimate)			22	178	127,094	
Czechia ^{II} (2018)		160 ²⁷			806,895	20
Malta (estimate)			17	135	96,425	
Poland (2018)	108 ²⁸				380,000	28
Lithuania (2018)		76 ²⁹			127,984	59

^I The figure is a calculation of the declared average number of firearms thefts. The source indicates the number of firearms theft declarations issued by citizens between 2012 and 2016 (1,000). Other types of victim such as government stockpiles are not included in the figures.

^{II} The number of lost or stolen firearms in 2017 was 221, as reported by the police. Data from a media report suggests that some 160 firearms were stolen in 2018, the majority of which were long guns.

Austria ^I (2017)	61 ³⁰				837,000	7
Latvia (2018)		17 ³¹			70,000	24
Luxembourg (2018)	11 ^{II 32}				86,000	13
Estonia (2018)	6	ca. 110 (lost and stolen) ³³			47,000	13

^I According to the Austrian annual report on crime, in 2017 there were 61 thefts of weapons, although it is not clear how many of these are firearms.

^{II} In addition to these 11 firearms, two batches of ammunition were stolen in 2018.

For eight Member States we were able to collect the number of theft declarations for firearms. In these countries, in the most recently available year, a total number of 11,321 theft declarations were recorded. For 13 other Member States, data on the number of firearms stolen per year was available. In these countries, a total number of 8,607 firearms were reported stolen in the most recently available year. In the eight Member States in which no data on firearm thefts were available, the higher estimate indicates that an average of 4,860 firearms get stolen each year, whereas the lower estimate is at 596. Adding up all official numbers of firearm thefts and our estimates, we can conclude that **annually between 20,000 to 25,000 firearms are registered as stolen in the EU.**

While it is difficult to compare, it is clear that **very large differences in the number of firearms thefts can be observed between Member States.** In France, for example, 10,572 declarations of firearms theft were reported in 2015 compared to only six such declarations in Estonia in 2018. This number for France is much higher than in other EU Member States. In addition to France, other EU Member States with a high level of theft are Greece (4,374 stolen firearms in 2018), Spain (1,279 stolen firearms in 2019), the United Kingdom (635 stolen firearms in 2015), Germany (633 declarations of theft) and Belgium (624 stolen firearms). Interestingly, Central and Eastern European countries such as the Baltic states, Poland, Czechia and Slovenia are characterised by significantly lower numbers of stolen firearms and/or declarations of theft.

These figures must be read in light of the fact that much more firearms are registered in certain Member States than others. **In general Member States where more firearms are registered tend to have higher numbers of thefts.** For example, much more firearms are stolen in France than in Estonia, but this also reflects the fact that much more firearms are registered in France. Yet, **also other factors are at play.** Looking at the rate of firearm thefts per registered firearms in France on average 235 in every 100,000 registered firearms get stolen, whereas in Estonia only 13 in every 100,000 firearms get stolen. This means that even though more firearms are registered in France than in Estonia, the risk that a registered firearm will get stolen is higher in France than in Estonia. In the same vein, we observe that certain Member States have much higher numbers of thefts than the number of firearms registered would have suggested. For example, Greece has the highest rate in the EU (433 in every 100,000 registered firearms get stolen). On the opposite, certain Member States have much lower numbers of thefts than the number of firearms registered would have suggested. For example, even though Germany is ranked 6th in terms of firearm thefts, it also has the highest number of firearms registered in the EU. On average, only 11 in every 100,000 firearms registered get stolen in the country, which is the second smallest ratio in the EU (after Austria).

Important to keep in mind is that these annual figures do not shed light on the **‘dark number’ of stolen firearms which are either not noticed or not declared to the authorities.** In theory, all cases of thefts must be reported to the police (see also subsection 4.2.1.). Yet, not all cases of theft are reported in a timely fashion to the police, as shown in this example from Sweden:

In the winter 2019, Swedish police were notified that 6 Glock 17 pistols and 300 hollow-point ammunition had been stolen from a safe in the Prime Minister's office in Stockholm. The private security company Securitas, responsible for employing the security personnel at the Prime Minister's office and storing the weapons became aware of the theft in March 2019 but waited until October before reporting it to the police. News of the theft became publicly known on 14 November 2019 when it was reported in the local media.³⁴ (Sweden, 2019)

While especially in particular, the thefts of illicitly held firearms are not reported to the authorities, we believe that **also legal gun owners who have been targeted by thieves do not always report these thefts to the authorities; they do not either because they are not aware of the importance of declaring thefts or because they fear penalties** (e.g. if their firearms were stolen while they were not complying with the storage rules). This is in line with patterns and practices observed abroad. A study conducted in Chicago, for example, indicated that only 75–82% of firearm thefts are declared to the police,³⁵ although it is not clear whether this refers only to legal firearms, or also illegal guns. Although this figure cannot be completely transposed to the European context, it does suggest that an (unknown) number of thefts of legally-held firearms may not be reported.

In addition, **it is unclear how many firearms declared stolen to the authorities are 'fake thefts'**. In Italy, for example, it is common that members of organised crime groups ask others without criminal records to act as straw purchasers and legally acquire firearms on their behalf. Afterwards, these straw purchasers declare their firearms as stolen but in reality these weapons are transferred to criminals.³⁶ It is difficult to determine the scale of fake thefts due to the hidden nature of the phenomenon, but this practice must be taken into account while looking at the figures of theft.

Although significant differences in the number of stolen firearms and theft declarations can be observed, there seems to be **trend of a decreasing number of thefts of firearms in the EU**. In most EU Member States the annual number of firearms thefts has been decreasing quite consistently over the years (see Table 3). In Sweden, for example, the number of firearms theft declarations decreased from 614 in 2009 to 381 in 2018, while in Germany the number of firearms theft declarations decreased from 784 in 2015 to 633 in 2019. Yet, in a few EU Member States the number of firearms thefts has increased over the years (e.g. Spain), remained quite stable (e.g. Latvia) or no clear pattern was observed (e.g. Lithuania).

Table 3 Cases of declaration of thefts and/or number of firearms stolen in the EU, 2008–2019

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Belgium [a]			2,161	476	638	786	803	665	471	494	624	285
Spain				964	1,070	1,048	1,030	1,044	945	1,063	1,294	1,279
Germany								784	767	689	604	633
Sweden		614	500	559	558	440	486	454	505	512	381	
The Netherlands	347	188	146	ca. 360	ca. 300							
Lithuania		96	148	109	119	118	127	352	129	105	76	
Poland	73	75	89	65	70	179	164	163	126	100	108	
Luxembourg									24	23	13	
Denmark [b]		56	37	35	20	25	7	7	6	11	11	
Austria (weapons)						31	34	43	63	61		
Latvia							17	11	19	16	17	
Estonia [c]		14	9	13	5	13	42	11	4	6	6	3

Sources: Luxembourg Grand Ducal Police,³⁷ Polish Police,³⁸ Czechia Police, Danish Police,³⁹ Lithuanian Police,⁴⁰ Belgian Police,⁴¹ Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention,⁴² Austrian Ministry of Interior,⁴³ Estonian Police,⁴⁴ German Criminal Police,⁴⁵ Spanish Guardia Civil (ICAIE),⁴⁶ Boerman et. al.,⁴⁷ Latvian Criminal Police.⁴⁸

[a] Figures in 2019 cover the period January–September 2019 only.

[b] Figures cover theft of weapons and/or ammunition committed to barracks, weapons stores, factories and shops.

[c] In 2014 there were 30 registered cases of theft in one criminal episode; however, not all of them included the theft of firearms. Figures for 2019 cover the first nine months of 2019.

The evolution of registered firearm thefts can be influenced by societal changes, by changes in crime-prevention policies or even by changes in methods or upgrades in data registration. It is not always possible to pinpoint the reason for the observed evolution.

2.2 Contextual elements affecting the national scope of theft

Methodological caveats are not the only reasons explaining the national differences in the numbers of firearms stolen and declarations of firearms theft across the EU. **The number of firearms thefts is often connected to the overall level of gun possession in a country, since the presence of large amounts of firearms provide criminals with more potential targets of thefts.** Nevertheless, our analysis above has shown that this is not always the case. This suggests that other factors may influence the number of firearm thefts. The ways in which firearms and ammunition need to be stored and secured in a country reduce the potential for thefts. In addition, the specific features and dynamics of the illicit gun market in a country may affect theft rates.

Firearm thefts do not happen in a vacuum, but occur within a specific national context of firearms possession and market, which have their own distinct features and characteristics. On the one hand, the more firearms circulate in a country, the more opportunities this in theory provides for thieves to target gun owners. On the other hand, in a context where the illicit firearms market is very active, there tend to be many alternative options for criminals to gain access to firearms, which means that they do not necessarily need to resort to theft. As mentioned above, a number of EU Member States with high levels of gun ownership are characterised by high numbers of thefts and/or the observation that thefts are a key source of diversion in the country. In Finland, for example, theft is considered one of the most important sources of illicit firearms in the country⁴⁹ and stolen firearms are sometimes sold to criminals on the dark net.⁵⁰ This occurs in a context where the numbers of firearms legally held in the country is one of the highest in Europe. According to an estimate by the Small Arms Survey, there are 32.4 civilian firearms per 100 persons in the country.⁵¹ This provides ample opportunities for criminals to divert legal firearms through theft. One facilitating factor of the legal possession rate could be the national gun culture, which is closely connected to hunting, shooting and a legacy of national defence inherited from mandatory military service.⁵² In southeast Finland, the proximity to Russia also influences the dynamic of firearms movement in terms of smuggling and creates another layer of demand for stolen firearms.⁵³ Nevertheless, the assumption that theft is one of the most important sources of illicit firearms should be interpreted with caution since there were only 350 firearms declared stolen in 2009 and the ratio of firearms thefts was one of the lower ratios in the EU (23 firearms thefts per 100,000 registered firearms) (see table 2).

France has very high numbers of firearms thefts compared to other EU Member States. A high number of thefts was also reported in Greece, Germany and Belgium (see table 2).

According to the estimate by the Small Arms Survey, these Member States have rather high levels of gun possession compared to those of other EU Member States. In France and Germany, there are an estimated 19.6 civilian firearms per 100 persons in the country, whereas in Greece and Belgium this estimate is respectively 17.6 and 12.7.⁵⁴ The ratio of firearms thefts is particularly high in France (0.23), Greece (0.43) and Belgium (0.15) (see table 2). The fact that the ratios are rather low in Spain (0.05) and in Germany (0.01), although high numbers of firearms are registered among civilians, suggests that **other factors can diminish the role of firearm thefts in these Member States.**

The other side of the argument is that smaller legal firearms scenes provide fewer opportunities for thieves. In the Baltic States, for example, legal firearm pools are very limited compared to other EU countries. According to the estimate by the Small Arms Survey, there are 13.6 firearms per 100 inhabitants in Lithuania, 10.5 in Latvia, and 5.0 in Estonia.⁵⁵ The ratios of annual firearms thefts are also particularly low in these countries (0.06 in Lithuania, 0.02 in Latvia, 0.01 in Estonia (see table 2)). This suggests that the little number of firearms in legal holdings in Lithuania and Latvia are not an important target of thefts. Not surprisingly, firearms theft is not a common phenomenon, and neither is there a significant source of diversion in these three countries. Firearms theft is very low in Lithuania and follows a decreasing trend, with only 76 firearms stolen in 2018.⁵⁶ Firearms thefts can be characterised as individualised opportunism in Lithuania, and are largely incidental to larger burglaries.⁵⁷ In Latvia, theft is not a systematic approach to acquiring firearms and there is no indication that theft is related to organised crime groups (hereafter 'OCGs').⁵⁸ Firearms theft is even less frequent in Latvia than in Lithuania; it is also very limited in Estonia – for example, in 2018, only six cases of firearms theft were reported to the police.⁵⁹

Additional contextual factors can explain the little importance of firearm thefts in the Baltic States. There seems to be little criminal demand in firearms in these countries. Illicit firearm trafficking and smuggling is in itself a rather rare activity and few or no OCGs are committed to smuggling and trafficking in firearms.⁶⁰ The fact that a little number of cases of trafficking involved members of OCGs, probably stems from the complementary nature of firearm trafficking and drug and other illicit goods trafficking.⁶¹ An alternative source of firearms is converted firearms, and even though they proliferated in Lithuania in the late 2000s, this tendency is decreasing, largely due to the legislative action taken to stem the free flow of gas alarm pistols.⁶² In Lithuania and Latvia, the reactivation of deactivated firearms is not a significant source of firearms diversion.⁶³ Also, cross-border smuggling between the Baltic States is a source of illicit firearms – most illicit Estonian firearms come from Latvia,⁶⁴ and sometimes originating in Russia, Ukraine, Poland and Belarus.⁶⁵ A more significant source of weapons is non-regularisation.⁶⁶

On the opposite, an increasingly restricted access to illicit firearms can create an incentive for criminals to turn to alternative sources of supply, including the theft of firearms from legitimate owners. In the United Kingdom more than 600 firearms were stolen in 2015 despite the relatively low levels of gun possession in the country (see

table 2). With an estimated 7.8 civilian firearms per 100 persons⁶⁷, the level of civilian gun ownership can be considered low. According to the National Crime Agency, lawfully held firearms that have been stolen are a source of diversion to the criminal market.⁶⁸ Even though theft and loss from the legal market in general represent a rather small proportion of diverted weapons in England and Wales⁶⁹, the UK police have reported an increasing number of lost or stolen firearms and shotguns; they suspect that a stricter gun-control regulation contributed to increased restrictions on the illicit firearms market.⁷⁰ This in turn might have created incentives for criminals to turn to alternative sources of supply than in normal times. The number of firearms thefts must therefore always be interpreted in an overall illicit firearms context.

3

Characteristics of theft of firearms and ammunition in the EU

It is difficult to grasp the scope of the theft of firearms and ammunition in the EU; this is due to the illicit nature of this phenomenon and the above-mentioned problems with the comprehensiveness, level of detail and comparability of data on thefts in the EU. A qualitative approach can help to gain in-depth insight into the characteristics of firearm and ammunition theft in the EU, though. In this section, we shed light on the following questions: Who is targeted by thieves? What types of firearm are stolen? How many firearms and how much ammunition are usually stolen in cases of theft? What modus operandus was used by the thieves? Did the firearms end up in criminal circles and were they misused?

The following chapter shows that there is a wide variety of ways and contexts in which firearms have been stolen in the EU. One way to look at firearm thefts is to distinguish between targeted and non-targeted thefts. Private individuals, who generally store relatively small numbers of firearms at home, are mainly the victims of non-targeted thefts. These are often opportunistic burglaries during which thieves are looking for valuable goods and come across firearms. These types of burglaries often involve only one or a few firearms and represent the main type of firearms thefts in the EU. Yet, thieves sometimes target larger commercial and governmental stockpiles, which are often better secured, that store larger numbers of firearms, sometimes even including military grade firearms. In these cases, thieves often profit from insider knowledge, an accomplice, or failing security systems. Such cases may also target decommissioned stockpiles, including seized firearms, surplus weaponry and destruction stockpiles. In addition, firearms have also been stolen while being transported or while carried by law enforcement officials. Important to stress is that, while stolen firearms are often not the weapons of choice for criminals, stolen firearms have been misused for violent acts (including murders) in the context of organised crime groups (OCGs) including the drug milieu, but also that of political extremism and terrorism. The following sections elaborate on these findings.

Box 3: Research design for analysing the characteristics of firearms theft in the EU

The following analysis is based on a dataset of 184 identified cases of theft. The cases of theft presented below were retrieved from the 28 country mappings and 8 in-depth country studies produced by our research team (see also box 1 above). To access these cases, we conducted a thorough desk research, focusing on reports from national authorities, previous studies from various research institutes and media sources. We also identified several cases during our conversations with national and EU experts.

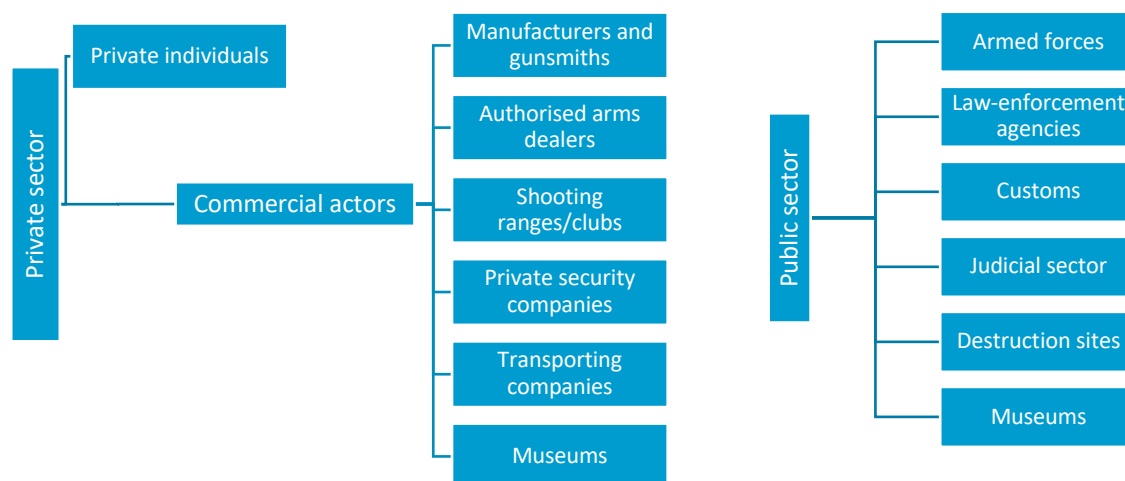
Data collection was conducted between January 2019 and May 2020. Therefore, most recent cases may not be included in the analysis. For each Member State, we collected all the cases involving the theft of firearms, components or ammunition that we were able to identify. We included them in our database of cases. We focused on live-firing firearms, although some cases involving non-live-firing firearms or other types weapons were exceptionally included as illustrative schemes of thefts, which, if replicated, could potentially involve firearms or ammunition. Priority was given to cases of theft which occurred in the past decade, but a little number of relevant, older cases were also included. All the cases are included in annex 3 to this report.

There were a few methodological biases in the dataset. First, it is obvious that not all cases of theft are reported in detail in official reports and in the media. Second, thefts from private individuals are less often publicised than other types of theft since they are usually less spectacular with regard to the number and types of weapon stolen (e.g. trading companies or government stockpiles). This implies that our dataset is not comprehensive and does not illustrate an accurate repartition of thefts among all legal owners. Finally, some details about cases of theft are not shared in public sources. On the one hand, certain sensitive information was not disclosed to the press (for example cases concerning thefts from government stockpiles). On the other hand, the press sometimes covered very recent cases for which little information was available, and subsequent, more detailed information, for example after police investigations, was not released publicly.

To remediate to these methodological caveats, we interviewed several national and EU experts to complement the desk research. Interviews were conducted for each of the eight in-depth country studies, during phase 2 of the project. In parallel, we disseminated our results and received additional information throughout the project during three EMPACT meetings and six expert meeting.

3.1 Targets of theft

All types of actor authorised to possess and use firearms may potentially be targeted by thieves throughout the lifecycle of firearms and ammunition. This section shows that a wide variety of these actors have been the victim of thefts of firearms and ammunition. They include commercial actors (such as gun-manufacturing facilities and gunsmiths, authorised arms dealers, private security companies and transporting companies), state actors (such as the armed forces, law enforcement agencies and customs organisations) and private gun owners. Interestingly, firearms and/or ammunition have also been stolen from judicial entities (where these weapons are stored in the context of a judicial procedure), shooting ranges, destruction sites, and public and private museums. In the absence of comprehensive, comparable, and detailed data on the targets of firearm thefts in the EU, it is not possible to weigh the relative importance of each type of targets.



Even though it is difficult to determine which actors are most at risk of being targeted by thieves, several indicators detailed below suggests that **the actors most often targeted by firearm thieves in the EU are private individuals.**^I These persons are generally legal gun owners such as hunters, sport shooters, firearm collectors or persons who are allowed keep firearms for reasons of self-defence. In general, the firearms from these individuals are stolen from their private residences.^{II} ⁷¹ In Spain in 2019, for example, 3,571 firearms were recorded as either lost or stolen from private actors (private individuals and arms businesses) in the national database,⁷² whereas on

^I This is in line with findings from study from the United States that 58% of stolen firearms in Chicago between 2005 and 2010 were stolen from the homes of private individuals. See Cook, Philip J (2018) "Gun theft and crime." in Journal of Urban Health 95(1) (New York: The New York Academy of Medicine).

^{II} This is in line with findings from study in New Zealand that noted that 77% of a sample of gun thefts occurred in private homes, compared to 7% at business premises and 1% in a shooting club. A US study found that among guns recovered as part of several Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF) investigations in the United States 13.5 % were stolen from a private residence against 6% from a licensed dealer.

average 23 weapons were lost or stolen annually from the police and the Guardia Civil between 2007 and 2018).⁷³ For example:

Five short firearms and 150 cartridges of calibre 9mm were stolen from the barracks of the Guardia Civil in the rural area of Láchar (Granada). The theft took place during the weekend when the barrack was closed. A news article argued that the theft was partly due to the poor security standards at the barracks and a lack of personnel in rural areas.⁷⁴ Better security provisions were also demanded by a professional organization within the Civil Guard. The organisation bemoaned that weapons and seized narcotics were stored in the barrack while it is not guarded in the weekend, and has no alarm system or cameras monitoring the security. All firearms were later recovered, and the suspects were detained.⁷⁵ (Spain, 2019)

There are several reasons for the prevalence of private individuals among the victims of firearms and ammunition thefts. First, in almost all EU Member States, private citizens possess in total more firearms than the armed forces, law enforcement agencies and other state actors.⁷⁶ Secondly, civilians are more often the victims of burglaries in which criminals are looking for valuable goods but also take firearms as side-products. For example:

In 2017, two residents of Bukkaranyos (north-east Hungary) broke into a property in the countryside and stole, among other things, 7 licensed hunting rifles. The source indicated that the weapons were not properly stored and were stolen in connection with other goods located in the domicile.⁷⁷ (Hungary, 2017)

Thirdly, owing to stricter regulation on safe storage for government stockpiles than for civilians (see above), **civilians are often easier targets**. In Poland, it has been found that the number of firearms held by private persons is roughly equivalent to the number of that in the hands of the armed forces and law enforcement agencies,^{1 78} a situation which is exceptional in the EU, since generally civilian firearm holdings are bigger than government holdings. The fact that most firearms stolen in Poland are hunting rifles⁷⁹ belonging to civilian actors⁸⁰ clearly suggests that individual owners are easier targets than government stockpiles. In many EU Member States, the use of alarm systems is mandatory in the police and the military,⁸¹ together with the presence of guards.⁸² The materials used for storing places must sometimes be stronger than those for private stockpiles.⁸³ Verifying the safe storage of firearms is more frequent for government actors than for private individuals.⁸⁴ Periodic controls may be a good deterrent to thieves, because the more frequent the controls, the faster missing firearms and ammunition can be identified and the greater the chance the investigators have of tracing the stolen items.

¹ There were 505,429 firearms registered in 2018, compared to 307,200 military firearms and 188,000 police firearms.

Actors hosting larger stockpiles, such as commercial actors, are subject to less frequent but often targeted burglaries (see subsection 3.3. below). The available data strongly suggests that thefts from the arms business are much less frequent than thefts from private individuals. Figures on the theft and loss of firearms in Czechia, for example, indicate that in 2017, out of 221 firearms lost or stolen only 18 belonged to business licence-holders.^I In Denmark, six cases of burglary at weapon stores, factories and shops were recorded in 2018⁸⁵ compared to an annual average of 200 overall firearms thefts.⁸⁶ In Sweden, nine cases of firearms theft from shooting organisations, arms dealers and explosives stores were recorded in 2018⁸⁷ compared to 381 cases of theft from all targets in that same year.⁸⁸ Interestingly, in various EU Member States, thefts from arms businesses are decreasing – for example, in Denmark,⁸⁹ Sweden⁹⁰ and Belgium.⁹¹

Manufacturing companies in the EU have also been targeted by thieves, but not very frequently. In Bulgaria, for example, leakage from the main firearms manufacturing company (Arsenal) used to be a significant problem in the 2000s.⁹² Employees of the company were reported stealing firearms parts from the production facilities and passing them on to local craftsmen, who used them to make firearms.⁹³ To date, there is no reliable data to determine whether this is still a problem, but in 2018 a case was reported of two former employees from the factory who stole 17 Kalashnikov-type rifles and 15 pistols.⁹⁴ This suggests that the problem may persist. Also in other firearm producing Member States, such as Belgium, thefts from manufacturing sites have been observed.

While they are less frequently targeted by thieves, the **number of firearms stolen in one single burglary from arms factories, authorised arms dealers and government stockpiles are often higher than when private individuals are targeted.** This is not surprising, given that these stockpiles are generally more secured than civilian holdings, which reduces the likelihood that a theft will succeed (see sub-section 4.1.). Because these actors generally store a larger number of firearms, it is likely that successful thefts involve more firearms than when private individuals are targeted. Our dataset indicates that **the number of firearms stolen during burglaries from private citizens generally fluctuates around one or two** (see Annex 3).^{II} This is consistent with several overseas studies.⁹⁵ The quantities of weapons stolen from arms businesses generally fluctuate around a few dozen (see Annex 3) and sometimes even more, for example:

In 2013, 47 firearms were stolen from a premise of a gun shop and shooting range in Knokke, a Belgian town neighbouring the border with The Netherlands, some of which were later retrieved in the Dutch criminal world, including within organised motorcycle gangs.⁹⁶ (Belgium, 2013a)

^I The available 2018 data covers only up to 30 June 2018.

^{II} Four outliers involved several dozen burglaries targeting two collectors, one hunter and one sports shooter. We found that, as a result, on average, 4.2 guns were stolen in one burglary targeting a private individual.

In addition, there is an **under-researched issue with stolen ammunition from shooting ranges**, where shooters are suspected of stealing small quantities of ammunition which they have not used in practice sessions. The Spanish authorities, for example, point out that small quantities are involved at a time, but the frequency of such thefts makes this an important phenomenon. It is assumed that these rounds of ammunition are intended for illicit sales.⁹⁷ An in-depth study of the diversion and trafficking of ammunition in the Netherlands came to the conclusion that large-scale theft of ammunition from shooting clubs or arms dealers has not been observed. According to this study the main domestic diversion method of ammunition in the country consists of illicit transfers of ammunition from sport shooters and collectors who have the necessary licenses to possess ammunition legally but, motivated by high profit margins and facilitated by the lack of controls, sell this ammunition illegally to criminals.⁹⁸ An interesting case of theft from shooting ranges was also observed in Belgium where a person was accused of stealing empty cartridges after shooting exercises in the shooting range of a firearms manufacturing company in Belgium in 2016. After investigating the house of the man, the police found ammunition boxes, tear gas, various kinds of ammunition, the head of a shell and 15 partially unlicensed weapons. The police suspect that the perpetrator wanted to handmake cartridges from the spare ones he collected.⁹⁹ Ammunition theft from shooting ranges and clubs are sometimes facilitated by negligence, for example:

In 2012, 33 rifles and shotguns were stolen from a shooting club in Monsanto. The theft occurred during a holiday period when the shooting club was closed and not all safe storage requirements were met.¹⁰⁰ (Portugal, 2012)

Reliable and detailed data on thefts from law enforcement agencies and armed forces in the EU is lacking. Some media reports have revealed cases of theft,¹⁰¹ but for most Member States no systematic data is available, other than exceptionally when a parliamentary question specifically asks for these figures.¹⁰² For only a few Member States, the research team obtained statistics on thefts targeting state actors. For example, in Sweden, the annual number of firearms thefts from military stores and military facilities has fluctuated around 13 since 2009, although this figure has been criticized.¹⁰³ In Germany, too, a small number of firearms are stolen every year from police officers or from police stations.¹⁰⁴ Additionally, between 2010 and 2018 58 live-firing weapons and 57,000 rounds of ammunition went missing from the Bundeswehr,¹⁰⁵ while in 2019 alone 633 cases of firearms theft were recorded nationally. It has been speculated that some of the thefts may have been committed or enabled by soldiers.¹⁰⁶

¹ One expert interviewed in the course of this study noted that the national statistics on thefts from military stores and facilities do not reflect accurately the number of incidents in recent years or the number of firearms involved. Indeed, an internal study of the number of thefts of weapons from military facilities in Sweden indicated that these figures were far lower than those which appeared in national statistics. Source: Verbal communication with a representative of the Swedish Armed Forces, 13 November 2019.

The limited available quantitative data suggests that the number of stolen firearms from law enforcement agencies and armed forces is limited in the EU. Nevertheless, the few successful cases of firearms thefts targeting government stockpiles can have important consequences. One illustration is the attack against the Krudttønden Cultural Centre that occurred in February 2015 in Copenhagen was committed with a firearm that had been previously stolen from a member of the Danish Home Guard, a volunteer military organisation that supports the military and the police.¹⁰⁷

Another type of governmental actors which can be targeted by thieves is customs offices storing firearms temporarily for examination at the time of importation. In Malta, in 2008, several antique weapons of high financial value were stolen from a customs office. They had been imported by a private collector and which were stored within the customs before being transferred to him:

In 2008, two individuals broke into a Customs General Examination Shed at the Marsa Industrial Estate and stole antique firearms valued 95,000 euros. The guns had been imported from the US to Malta to add to an individual's firearms collection and were stored in the warehouse. The firearms were stolen for financial reasons.¹⁰⁸ (Malta, 2008)

Firearms have also been stolen from private security companies in the EU, for example:

In October 2019, the Swedish police were notified that 6 Glock 17 pistols and 300 pieces of ammunition had been stolen from a safe in the Prime Minister's office in Stockholm in March 2019.¹⁰⁹ The private security company Securitas was employing the security personnel at the Prime Minister's office and was in charge of storing their service weapons safely.¹¹⁰ (Sweden, 2019)

One specific problem pertaining to state forces is **the theft or loss of service weapons during exercises.** In Belgium, for example, 260 small-calibre weapons and 774 cartridges of ammunition disappeared during operations and training (through theft or lost) between 2002 and 2006. During this period, nine known cases of the abuse of weapons and ammunition by defence personnel were registered. Six suspects were convicted of theft by force or for selling stolen goods.¹¹¹ More recently, there were 102 incidents of theft of police weapons and explosives between 2013 and 2017,¹¹² which represents an average of 20.4 per year. It is unclear, though, whether these weapons were stolen from warehouses or during exercises or training.

Sometimes firearms have also been stolen from law enforcement officials while they were on active duty, for example:

During riots in the commune of Anderlecht located in the outskirts of Brussels on 11 April 2020, one of the demonstrators was able to steal the service weapon of a police officer. Sources provided contradicting information on the circumstances of the theft. Either the gun fell from the police officer's belt in

the street, or it had been improperly stored in the glove box of a police car. The firearm was recovered one month later in a glass container, before the thief turned himself in to the police.¹¹³ (Belgium, 2020b)

Our dataset on thefts (see Annex 3) indicates that **most cases of theft targeting government actors involved less than a dozen stolen firearms per case**. Yet, in at least 12 identified cases tens of firearms were stolen, while in six identified (often older) cases even more than 100 firearms were stolen. Some examples:

In Portugal, one of the most significant cases occurred in 2017 when an investigation triggered by the possession of a drug dealer with a police Glock revealed that 57 pieces of 9 mm Glock pistols had been stolen from the gunsmith of the Lisbon Police in the National Directorate. Two officers who were responsible for storing the weapons were put in custody as well as a civilian who allegedly received the firearms and sold them illicitly.¹¹⁴ (Portugal, 2017a)

In 2009, a thief stole 201 military weapons from a military barrack in Denmark. The weapons included automatic rifles, light machine guns, pistols, grenade launchers, to a value of 2,4 million Danish Crowns (equivalent to 320,000 euros). Many of these weapons were destined to Afghanistan. After a one-month investigation, three individuals were arrested and half of the stolen weapons seized.¹¹⁵ In 2011, the Danish Eastern High Court convicted four persons for the theft. All of the stolen weapons were later recovered.¹¹⁶ (Denmark, 2009)

The theft of ammunition is more difficult to identify than that of firearms, but when cases are detected, they sometimes involve very large amounts of ammunition. For example, in the 2000s, a theft from the main Belgian firearms manufacturing company by a gang of thieves, who were employed by the manufacturer, involved 20,600 cartridges of ammunition.¹¹⁷ A recent example from Germany further highlights that very high numbers of rounds of ammunition can disappear without being detected or reported: in the Spring of 2020 an amnesty was organised during which soldiers from the special commando forces were allowed to return ammunition that they had misappropriated – without being prosecuted. In total tens of thousands of pieces of ammunition were handed in as part of this amnesty action. The amount of ammunition surrendered was considerably higher than the amount of ammunition that had been identified by internal investigations as lost or stolen.¹¹⁸ This suggests that many cases of ammunition theft may potentially go undetected and that a large part of the problem of ammunition theft from the German armed forces remains unknown. In addition, the amnesty took place without authorisation of the Ministry of Defence. Further investigations into the special commando forces and the soldiers who authorised the amnesty are ongoing.¹¹⁹

3.2 Types of stolen firearm and ammunition

As mentioned above, private individuals are both the largest group of firearms owners in the EU and the most frequent targets of firearms and ammunition thefts. In this section, we review various national statistics on firearms thefts that we retrieved as part of the project. We observe that the types of firearms stolen often correspond with the types of firearm widely held by private individuals. This suggests that **the repartition of weapons thefts often reflects the nature of the legal market and the national gun culture**. This is consistent with an overseas study which showed that in New Zealand the proportions of shotguns and rifles reported stolen roughly corresponds to the ratios in legal ownership.¹²⁰ Unfortunately, detailed information on the different specific models and calibres of stolen firearms is often lacking in the EU.

An important observation is that **in the EU many stolen firearms are hunting rifles and shotguns**. This is not surprising, since hunting (35%) is the most popular reason for firearms possession by private individuals in the EU. The other most important reasons for firearms possession in the EU are professional – service in law enforcement or the armed forces (29%) – sports (23%) and personal protection (14%). Yet, the reasons for possessing a firearm differ considerably between EU Member States: for example, 73% of firearm-owners in Finland have one for hunting, while 71% have one for professional reasons in Romania. Interestingly, the reasons for firearms possession differ between 15 Member States who joined the EU before 2004 and the 13 Member States, mainly located in Central and Eastern Europe, who joined in 2004 or later. The citizens from the first 15 Member States are more likely to possess firearms for hunting and sports; those from the 13 other Member States are more likely to possess firearms for professional reasons and personal protection.¹²¹

In France, for example, hunting is the most important reason for the possession of firearms¹²² and most cases of theft involve Category C and formerly D weapons (often hunting rifles and shotguns). These mostly belonged to individual gun owners and gun shops, which represent three-quarters of the victims of firearms thefts (7,800 weapons).¹²³ For example:

*In March 2018, a 83-year-old man was burgled in Grenoble. The perpetrators broke into his house and managed to take a safe that was storing one handgun, two shotguns of 0.22 calibre, about 50 cartridges and permits for possession of all the arms they took.*¹²⁴ (France, 2018a)

A similar situation can be observed in Spain, where hunting is the most popular reason for firearms possession and shotguns are by far the most popular type of firearm among legal owners. Not surprisingly, data on stolen and lost firearms covering the years 2011 to 2013 indicates that shotguns make up the vast majority of lost and/or stolen firearms.¹²⁵ A similar observation can be made in Portugal, where the majority of firearm licences are granted for hunting¹²⁶ and Portuguese data indicates that the most commonly stolen firearms were hunting rifles (70%) between 2004 and 2007. Pistols (17%) and revolvers (6%) were stolen less often in that period.¹²⁷

Interestingly, in Belgium a different observation can be made based on data from 2015: the two categories of firearm mostly targeted by thieves are ‘rifles, carabines and machine guns’ (274 stolen firearms) and handguns (265 stolen firearms).¹²⁸ This is likely connected to the observation that not hunting, but ‘sports and recreational shooting’ is the main reason for firearms possession¹ in the country.¹²⁹

More dangerous firearms seem to be less often stolen in the EU. In France, for example, higher-capacity rifles and semi-automatic handguns of Category B account for 10% of all stolen firearms.¹³⁰ Statistics on stolen and lost firearms in Spain for the years 2011–2013 indicate that the most stolen firearms are shotguns (938 in 2013), followed by rifles (114), pistols (81), revolvers (34) and sub-machine guns (1).¹³¹

It seems that **in most EU Member States the theft of blank-firing weapons is not considered a significant problem.** One notable exception is Lithuania, where alarm weapons were the most commonly stolen firearm, accounting for 47% of all thefts between 2015 and 2018, followed by shotguns at 28%.¹³² This high number of stolen alarm weapons is probably connected to the fact that until 2011 they were freely available. In the 20 years prior to this legislative change, these pistols had been especially popular among criminals who converted them to live-firing weapons and proliferated them across Europe.¹³³

Thefts from government stockpiles generally reflect the different types of weapon that are kept at the various types of stockpile. In Belgium, for example, thefts in police stations mostly targeted handguns, whereas assault rifles are the main target in army barracks.¹³⁴ Government stockpiles represent more risks of theft since they often contain more dangerous firearms and larger quantities of firearms and amounts of ammunition. In Spain, for example, quantities stolen from police stockpiles fluctuate between three and four weapons, whereas in thefts targeting police officers at home, generally only one service weapon is taken at a time (see Annex 3). In military barracks, dozens of military-grade firearms can be stolen at a time. For example:

In 2011 20 Heckler & Koch rifles and 10 pistols were stolen from a military barrack in Badajoz, Spain. ¹³⁵ The Guardia Civil arrested 5 suspects who were Spanish citizens connected to organized crime and were responsible for a range of major robberies in banks and ATM. A former member of the military provided the thieves with detailed information on security measures.¹³⁶ (Spain, 2011)

¹ In 2019 ca 234,000 firearms were licensed for sports and recreational shooting compared to ca 159,000 firearms for hunting

3.3 Characteristics of targeted and non-targeted thefts

Non-targeted thefts are carried out by thieves who steal firearms without looking for them in particular but rather want to steal valuable goods in general while targeted thefts are perpetrated by thieves who are looking for firearms specifically. While non-targeted thefts are generally more opportunistic actions, targeted thefts usually require a plan or a strategy. Non-targeted thefts generally involve firearms possessed by private gun owners. This type of theft is much less common among authorised firearms dealers and government stockpiles, where security standards are generally higher and insider knowledge is often of great importance for getting access to the firearms. In the following paragraphs we will further elaborate on the different characteristics of targeted and non-targeted thefts and illustrate them with examples.

Our analysis is based on a review of our database of collected cases of theft of firearms, ammunition and components. Although it is often difficult to determine with certainty whether the thieves targeted firearms specifically, various elements can indicate whether a firearm were targeted or not. For example, the observation that also valuable items are taken together with firearms during thefts at private homes suggests that firearms were not specifically targeted but rather taken solely for their financial value. If there is an indication that the thieves were aware of the presence of firearms before the theft, it is likely that the firearms were specifically targeted. Yet, it is not always possible to determine with certainty whether the thieves were aware of the presence of firearms or not. Hence, our findings should be interpreted with caution.

3.3.1 Non-targeted thefts

During non-targeted burglaries, thieves who do not target firearms specifically may come across firearms and take them as part of the loot. **Opportunism is a key a driver of non-targeted thefts of firearms.** In general, **non-targeted firearms thefts occur in the residences of private individuals and the number of firearms stolen from private individuals is generally smaller than in thefts from other types of actor.** Our dataset indicates that the number of stolen firearms from private citizens generally fluctuates between one and five firearms per case of theft. Cases of theft from private citizens rarely involves more than a dozen firearms (see Annex 3).

In certain countries, such as Lithuania, firearm thefts from civilian owners are exceptional. According to the Lithuanian police, these thefts are almost exclusively characterised by low-level opportunism.¹³⁷ Also in Belgium, firearms are often considered a by-product of burglaries, where thieves take all kinds of valuable goods such as jewellery, money or cars.¹³⁸ In most EU Member States, however, it is not possible to discern on an aggregated basis the extent to which opportunism plays a role in firearms thefts because of a lack of detailed government data on this phenomenon and a lack of details provided in the identified media reporting on such cases. Yet, through a case-by-case approach, we have identified clear cases of opportunism across Europe. In Czechia, for example, a construction worker in 2010 found himself ‘in the right place, at the right time’. While he was conducting construction work, he tore off

the back of a storage cabinet and stole the firearm kept inside it.¹³⁹ Also, a more recent case in the United Kingdom illustrates this type of theft:

*In February 2018, six shotguns were stolen in a raid at a house in Southampton. Burglars broke the guns out of locked cabinets. As a result of the raid, firearms (mostly hunting firearms or replicas), ammunition, a quantity of cash and other items were also stolen from the house. (United Kingdom, 2018c)*¹⁴⁰

It is often, however, not possible to determine whether the thieves were aware of the presence of firearms before the actual burglary:

*During a burglary into a house in the Belgian town of Ransart, several registered firearms were stolen during one evening in May 2020. The firearms stolen included a Kalashnikov type rifle, a pump-action shotgun (often referred to as a 'riot-gun' in Belgium), a .375 Magnum revolver, a 9 mm pistol, a Winchester carbine and a Smith & Wesson firearm. Cartridges were also taken as part of the loot. The burglars also took valuable goods such as a computer, a game console and other electronic devices. The investigation should establish whether the burglars were aware of the presence of guns or if the firearms theft was not specifically targeted.*¹⁴¹ (Belgium, 2020a)

A practice that has been observed in various cases is to steal the safe where firearms owners store their firearms and ammunition instead of opening it on the spot. It remains unclear if thieves are aware of the firearms in the vault at the time of the theft. This practice has been identified among others in Spain, where firearms are often the side-products of burglaries targeting mostly private individuals. According to the Guardia Civil, the thieves often mistake handgun vaults for small-size vaults which are generally designed for other types of valuable.¹⁴² Cases where thieves steal safes that contain firearms have also been detected in other EU Member States, for example:

*In February 2019 in Glendenberg in Germany, robbers stole a whole firearms-safe from the home of a hunter, including 4 hunting rifles. The safe was later found empty, the police is still searching for the firearms.*¹⁴³ (Germany, 2019c)

*In an Austrian case from 2019, burglars broke into a safe stored in the basement of a private home where they only took the firearms stored and no other goods. The facts that the thieves were able to break-in the firearms safe and that the theft was only detected days after it took place suggests some degree of professionalism.*¹⁴⁴ (Austria, 2019a)

Our analysis suggests that **non-targeted thefts are carried out by both professional and non-professional thieves**. Some non-targeted thefts are clearly carried out by non-professional thieves. In the Netherlands in 2015, for example, a group of persons stole a Beretta pistol and boxes of ammunition. They were deliberately looking for a firearm to steal, but did this for fun and under the influence of alcohol. One person was later arrested by the police and admitted to having broken into the house under the influence

of alcohol.¹⁴⁵ The Spanish Guardia Civil notes that hunters who want to possess firearms without a permit may also be interested in stolen firearms (which are to a large degree hunting rifles and shotguns in Spain).¹⁴⁶

Other cases have indicated a higher level of professionalism. An indication of the involvement of professional criminals is the use of specialised tools to break open firearms safes during the theft. The research team detected several cases where thieves managed to access firearms and ammunition stored in certified safes. This suggests that these burglars are equipped with the right tools and the right knowledge of how to break into such well protected vaults. For example:

Three men in Karsava were arrested for breaking into a house and stealing the safe-deposit box along with its contents, including a firearm and ammunition.¹⁴⁷ (Latvia, 2016)

Opportunism can play a role in cases where firearms are stolen during transportation. For example, the gun used in the murder of Jo Cox, a British Labour Party Member of Parliament, in 2016, was a German-made 0.22 calibre bolt-action rifle that had been stolen from a car in Keighley. After this theft, the length of the weapon had been reduced to 12 inches so that it could be used more easily with one hand.¹⁴⁸ Thieves may seize the opportunity when firearms are less secure than when they are usually stored at home and take the guns. Often, non-targeted thefts can occur during transportation from home to the place of use (shooting club or hunting place). Sometimes negligence plays a role: for example, when firearms are left in cars either unattended or unlocked. For example, in Germany in 2019, a shotgun of high value was stolen from the locked car of a hunter, who had left the car unattended for a few minutes on private property.¹⁴⁹

3.3.2 Targeted thefts

Thieves who specifically target certain stockpiles are aware that firearms or ammunition are stored at a specific place. Stockpiles where large numbers of firearms or amounts of ammunition are stored, or where Category A weapons are stored, are particularly attractive to thieves. As a result, **burglaries from the stockpiles of commercial actors involved in the legal firearms markets or government actors are generally deliberate, more organised and specifically targeted.**¹⁵⁰ The problem for thieves is that such stockpiles are generally well secured. Therefore, **it often requires insider knowledge to facilitate the theft. In other cases, (un-)intentional negligence by employees of the storing facility may facilitate the theft.** Furthermore, certain circumstances are more prone to theft, such as the transportation of firearms or their use in an exercise.

Commercial actors such as shooting ranges, firearm stores and manufacturing sites can be attractive targets because they generally store large numbers of firearms or amounts of ammunition. Yet, restrictive safe storage rules for these facilities mitigate the risk of theft. According to the Bundeskriminalamt (BKA), for example, commercial armouries,

shooting ranges and manufacturers are not frequently targeted by thieves because of the good security standards upheld at these sites.¹⁵¹ Although thefts from these actors occur less frequently compared to those from private individuals because of the deterrent role of high security standards, often, larger quantities of firearms are stolen when the thieves succeed in their attempted theft. For example:

In 2018, there was break-in in the shooting range in Krelingen. Firearms, cash and ammunitions were taken. A low double-digit number of firearms were stolen according to the police. The shooting range is mostly used for shooting certifications for hunters, and the police assumes that most firearms which were stolen, were also used for this purpose.¹⁵² (Germany, 2018d)

Members of shooting clubs can also use their membership as a way to facilitate firearms theft. Sometimes this also includes the theft of types of firearm these members do not have legal access to. In Denmark, for example, a 0.22 calibre pistol that was stolen from a shooting club in 2016 was used to kill a police officer the next day. The perpetrator was a member of the club but did not have a licence to carry or operate this type of gun.¹⁵³ In the aftermath of this incident, the authorities strengthened the rules on membership of gun clubs in Denmark, which led to a decrease in the theft of firearms from shooting clubs.¹⁵⁴

Several cases of theft at gun fairs have been identified in our database. In Germany, 15 hunting rifles which were stored in a locked cabinet were stolen during a gun fair in 2009.¹⁵⁵ In another case, a CZ-92 pistol belonging to a police school was stolen from an exhibition centre in Lithuania in 2015. In contrast to the example in Germany, this case involved the theft of a firearm that had not been properly secured. It is still unclear when and how the firearm was stolen as the investigation was halted because the firearm could not be found.¹⁵⁶

Although most firearms thefts from private gun owners are believed to be non-targeted thefts, these gun owners are sometimes also the deliberate victims of targeted thefts. An example is the Colt pistol M1911, also known as Colt 45, that was stolen from a professional sports shooter's home and which was used during the series of terrorist-inspired shootings from 11 to 19 March 2012. In this attack, the perpetrator killed three French soldiers in Toulouse and Montauban and three students and a teacher in a Jewish school in Toulouse with the stolen firearm.¹⁵⁷ An in-depth analysis of the illicit gun market in France noted that the sometimes excessive (and often illegal) arsenals of firearms accumulated by so-called "compulsive collectors" can be considered valuable loot for gun thieves.¹⁵⁸

Insider knowledge is often an important element in targeted thefts from various types of firearm possessor. It may help thieves targeting larger stockpiles, but also smaller holdings. For example, thieves may be aware that their acquaintances store firearms at home and may decide to take these weapons. In a case that occurred in Cyprus in 2010, for example, a man stole his father's shotguns with the intention to harm a local resident. The father had failed to keep his shotguns safe inside the private residence;

instead, they were unsecured and easily accessible.¹⁵⁹ In this case, the weapon was stolen by a family member with the intention to commit a crime and the weapon was not traded further to illicit users.

When thieves target larger stockpiles such as government or commercial stockpiles, they often have inside knowledge of the presence of firearms and how to by-pass security measures and deactivate alarm systems, etc. Alternatively, they may resort to using an accomplice in the stockpile facility to make the theft successful.¹⁶⁰ In some instances, poor storage measures or a lack of verification and control measures may be a facilitating factor. The problem of leakages and thefts from state arsenals is sometimes linked to cases of corruption where members of the security forces would sabotage control systems or steal weapons.¹⁶¹ For example, in Greece:

In 2018, a probation officer serving at a military prison in Filakio, Kastelorizo used a hat to blind a security camera and smuggled his G3 rifle out during a short period of leave. He was caught during an investigation.¹⁶² (Greece, 2018b)

A prominent case occurred in Croatia in 2019, when three Air Force pilots introduced an outsider with criminal connections in a military base to facilitate the theft of large quantities of ammunition:

The pilots facilitated the theft of military material by introducing a fourth person who had criminal connections into the premises. They transported out the weapons in plane. Police searches conducted in the framework of this investigation found large amounts of ammunition of military origin: 6,593 pieces of 5.56 x 45 mm ammunition; 31 pieces of 12.7 x 99 mm ammunition; 908 pieces of 7.62 mm ammunition; 415 pieces of 7.9 mm ammunition. It is suspected that these ammunition stem from the Homeland War stockpiles and (given the quantities) that they were intended for the black market.¹⁶³ (Croatia, 2019)

In Germany, a police officer from the Special Commando of the police (SEK) was found guilty of having diverted large amounts of ammunition, and some firearms and explosives, with the help of other police officers. He collected up to 55,000 rounds of ammunition in addition to explosives and firearms. He served as a sharp-shooter and a trainer of firearms shooting in the special commando. The accused confessed in court that the ammunition was passed on to him in his capacity as trainer for firearms over an extended period of time by colleagues after target-shooting training sessions.¹⁶⁴

A similar case occurred in another Special Commando (KSK), this time within the Armed Forces. One soldier from this commando was convicted in March 2021 for breaches to the regulation controlling weapons of war after several thousands of pieces of ammunition and two kilos of explosives from the armed forces as well as a Kalashnikov-type rifle were found in his garden. The inspectors also found several right-wing extremist newspapers and one SS songbook.¹⁶⁵

The risk that thieves target stockpiles intended for destruction – or awaiting judicial proceedings before destruction – can be particularly high when destruction centres are congested. For example, in Italy, a change in the firearms legislation in 2017 amended the requirements for owning a weapon legally. As a result, destruction centres, managed by the Ministry of Defence, experienced a certain level of “congestion”. This prolonged the waiting time for weapons to be destroyed, which made keeping firearms under safe custody sometimes critical.¹⁶⁶ This shows the risk of storing firearms which are no longer in use. For example, in Croatia, in 2015, three police officers stole firearms from the police department located in Dubrovnik–Neretva. The firearms were destined to be destroyed but were stolen before their physical destruction. An employee acting as a storekeeper facilitated the theft.¹⁶⁷ Interestingly, in Belgium firearms which should have been destroyed 15 years previously were stolen from a police station:

In 2013, a large-scale theft was discovered in the police station of Mortsel, where 67 firearms went missing, including Browning GP 35 and Smith & Wesson revolvers. Investigation started after a firearm that was registered in this police station was found in the criminal milieu of Ghent. These weapons used to belong to police officers who were discarded after a 1998 police reform. Instead of having them destroyed by the national Proof House, the police kept them in a locked room in the police office of Mortsel. In this case, inside knowledge is believed to have facilitated the theft.¹⁶⁸ (Belgium, 2013b)

A possible indicator of inside knowledge is the absence of evidence of a break-in. This suggests that either an insider left the door open intentionally or that the perpetrators secretly obtained the key to the storage place, perhaps from an insider:

In 2014, 3 Glock pistols, 2 bullet-proof vests and tear gas sprays were stolen from a police office in Brussels. The weapons were stolen from a locker room on the second floor of the police station and no evidence of break-in was found.¹⁶⁹ (Belgium, 2014a)

In some cases, the security system failed. This could be coincidental, but could also be the result of an insider intentionally deactivating the system in order to prevent the intervention of the security guards:

Between 2006 and 2007, 549 pistols were stolen from a police warehouse in Sesvete in Croatia, storing both obsolete and recent weapons. It was suspected that police officers from inside the warehouse leaked and sold the stolen firearms.¹⁷⁰ Further, in cases that occurred between 2013 and 2015, where 153 firearms went missing from a police warehouse, the thefts had not been detected and the security system failed, which suggests inside knowledge or cooperation.¹⁷¹ (Croatia, 2006–2007)

It is often difficult to determine whether the insiders intentionally facilitated a theft, whether the insiders were just neglectful, or a combination of both. In Spain, in 2011, members of an OCG retrieved information on security systems from a former military

person stationed in a military barracks. This helped them to commit a burglary in which they took 20 HK rifles and 10 pistols. The negligence of several soldiers also facilitated the theft.¹⁷²

The involvement of insiders was also identified in several cases of targeted theft from manufacturing sites. The phenomenon of the theft of firearms components from manufacturers by employees and illicit assemblage in underground workshops by handymen has been observed in several EU countries. In Bulgaria, factory employees have been involved in several cases of theft of parts and components.¹⁷³ Barrels are the most sought-after component. They can be retrieved before permanent markings are engraved on them in order to circumvent their traceability. It is likely that the theft of parts and components is under-reported by the media or official sources, since no exact count of defective and/or discarded pieces seems to be kept.¹⁷⁴

Factory workers from manufacturing companies have acted as accomplices or thieves, but also as brokers or retailers of the stolen firearms, sometimes using their criminal connections. For example:

In Belgium until the late 2000s a group of employees and security guards from the manufacture FN Herstal would reportedly steal spare parts of firearms that they later assembled, together with cartridges and magazines that they sold on the criminal market. This large-scale activity involved at least 3 P90 submachine guns, 15 Five seven pistols and 20,600 cartridges. The key figure in this gang of thieves was employed as a porter in the manufacture and was responsible for selling the arms.¹⁷⁵ (Belgium, 2007)

Often, the employees involved collect components from the production floor. To leak them out of the manufacturer's premises requires careful organisation. For example:

In a case of attempted theft that was disclosed in 2006 in Poland, five workers from the Archer – Radom Arms Factory organised the theft of 170 firearms components, hid them in the cladding of the production hall and in tool cabinets. The system was organised so that the records of the production factory showed no discrepancies, but there was no evidence that the production records were forged. The components were intended for criminal groups from central Poland. The group was active from 1998 to 2005 and managed to assemble at least 17 sub-machine guns of which 15 were sold.¹⁷⁶ (Poland, 2006)

Although most targeted firearm thefts are premeditated and organised, some cases of targeted theft occur in a more opportunistic context. Such thefts often occur when firearm owners are more vulnerable. Several cases of theft of service weapons from police officers while they were on duty, for example, have been detected across the EU. In some cases, the service weapon was not taken by the thief with aim of committing a crime with the stolen weapon, but in the heat of the moment. For instance, the theft of a police service weapon by a demonstrator during riots in Belgium in April 2020 mentioned above is a clear example of opportunistic theft (Belgium, 2020b).¹⁷⁷

In some cases spontaneous acts of targeted thefts were carried out with criminal or even terrorist motives. In another case from Belgium, a prisoner who was temporarily released from prison stole a service weapon from a police officer who was on duty in 2018. The perpetrator, who had a terrorist motive, used the stolen gun to kill two police agents. He then fled with the weapons, stealing a car, the driver of which he shot. He hid in a school nearby and when the police arrived, he emerged from the school, shooting four officers before himself being shot dead.¹⁷⁸

Opportunistic targeted thefts can be facilitated by negligence during the storage or transportation of the items. For example, in Germany, a small number of thefts have occurred because police officers failed to secure their service weapons. This concerned thefts that took place because police officers carried their service weapon in a bag instead of on their body. Other thefts occurred during the theft of police cars or when the homes of police officers are burgled.¹⁷⁹ During our in-depth studies, various cases of firearms theft through negligence were identified. For example:

In Germany in 2017, an armoured personnel carrier type “Fuchs” that was parked on the military training ground Münster Nord in Lower Saxony was broken into. Two assault rifles, type Heckler and Koch G36, the standard weapon of the Bundeswehr, and a pistol type Heckler und Koch P8 and a signal gun were stolen from the vehicle.¹⁸⁰ The security standards were not adhered to during the theft. The vehicle had been locked, but due to its load, it would have needed to be under constant surveillance, even when parked.¹⁸¹ (Germany, 2017c)

In May 2017, several dozen hunting weapons were stolen from Transmec Belgium SPRL, a Multitra Logistics sub-contractor, as a result of improper storage. The weapons in question had been left in a car park, from where they were taken. The company had its license for exporting, importing and transporting weapons and ammunitions refused by the Justice Minister in September 2017.¹⁸² (Belgium, 2017a)

In 2015, a handcuffed individual in a police car managed to seize an AKS rifle from the front passenger seat and escape from the vehicle with the weapon in Lithuania. He was found five hours later having abandoned the firearm.¹⁸³ (Lithuania, 2015a)

In January 2019, there was a break in at a Ljubljana gun shop, during which the thieves stole several weapons, most of which were handguns, as well as two grenade launchers.¹⁸⁴ Reportedly, the gun shop lacked security measures such as motion detectors making the shop vulnerable to thefts.¹⁸⁵ The thieves have not been identified. The incident led at least one newspaper to argue that regulations on weapons traders in Slovenia are insufficient.¹⁸⁶ (Slovenia, 2019)

3.4 Illicit firearms trafficking with and misuse of stolen firearms

This section examines how and to what extent stolen firearms have found their ways in criminal circles, and for which types of crimes they have been misused. Previous studies (see below) and interviews with key actors conducted as part of Project DIVERT suggest that criminals generally favour firearms which have been acquired through different methods than theft. Nevertheless, our database contains several cases of stolen firearms that have been retrieved in criminal circles and misused to commit violent acts in the EU.

The instrumental use of stolen firearms to commit criminal activities is not a recent phenomenon. In the past, firearms have sometimes been stolen with the specific purpose of using them to commit serious criminal activities. Between 1982 and 1985 the so called ‘Brabant Killers’, for example, carried out a series of extremely violent robberies in Belgium, which led to the death of 22 people and the injury of 28 others. This group was suspected of the theft of automatic weapons, ammunition and a car from a police office in Brussels in December 1981¹⁸⁷ and the armed robbery of a weapons dealer in Wavre in September 1982, which resulted in the theft of 15 firearms, including sub-machine guns.¹⁸⁸

Previous research demonstrated that stolen firearms have ended up on illicit gun markets across the EU.¹⁸⁹ An analysis of crime data should in theory make it possible to gain an insight into the current situation with regard to the perpetrators of thefts and the misuse of stolen firearms. Member States have several tools at their disposal for doing so. When firearms are retrieved from crime scenes or seized in unauthorised hands, the authorities often conduct searches in the national registry that may determine whether they have been recorded as “stolen”, “lost”, “confiscated”, “marked for destruction”, “deactivated”, etc. If the firearm is not matched in the national registry, the authorities may try to find a match in foreign registries. For that purpose, they may search Interpol’s iARMS database of stolen, lost and found firearms, or they may send a tracing request through bilateral contacts.¹⁹⁰ UNODC recently reported that almost 80% of the firearms seized in Europe were uniquely marked and can therefore be traced. Six EU Member States reported to UNODC that in 2017 they sent in a total 301 tracing requests, mainly to other European countries, for a total of 1,137 firearms.¹⁹¹ While it is unknown how often tracing requests were sent for firearms which had been diverted from legal possession through theft, the systematic tracing of seized firearms can be considered crucial to identifying points of diversion in general and firearms thefts in particular. Another way of identifying firearms that cannot be traced because they are not identifiable through their markings – for example, if the serial number has been erased – is through ballistic analysis.¹⁹² In practice, however, the tracing of firearms and ballistic analyses are not carried out enough in the EU to develop a better intelligence picture on the misuse of stolen firearms. One reason for that is a lack of financial resources to carry out such tracing, and that many (non-electronic) repositories do not allow for a systematic tracing of firearms.¹⁹³

Typically, **weapons which have been stolen in non-targeted thefts are sold afterwards to a middleman, who may later redistribute the weapons on the criminal market.** This modus operandi has been identified in several countries, including Belgium,¹⁹⁴ Spain¹⁹⁵ and Germany.¹⁹⁶ Yet, it is currently impossible to determine the scope of stolen firearms as a source of supply for criminals. Previous studies of this topic show mixed results. While some (older) studies from the United States¹⁹⁷ and New-Zealand¹⁹⁸ indicate that firearms stolen from private residences have a high risk of being used in crime, research on the situation in Sweden indicates that only a very limited number of stolen firearms are used to commit murder, manslaughter or robberies. One study investigating firearms thefts in the country concluded that stolen weapons are very rarely used in murder, manslaughter or robberies against banks or post offices.¹⁹⁹ Further Swedish studies also pointed out that it is highly unusual for legal or previously legal guns to be used in crimes.²⁰⁰ Instead, criminals in Sweden usually use weapons smuggled into Sweden from Eastern Europe.²⁰¹

Several elements have been advanced to explain why criminals might not use stolen firearms frequently. First, the **types of gun typically stored in residences are not the types that criminals desire.**²⁰² Previous research noted that criminal demand for acquiring firearms is of an instrumental nature: *“many criminals perceive firearms as instruments that assist – and are sometimes crucial – in the carrying out of criminal activities, both as offensive tools (the threat of violence) and as defensive ones (providing protection).”*²⁰³ In addition, the status connected to the possession of firearms – and especially top-brand or military-grade firearms – is considered important since it implies that the possessor is engaged in serious criminal activities and has extensive criminal connections.²⁰⁴ But, as mentioned above, the most stolen types of firearm in the EU are hunting rifles and shotguns (see subsection 4.2) which are considered to be much less suitable for carrying out criminal activities. Judging by our dataset, it appears that when stolen weapons were misused to commit crimes, these were often firearms which are not typically accessible to private individuals which do not seem to be weapons of choice for criminals. A second element is that **stolen firearms from legal gun owners can more easily be traced because they have generally been registered before being stolen.**²⁰⁵

Notwithstanding these observations, our database identified numerous crimes committed with stolen firearms, including terrorist attacks, murders and drug trafficking (see below). **Whereas theft might not be the main source of firearms used by criminals, firearms thefts can have significant security consequences for European societies.** The murder of a UK member of parliament in 2016, for example, was committed with a firearm stolen from a legal owner:

*Investigation on the murder of Jo Cox who was stabbed and shot to death on 16 June 2016 revealed that the gun used by the perpetrator had been stolen from a legal owner. The firearm used was a German-made 0.22 calibre bolt action rifle which had been reduced to 12 ins in length to be used with one hand. It had been stolen from a car in Keighley but it remains unclear how the perpetrator accessed the gun and whether he chopped it off himself.*²⁰⁶ (United Kingdom, 2016a)

Stolen firearms are sometimes used in the circles of specific OCGs such as outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMG). In the so-called ‘Great Nordic Biker War’ of the 1990s, for example, Scandinavian OMG attacked each other with assault rifles, grenades and anti-tank weapons stolen from army bases.²⁰⁷ Also more recently stolen firearms have been seized from OMG. In Germany in 2019, for example, firearms retrieved from various crime scenes involving outlaw motorcycle gangs were linked to firearms stolen from a factory:

An employee of a weapons factory Umarex in the German town of Arnsberg stands accused of smuggling out parts to assemble guns at home in order to sell them. The years long racket saw several weapons of the scheme end up in criminal hands. Investigators assume that firearms parts with which at least 150 pistols (among them type Walther P22) and an automatic rifle were assembled, were stolen from this company. Some firearms were arguably sold illicitly and some were used in three attempted homicides in the biker scene.²⁰⁸ (Germany, 2019a)

There is also evidence of **stolen firearms in use in the criminal drug milieu across Europe.** This is usually discovered when police conduct house searches and come across various types of illicit item, including firearms held illegally and drugs:

In 2013, the Finnish police conducted an investigation following a shooting in the neighbourhood of Hämeenkoski (South Finland). During a raid in the house of the suspects as well as in two warehouses, the police seized 47 weapons, among which 19 particularly dangerous firearms, 9,000 cartridges and large quantities of drugs. 8 of the firearms had been reported as stolen or lost.²⁰⁹ (Finland, 2013b)

In January 2009, members of an organized crime group stole 62 firearms from a military stockpile. These weapons were then distributed among the members of the group in support of their illicit drug trafficking operations. Eventually, one of the suspects was caught trying to sell 27 of these firearms (pistols and automatic rifles) to a police informant. During subsequent investigations 35 firearms were found in December 2009 and another 15 in January 2011.²¹⁰ (Romania, 2009)

The results of previous studies suggest that in several Member States criminals resort to theft to a larger extent than in other Member States. In Italy, for example, thefts from firearms shops or from private homes is a strategy commonly used by organised criminal groups because it is convenient to secure weapons which are not linked to other crimes.²¹¹ In Denmark, the main sources of illicit firearms are domestic – including theft and robbery – the illegal sales of guns to enthusiasts, and also conversion and importation. Stolen weapons are often leaked to the Danish illicit markets run by criminals.²¹²

Stolen firearms can also end up in the hands of terrorists. In Ireland, for example, it is suspected that members of various paramilitary organisations dedicated to irredentism through Irish Republicanism, have armed themselves through thefts, for example:

In 2012, criminals with ties to the IRA were accused to have broken into the premises of a gun dealer and stolen 30 rifles with telescopic sights, some of which were smuggled into the United Kingdom.²¹³ (Ireland, 2012)

The acquisition of stolen firearms by terrorists can be the result of the direct transfer of the weapons or indirectly through criminal gun markets. Multiple recent jihadi terrorist attacks, for example, have been perpetrated with stolen firearms that were available in local criminal markets. In France, the terrorist attacks in Toulouse and Montauban in March 2012, which resulted in the death of three French soldiers, three students and a teacher, were conducted with a Colt 45 that was stolen in 2011 from a professional sports shooter. Prior to the attack, the perpetrator was part of an OCG smuggling cocaine between Spain and France. It is believed he acquired the stolen pistol from his criminal connections in the drug-trafficking underworld, especially since some of the other firearms stolen at the same time were later seized from Toulouse-based drug-traffickers.²¹⁴

The terrorist attack on the Krudttønden Cultural Centre and a synagogue in Copenhagen February 2015 was also carried out using a stolen firearm. The perpetrator used a 0.56 mm GV M/95 rifle that had previously been stolen from a member of the Danish Home Guard, a volunteer military organisation that supports the military and police. The three perpetrators of the theft were members of a street gang. They entered the house of the member of the Home Guard and threatened him with a knife so they could open the firearm vault and get away with the weapon. They were sentenced for the theft, but the firearm was not recovered until the perpetrator, who also used to be a member of Copenhagen street gang, threw it away after his attack.²¹⁵

It is believed that stolen firearms from targeted thefts have also been transferred to right-wing extremists. A member of the German Special Commando Forces (SEK) has been convicted for the targeted theft of firearms, ammunition and explosives, for example. The man had boundaries with a right-wing group from the so-called 'prepper scene'¹ called Nordkreuz who were suspected of preparing a serious state-endangering act of violence. Since 2016, this group has allegedly been actively preparing for serious crises in the state by setting up weapons depots. Some of the ammunition had been stolen from the State Office in Criminal Investigation (LKA) to which the SEK unit belongs. Other military-grade ammunition was traced back to the Bundeswehr. In total, eight members of the SEK unit had connections to the prepper scene.²¹⁶

¹ The 'prepper scene' refers to a loose network of people collecting firearms and ammunition in preparation for a collapse of the state in Germany.

4

Policies to combat the theft of firearms and ammunition in the EU

The theft of firearms and ammunition can fuel illicit markets and facilitate criminal activities across Europe. An important step in responding to the problem of firearms and ammunition theft is to increase our understanding of the key aspects of this phenomenon. Our research findings in the previous sections have provided more insight into the scope and characteristics of firearms theft and the illicit trafficking in stolen firearms. In recent years, as part of the international combat against illicit firearm trafficking, the EU has taken important steps to secure the stockpiles of private firearm owners by harmonizing safe storage requirements in 2017. In parallel, at a national level, Member States have also responded to the threat that firearm theft poses to national public security, not only by improving safe storage rules but also by implementing alternative safeguard and investigation mechanisms. In the following paragraphs we will provide an overview of the various measures adopted to prevent firearms theft in the EU.

4.1 Safe storage and safe transportation rules in the European Union

A general assumption is that strong safe storage rules for firearms and ammunition possessed by private citizens and the effective and secure management of state stockpiles of firearms and ammunition hinders unauthorised access to firearms and ammunition and therefore reduces the risks of theft of these weapons. As a result, several policy instruments that have been developed at international and EU levels to combat illicit trafficking in or the diversion of firearms and ammunition contain important safeguard mechanisms against thefts, both targeting government and civilian stockpiles. The safe storage of firearms, ammunition and essential components is considered an important safeguard mechanism to prevent thefts. The UN Firearms Protocol, for example, stipulates that in an effort to detect, prevent and eliminate the theft, loss or diversion of firearms, their parts and components and ammunition, each State Party needs to take (unspecified) “appropriate measures” to require the security of these products at the time of manufacture, import, export and transit through its

territory; and to increase the effectiveness of import, export and transit controls.²¹⁷ The UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons (hereafter ‘UN PoA’) is more detailed and encourages states “*to promote safe, effective stockpile management and security, in particular physical security measures, for small arms and light weapons, and to implement, where appropriate, regional and subregional mechanisms in this regard*”.²¹⁸ States also commit themselves to establishing adequate and detailed standards and procedures for managing and securing their stockpiles of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW). These include, among other things, physical security measures, control of access to stocks, inventory management and accounting control, and procedures and sanctions in the event of thefts or loss.²¹⁹ Both the UN PoA and the Arms Trade Treaty (hereafter ‘ATT’)¹ note that in implementing these frameworks, states may seek international assistance to improve their stockpile management.²²⁰

The 2018 EU Strategy against Illicit Firearms, Small Arms & Light Weapons & their Ammunition (hereafter ‘EU SALW Strategy’) highlights the need for Member States to prevent the diversion of firearms to “*terrorists, criminals and other unauthorised users in violation of arms embargoes and end-user agreements*”.²²¹ To fight such diversion risks, the Strategy pursues several objectives, including improving physical security and stockpile management for firearms and ammunition, including government stockpiles and civilian-owned firearms.²²²

Not surprisingly, the EU Firearms Directive also sets out the ground rules for national measures to secure firearms and ammunition during their storage, use and transportation, although this only applies to civilian owners. This chapter provides an overview of different approaches to secure firearms stockpiles, including safe storage rules for civilian owners (subsection 4.1.) as laid out in the EU Firearms Directive (subsection 4.1.1.) and its national implementation (subsection 4.1.2.). In subsection 4.2. we examine national policy responses to cases of thefts or deadly shootings that resulted in stricter storage requirements (subsection 4.2.1.) and other policy responses (subsection 4.2.2.). The first section reviews Member States’ compliance with EU requirements on safe storage. It shows that Member States do not always comply fully with these requirements, which is problematic since this means that certain national rules on safe storage are rather poor. The second section shows how some Member States have gone beyond the EU rules on safe storage. These measures are strongly embedded in their specific national contexts and include the modernisation and centralisation of state stockpiles, increased security standards, periodic controls and awareness raising on the risks of unsafe storage. Finally, the last section provides an overview of measures other than safe storage, such as controlling the profiles of firearm owners, sanctioning negligent victims of thefts, reducing the overall

¹ The ATT contains several measures against diversion. The third paragraph of the ATT preamble describes an obligation to prevent the diversion of firearms to the illicit market or unauthorised end-users, and the unauthorised end-use of firearms, including in the context of terrorist acts. Article 11 contains the main provisions of the ATT against diversion. They include several types of obligations: an obligation to prevent the diversion of transfers, an obligation to examine the risks and to mitigate and prevent these risks, an obligation to detect and investigate cases of diversion and enforce measures, and an obligation to share information and cooperate on diversion issues. Importantly, this article applies only to firearms covered under article 2(1) of the Treaty and not to ammunition or parts and components. See “The Arms Trade Treaty”, *United Nations*, <https://thearmstradetreaty.org/hyper-images/file/ATT_English/ATT_English.pdf?templateId=137253>.

availability of decommissioned firearms by encouraging destruction, improving the traceability of firearms and monitoring the chain of manufacture of firearms.

4.1.1 The EU Firearms Directive

Safe storage rules are an important element of EU Firearms Directive. The safe storage of each firearm is a pre-condition to possess firearms in the EU. Article 5 of the EU Firearms Directive states that firearms owners are responsible for the proper storage of the weapon and that their authorisation to possess firearms will be withdrawn if this condition is not met (see Box 4). This requirement applies to all types of civilian firearm owner.²²³

Box 4: Article 5 of the EU Firearms Directive

1. Without prejudice to Article 3, Member States shall permit the acquisition and possession of firearms only by persons who have good cause and who:

(a) are at least 18 years of age, except in relation to the acquisition, other than through purchase, and possession of firearms for hunting and target shooting, provided that in that case persons of less than 18 years of age have parental permission, or are under parental guidance or the guidance of an adult with a valid firearms or hunting licence, or are within a licensed or otherwise approved training centre, and the parent, or an adult with a valid firearms or hunting licence, **assumes responsibility for proper storage** pursuant to Article 5a; and

(b) are not likely to be a danger to themselves or others, to public order or to public safety; the fact of having been convicted of a violent intentional crime shall be considered as indicative of such danger.

2. Member States shall have in place a monitoring system, which they may operate on a continuous or non-continuous basis, to ensure that the conditions of authorisation set by national law are met throughout the duration of the authorisation and, inter alia, relevant medical and psychological information is assessed. The specific arrangements shall be determined in accordance with national law.

Where any of the conditions of authorisation is no longer met, Member States shall withdraw the respective authorisation.

In the wake of the 2015 terrorist attacks in Europe, the European Commission adopted actions and proposed initiatives to combat illicit firearm trafficking, including amendments to the Firearms Directive 91/477/EC. The revision of the Firearms Directive in 2017 included more detailed and precise rules for storing firearms and ammunition safely.²²⁴ The introduction of a new article 5a to the EU Firearms Directive specified the conditions for safe storage that Member States need to adopt. To minimise

the risk of access to firearms and ammunition by unauthorised persons, article 5a of the Firearms Directive stipulates that EU Member States need to establish rules on the proper supervision of firearms and ammunition; it also stipulates rules on their proper storage in a secure manner. First of all, firearms and their ammunition cannot be readily accessible together.

Second, article 5a further notes that the level of scrutiny of safe storage measures should reflect the number and category of the firearms and ammunition concerned. The importance of safe storage measures, and the need for more restrictive measures for firearms considered the most dangerous, is also highlighted in the conditions for “collectors” to acquire and possess Category A weapons. Since 2017, the EU Firearms Directive has explicitly noted that Member States may choose to grant to collectors, in individual special and exceptional cases, authorisations to acquire and possess these weapons, which are otherwise prohibited. Member States may do so only if they have a proof that these firearms or ammunition are stored with a level of security proportionate to the risks associated to any unauthorised access to such items. The Directive does not specify the conditions of safe storage for category A firearms held by collectors. Member States must keep accurate registers on firearm collectors in a way that allows the authorities to identify each firearm collector. Collectors must also maintain a register of all firearms of category A which are in their possession.²²⁵

The amendment to the EU Firearms Directive in 2017 also introduced a new language on safe transportation. Project DIVERT identified various cases of firearms and ammunition that were stolen while they were being transported by their users or by transporting companies. In some cases, thieves have also stolen firearms while they were being used, for example, while they were being used by police officers on duty (see subsection 3.3.2.). These documented cases of theft during transportation and use underline the importance of adequate safety rules that safeguard firearms and/or ammunition during their transportation.

To minimise the risk of access to firearms and ammunition by unauthorised persons during transportation, article 5a of the Firearms Directive (see Box 5) stipulates that EU Member States must establish rules on the proper supervision of firearms and ammunition and rules on their transportation in a secure manner. This requirement to transport firearms safely applies to all types of civilian firearm owners. It is, however, not completely clear whether the requirement to keep firearms separate from ammunition applies only to storage or also to transportation. The observation that the sentence stating that the level of scrutiny of safe transportation measures should reflect the number and category of the firearms and ammunition concerned comes at the very end of the paragraph, suggests that this requirement also concerns the transportation of firearms and ammunition.²²⁶

Box 5: Article 5a of the EU Firearms Directive

In order to minimise the risk of firearms and ammunition being accessed by unauthorised persons, Member States shall establish rules on the proper supervision of firearms and ammunition and rules on their proper storage in a secure manner.

Firearms and their ammunition shall not be readily accessible together. Proper supervision shall mean that the person lawfully possessing the firearm or the ammunition concerned has **control over it during its transportation and use.** The level of scrutiny of such proper storage arrangements shall **reflect the number and category of the firearms and ammunition concerned.**

4.1.2 National implementation of EU legislation

As mentioned above, the revised EU Directive, adopted in May 2017, tightened controls on the legal acquisition and possession of firearms. Member States were obliged to inform the Commission of the transposition measures for the majority of the Directive's provisions by 14 September 2018. Nevertheless, several years after the adoption of the 2017 amendments, the EU Firearms Directive is still not fully transposed in all Member States.^I On 25 July 2019, the EU Commission urged 20 Member States to transpose the new EU rules on firearms (the Firearms Directive, Directive (EU) 2017/853) into national legislation. The Commission sent eight Member States^{II} a reasoned opinion requesting that the Member States comply fully with the Directive. In addition, the European Commission addressed further reasoned opinions to 12 Member States^{III} for not communicating about the national implementation of the Directive. The Member States concerned had a deadline of two months (after notification) to notify the Commission of the measures taken, after which the Commission may decide to refer them to the Court of Justice of the EU.²²⁷ At the time of publishing this report (June 2021), almost all Member States had communicated their progress of transposition, excluding Luxemburg and Slovenia.²²⁸

In the following paragraphs we will examine the transposition of safe storage measures from the Firearms Directive (see Box 6 for the research design). Given the fact that the Directive does not cover firearms held by the government, the analysis is limited to firearms held by civilian actors (private citizens, firearms dealers, firearms producers, shooting facilities, museums).^{IV} Our analysis indicates that new rules on safe storage

^I Transposition refers to the process by which EU Member States incorporate EU directives into their national law. Member States are bound by the terms of the directives, the result to be achieved and the transposition deadline. Implementation on the other hand refers to the procedure by which an EU directive is applied at national or regional level.

^{II} Belgium, Czechia, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Sweden and the United Kingdom

^{III} Cyprus, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain

^{IV} Even though certain international policy instruments mention the importance of safe storage to prevent illicit firearms trafficking, there are no binding rules at international level. Even though, as mentioned above, the UN PoA and the UN Firearms Protocol foresee that each state must take appropriate measure to prevent the theft of government stockpiles, none of these texts specify these measures. National measures are often laid out internally and not accessible publicly.

and transportation have been transposed at the national level by EU Member States at varying degrees of compliance. Therefore, the national rules on safe storage are not always harmonised between Member States. This is particularly important because more relaxed storage rules may be less effective in preventing unauthorised access to firearms and/or ammunition. An overview of the degree of compliance of the EU Member States with the various elements of the safe storage rules and safe transportation rules of the Firearms Directive can be found in Annex 1 and Annex 2 of this report.

Box 6: Research design

All legislation, regulations, guidelines or advice in force as at August 2020 were examined by the research team.¹ Research was conducted in 28 countries, including the United Kingdom, since the withdrawal agreement of the United Kingdom from the EU entered into force in February 2020, after the start of Project DIVERT. Yet, not all countries were included in our analysis:

- Safe storage regulations could not be found in Greece and Italy. Therefore, they were excluded from the analysis.
- Two Member States (Luxembourg and the United Kingdom) have included the safe storage measures based on non-binding *guidelines* or *advice*. Because these rules are not legally binding, they were not considered in the analysis. However, there is a proposal on the weapons and ammunition Bill²²⁹ pending in Luxembourg which does include safe storage measures. A recent amendment of the UK Firearms Act 1968²³⁰ states that the Secretary of State must impose requirements as to the storage of firearms, but this is not yet in force. In addition, there is a proposal for an amendment of the Weapons Act currently in process in Slovenia²³¹. All three Bills and amendments were pending at the time of writing; therefore, they were not included in the analysis.

Specific attention was given to the requirement to store firearms and ammunition according to their *number* and *categories*. The research team also examined whether these requirements were *general* obligations or if they were further *specified*. In addition, the research team examined whether firearms and ammunition must be stored *separately*. Certain Member States mentioned that firearms must be stored *unloaded*. We consider that unloading firearms does not mean that firearms are stored separately from ammunition. In the first case, firearms could be stored in the same safe as ammunition but unloaded. In the second case, firearms and ammunition are not readily accessible together, as in our interpretation of the Directive. Therefore, the research team did not consider unloading firearms as a criterion for compliance.

¹ Given the linguistic diversity of the legal texts examined, the research team resorted to an automatic translation tool for all the texts which were not in French, Dutch or English. This may have resulted in inaccuracies.

Rules for storing firearms and ammunition depending on their numbers or categories

Our analysis suggests that, in August 2020, **11 Member States¹ complied fully with the rule laid out in the EU Firearms Directive to store firearms depending on their categories and on the number of firearms and the amount of ammunition.** These Member States require all private firearm owners to store all types of firearm according to their categories and the number of firearms involved.

In Austria the legislation states that firearms and ammunition must be stored depending on the number and danger of the items, but does not further specify the rules for this:

“Protection against unauthorized access by means of violence against property, in particular according to the number and danger of weapons and ammunition” (Art §3 2 Waffengesetz-Durchführungsverordnung²³²).

In the other 10 Member States who fully comply with the requirement to store firearms depending on their categories and the number of firearms involved, more specific regulations are in place, but in various forms. We will illustrate these differences with examples from France, Czechia, Denmark and Germany.

In France the law does not specify different rules for specific quantities of firearm and/or amounts of ammunition, but there are specific rules depending on the categories of firearm. Indeed, rules are stricter for category A and B firearms than for Category C:

“Category A and B must be stored either in a safe or strong cabinet, or in a safe room. Firearms of category C must be stored either in a safe or strong cabinet adapted to the number and type of the items; or by removing one essential component which must be stored separately; or by any other means preventing the removal of the firearms” (Art R314-3 and art R314-4 Internal Security Code²³³).

In Czechia, specific rules apply depending on the category of firearms and also on the number of firearms and/or the amount of ammunition stored:

- “Up to 2 category B or C weapons, or up to 500 pieces of ammunition must be secured against theft or loss
- Up to 10 pieces of category A, B or C weapons, or up to 10,000 rounds of ammunition may be stored in a lockable steel box or a specialized locked device
- More than 10 weapons of category A, B or C, or more than 10,000 rounds of ammunition must be stored either a) in a lockable safe, or b) in a locked rooms or separate buildings, if they meet the technical requirements laid down in the implemented legislation.

¹ These 11 Member States were: Austria, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, Portugal and Slovakia. Greece and Italy are excluded from the analysis because the research team could not find any legislation regulating the safe storage of firearms and ammunition.

- More than 20 weapons of category A, B or C or more than 20,000 pieces of ammunition must be stored in a locked room, separate building or a safe, provided they are protected by an electronic security device” (Section 58 Weapons Act²³⁴).

In Denmark, the law does differentiate between specific numbers of firearms, but not ammunition. Further, it mentions “particularly dangerous firearms”, but it is unclear to which categories these firearms belong (category A, B or C):

- “Up to 25 firearms, of which no more than 10 particularly dangerous firearms must be stored in a security cabinet. If the cabinet weighs below 1,000 kg, it must be bolted to the floor, wall or alike
- More than 25 firearms or more than 10 particularly dangerous firearms must be stored in a molded box room with a higher security grade, and if below 1,000 kg, the box must be bolted to the floor, wall or alike. In addition, a burglar alarm system must be installed and approved by the National Police” (Section 24 Executive order on weapons and munitions, etc. BEK nr 1444 of 01/12/2016²³⁵).

In Germany, the law differentiates between the number of firearms and the types of firearm (long arms, handguns, subject to authorisation, etc):

- “Maximum five long arms and certain prohibited weapons and handguns requiring a permit in a safe that complies with a certain security level with a weight of less than 200 kg
- An unlimited number of certain other prohibited weapons and their ammunition must be stored in a similar safe
- Up to 10 firearms must be stored in a safe with a weight of at least 200 kg
- An unlimited number of long and short firearms subject to authorization must be stored in a safe with a higher resistance level
- When firearms are stored in a building which is not permanently inhabited, the maximum amount of long firearms subject to authorisation that may be stored is three. They must be stored in a safe with a higher resistance level” (section 13 General Ordinance²³⁶).

While 11 analysed Member States complied fully with the requirement of the EU Firearms Directive to store firearms depending on the number of items and the categories of firearm, **nine other analysed Member States¹ complied only partially with this requirement, either because these rules only applied to specific types of private gun owners or because firearms and ammunition must be stored differently only depending on their categories or on their numbers.**

¹ These nine Member States were: Belgium, Estonia, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden. As mentioned above, an amendment to the weapons law was pending in Slovenia at the time of publication of this report (April 2021). Greece and Italy are excluded from the analysis.

In some cases, the measures apply to a specific target group (ie hunters, sports shooters, arms dealers, shooting ranges, etc) and not to all private owners; but they do not necessarily differentiate between the categories of firearm. For example, in Malta, different rules apply to target shooters, arms dealers and gunsmiths, but the rules do not seem to apply to other types of user (e.g. hunters):

- “Target shooters with a certain type of licence may store maximum 20 firearms, and 7,000 rounds of ammunition at the same time
- Arms dealers are allowed to store maximum 250,000 rounds of ammunition and 750,000 rounds of brass ammunition in their premises
- Gunsmiths may store maximum 1,500 rounds of ammunition for testing purposes only and not for resale” (section 20, 34, 47 Regulation Arms licensing (subsidiary legislation 480.02).²³⁷

Another example of partial implementation of these rules stems from Belgium, where the Weapons Act specifies rules for the number of firearms but not for different categories of firearm:

- “A maximum of five weapons subject to a license in a locked safe, remove one essential component and store it separately, or attach the weapon with a chain to a fixed point.
- Between six and ten weapons subject to authorisation in a lock-resistant and strong material safe which does not bear a sign that it contains a weapon or ammunition.
- Between eleven and thirty weapons subject to authorization in a safe locked with an electronic, magnetic or mechanical key, an alphabetical or numerical combination or a biometric recognition. All entrances and windows of the room storing the weapons must be closed, the keys must be kept in a safe place and out of reach of unauthorised persons” (Art. 11 Royal Decree 24 April 1997²³⁸).

The six remaining analysed Member States¹ do not comply with provision of the Firearms Directive that private gun owners need to store firearms according to their categories and the number of firearms.

Rules for storing firearms and ammunition separately

An important element to prevent the misuse of stolen firearms is to avoid firearms being accessible simultaneously with ammunition. This may reduce the risk that stolen firearms will be used immediately for a crime since thieves do not need to acquire the appropriate ammunition to be able to use the stolen firearms.

¹ These six Member States were: Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Latvia, Luxembourg and the United Kingdom. An amendment to the weapons law was pending at the time of publication of this report (April 2021) in Luxembourg and the United Kingdom. Greece and Italy are excluded from the analysis.

Our analysis indicates that **only six Member States^I required that all types of firearm and ammunition are stored separately in all circumstances.** In Estonia, for example, all ammunition, gunpowder and fuses must be stored in a lockable compartment separately from weapons (Section 46 Weapons Act),²³⁹ whereas in Hungary ammunition must be stored in a strong, locked cabinet separately from the corresponding firearms (Art 42 Government Decree No 253/2004).²⁴⁰

Ten Member States^{II} allow firearms and ammunition to be stored together under certain circumstances. In Finland, for example, the law specifies that when firearms and particularly dangerous cartridges or pieces of ammunition are not stored in a security cabinet, they must be stored separately (Section 106b Firearms Act (1/1998)).²⁴¹ This implies that when they are stored in a security cabinet, they may be stored together. In Latvia, certain natural persons owning firearms, given that they have the appropriate permission of the State Police, may store firearms and ammunition in the same safe. This concerns only long-barrelled firearms used for hunting or sports shooting (Art section 22 and 73 Cabinet Regulation No 210 of 21 May 2019 on the movement of weapons and ammunition).²⁴²

Ten other analysed Member States^{III} do not fully or even partially comply with the European rule to store firearms and ammunition separately.

Rules for transporting firearms and ammunition

Chapter 3 of this report demonstrated that gun owners are vulnerable targets for firearm thieves when transporting or carrying their firearms. Not only private citizens such as sports shooters and hunters can be targeted, but also commercial actors such as transporting companies. Our analysis indicates that safe transportation rules for firearms are not harmonised in the EU. Alike the rules on safe storage, the rules of safe transportation laid out in article 5a of the EU Directive have been transposed to various degrees of compliance at a national level. Remarkably, in five analysed EU Member States^{IV} the national regulation does not even include safe transportation rules or guidelines.

Most EU Member States do not have different safe transportation measures depending on the number of firearms transported. In only a few EU Member States is such a distinction included^V. In Estonia, for example, up to 20 firearms or up to 10,000 cartridges may be carried concealed in a passenger car. The carriage must be

^I These seven Member States were: Estonia, Hungary, Ireland, Luxembourg, Slovakia and Slovenia. Greece and Italy are excluded from the analysis.

^{II} These ten Member States were: Belgium, Croatia, Finland, France, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Romania and Sweden. Greece and Italy are excluded from the analysis.

^{III} These ten Member States were: Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Germany, Poland, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom. Greece and Italy are excluded from the analysis.

^{IV} These Member States were: Austria, Croatia, Greece, Italy and Slovakia.

^V These Member States were: Estonia, Latvia, Malta, Portugal and Romania.

accompanied by at least one armed escort. A larger batch of firearms or cartridges may be transported by a truck with a closed cargo compartment and it must be accompanied by at least two armed escorts (section 57 Weapons Act).²⁴³ Also in Latvia, different rules apply depending on the number of firearms and the amount of ammunition being transported: more than 10 firearms or more than 100,000 cartridges must be accompanied by an armed escort, and their owner must ensure that there is armed security of firearms and ammunition during transportation (Section 38 Regulation no. 210²⁴⁴).

Interestingly, in some Member States national regulation limits the number of firearms that can be transported at the same time. Some examples:

- In Malta, licensed target shooters may transport maximum of three firearms from their residence to a licensed shooting range and back (Sections 20–21 Arms Licensing Regulation).²⁴⁵
- In Portugal, the rules for transportation are differentiated only for gunsmiths, but not for other users. Gunsmiths may transport a maximum 50 firearms or 250 essential components, regardless of their categories, in a tamper-resistant container (Art. 7 Regulation no. 933/2006).²⁴⁶
- In Romania, natural persons may transport a maximum of 10 weapons at the same time. Authorised gunsmiths are allowed to transport more firearms (art 18 Government decision no 11/2018).²⁴⁷

As mentioned above, it is not clear whether the Firearms Directive stipulates that the level of scrutiny of safe transportation measures must also reflect the category of firearms and ammunition.²⁴⁸ In only six Member States¹ is such a distinction explicitly mentioned in the national legislation: this rule applies to all kinds of firearm in Czechia²⁴⁹, while in the five other Member States the rules on safe transportation are different for certain categories of firearm. In these five Member States this provision does not cover all categories of firearm, all types of firearms possessors, or all circumstances of transportation. In Bulgaria, for example, the rules cover the transportation of firearms or ammunition only in the context of specific types of activity. Persons may transport category A, B and C firearms for sporting purposes and transport category C firearms for hunting purposes or for participation in historical events; however, the rules for transportation in other contexts (e.g. for exhibitions or commercial activities) are not included in the Weapons Act.²⁵⁰ Another example is Cyprus, where specific rules for safe transportation are mentioned only for Category D firearms: persons with a hunting licence may not transport their category D firearms outside of the hunting season, except on the day before the opening of the hunting season and if the firearm has first been dismantled (section 17, par 2 Firearms and other weapons ordinance 2009).²⁵¹

¹ These Member States were: Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czechia, France, Portugal and Slovenia.

4.2 National policy responses

Next to the implementation of the EU Firearms Directive, some EU Member States have addressed the issue of theft in their national policies. These policies have sometimes been designed in response to major issues of theft of firearms and ammunition or to violent events such as mass shootings or terrorist attacks perpetrated with stolen firearms. Hence, the development of such policies is strongly connected to the national context in which they have been framed. The first subsection focuses on safe storage policies other than the mere implementation of safe storage rules imposed by the EU Firearms Directive. The second subsection focuses on other policies that can impact the levels of firearm thefts, such as controls on firearm owners, the rationalisation of stockpiles, tracing mechanisms and sanctions.

4.2.1 Improvements to safe storage rules in response to theft issues or violent events

In several EU Member States measures have been taken to increase safe storage conditions in reaction to the issue of thefts or to violent events committed with stolen firearms. These policies have been developed along different lines. In various post-conflict settings, for example, important measures were taken to centralize and modernize storage facilities to reduce the opportunities of theft from large stockpiles of surplus and seized firearms. Stricter requirements were adopted to increase the physical security of stockpiles and to develop the practice of controlling safe storage at home have also been developed in EU Member States without a recent history of armed conflict. Although it is difficult to pinpoint the exact impact of each of these measures, it is likely that a combination of these measures has had a positive impact on the observed decrease of thefts in certain Member States (see chapter 2). In the following paragraphs we will provide an overview of various types of national policies that have been implemented across the EU.

The theft of surplus or seized firearms has been a problem especially in post-conflict countries in Europe, such as Croatia. The centralisation and modernisation of a state's facilities can be an interesting response to the problem of thefts from these stockpiles. In the aftermath of the armed conflict in the country between 1991–1995, much has also been done in Croatia to both reduce illicit stockpiles in circulation among the population and secure the government's stockpiles. In the past, government stockpiles had regularly been the target of large-scale thefts.²⁵² For example, Croatia progressively restructured and modernised the armed forces and reduced firearm holdings in the military²⁵³ with a view to joining NATO.²⁵⁴ In Croatia, to respond to the recurring problem of theft of seized firearms from police facilities, the authorities set up a central facility (MURAT) in the city of Jastrebarsko. The facility has a modern security system to control access and prevent unauthorised entries. This was undertaken with UNDP and EU funding.²⁵⁵ Theft from military stockpiles used to be a significant problem, but is now believed to take place at a much smaller scale.²⁵⁶ The Croatian Ministry of Defence recently started a project to improve security standards of its central warehouse, and plans to protect all the infrastructure in an underground concrete

shelter.²⁵⁷ Cooperation with key international partners could also offer a solution to thefts targeting police stockpiles.²⁵⁸

Also in other EU Member States state stockpiles have in the past been important targets for firearms thieves. In Bulgaria, for example, theft has been identified as a major problem in the context of the restructuring and improved security standards of its facilities in the 1990s. The problem of theft was reportedly at its height when large numbers of firearms were being moved to new military bases across the country. In 1996, the Military Police and Military Counterintelligence Security Service (MPMCS) reported 22 cases of theft, a number that progressively fell to nine in 2001 and 5 in 2002. Reports indicate that most of the stolen weapons in these cases were 9 mm Makarov pistols and 7.62 mm Kalashnikovs.²⁵⁹

The theft of weapons from military stockpiles was also a significant problem in Sweden in the 1980s and the early 1990s. In 1986 a criminal group known as “Järnaligan” stole a large number of weapons from a military depot. The group filled two cars with automatic weapons, anti-tank missiles, hand grenades and explosives. To cover their tracks, the gang blew up the facility, resulting in the largest military depot explosion that had ever happened in Sweden.²⁶⁰ Many other cases occurred in the 1980s and 1990s, sometimes involving hundreds of weapons.²⁶¹ The problem was twofold: first, there were many cases of theft, resulting in large quantities of firearms leaking into the illicit sphere; secondly, several of the stolen weapons were used to commit crimes. In response, the authorities took several measures to centralise weapon facilities and improve the rules for safe storage – operational weapons were concentrated in certain regiment areas and central storage facilities, with very limited access.²⁶² Inventory routines were set up: weapons in use in the Armed Forces have to be inspected and counted every year; those in storage are checked every five years.²⁶³ The Home Guard, a military reserve force of the Swedish Armed Forces, which is also allowed to use weapons and store them at home, was also subjected to restrictions. First, the number of Home Guards who are allowed to store firearms at home has decreased since the end of the Cold War. Secondly, the storage rules were strengthened, for example by introducing a mandatory chamber-lock system.²⁶⁴ Over time, the problem of weapons theft from military storage facilities has decreased considerably in Sweden. Yet, it remains very difficult to pinpoint the exact impact of each of these actions.

In Germany, the management standards for physical stockpile security were increased after a large-scale theft in 2014 of nearly 33,000 rounds of ammunition from a military barracks.²⁶⁵ Among other things, the new guidelines included the protection of ammunition containers with fences, technical or personal surveillance of those storage places, the use of stronger containers for storing ammunition and limiting the storage of ammunition at barracks to a maximum of a three-month advance period.²⁶⁶

As described earlier in this report, **service weapons and ammunition from law enforcement agencies have also been targeted across the EU, either in law enforcement buildings, while on active duty, during exercise, or in the homes of law enforcement officials. Confronted with significant numbers of firearms stolen this way, several EU**

Member States have introduced additional safety measures. In Belgium, for example, where many cases of thefts have targeted unsecured police stockpiles, safe storage rules were progressively improved. In 2006 the Standing Police Monitoring Committee (Committee P) highlighted various problems regarding the safe storage of firearms by the Belgian police and its members, setting red alerts and calling for reforms. Among other things, reports from Committee P indicated that many police officers would take their service weapons home without the necessary authorisation. They also mentioned a lack of the use of alarm systems. In addition, they alerted the police to the risk of ammunition surpluses (there were sufficient ammunition to cover the needs of the police for several years), some of which were stored in rooms where alarm systems (including fire alarms) had been cut after several false alerts.²⁶⁷ In 2003, they also pointed out that the effective storage conditions in the police warehouses did not match the requirements of internal police regulations on the possession of firearms. They identified the use of collective vaults instead of individual cabinets to store service weapons as a bad practice.²⁶⁸ In response to Committee P's reports, several steps were taken to improve controls, implement security measures and conduct periodic inspections.²⁶⁹ The police improved stockpile security, investing in firearms storage between 2006 and 2010.²⁷⁰ Between 2006 and 2011, 2,300 pieces of equipment to increase safe storage were ordered and installed in police offices. This measure helped to reduce the security issues caused by collective storage. In each police office, it was planned that a specific room be dedicated to storing firearms.²⁷¹ To increase security and control some police zones also invested in electronic storage boxes for firearms that also monitors lease and returns of service weapons. Some police zones have also installed a camera system to protect the police office from intrusion.²⁷²

While new rules have been developed to prevent the theft of service weapons from law enforcement agencies, these rules are not always followed. In Greece, for example, law enforcement officers are allowed to keep their firearms at home but only if they are stored in a secured safe. Yet, it has been reported many officers have not acquired the required safes due to their cost.²⁷³

Confronted with high numbers of firearms thefts, some EU Member States also adopted more restrictive safe storage measures for private gun owners. In Denmark, for example, targeted thefts of weapons from legal owners was one of the main sources of supply for the illegal gun market in the past,²⁷⁴ mainly due to these weapons being insecurely stored. Based on a calculation of the number of weapons lockers sold by the Danish suppliers to their dealers, one study from 2007 estimated that one in four weapons owners had not acquired a weapons locker for their firearms, although it had become a legal requirement.²⁷⁵ Since that period, the Danish authorities have adopted a series of measures – in 2009, 2013 and 2018 – to combat firearms diversion and illicit firearm trafficking.¹ ²⁷⁶ Figures on the thefts from authorised firearms businesses indicate a strong decline: between 2009 and 2018 the number of reported thefts from

¹ The 2009 package increased the minimum sentence for illegal firearms possession from six months to one year in prison and a 2013 package introduced new penalties for the illegal possession of firearms in a public space and the simultaneous holding of ammunition.

Danish weapons stores, factories and shops decreased from 49 to only six cases.²⁷⁷ In addition, a package of measures was adopted in 2018.²⁷⁸ These measures included stricter safe storage rules and introduced physical controls of the storage of firearms at home for hunters and sport shooters (previously, this applied only to weapons collectors).¹ While the number of firearms thefts has decreased over the years, it is still too early to measure the exact impact of the new rules.

It is clear that also **some private gun owners do not (always) comply with the safe storage rules**. In England and Wales, for example, at least one in seven premises from which firearms were stolen had been left insecure.²⁷⁹ Simply adopting safe storage rules is often not enough and it is important to implement and enforce such rules effectively. For example, Sweden has adapted the rules on the safe storage of firearms by introducing the requirement to store firearms in a certified safe. This means that safes must correspond to precise standards and must be certified by specific authorities. The obligation to store firearms in certified gun safes was introduced in 2000 and became effective in 2002. Yet, a previous study on firearms thefts in Sweden did not establish a positive impact of stricter safe storage obligations on firearms, since it observed that the number of thefts has “declined at the same rate both before and after the introduction” of these measures.²⁸⁰

EU Member States have also responded with more restrictions on the storage of firearms and ammunition following incidents of gun violence with stolen weapons. In the aftermath of a terrorist attack on the Krudttønden Cultural Centre and Synagogue in Copenhagen in February 2015, for example, Denmark strengthened the home storage rules for the Danish Home Guard, a volunteer military organisation that supports the military and the police. The GV M/95 rifle used in this attack had been stolen from the property of a member of the Danish Home Guard. In response to this attack, all weapons held by the members of the Home Guard were temporarily recalled to a central storage facility. After a while, the members of the Home Guard were again allowed to take their weapons home, but with the mandatory requirement to store them with a chamber lock. The chamber can be unlocked only with a key or a code and attempts to remove the lock without the key will render the weapon inoperable.²⁸¹

Another notorious example is the 2009 Winnenden school shooting in Germany, which led to the adoption of stricter safe storage rules for private gun owners. In the school shooting, a former student killed 15 people and injured 11 before killing himself. The perpetrator was the son of sport shooter and used one of his father’s pistols. The father of the perpetrator legally owned 15 firearms and kept most of these firearms in two locked gun cabinets, each of which was secured with a numerical code. Although the father’s storage was previously checked by the local authorities, the day of the shooting one of his pistols was not stored in one of his gun cabinets but kept it in an unlocked cabinet in the father’s bedroom. The father was later convicted of involuntary

¹ The remaining measures of the packages were: the obligation to indicate any violation of the weapons legislation that resulted in conditional or unconditional imprisonment (even minor offences) on a person’s criminal record; penalties for the possession of firearms in public places doubled from one to two years in prison and the penalty increased to up to half if a crime involves the use of a firearm in a public space.

manslaughter and “negligence causing bodily harm” and received a suspended sentence of 18 months for not having securely stored the pistol.²⁸² A new amendment introduced further measures to prevent the misuse of legally held firearms, including inspections of the homes of weapons owners.¹ Inspections may also be conducted if the authorities have no reason to doubt that firearms are stored.²⁸³ Following the same trend, the Weapons Act was amended again in 2017, with several amendments focusing on strengthening standards for storage containers or cabinets for firearms.²⁸⁴

Following several terrorist attacks that occurred in the EU in the 2010s,²⁸⁵ and to prevent terrorists from obtaining firearms from legal arms dealers, the Austrian Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution and Countering Terrorism issued warnings to all arms dealers. Those warnings issued in 2017 were about possible thefts of weapons and raids on stores by terrorists to gain access to weaponry. Such dealers have therefore been especially vigilant, a few of them having reported being observed by unknown persons.²⁸⁶

In the absence of comprehensive data on the issue in the EU, it is difficult to determine the effectiveness of additional safe storage measures and the exact impact of inappropriate storage of firearms at home on gun violence. In the United States, the results of various research projects indicated that many firearms used in non-intentional shootings came from households where firearms were accessible and loaded.²⁸⁷ This is not necessarily because the legislation is lax, or because safes are expensive and beyond the budget of certain households, but rather due to the habit of keeping weapons within reach for self-defence purposes.²⁸⁸ Yet, it is not possible to automatically transpose these results to the European context given the significant differences with regard to firearm legislation, gun possession and illicit firearms trafficking between the United States and the EU. The evaluation of safe storage rules is not a standard practice across the EU. As a result, it is currently very difficult. Although the examples above suggest a positive impact of safe storage rules and securing state stockpiles on the theft of firearms and ammunition, more research is needed in Europe to document whether and how safe storage rules effectively prevent thefts.²⁸⁹

Strict reporting requirements have been identified as a good incentive for potential targets of thefts to take steps to limit access to their firearms. In many EU Member States,^{II} the theft of firearms must be declared to the police.²⁹⁰ In a few Member States^{III}, this needs to be declared without delay.²⁹¹ In some Member States, such as Belgium, data are kept in a national database until the firearms are recovered²⁹², while in other Member States, such as Poland and Romania, there is a specific delay – for example, within 24 hours following the discovery.²⁹³ Timely reporting of theft could help the police efforts to prosecute criminals and firearm traffickers. Yet, at the same time, heavy penalties for firearm owners who have failed to secure their firearms may

^I Further measures included proof of participation in shooting competitions, the possibility of destroying seized firearms, an increased minimum age for shooting training and an amnesty programme.

^{II} These Member States were: Belgium, Croatia, Germany, Bulgaria, Italy, Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Romania and Spain.

^{III} These Member States were: Portugal, Croatia, Spain, Lithuania and Belgium.

also deter the victims of thefts from reporting them.²⁹⁴ In New Zealand, for example, the police are reluctant to penalise negligent owners because it might deter them from reporting theft. Therefore, they prefer monetary penalties over revocation as well as warnings for minor breaches of the safe storage rules, except if they are serious or repeated.²⁹⁵ More research is, however, needed to substantiate this finding for the EU.

4.2.2 Other national policy responses

Safe storage rules and physical security requirements are not the only tools that may contribute to prevent the theft of firearms. As part of Project DIVERTE various types of policies to prevent firearms theft have been observed and identified by experts as good practices.

First, **several EU Member States have adopted increased safeguard mechanisms by limiting access to firearms by unreliable persons in an attempt to prevent identified risks of theft of firearms, components and ammunition from commercial actors** such as manufacturers, firearms dealers, gunsmiths and shooting clubs and ranges. In Denmark, for example, the authorities tightened the rules of membership to shooting clubs after cases of theft from these actors. In December 2016, such a theft had far-reaching consequences: a 0.22 calibre firearm was stolen from a shooting club by one of its members who then used it to kill a police officer.²⁹⁶ Previously everybody could join any shooting club without any prior background check in Denmark. This meant that underage people, mentally ill individuals or even criminals could join shooting clubs and learn weapon-handling and shooting skills. Even though club members were not allowed to take the club's firearms home, they could gain information about the club's security arrangements such as the location of storage rooms and surveillance cameras.²⁹⁷ In response to the 2016 shooting, the rules regarding membership of gun clubs were tightened and persons who wish to become a member of a shooting club must first be approved by the police even if they do not own a firearms licence but only use shooting club weapons (ca. 50,000 in Denmark).²⁹⁸

In some gun producing countries manufacturers have also taken additional precautions themselves to secure their stockpiles. Sometimes this was a direct result of detected thefts. The internal security standards of the main Belgian firearms manufacturer, for example, have been upgraded following a series of thefts committed in the factory. The production and assemblage now take place in different places inside the factory, with increasing controls put in place as manufacture progresses. Each essential component is marked immediately after production. Employees and visitors are controlled by means of a metal detector by a private security company. Guards change shifts regularly to avoid trafficking. Employees are often checked randomly while exiting the manufacturer.²⁹⁹

The main Croatian firearms manufacturer has progressively increased its standards of conformity with domestic and EU legislation.³⁰⁰ For example, only 10 employees are authorised to have access to fully manufactured guns, mainly for testing purposes, the other employees having access only to components or machines. According to the

authorities, no cases of theft of components from the company have been detected in recent years.³⁰¹ According to the company the absence of theft due to high security standards is crucial to preserving their reputation.³⁰² In the same vein, the Croatian 2011 Action Plan for the Prevention and Suppression of Terrorism set out measures to prevent terrorists gaining access to firearms, including through thefts. Theft-prevention measures include the investigation of forced entries into firearms manufacturers and storage facilities. The recommendation also covered military stockpiles and a better control of weapons intended for destruction (which are covered below).³⁰³

Second, the national authorities have sometimes responded to cases of theft by sanctioning the commercial actors involved, especially in cases where they have been neglectful. In Belgium, for example, several dozen hunting weapons were stolen from a transporting firm as a result of improper storage. Consequently, the company had its licence for exporting, importing and transporting weapons and ammunition refused by the Ministry of Justice in the same year (2017).³⁰⁴

Third, reducing stockpiles can also prevent the theft of decommissioned firearms. Some EU Member States have responded to cases of thefts that could be attributed to a lack of oversight of seized or surplus stockpiles, or of firearms intended for destruction, by reducing surpluses and securing decommissioned stockpiles. Indeed, decommissioned stockpiles are vulnerable targets for firearm thieves. After the end of the Cold War, especially in Central and Eastern European countries, much attention has been given to reducing surplus weapons from state stockpiles in an attempt to lower the risk of theft. For example, diversion from Romanian military stockpiles was considered a concrete risk at the end of the 1980s, when the Romanian Army underwent a process of overall modernisation that led to a considerable surplus of stockpiled weapons and ammunition.^{1 305}

Also in post-conflict countries, large military surplus stockpiles are often at risk. In Croatia, for example, large amounts of surplus weapons have remained stored in government stockpiles after the armed conflict. While some of them were destroyed, sold or donated abroad, there is ample evidence that some surplus weapons in armed forces stockpiles have remained subject to leakages in the past few decades.³⁰⁶ The authorities believe that the problem is strongly diminished over time since several steps were taken to reduce the firearms surplus and to secure stockpiles.³⁰⁷ In its support for strengthening the combat against illicit firearms trafficking in Third Countries in the Western Balkans, the EU has repeatedly emphasised the importance of reducing so-called ‘surplus weapons’ and rationalising state stockpiles.³⁰⁸ As long as they are not destroyed, surplus stockpiles mean more opportunities for theft, especially if they are stockpiled without proper management. Not surprisingly, systematically

¹ However, only one major case of theft from government-owned stockpiles has been identified by the research team.

decreasing surplus and destroying seized firearms and ammunition to prevent diversion is one of the goals of the EU Western Balkans SALW Control Roadmap.^{1 309}

Similar issues with seized firearms or destruction stockpiles have also been identified in other settings than post-conflict context. In Italy, for example, leakage from destruction centres managed by the Ministry of Defence has been particularly at risk in the context of a change of legislation in 2017. The new text amended the requirements to own a weapon legally. As a result, many people no longer complied with the new requirements and decided to have their weapons destroyed. This resulted in these centres experiencing congestion, which prolonged the waiting time for weapons to be destroyed and put pressure on the centres' ability to ensure safe custody.³¹⁰

In Belgium, Standing Police Monitoring Committee stressed the problem of the theft of pieces of evidence, seized items, surplus equipment, weapons intended for destruction, etc. To deal with problems in the management of pieces of evidence and, in particular, seized firearms, Belgium is currently developing a digital database to manage items of evidence stored in court houses and in depots (including photographs).³¹¹ This aims to reduce the risks of diversion from seized stockpiles and destruction stockpiles. In addition, several protocols of understanding between the Ministries of Defence and Economy have been signed to store immediately dangerous pieces of evidence for future destruction.³¹²

¹ Further objectives of the Roadmap include: reducing the number of firearms in illicit possession, reducing illicit arms flows, reducing the supply, demand and misuse of firearms, standardising legislations across the region and harmonizing them with the EU framework, improving arms control policies, and decrease the risk of proliferation.

5

Conclusions and good practices

Preventing firearms diversion and the safeguarding of the licit market are key priorities of the EU Action Plan against firearms trafficking 2020–2025 that was adopted by the European Commission in July 2020. The Action Plan aims to improve the intelligence picture on illicit firearms, including that on stolen firearms. To that end, it calls for more cooperation and information-sharing on firearms thefts. The European Commission recommends the systematic feeding of the Schengen Information System (SIS II) to record data on theft and loss, and to consult it systematically in cases of seizure. This should help EU Member States to understand better how stolen firearms may end up in seizures. The Action Plan also foresees the support of initiatives that will make it possible to conduct simultaneous searches both in SIS II and in Interpol's database on illicit firearms (iARMS). Notwithstanding these ambitions and recommendations, the EU still lacks a comprehensive intelligence picture of ammunition and firearms thefts since theft data are collected at a national level – and sometimes a regional level – with different methods and different levels of precision. As a result, the quality of theft data recorded in many Member States is not optimal and difficult to compare. The efforts made to harmonise data collection, and to centralise national registers and digitalise them, were not always sufficient and have sometimes further complicated the registration of data. Not only does this result in a fragmented picture of firearms and ammunition thefts in the EU, but it complicates the proactive fight against theft. Therefore, the need for greater coordination and cooperation between Member States has become urgent.

Project DIVERT was developed to contribute to the intelligence picture on firearms diversion in the EU in general and on firearms theft in particular. This way we aim to support the development of effective policies to prevent such theft and strengthen the combat against the trafficking in stolen firearms in Europe. Our study identified that **private individuals, as opposed to commercial actors or state stockpiles, are most often the victim of firearms thefts**. Not surprisingly, the available quantitative data indicates that **the types of firearm stolen in EU Member States therefore generally reflect the firearms legally held by private citizens in these countries**. In several EU Member States, for example, shotguns and hunting rifles account for the most thefts. Several

elements can explain the observation that particularly private citizens are the victims of firearms theft in the EU. First, in most EU Member States, private citizens own the bulk of firearms in the country. Secondly, private individuals are easier targets of theft than the larger stockpiles of commercial actors and national authorities, which are often better protected. Even though private individuals are required by EU and national legislation to store firearms securely, individuals do not always abide by these rules. Thirdly, private individuals are generally victims of general burglaries where thieves are looking for valuable goods above all and are not necessarily targeting firearms. When burglars do come across firearms, they often take and sell them to fences, who later sell the weapons on.

Other types of actor who possess more dangerous firearms are often targeted by thieves looking for large quantities and specific types of weapon. Larger stockpiles held by commercial actors or national authorities are often more difficult to access because **their security standards are higher than those of private individuals.** Successful thefts targeting these types of actor have therefore often **required the collaboration of an accomplice** with inside knowledge on how to access the stockpiles and how to deactivate the alarms, or who secretly leave the door of a warehouse open, etc. Yet, private citizens can also be the victim of more targeted thefts, especially private citizens who own larger quantities of weapons, such as sports shooters or collectors. In some cases, these thefts from private citizens also involve military-grade firearms – for example, those from authorised firearms collectors.

In almost all EU Member States **the theft of firearms and ammunition is not considered the main source of the illicit supply for criminals** compared to other methods of supply. In fact, we have observed a **decreasing trend of such thefts** in the EU. Yet, despite the relatively low number of stolen firearms, some of these weapons have been used to commit crimes, including terrorist attacks. This indicates that these thefts can have far-reaching consequences on the security situation in the EU.

In recent years, several Member States have taken steps to reduce the theft of firearms and ammunition. This is done to comply with new EU standards, but also in response to major cases of theft (sometimes targeting government stockpiles) or to the identified use of stolen firearms to perpetrate mass shootings. Such measures have included the **disposal of surplus firearms and ammunition, setting up stronger security standards** (locks, alarm systems), **stricter record-keeping and physical verification of stockpiles,** and **stricter rules for taking service weapons home.** The introduction of anti-theft policies, or the strengthening of safe storage rules may correspond to a reduction of firearms and ammunition theft, but due to the limited number of cases and a lack of information in certain Member States, the available data is not generalisable and we cannot draw any conclusion on the effective role of safe storage rules at EU level at this stage of our research.

In the final paragraphs of this research report we will give an overview of good practices that have been developed by EU Member States to prevent the theft of firearms, ammunition and essential components.

5.1 Good practices of safe storage

This section highlights good practices to prevent and address the theft of firearms and ammunition in the EU. To start with, it is crucial to improve the implementation of the basic safe storage rules laid out in the EU Firearms Directive. It is also important to go beyond the scope of the EU Firearms Directive, for example by reducing the superfluous accumulation of firearms. In addition, improving the frequency and the quality of control mechanisms of firearm owners can have preventing effects against the unsafe storage of firearms.

Project DIVERT identified that the requirements of safe storage for civilian actors set out in the EU Firearms Directive are often only partially transposed at a national level. It is striking that transposition is especially poor regarding the requirements of safe transportation. This is particularly problematic, given that several cases of theft identified in project DIVERT occurred during the transportation of firearms and/or ammunition. As a result, there is **a need to improve the implementation of safe storage and safe transportation requirements set out in the EU Firearms Directive.**

To limit the risk of thefts from government stockpiles, a good practice observed in several EU countries is stockpile reduction to the minimum needed by reducing so-called “surplus weapons”. This approach is framed in an international effort to fight against the illicit trade in firearms that also addresses the diversion of surplus weapons. Several options exist for dealing with surplus weapons: they can be donated or transferred to other states, sold to legal or natural persons (in their original state or as deactivated firearms) or they can be destroyed. To avoid the misappropriation of surplus stockpiles, most of Member States generally destroy them together with seized weapons rather than passing them on to further users (e.g. Sweden, Slovenia). When weapons are destroyed, it is of utmost importance **to keep records of destructions and to monitor the effective destruction of stockpiles.** Such close monitoring of destruction is very important to prevent misappropriation. To start with, the Wassenaar Arrangement provides best practices to prevent the diversion of surplus military firearms and ammunition, including physical security requirements against thefts.³¹³ The EU is one of the main drivers of the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (UNPoA), a politically binding instrument aiming to prevent the illicit trade in firearms. It aims to reduce the accumulation of surplus firearms which are at risk of being diverted, including surplus stockpiles, which shall be disposed, preferably through destruction.³¹⁴ The Modular Small Arms Control Implementation Compendium (MOSAIC), developed by the United Nations, translates this objective into practice, together with other agreements aiming to prevent the proliferation of firearms and ammunition. MOSAIC has pointed out the importance to destroy surplus weapons in the context of security sector reforms and weapons collection. It also highlights that public destructions may encourage people to surrender their weapons and stimulate trust in the security sector.³¹⁵ MOSAIC provides more specific guidance on the planning and safe execution of firearms destruction activities, as part of collection programmes or in the context of firearm seizures or state surpluses.³¹⁶ At the European level, in parallel, the

Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) provides technical guidelines to help states plan and execute destruction activities. For example, the OSCE developed recommendations for the safe destruction of firearms, for example on how to keep destruction records, how to conduct safety checks at each step of the destruction process.³¹⁷ Good practices identified in Project DIVERT include having a government authority monitor the destruction, even in cases where the weapons are civilian (e.g. France³¹⁸), to keep these stockpiles under constant guard (e.g. Austria³¹⁹); another is to have firearms destruction monitored by several witnesses (e.g. Luxembourg³²⁰).

During Project DIVERT, we identified several cases of theft of firearms which were not correctly stored, sometimes as a result of negligence. **To prevent insecure storage in civilian's homes, most EU Member States require law enforcement agencies to conduct physical controls to check whether firearms, their components and ammunition are stored according to national standards.** This is sometimes mentioned during the licensing process as a formal condition of allowing civilians to store firearms at home (Germany,³²¹ Denmark,³²² Austria,³²³ Lithuania³²⁴, Estonia³²⁵, Czechia³²⁶, Netherlands³²⁷). This implies that firearms owners must communicate strict information on the location of storage of firearms and also on changes of location (Italy³²⁸). Sometimes, the authorities must announce these controls in advance to the people who will be investigated (e.g. Sweden) while other countries have set up unannounced controls. This concerns, for example, arms businesses and private security companies in Spain³²⁹, but also private citizens who possess firearms (e.g. the Netherlands,³³⁰ Germany³³¹).

Given the amount of work that the verification of each firearm owner would require of law enforcement agencies, **the physical verification of safe storage for private individuals is not systematic in some Member States.** For example, in Latvia, the police check only around 2% of the registered firearms owners.³³² This is sometimes dependent on the local budget (Sweden) or on the practice of each region (Croatia³³³, or state, in Germany³³⁴). In some Member States, physical controls by law enforcement agencies are replaced by the **obligation to present proof of purchase** of a vault corresponding to the safety standards (Spain³³⁵) or a written statement stating that the firearms will be stored according to legal standards (Croatia³³⁶).

Verification measures are sometimes limited to specific risk profiles. For example, if there is a suspicion that the owner does not comply with safe storage rules or because the owner possesses a large quantity of specific types of firearm. In Croatia,³³⁷ for example, verification measures are conducted only where the authorities have a serious doubt that the firearms are stored safely. In Spain,³³⁸ such verification requires the authorisation of a judge. Civilian owners who store larger quantities of firearms, or more dangerous firearms such as category A (Czechia³³⁹), may be visited more frequently by the police. These include shooting ranges or collectors (the United Kingdom³⁴⁰). Arms dealers or manufacturers may be more frequently subject to physical controls than private individuals (Spain,³⁴¹ Malta³⁴²), sometimes several times a year (Latvia,³⁴³ Estonia³⁴⁴). There is no common practice for state stockpiles in EU Member States. Some Member States foresee annual controls (Finland³⁴⁵, Sweden³⁴⁶), others control a number of times a year (Lithuania,³⁴⁷ Latvia³⁴⁸) or even weekly (Ireland³⁴⁹). A

good practice identified in the Netherlands is that **controls are more frequent for users who previously breached safe storage rules**.³⁵⁰ In some Member States, **gun owners who fail to conform to safe storage regulation may lose their licences** (Luxembourg³⁵¹, Sweden³⁵², Ireland³⁵³). This can have a deterrent impact on negligent firearms owners, but only if combined with regular physical controls by the competent authorities.

5.2 Good practices of data collection

Next to safe storage measures, it is important to understand the phenomenon of firearms and ammunition theft in the EU fully to increase the prevention of the phenomenon. One problem identified in this report is that in many EU Member States insufficient knowledge is available on various aspects related to such thefts – for example, on enabling factors, the perpetrators, the whereabouts of stolen firearms and ammunition on the illicit market and their misuse. Data collection and record-keeping lack common guidelines at the EU level, resulting in a fragmented picture of firearms thefts. Further, it proposes avenues for harmonising data at the EU level. Finally, it details the advantages of digitalising data on thefts.

5.2.1 Improving the quality of theft data

There is a need for more recent and comprehensive data on thefts at an EU level. To mitigate this issue, certain Member States have developed particularly comprehensive and accurate systems of record-keeping. These include centralizing data collection and organising training and awareness-raising activities on the issue of record-keeping. Finally, we provide advice to improve the intelligence of certain less known aspects of firearm thefts, such as the theft of seized firearms and the issue of unreported thefts.

Several Member States have acknowledged that their databases on stolen firearms are not of a sufficiently high quality. Some databases record **outdated information**, such as categories which no longer exist or firearms belonging to deceased persons. In order to respond to these problems, some Member States are working on improving their databases. In Belgium, for example, significant numbers of firearms are still registered in the central arms register under legal-possession categories which no longer exist, despite the efforts of the authorities to update their database.³⁵⁴ Another problem is that in some Member States **disaggregated data on firearms and ammunition, including on the theft of such items, is not systematically made available to the public**. It is unclear whether such disaggregated data is not collected by the authorities or whether such data is collected but not made publicly available. This suggests a lack of awareness in some Member States of the importance of recording and analysing detailed and comprehensive data on thefts. Furthermore, it is **not always possible to disaggregate between lost and stolen firearms** (e.g. Czechia³⁵⁵). Sometimes, only the number of theft declarations is available and not the number of firearms stolen (e.g. France, Sweden, Germany, Portugal, Poland, Austria, Luxembourg, see table 2). In most EU Member States **few details on the various contexts of firearms theft** are available. Often databases, for example, do not disaggregate between different types of theft (robbery, diversion, repetitive theft, etc.).

Project DIVERT identified **some databases which provide detailed information on firearms thefts**. In Germany, various variables are recorded on (attempted) thefts of firearms such as the gender of the target, aggravated thefts, the location of the theft, the time of day, etc.³⁵⁶ In the Netherlands, the database on thefts is also very detailed and is updated every week. The database is operational both for the purposes of investigation and to provide statistics.³⁵⁷ Portugal provides disaggregated data that differentiates between theft and violent theft.³⁵⁸

One problem is that in some Member States **various actors are responsible for collecting data** on the theft of firearms and ammunition. In cases where data-collection methods are not fully harmonised between each actor, there is a risk that these data are not aggregable at a national level. For example, in Germany, each region (*Land*) collects police data on thefts at the regional level, which is later aggregated at the national level. However, the transition from paper registers to digital registers led to enduring software problems that impeded the integration of regional-level data sets on the national level. This means that data stored in digital records are not complete at the federal level. Additionally, paper-based registers are no longer used, and, as a result, police data on the national level lacked accuracy at the time of writing. Authorities are currently working on fixing the problem.³⁵⁹

Better and more harmonised data is important and is also crucial to improving the intelligence picture on firearms thefts and for developing effective action to prevent such criminal acts. To improve data collection, it is important to **train staff** on how to record data and **raise awareness** among staff as to why it is important to record good data. To do this, there is a need for more guidelines on how to record data and also on the quantity and the quality of data.

There are important questions to ask in preparation of such an update of national databases. First, what is the goal of the database in its current state? What will be the goal of the new database? Are they operational or analytical? The re-organisation of the database will depend on these previously identified objectives. Another good practice is to **make databases user-friendly**. German police forces, for example, are working on simplifying their databases on seized firearms³⁶⁰ to make data entry easier.

In order to adopt a proactive approach to preventing firearms theft and illicit firearms trafficking, **reliable, comprehensive and detailed data needs to be collected on seized firearms**. This is necessary because it is a prerequisite for gaining better insight into the activities of crime groups and their misuse of stolen firearms. Better criminal data may increase the possibility of “matching” seized items with stolen items. In addition to the serial number of firearms (which is sometimes erased by criminals), other information connected to the seized firearms needs to be collected, such as forensic details, fingerprints, test-fire bullets and ballistic information. A good practice in this regard has been identified in the Western Balkans, where automated ballistic data systems have made it possible to identify certain *modi operandi* of criminals sometimes using stolen firearms. With such analyses, it is possible, for example, to link certain methods of serial number removals to certain perpetrators, which may help the

investigation.³⁶¹ Within the EU, the French database ‘Traffic’ records different kinds of seized firearm which were fraudulently manufactured, imported or commercialised. This database includes the technical characteristics of these firearms and enables cross-checking between seized, found and stolen firearms.³⁶² Given the level of the details recorded (serial number, details on the suspects, description of the weapons, and alterations), it also enables the separate parts of the same weapon to be linked if they were seized separately.

An important black hole in the intelligence picture of theft is the ‘dark number’ of thefts of firearms and ammunition. This dark number is the result of thefts which are not declared to the authorities, and this clearly reduces the chances of recovering the firearms stolen. **In most EU Member States it is mandatory to report immediately any theft or loss of firearms.** In Latvia, for example, the Ministry of Defence has a chain of command for reporting firearms theft or loss which ultimately results in the Military Intelligence Service, Security Service, Military Police and the State Police being informed.³⁶³ In some countries, the police conduct diverse types of investigation to prevent thefts or repeated thefts. Investigation by the police is systematic after cases of thefts in certain Member States (Lithuania³⁶⁴). In other countries, a physical investigation is conducted only in repetitive cases of theft or loss (Croatia³⁶⁵, Spain³⁶⁶). Our analyses further indicate that some firearm owners who are targeted by thieves do not systematically report these cases of theft, possibly because they fear retaliation in case firearms were not stored appropriately, or in cases of repetitive theft a lack of denunciation of the theft or loss has been identified in certain Member States. One question that arises is this: how do we encourage victims of thefts to declare their firearms stolen? Even when cases of theft have occurred when safe storage rules were not adhered to, it seems that penalising negligent firearms owners could have a deterrent effect on reporting thefts. Therefore, a more efficient approach would be to place monetary penalties or warnings rather than revocation for minor breaches to the safe storage rules – except if they are serious or repeated.

5.2.2 Harmonization and dissemination of data

Even when Member States collect good data at national level, this data is often not comparable at an EU level. This section shows that although international initiatives have helped analyse data on thefts, there is a need for more harmonization in the collection of data within the EU. This is not only important for analytical issues, but also for operational purposes, since better data can enhance the traceability of firearms within the EU.

The observation that national databases are not comparable hinders the development of harmonized data at an EU level, and this impedes drawing an EU-wide picture of firearms thefts and comparing the scope and characteristics of this phenomenon between EU Member States. In order to harmonise data collection, **the Global Firearms Programme of UNODC collects and analyses harmonised data at a global level in order to draw a global picture of illicit firearms trafficking that can be used for strategic and operational action.** The purpose of this initiative, funded by the European Commission,

is to support countries' efforts at improving data collection and analysis by providing technical assistance and fostering capacity-building. The programme's method is based on its "Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire", which has been sent to UN Member States. The questionnaire asked, among other things, for data on the number of seizures and firearms seized, including the specific data on seized firearms, the criminal context of seizures (illicit possession, trafficking, violence), the place of seizure, and the number of tracing requests sent and received. In total, UNODC received responses and quantitative data on seized and trafficked firearms from 81 countries for the period 2016–2017, including those from 16 EU Member States. Concerning thefts, the study found that many seized firearms are recorded as lost or stolen from their legitimate owners (private individuals, police, military or private security-company personnel). The study recommends matching legal data with criminal data in order to be able to improve the intelligence picture on who the end-users of stolen firearms are.³⁶⁷ It is important to keep in mind that the UNODC method was primarily developed for strategic-analytical purposes in a context of research, whereas data collection at a national level is generally driven by operational objectives. However, the approach of UNODC also intends to raise awareness among Member States of the importance of recording good data for both analytical and strategic purposes. It also points to the advantages of collecting harmonised data for analytical purposes and can thus be regarded as good practice.

From the observation that a good intelligence picture of firearms theft remains patchy due to the lack comprehensive and comparable data, it is recommended that additional initiatives be pursued to improve and harmonise data collection. The objective of the European Commission in its 2020–2025 Action Plan – that is, to take action to **establish a systematic and harmonised collection of data on seizures of firearms**³⁶⁸ – will benefit not only the fight against illicit firearms trafficking in general but also strengthen actions aimed at preventing and combatting firearms theft.

In this Action Plan the European Commission also reiterated its earlier recommendation to Member States to **systematically feed the SIS II with information on lost and stolen firearms and, importantly, also to consult it when they seize a firearm**.³⁶⁹ This will enhance the possibilities of tracing seized firearms to their point of diversion and identifying specific problems regarding the theft of firearms. A particular issue is the difficulty of tracing ammunition, including stolen ammunition, since there is no common standard for the marking of ammunition. Each manufacturer has its own method of marking ammunition and, as a result, markings are often incomparable with one another. To respond to this issue, UNIDIR has recently developed a handbook to help practitioners standardise data collection and the harmonization of data on ammunition. This will make it easier to trace ammunition from manufacture up to seizure and identify potential points of diversion.³⁷⁰

5.2.3 Digitalisation

Next to improving the quality of data on theft and the harmonization of data collection methods, the **digitalisation of national firearm repositories can play an important role in the prevention of illicit firearms trafficking, including of the trade in stolen firearms**. Indeed, electronic firearm registers increase the traceability of firearms. Digitalised repositories are often more accurate and offer the possibility for smoother information-sharing than paper-based registers. The 2008 amendments to the EU Firearms Directive introduced the obligation of Member States to establish digitalised arms registers. Most EU Member States have electronic record-keeping systems for firearms possession (e.g. Austria,³⁷¹ Spain,³⁷² Germany,³⁷³ Belgium³⁷⁴, Lithuania³⁷⁵) or have taken steps towards developing such systems (e.g. Slovakia³⁷⁶, Latvia^{I 377}). Electronic registers provide the advantage of speeding up access to information for law enforcement agencies that conduct investigations into firearms thefts.

One of the most developed electronic systems has been set up in Lithuania. The country has implemented an electronic register for tracing legal firearms from the point of manufacture or entry into the country until their destruction or export. All data on legal firearms is kept in one state register, which allows for stocks of firearms and ammunition to be managed safely and effectively. According to Lithuanian law, firearms dealers are obligated to provide information on all imported, purchased, collected, transferred, sold or exported firearms to police electronically through the official police website. In addition, the identity of the dealer or manufacturer involved in the transaction is provided, as each has a unique account with which to access the database. This decreases the opportunity for fraudulent documentation to be generated. Furthermore, this increases transparency on legal firearms businesses since arms dealers are obligated to manage their own stocks through the database. This also makes for greater thoroughness and accuracy during the biannual police checks of warehouses. The same database is used by both the police and dealers for providing and receiving firearms information, leading to continuous cooperation between dealers (and manufacturers) and the police.³⁷⁸ Ultimately, the system is designed to provide a systematic full cycle of life information on licit firearms in Lithuania.

5.3 Good practices of cooperation and coordination

The good practices in data collection mentioned above can contribute to improving the intelligence picture on firearms trafficking and diversion schemes; they can also contribute to enhancing opportunities for firearms tracing for strategic and operational purposes. To complement these efforts, it is crucial to connect the actors who often focus on one aspect of gun control. This is important to build a comprehensive approach to the theft of firearms in the EU. This section underlines several good practices to coordinate actors and standardize information-sharing mechanisms at national and EU level.

^I Latvia's licensing system remains paper based but is looking for funding to digitalise the process.

The lack of systematic tracing of firearms, including that of stolen firearms, has been identified as a problem in various EU Member States.³⁷⁹ Such **tracing enables a proactive approach to be pursued against firearms diversion**, including thefts, by identifying points of diversion and weaknesses in the legal control of firearms. This way, better tracing of seized firearms enhances the safeguarding of the licit market and the fight against trafficking. In order to combat firearms diversion through theft, it is important to check whether seized firearms were previously reported stolen.

Cooperation and coordination between actors involved in the legal control of firearms as well as actors involved in combatting illicit firearms trafficking is crucial to preventing firearms diversion. In all EU Member States, the work against illicit firearms trafficking is split across different units. In the context of firearms theft, this means that actors working in the legal field of firearms (ie those who manage the legal database of firearms) must often coordinate with actors working for the criminal field (ie those who conduct the investigation or deal with the seizures). In addition, in certain countries, police forces are split. For example, in Spain, between the Guardia Civil, national police forces and regional police forces. In federal states, these forces may also be spread across the different federal levels (e.g. Germany, Belgium). The implementation of **effective national firearms focal points can be considered of utmost importance** in order to improve the cooperation and coordination between these various actors in the country. Such focal points can oversee coordinating actors in the field of illicit firearms trafficking, collect information from all these actors and share information to the EU, other EU Member States and other countries.³⁸⁰ The 2020–2025 EU Action Plan against firearms trafficking therefore urges Member States and south-eastern European states to develop such national firearms focal points and recommends equipping them with the right competencies, among other things to improve data collection and to broaden access to databases and increase staffing.³⁸¹

In some Member States also **other types of mechanism** have also been set up to coordinate the variety of actors working in the field. In Spain, for example, an interagency coordination mechanism called CITCO was set up to coordinate police investigations. For instance, when an investigation is launched, the details of the investigation (the persons or the objects investigated) are entered into CITCO. In case any other agency is already working on these persons or objects, for example a firearm, the system will flag the investigation. The relevant agencies (Guardia Civil, customs, national police) can then coordinate their investigations accordingly.³⁸²

To complement the coordination mechanisms between actors, one important element is to **improve the interconnectivity of databases**. Indeed, allowing for simultaneous searches in legal and criminal databases may help actors connect cases of seizure with cases of theft. Any interconnection between legal and crime databases can be used for investigation purposes. For example, it may make it possible to link cases of firearms theft to a sudden increase in armed crimes in a region. If data are recorded in two different systems, though, the connection cannot be made. The interconnectivity of databases has been identified in the 2020–2025 EU Action Plan against illicit firearms trafficking as a means for improving the intelligence picture of illicit firearms

trafficking. Indeed, the EU Commission will support initiatives to enable simultaneous searches between the SIS II (which records data on lost and stolen firearms) and Interpol's database iARMS.³⁸³

The interconnection of databases with the EU level makes it possible to conduct searches not only within a Member State, but also in other Member States. This is especially important, given the fact that in the Schengen area the internal borders of the EU do not exist anymore. This means that not only licit, but also illicit trafficking is facilitated. Based on project DIVERT but also previous research projects,³⁸⁴ we know that illicit firearms, including stolen firearms, circulate to a great extent within the EU territory. They may be stolen in one Member State and used in crimes in another Member State. This is why it is a good practice to interconnect national databases on stolen firearms with SIS II. That way, national authorities may check whether firearms seized in their countries were declared stolen in another Member State.

A good practice of interconnected databases was identified in Lithuania, where the digital database of legal firearms also presents the advantage of being **interconnectable with the criminal firearms database**. In this context, legal firearms can be traced at any moment and illegal firearms can automatically be matched to legal firearms that may have been lost or stolen. Thefts are recorded in the register of lost, stolen and seized firearms. This database is automatically synchronised with the national register on legal firearms, which is accessible by all Lithuanian law enforcement agencies. It means that all seized firearms can be checked against the legal database to determine whether they have been stolen, and from whom. The advantage of such interconnectable and digitalised databases is that they enable access to a greater number of law enforcement agencies, which is a considerable advantage, for example, during investigations.³⁸⁵

Those databases which are not interconnected with other databases generally offer only a fragmented picture of firearms thefts. This can be a problem in Member States which have regional databases if these are not connected at a national level. Plus, it considerably slows down investigations. In that regard, again, **a national firearms focal point may play a coordinating role**. For example, in Spain, the firearms focal point is working on connecting all relevant databases, including national and foreign databases. They can also conduct tracing investigations of seized firearms, both nationally and internationally. In Spain, 800 such investigations were conducted in 2019 alone.³⁸⁶

In conclusion, this report has contributed to the objectives of the 2020–2025 EU Action Plan against firearm trafficking by improving the intelligence picture on firearms diversion and by identifying various avenues to prevent and address firearms thefts in the EU more effectively. Such avenues include measures to strengthen safe storage regulation and stockpile management, to improve recordkeeping and data analysis, to better identify possible points of diversion, and to enhance information-sharing, coordination and cooperation at national and EU level. We hope that this research can inspire all relevant actors engaged in the various domains of gun control and assist their work in preventing the diversion of firearms and ammunition and their use in acts of gun violence in the EU.

Annexes

Annex 1 Compliance of EU Member States with EU rules on safe storage of firearms and ammunition

Country	Obligation to store firearms depending on their number	Obligation to store firearms depending on their category	Obligation to store firearms and ammunition separately
Austria	O	O	
Belgium	X	X	
Bulgaria			
Croatia			
Cyprus			
Czech Republic	X	X	
Denmark	X	X	
Estonia	X	X	
Finland	X	X	
France	O	X	
Germany	X	X	
Greece			
Hungary	X	X	
Ireland	X	X	
Italy			
Latvia			
Lithuania	X	X	
Luxembourg			
<i>Luxembourg (future)</i>			
Malta	X		
Netherlands	X	X	
Poland	X		
Portugal	X	X	
Romania	X		
Slovakia	X	X	
Slovenia	X		

Spain		X	
Sweden	X	X	
UK	X	X	

YES

NO

NO DATA

PARTIAL

X = specific measure

O = general obligation

Annex 2 Compliance of EU Member States with EU rules on safe transportation of firearms and ammunition

Country	Obligation to transport firearms depending on their number	Obligation to store firearms depending on their category	Obligation to store firearms and ammunition separately
Austria			
Belgium			
Bulgaria		X	
Croatia			
Cyprus		X	
Czech Republic		X	
Denmark			
Estonia	X		
Finland			
France		X	
Germany			
Greece			
Hungary			
Ireland			
Italy			
Latvia	X		X
Lithuania			
Luxembourg			
<i>Luxembourg (future)</i>			
Malta	X		
Netherlands			
Poland			
Portugal	X		
Romania	X		
Slovakia			
Slovenia		X	
Spain			
Sweden			
UK			

YES

NO

NO DATA

PARTIAL

X = specific measure

O = general obligation

Annex 3 List of detailed cases

Austria	
2019a	In 2019, burglars broke into a safe stored in the basement of a private home where they only took the firearms stored and no other goods. The facts that the thieves were able to break-in the firearms safe and that the theft was only detected days after it took place suggests some degree of professionalism. ³⁸⁷
2019b	In March 2019, an individual attempted to steal weapons from a gun shop in Bregenz during opening hours. The individual was apprehended by police. ³⁸⁸
2017	In 2017, thieves broke into a gun shop in Innsbruck and stole 6 pistols and revolvers and close to a thousand euros in cash. Five days after, thieves broke in again, though this time leaving the firearms and only taking an additional one thousand euros in cash. It is unknown whether the two thefts were connected. ³⁸⁹ However given that the police found 5 of the handguns quickly after the theft, it seems that the main target of the thefts was the money held in the shop.
Belgium	
2020a	During a burglary into a house in Ransart (in Charleroi, Walloon region), several registered firearms were stolen during one evening in May 2020. The weapons were: one firearm described as a Kalashnikov, one riot-gun, one .375 Magnum, a 9 mm pistol, a Winchester carbine and a Smith & Wesson firearm. Cartridges were also taken as part of the loot. The burglars also took valuable goods such as a computer, a game console and other electronic devices. The investigation should establish whether the burglars were aware of the presence of guns or if the firearms theft was not specifically targeted. ³⁹⁰
2020b	During riots in the commune of Anderlecht located in the outskirts of Brussels on 11 April 2020, one of the demonstrators was able to steal the service weapon of a police officer. Sources provided contradicting information on the circumstances of the theft. Either the gun fell from the police officer's belt in the street, or it had been improperly stored in the glove box of a police car. The firearm was recovered one month later in a glass container, before the thief turned himself in to the police. ³⁹¹
2018	in 2018, a prisoner who was temporarily released from prison stole a service weapon from a police officer who was on duty. The perpetrator, who had a terrorist motive, used the stolen gun to kill two police agents. He then fled with the weapons, stealing a car, the driver of which he shot. He hid in a school nearby and when the police arrived, he emerged from the school, shooting four officers before himself being shot dead. ³⁹²
2017a	In May 2017, several dozen hunting weapons were stolen from Transmec Belgium SPRL, a Multitra Logistics sub-contractor, as a

	result of improper storage. The weapons in question had been left in a car park, from where they were taken. The company had its license for exporting, importing and transporting weapons and ammunitions refused by the Justice Minister in September 2017. ³⁹³
2017b	In 2017 a 41-year-old man from Meulenberg (Flanders) tried to steal the weapon of a policeman in service who was intervening in the framework of repeated cases of intimate partner violence. He was sentenced to a fine of 400 euros and to go to psychotherapy. ³⁹⁴
2016	In 2016, two men dressed in military clothing were arrested near a military domain and the shooting range of FN Zutendaal. In their van, the police found ammunition boxes and military clothing together with other items (wheelbarrows and bivouac hats). In the house of one of the suspects, the police found ammunition boxes, tear gas, various kinds of ammunition, the head of a shell and 15 weapons. They did not have the appropriate authorisation for all of the weapons. They were accused of stealing empty cartridges after shooting exercises in the shooting range. The police suspect that the perpetrator wanted to handmake cartridges from the spare ones he collected. ³⁹⁵
2015	In December 2015, in Overpelt (province of Limbourg), 13 firearms and 6000 cartridges were stolen at the house of the member of shooting club. The firearms were stored in a safe and the burglars took the safe. Among the 13 stolen weapons were 6 pistols and 7 rifles. ³⁹⁶
2014a	In October 2014, 3 Glock pistols, 2 bullet-proof vests and tear gas sprays were stolen from a police office in Brussels. The weapons were stolen from a locker room on the second floor of the police station and no evidence of break-in was found, which suggests either cooperation with insiders or negligence by security services. ³⁹⁷
2014b	In a case identified by Committee P in 2014, one police officer was condemned for attempting to steal another police officer's weapon. ³⁹⁸
2013a	In 2013, 47 firearms were stolen from a premise of a gun shop and shooting range in Knokke (West Flanders), some of which were later retrieved in the Dutch criminal world, including within organised motorcycle gangs. ³⁹⁹
2013b	In 2013, a large-scale theft was discovered in the police station of Mortsel, where 67 firearms went missing, including Browning GP 35 and Smith & Wesson revolvers). Investigation started after a firearm that was registered in this police station was found in the criminal milieu of Ghent. These weapons used to belong to police officers who were discarded after a 1998 police reform. Instead of having them destroyed by the national Proof House, the police kept them in a locked room in the police office of Mortsel. In this case, inside knowledge is likely to have facilitated the theft. ⁴⁰⁰
2011	An attack was committed on 13 December 2011 in the city centre of Liège with 4 hand grenades and shots in the crowd of people walking on the Christmas market. ⁴⁰¹ The perpetrator was armed with an FN FAL assault rifle – with which he shot on the crowd – and a Smith &

	<p>Wesson .41 Magnum revolver – with which he later killed himself⁴⁰². Two teenagers and a toddler died on the spot, 2 other people later died in the hospital as a result of their injuries and further people were injured, some of them severely.⁴⁰³ Earlier in the day, he had killed another woman in his shelter.⁴⁰⁴ The police later found a revolver in his house together with a riot gun and a long rifle.⁴⁰⁵ The Smith & Wesson revolver had been stolen in November 2009 together with 29 other firearms, from a legal firearms trader located in Verviers (province of Liège, close to the border with Germany). Some of these weapons were found in 2010 in the possession of an armed robber in the suburb of Liège, following an armed robbery at a car shop in Aubel, a small town close to Liège.⁴⁰⁶ The FN FAL assault rifle ended up in the hands of Amrani through a different route: it seems that the FN FAL rifle was assembled from firearms pieces, some of which had been sold to the Israeli army by FN Herstal in the second half of the 1960s.⁴⁰⁷ Amrani was involved in reactivation of deactivated weapons and converting fully automatic weapons that had been converted to semi-automatic weapons back to fully automatic weapons.⁴⁰⁸ As part of an anti-drug operation, the police found in October 2007 a dozen firearms (an AK-47 assault rifle, an MP40 sub-machine gun, an FN FAL assault rifle and a pump-action shotgun, besides handguns, silencers) and 9,500 firearm components, a rocket launcher, and hundreds of rounds of ammunition, in his shed.⁴⁰⁹ Because of this, Amrani had been prosecuted for illegal possession of weapons and was sentenced to 16 months in prison in 2008. However, the Court of appeal acquitted him of charge.⁴¹⁰ The public prosecutor clarified that he had been acquitted because a surrender programme was ongoing at that time (2006). He had also been convicted for cannabis plantation and a suspended conviction for rape dating back to 2003.⁴¹¹</p>
2010	<p>In June 2010, a set of M72-LAW antitank missiles and simulation-explosives were stolen from the Leopoldsburg military barracks. It was officially confirmed that all safety systems failed. Based on this, the Hasselt parquet suspects that the theft was committed by the local soldiers.⁴¹²</p>
2009	<p>In 2009, a police officer stole 3 service weapons while he let another person be accused of the theft. He abandoned the loaded firearms where anybody could have found them.⁴¹³</p>
2007	<p>In 2007 the Hasselt criminal court convicted eight men and one woman for their involvement in thefts and illicit trade in firearms. The perpetrators included an employee of FN Herstal, who stole rejected spare parts of firearms from the factory floor and assembled them at home into lethal purpose weapons. Two security guards at the ammunition storage depot in Zutendaal (province of Limburg) also stole cartridges and magazines. The key figure in this gang of thieves was employed as a porter and was responsible for selling the arms. The</p>

	gang stole at least three FN P90 submachine guns, 15 FN Five sevenN pistols and 20,600 cartridges. ⁴¹⁴
2002a	In 2002, 4 pieces of 9 mm Glock pistols which were loaded were stolen from the police office of Schaerbeek, a commune of Brussels. It seems that the thieves used a construction site nearby to enter the building and knew exactly where to look for the weapons once inside the police office. Guns were taken from four policemen's lockers who were not on duty at the time. ⁴¹⁵
2002b	In 2002, a military barrack in Thuin (province of Hainaut) was victim of a large-scale theft where three armed men stole 130 FNC rifles and 14 Glock pistols. Within the following week, 121 of the rifles and two of the pistols stolen were found, together with further handguns, silencers, ammunition and more than 9,000 euros in cash. Four persons were arrested. ⁴¹⁶
Bulgaria	
2018	In 2018, two persons were arrested for the unauthorized sale of 17 Kalashnikovs rifles and 15 handguns classified as silent pistols. These firearms had been stolen from the local factory in Kazanlak, a town in the centre of the country. The prosecutor noted that the suspects had worked previously in the local Arsenal-Kazanlak factory, one of the largest manufacturers in the country. ⁴¹⁷
Early 2000s	In addition to weapons theft, parts and components seem to have been illicitly retrieved with regularity from weapons manufacturers in the early 2000s. Interviews with factory employees carried out for a SEESAC 2005 report highlighted that the combination of discarded parts and components during the manufacturing process and low salaries created an opportunity and willingness for employees to smuggle such components and sell them illicitly. Aside from the discarded pieces, the pre-markings barrel was the most sought after piece to retrieve, since a industrially-manufactured barrel improves the reliability and quality of craft and/or modified weapons. The SEESAC study notes, "Kalashnikovs, usually stolen from military stockpiles or assembled from parts smuggled out of factories, sell for as much EU 350 [in the 2004 black market]." ⁴¹⁸ The possibility to assemble a rifle from smuggled components, highlights the pervasiveness of diversion of parts and components from arms manufacturers.
Late 1990s early 2000s	In 2002, the Military Police and Military Counterintelligence Security Service (MPMCS) reported five cases of weapon theft, stating that people had been arrested in four cases. Reports indicate that 9 mm Makarov pistols and 7.62 mm Kalashnikovs belonged to the weapons stolen. In one case, the security service also reported the theft of fifty pistols, seven submachine-guns and twenty-two <i>Neto</i> hand-held anti-tank rocket-propelled grenade launchers (RPGs). Ten of these RPGs had been stolen from a military unit. ⁴¹⁹

Croatia

2019	In November 2019, three Air Force pilots introduced an outsider with criminal connections in a military base to facilitate the theft of large quantities of ammunition. The pilots facilitated the theft of military material by introducing a fourth person who had criminal connections into the premises. They transported out the weapons in plane. Police searches conducted in the framework of this investigation found large amounts of ammunition of military origin: 6,593 pieces of 5.56 x 45 mm ammunition; 31 pieces of 12.7 x 99 mm ammunition; 908 pieces of 7.62 mm ammunition; 415 pieces of 7.9 mm ammunition. It is suspected that these ammunition stem from the Homeland War stockpiles and (given the quantities) that they were intended for the illicit market. ⁴²⁰
2016	In 2016, a machine gun of the Croatian-manufactured ERO was stolen from a police department located in Ogulin (Karlovac county). The firearm was an official police weapon. ⁴²¹
2015	In 2015, three police officers stole firearms from the police department located in Dubrovnik-Neretva. The firearms were destined to be destroyed but were stolen before their physical destruction. An employee acting as a storekeeper facilitated the theft. ⁴²²
2013–2015	In 2015, the Varazdin police (northern Croatia) accidentally discovered 20 pistols, 16 automatic silencer pistols, 9 automatic rifles, 30 hand grenades, 2,8 kilograms of TNT explosives and laser guns in the trunk of a car. After finding out that some of the weapons belonged to the Varazdin police station, police made an inventory at their warehouse and discovered that 153 firearms went missing between 2013 and 2015. No clarification has been provided so far. ⁴²³
2009	In January 2009, a dozen rifles were stolen from the warehouse of a Military Museum of the Croatian Military College in Črnomerec, a city district in Zagreb. Even though an internal source claimed the weapons were not live-firing, a media source argued that at least Israel-made automatic rifles were functional. The security team guarding the building was not alerted by the theft. According to the media, the weapons were stored securely which suggests that the thieves cooperated with insiders from the Military College. ⁴²⁴
2006–2007	Between 2006 and 2007, 549 pistols were stolen from a police warehouse in Sesvete (a city district of Zagreb), storing both obsolete and recent weapons. It was suspected that police officers from inside the warehouse leaked and sold the stolen firearms. The monetary value of these firearms was estimated at 30,000 Kunas (3,965 euros). ⁴²⁵
2003	In 2003, 231 HS95 pistols were stolen from the warehouses of military barracks in Dračevac near Split. The Ministry of Defence confirmed the theft started an investigation. ⁴²⁶
2001–2003	Between 2001 and 2003, 20 ERO sub-machine guns were stolen from a police department located in Zaprešić (Zagreb county). An ensuing

	investigation established that a criminal group bought these guns for an estimated 9,500 Kunas (or 475 Euro each) in Zagreb. A sergeant from that station was convicted of theft. ⁴²⁷
Cyprus	
2018a	In 2018 two men were convicted for the theft of firearms and explosives discovered in 2011 and 2014. Three G3 army-issue assault rifles, a light support machine gun, two hunting shotguns, a Flobert gun, four revolvers and large quantities of ammunition were discovered in an abandoned house in 2011. The police believe that these items were stolen and then abandoned in the premise. ⁴²⁸
2018b	A National Guard Master Sergeant was convicted for theft in 2018 after illegal arms were found at his barracks, including a revolver, a hand-grenade, and other items. The weapons were discovered during repairs to the barracks in the Larnaca area (South East of Cyprus). The items were collected by the Police and underwent forensic tests, including a collection of genetic material, which was later matched to the suspect. The authorities believe that some of the items had been stolen and smuggled. ⁴²⁹
2016a	In 2016, the police investigated the theft of a G3 rifle and a hunting gun from a home in Paphos which belonged to a reservist who had reported a burglary. ⁴³⁰
2016b	In 2016 a G3 rifle was stolen from a reservist. ⁴³¹
2010	In 2010, a man stole his father's shotguns with the intention to harm a local resident. The father had failed to keep his shotguns safe inside the private residence; instead, they were unsecured and easily accessible. ⁴³² In this case, the weapon was stolen by a family member with the intention to commit a crime and the weapon was not traded further to illicit users.
Czech Republic	
2017	In 2017 a thief broke into a car and stole a semi-automatic pistol CZ-75, together with money and documentation which were stored in the car. ⁴³³
2016–2017	Between 2016 and 2017 a group of six people stole firearms from a cordoned off area surrounding an ammunition depot which had exploded in 2014. The explosion had scattered firearms across the surrounding area. Among the stolen firearms were 6 sub-machine guns. The perpetrators were arrested. ⁴³⁴
2016	In 2016 an individual broke into a house to commit a generic burglary. He stole valuable goods as well as a CZ-83, a compact semi-automatic pistol. ⁴³⁵
2010	in 2010 a man carrying out construction work tore off the back of a storage cabinet and stole the firearm kept inside. ⁴³⁶

Denmark	
2018	A 42-year-old man was arrested in Aarhus for stealing several weapons and ammunition. The man was charged for burglary, and for the theft and illicit possession of the weapons. ⁴³⁷
2017	In Allingåbro a 43-year-old man stole privately-owned weapons from a locker, including pistols, rifles and shotguns. As a result of another investigation, the fingerprints of the man, who was already known to the police for previous crimes such as theft and burglary, were identified in Copenhagen. The individual received an extended five-year-prison sentence. ⁴³⁸
2016	In December 2016, a 0.22 calibre pistol that was stolen from a shooting club in 2016 was used to kill a police officer the next day. The perpetrator was a member of the club but did not have a licence to carry or operate this type of gun. ⁴³⁹ In the aftermath of this incident, the authorities strengthened the rules on membership of gun clubs in Denmark, which led to a decrease in the theft of firearms from shooting clubs. ⁴⁴⁰
2015	In the attack on the Krudttønden Cultural Centre committed in February 2015, the perpetrator used a .56 mm M95 rifle. The firearm had been stolen in an armed robbery of a house belonging to a member of the Danish Home Guard, a volunteer military organisation that supports the military and police. Its members take a series of obligatory courses, including target shooting and weapons training. ⁴⁴¹
2009	In 2009, a thief stole 201 military weapons from a military barrack in Denmark. The weapons included automatic rifles, light machine guns, pistols, grenade launchers, to a value of 2,4 million Danish Crowns (equivalent to 320,000 euros at the time of writing). Many of these weapons were destined to Afghanistan. After a one-month investigation, three individuals were arrested and half of the stolen weapons seized. ⁴⁴² In 2011, the Danish Eastern High Court convicted four persons for the theft. All of the stolen weapons were later recovered. ⁴⁴³
Finland	
2019	In March 2019, two men stole two handguns from a firearms shop in Tampere during the day when the shop was open. ⁴⁴⁴
2017	In 2017, a shotgun was stolen from an uninhabited farm Kerimäki (South Eastern Finland), a week later it had travelled some 100km to Ruokolahti. ⁴⁴⁵
2016	In 2016 an assault rifle was stolen from a military vehicle in Kärpän district (South Eastern Finland). After being missing for a week it was returned to the police. ⁴⁴⁶
2013a	In 2013 four thieves broke into the Hunting Museum of Finland in Riihimäki (Southern Finland) and stole 16 firearms including 2 assault rifles and 3 shotguns. The weapons had not been deactivated because it

	would have significantly reduced their value. ⁴⁴⁷ A police investigation highlighted that the weapons had been stored properly.
2013b	In 2013, the Finnish police conducted an investigation following a shooting in the neighbourhood of Hämeenkoski (South Finland). During a raid in the house of the suspects as well as in two warehouses, the police seized 47 weapons, among which 19 particularly dangerous firearms, 9,000 cartridges and large quantities of drugs. 8 of the firearms had been reported as stolen or lost. ⁴⁴⁸
1990	In 2017 a Finnish police officer was killed with an assault rifle that had been stolen from the border guard in 1990. It is unclear how the perpetrator acquired the weapon. ⁴⁴⁹
France	
2019	One of the firearms used during the attack against the Jewish Museum in Brussels committed on 24 May 2014 involved a firearm which had been stolen. The attack resulted in the death of four people. One of the perpetrators of the attack had stolen several weapons in 2011 in the suburbs of Marseille which they used during the attack. In December 2014, the thief was arrested for the illegal possession of weapons, and the stolen firearm was matched with one of the firearms used during the attack. ⁴⁵⁰
2018a	In March 2018, a 83-year-old man was burgled in Grenoble. The perpetrators broke into his house and managed to take a safe that was storing one handgun, two shotguns of 0.22 calibre, about 50 cartridges and permits for possession of all the arms they took. ⁴⁵¹
2018b	In the beginning of January 2018, during the reopening of the museum dedicated to the Second World War, the director of Fort Montbary discovered that the building had been burgled by thieves between 28 December 2017 and 2 January 2018. In total, 4 weapons and 1 rocket-launcher were taken: American rifle US Garand, Russian pistol Tokarev, American shotgun M1, a German pistol C96 Mauser and German rocket-launcher Panzer Schreck. The first three weapons were not live firing, but the Mauser was not deactivated. They were stored in a store front with a simple lock on it. Despite legal requirement to do so, the museum did not have video-surveillance or any alarm system. Although these arms were possessed only for collection, the investigation found that the museum had an authorisation for only seven weapons (mostly cannons and torpedoes). However, the authorization was no longer valid as it had been granted to the previous president of the association. Almost all of Fort Montbarrey's weapons were possessed illegally. ⁴⁵²
2018c	In December 2018, an assault rifle HK G36 was stolen during demonstrations in Paris. This firearm is relatively new for French police as they started to use it since the mass terrorist attacks in Paris in 2015. This firearm is used by the German army since 1997. The assault rifle HK G36 was taken when a police car column was attacked

	by protestors. The last vehicle in the column, whose doors could not be locked, was evacuated following the launch of a smoke producing agent (<i>fumigène</i>), when the assault rifle and two magazines were stolen. ⁴⁵³
2018d	In April 2018, 4 weapons disappeared from the arsenal of the commissariat of 13 th arrondissement in Paris. The weapons include three automatic Sig Sauer pistols and one Beretta sub-machine gun. The disappearance was discovered by the police officers during an inventory of the arms stock in the Directorate of Public Order and Circulation (DOPC). The investigation is conducted by the National Police (IGPN). They suspected that the firearms had been stolen. ⁴⁵⁴
2018e	In France, an employee of the Ministry of Interior who was in charge of supplying firearms to the police and to destroy decommissioned firearms, was put in custody as he is suspected to have stolen weapons intended for destruction. The police seized 22 long guns, 5 handguns and ammunition from his arsenal, which were rifles and pistols too old or too damaged to keep being used by the police and were therefore intended for destruction. The armourer is believed to have fed a large-scale trafficking network through his activities. ⁴⁵⁵
2017	In June 2017, four masked men entered into the shooting club located in Saint-Chef, in Isère, where they burgled around 75 weapons including about 50 handguns. The burglary was committed in the context of an exhibition of civilian and military arms. The same shooting club had already been burgled in 2014, where about 15 firearms disappeared. In 2012, in a six months' timeframe, several rifles, pistols and ammunition were also stolen. An instructor of this shooting club was also a victim of burglary. In the latter case, perpetrators took heavy arsenal including rifles. ⁴⁵⁶ The sources did not clearly indicate why measures were not taken to tackle the repeated burglaries.
2013	In March 2015, a Peters Stahl pistol of calibre .45 ACP was stolen from a gun shop located in Lille. The weapon was on a counter for presentation to a client when it was stolen by a person in the store. The theft was not detected immediately. A complaint was filed by the owner of the shop. ⁴⁵⁷
2012	The perpetrator of the series of terrorist-inspired shootings from 11 to 19 March 2012 in Toulouse and Montauban used a stolen pistol in these attacks. The Colt pistol M1911, also known as Colt 45 that he used had been stolen on 29 June 2011 from his legal owner, a sports shooter by profession. The pistol was found among two crates of arms and ammunition stolen from the sports shooter and the rest of the stolen weapons were recovered from Toulouse-based drug dealers. ⁴⁵⁸
Germany	
2021	One soldier from the Special Commando (KSK) of the Ministry of Defence was convicted in March 2021 for breaches to the regulation controlling weapons of war after several thousands of pieces of

	ammunition and two kilos of explosives from the armed forces as well as a Kalashnikov-type rifle were found in his garden. The inspectors also found several right-wing extremist newspapers and one SS songbook. ⁴⁵⁹
2019a	An employee of a weapons factory Umarex in the German town of Arnsberg stands accused of smuggling out parts to assemble guns at home in order to sell them. The theft was possible due to relatively weak security standards at the company. The years long racket saw several weapons of the scheme end up in criminal hands. Investigators assume that firearms parts with which at least 150 firearms (among them 55 pistols of type WaltherP22 and 15 Walther PK 380 pistols) were assembled were stolen from this company. Some firearms were sold to a known illegal firearm dealer and several firearms ended in criminal hands such as the biker scene and in the drug milieu, and some were used in three attempted homicides in the biker scene. ⁴⁶⁰
2019b	In the town of Celle (Lower Saxony), the police is missing a MP5 machine pistol and ammunition. The firearm is not assigned to a single police officers but can be borrowed when needed as long as this is registered accurately. The firearm had been borrowed and returned regularly in November 2018, but was found to be missing in March 2019 after a routine stock control by a police officer specialised in firearms. ⁴⁶¹
2019c	Two shotguns were stolen from a hunter during a burglary in a single-family house in Gutenswegen (Saxony Anhalt) in March 2019. The thieves also took ammunition, cash and jewellery. The weekend before, a similar case occurred in Glendenberg, where robbers stole a whole firearms safe from the home of a hunter, including 4 hunting rifles. The safe was later found empty, the police is still searching for the firearms. ⁴⁶²
2019d	The police in Munich is missing a Heckler & Koch P7 pistol. The firearms went missing from the storage facility where firearms foreseen for destruction were stored. ⁴⁶³
2019e	A shotgun of high value was stolen from the locked car of a hunter who had left the car unattended for a few minutes on a private property. ⁴⁶⁴
2019f	A police officer of the team that protects current and former presidents from Germany registered his service firearm Glock 17 missing from his hotel room in Neukölln. ⁴⁶⁵
2019g	In Hamburg-Heimfeld in January the home of an older married couple (73 and 84 years old) was burgled. A woman and several men had obtained the trust of the couple to gain access to their house. According to the police in Hamburg, they had faked an emergency to get into the house and fled shortly afterwards. Among other things, they stole jewellery worth around 100,000 euros and four firearms without ammunition that were in the 84-year-old's legal possession. ⁴⁶⁶
2019h	Three firearms were stolen from the car of a sport shooter while it was parked and locked. The owner of the firearms had left the car

	unobserved for few minutes after his training at the local shooting range. The stolen firearms included an AR 15 of calibre .223 Remington, a Glock 21 of calibre .45 ACP, and a Glock 19 of calibre 9 mm. ⁴⁶⁷
2019i	One Smith & Wesson .38 Special Revolver was stolen whereas it was stored in the safe of a hunter. Ammunition was also stolen. A hunting rifle was left behind by the thieves. ⁴⁶⁸
2018a	During a burglary in a shooting range, several valuable goods were stolen. Although no firearms were stolen, the research team kept the case as exemplary for possible other cases that may include firearms. ⁴⁶⁹
2018b	Police took into custody three persons who are accused of a violent robbery at the house of a hunter. The hunter was found dead near his house. The police discovered that approximately 20–30 of the firearms he legally possessed had been stolen. Some persons were accused and sued, not only for this case but also for planning another robbery. ⁴⁷⁰
2018c	A thief tried to break into a shooting range in Wunstdorf. Early during the day the same person is suspected to have stolen a notebook, tablet and cash from a kindergarden close by. ⁴⁷¹
2018d	In 2018, there was break in in the shooting range in Krelingen. Firearms, cash and ammunitions were taken. A low double-digit number of firearms were stolen according to the police. The shooting range is mostly used for shooting certifications for hunters, and the police assumes that most firearms which were stolen, were also used for this purpose. ⁴⁷²
2018e	A police officer from the Special Commando of the police (SEK) was found guilty of having diverted large amounts of ammunition, and some firearms and explosives, with the help of many other police officers. He allegedly collected up to 55,000 rounds of ammunition in addition to explosives and firearms. He served as a sharp-shooter and a trainer of firearms shooting in the special commando. The accused confessed in court that the ammunition was passed on to him in his capacity as trainer for firearms over an extended period of time by colleagues after target-shooting training sessions. ⁴⁷³
2010 – 2019a	In Berlin, three Police officers had their service weapon stolen by burglars in their homes. ⁴⁷⁴ It is unclear whether these burglaries were targeted, or if the burglars found the weapons by chance.
2010–2019b	A police officer—contrary to regulations—left his service weapon unattended in his car. The firearm was subsequently stolen. ⁴⁷⁵
2010–2019c	A police officer carried his service weapon in a backpack that was stolen after he had left it in a public restroom. ⁴⁷⁶
2017a	In January 2017, the Berlin Police registered four service weapons of the type Sig Sauer P6 as stolen. ⁴⁷⁷
2017b	A Bundeswehr soldier arguably planned the assassination of German politicians. He is also linked to a case of theft including ammunition, and potentially a firearm of type G3 from the Bundeswehr. Judicial

	proceedings were ongoing as of December 2019 in this case, and the accused has not been sentenced. ⁴⁷⁸
2017c	In Germany in 2017, an armoured personnel carrier type “Fuchs” that was parked on the military training ground Münster Nord in Lower Saxony was broken into and two assault rifles type Heckler und Koch G36, the standard weapon of the Bundeswehr, and a pistol type Heckler und Koch P8, as well as a signal gun were stolen from the vehicle. ⁴⁷⁹ The security standards were not adhered to during the theft. The vehicle had been locked, but due its load, it would have needed to be under constant surveillance, even when parked. ⁴⁸⁰
2016a	Several semi-automatic pistols, one small-calibre automatic rifle and a shotgun were stolen from a US Army base in the Stuttgart area. Investigators were not leaning to an outside participation in the theft, but could not rule it out completely. ⁴⁸¹
2016b	The police in Leipzig lost a H&K MP5 machine gun during a police operation. Evidence points at a loss while driving the police vehicle, but the possibility of theft cannot be excluded. ⁴⁸²
2014a	In 2014, a H&K P2000 pistol was stolen from within a locked room in a police station in Karlsruhe, where it had been placed with other service weapons from the same unit for a periodic inspection. ⁴⁸³
2014b	In February 2014, 32,981 rounds of ammunition were stolen from an ammunition stockpile at the paratrooper barracks in Seedorf in Lower Saxony. ⁴⁸⁴ This theft was the largest theft of ammunition from the Bundeswehr in 30 years and sparked a debate over the stockpile security standards applied by the Bundeswehr. The largest part of the ammunition was later recovered when the accused in another case revealed the location in a warehouse in Delmenhorst. ⁴⁸⁵ In the same barracks, a pistol had been stolen from a guarded stockpile in August 2008. ⁴⁸⁶ Better security measures for ammunition depots within the Bundeswehr were implemented, after the case had sparked public debate about safe storage of ammunition. ⁴⁸⁷
2012	The German police found 30 pistols and revolvers during the raid of the flat of a suspected illegal arms trader in Rendsburg-Eckernförde. ⁴⁸⁸ 18 of the 30 firearms found were matched with firearms that were stolen from a gun shop in February 2012. ⁴⁸⁹ The accused was apprehended after he had offered the weapons for sale in criminal circles and thereby contributed to the illicit firearms market. ⁴⁹⁰
2009	In 2009, 15 hunting rifles were stolen during the setup of stalls for the IWA Outdoor Classics trade fair in Nürnberg. ⁴⁹¹ The rifles were supposedly locked in a display cabinet at the time they were stolen.
Greece	
2019	In 2019 thieves broke into a police officer’s house and stole two weapons in addition to money in cash. It seems that the thieves did not know the inhabitant was a police officer. ⁴⁹²

2018a	In 2018, 2 firearms went missing from Exarchia Police Department. A regular 6-month check and accounting practice of the firearms revealed that they were missing. The police have questioned the officers that had last recorded contact with the firearms, although no further information is available. ⁴⁹³
2018b	In 2018, a probation officer serving at a military prison in Filakio, Kastelorizo used a hat to blind a security camera and smuggled his G3 rifle out during a short period of leave. He was caught during an investigation. ⁴⁹⁴
2013a	In 2013, during a search of an individual claiming to be a firearms collector, 18 firearms of various types were found as well as training grenades, smoke and tear gas, bayonets, knives and 8 military helmets and packs. The collection was believed to have been stolen from at least one military unit. ⁴⁹⁵
2013b	In 2013, reportedly following an anonymous tip-off that a lieutenant was using a Taser to torture immigrants, the investigation revealed a theft of military weapons by three people. A large number of weapons and weapon parts were reported to be found. The individuals were charged with embezzlement of military material. ⁴⁹⁶
2009	In 2009 a spate of firearms thefts against police officers was reported. 3 instances of firearms thefts from officer's homes and 5 instances of thefts from service cars were reported. During the thefts that occurred in the cars, the officers had stepped away from the cars for personal business. Then, thieves stole the firearms as well other documentation and valuables. The standard issue firearms are USP Standard and Compact 9mm pistols. Concerning the thefts of weapons at home, officers are required to keep their firearms in a secured safe when choosing to leave them at their homes, however, it has been reported many officers have not got the required safes because of their cost. ⁴⁹⁷
2008	In 2008 a large amount of material was stolen from a military base in Alexandroupolis, including explosives, grenades, anti-tank weapons, radio-controlled missiles, and military equipment. It is not clear however whether any firearms were stolen. ⁴⁹⁸
2006	In 2006 a group broke into the arms depot of a company called Kalko Ltd. and stole 12 shotguns and 7,200 units of ammunition. The theft was connected to other bank robberies. ⁴⁹⁹
2002	In 2002 23 firearms were stolen from the Kos Constantine Palaiologos military base. Charges were brought against 4 officers and a soldier. ⁵⁰⁰
Hungary	
2019	On 4 January 2019, two men from Szentgyörgyvár (Western Hungary) were captured for breaking into several homes and stealing, among other things, a firearm. It is believed that one of them had previously committed an offense with a gun and ammunition. ⁵⁰¹

2018	On 28 August 2018, a young man broke into a hunting lodge and stole a hunting gun and ammunition sleeves. He was captured after the robbery. ⁵⁰²
2017	In 2017, two residents of Bukkaranyos (north-east Hungary) broke into a property in the countryside and stole, among other things, 7 licensed hunting rifles. The source indicated that the weapons were not properly stored and were stolen in connection with other goods located in the domicile. ⁵⁰³
2015	In an instance of theft, the Mátészalkai Police Department (Eastern Hungary) arrested burglars who stole a shotgun, ammunition, money, among other items from a family home in November 2015. They were arrested two months later. A hunting gun had been stolen previously from the same home in 2013. ⁵⁰⁴
Ireland	
2018	In May 2018, shotguns were taken from an armoury in Clane, Co Kildare. ⁵⁰⁵
2012	In 2012, criminals with ties to the IRA were accused to have broken into the premises of a gun dealer and stolen 30 rifles with telescopic sights to smuggle into the UK. ⁵⁰⁶
2004	In 2004 a man burgled a Garda station in Dublin. He stole a firearm, 42 shotgun cartridges, including other police equipment. ⁵⁰⁷
Italy	
2018a	In the fall of 2018, a series of investigations conducted by the Carabinieri led to the confiscation of stolen weapons in the province of Turin. The weapons were stored by people without any criminal records which suggested that they were just keeping them for members of organized crime groups. The weapons seized included a rifle modified from a 6.5 calibre handcrafted musket, two Mauser rifles of model 98, a Winchester rifle which had been altered to enhance performance, 25 rounds of ammunition of calibre 6.5, a 12-gauge rifle, a 4.5-caliber rifle which had been modified to increase its power, and 14 rounds of 12 mm calibre ammunition. ⁵⁰⁸
2018b	In July 2018, in the region of Emilia Romagna, the police arrested two people accused of stealing firearms from a gun-shop in Forlì and illegally selling them to organized crime groups based in Puglia. One of the two was working for a shipping company contracted by the gun shop. ⁵⁰⁹
2017a	In 2017, the Romanian Investigation of Organized Crime and Terrorism (DIICOT) arrested two individuals in Romania accused of trying to sell three firearms stolen in Italy. ⁵¹⁰
2017b	In March 2017, a significant case of arms leakage was discovered in Padova in one of the Army's Centre for Refurbishment and Maintenance (CeRiMant). The investigations of the Anti-mafia Directorate District of Cagliari unveiled a network of illicit arms

	trafficking led by a member of the Army and a civil servant of the Ministry of Defence. He sold weapons to members of organized crime groups, including Ndrangheta, a mafia-type organised syndicate. The weapons included shotguns, handguns, Kalashnikov-type rifles and spare parts. ⁵¹¹
2017c	In January 2017, the media reported the case of a police officer stealing a small machine gun (Beretta M12) from the police depot of the Questura of Lecce to sell illicitly. ⁵¹²
2014	In April 2014, in Prato, the Police seized 13 semi-automatic guns which had been stolen from the armoury Rasponi. ⁵¹³
Latvia	
2019	In March 2019 two individuals broke into an apartment in Daugavpils (Southern Latvia) and stole several firearms. They were arrested and as part of the investigation, police recovered four pistols, a silencer and a shotgun as well as ammunition. ⁵¹⁴
2016	Three men in Karsava (Eastern Latvia) were arrested for breaking into a house and stealing the safe-deposit box along with its contents, including a firearm and ammunition. ⁵¹⁵
Lithuania	
2019	In September 2019 an individual gained broke into a residential house where he stole jewellery, money, a handbag with documents and a pistol which were stored in a safe with 100 rounds of ammunition. The thief also stole valuables and a car from the garage. ⁵¹⁶
2017	In July 2017 a thief broke into a house and stole a safe. The safe was reported to contain 15,000 euros in cash, jewellery, a firearm and cartridges. ⁵¹⁷ It is unclear whether the firearm was specifically targeted or was taken as part of a general theft attempt.
2015a	In 2015, a handcuffed individual in a police car managed to seize an AKS rifle from the front passenger seat and escape from the vehicle with the weapon in Lithuania. He was found five hours later having abandoned the firearm. ⁵¹⁸
2015b	A CZ-92 pistol belonging to a police school was stolen from an exhibition centre in Lithuania in 2015. This case involved the theft of a firearm that had not been properly secured. It is still unclear when and how the firearm was stolen as the investigation was halted because the firearm could not be found. ⁵¹⁹
2015c	In 2015, 1 shotgun and 3 rifles, along with 100 rounds of ammunition were stolen from a safe in the basement of a house as part of a burglary. ⁵²⁰
Malta	
2018	In 2018, a firearm was stolen as part of a home burglary. ⁵²¹

2016	In 2016, thieves broke into the Malta Enterprise chairman's residence and burgled two safes taking several firearms of collection. The thieves later returned the firearms. ⁵²²
2010a	One pistol was stolen from a firearms dealership in May 2010. The pistol was found later and the perpetrator was sentenced to 40 months imprisonment. ⁵²³
2010b	In April 2010, a considerable collection of 15 weapons were reported stolen from Zejtun (South of Malta). Most of the weapons were recovered from the sea following a tip to the police. Two of these weapons were used in two separate homicides. ⁵²⁴
2008	In 2008, two individuals broke into a Customs General Examination Shed at the Marsa Industrial Estate and stole antique firearms valued 95,000 euros. The guns had been imported from the US to Malta to add to an individual's firearms collection and were stored in the warehouse. The firearms were stolen for financial reasons. ⁵²⁵
2004	In 2004, a firearm was stolen from a police station, together with other accessories. ⁵²⁶
2003	In another case in 2003, police received an anonymous tip-off on the location of several stolen firearms. Police recovered many firearms from the seabed of the Grand Harbour. These had belonged to an extensive collection of firearms before being stolen from the home their owner. Among the 53 stolen weapons were firearms dating to the First World War, such as revolvers, pistols, machine guns and rifles, as well as a Luger, Colt .45, Berretta, and a Walther. ⁵²⁷
Netherlands	
2018	In July 2018 burglars stole 25 firearms and 450 bullets from the Transport & Support Service (Dienst Vervoer & Ondersteuning) of the Ministry of Justice in Zutphen. This police service provides transport for detainees and foreign nationals. The type of weapon stolen was the official police pistol Walther P99Q-NL. During the theft, the alarm systems failed. Because of the alarm failure, the Ministry of Justice suspects that the thieves were helped by an insider. A legal expert commenting on the story confirmed that such big break-ins are not the norm, and that a more regular phenomenon is the theft of service weapons from the home of members of the police. Parts of the stolen goods were later recovered during a raid on a house in Otterlo in Gelderland. ⁵²⁸
2017a	During a break-in in a shooting range in the Hertogenbosch, one rifle and hundreds of ammunitions were stolen. The break-in was made possible because of a lack of appropriate safety measures. The robbers entered the building by removing several screws from the roof. ⁵²⁹
2017b	In 2017 a service weapon was stolen from the home of a police agent. The weapon had been stored in a cupboard according to safety standards. According to the police investigations, the theft of the

	weapon seemed to be a by-product of a burglary, and it was recovered later. ⁵³⁰
2015a	In April 2015, criminals broke in the shop of a legal arms trader by driving a truck through the front site of the shop. During the burglary, several weapons of different types and calibres were stolen. ⁵³¹
2015b	A group of young men stole firearms and boxes full of ammunition in Elim (Northern Netherlands). One person was picked up by the police and admitted having broken into the house under the influence of alcohol. Among the arms stolen was a Beretta pistol. ⁵³²
2013	In March 2013, 29 pistols and revolvers were stolen from a weapons retailer. A shooting range also belongs to the gun shop. It is likely that the burglars first entered the shooting range before entering the gun shop. The gun shop is located in a bunker near Amsterdam. ⁵³³
2011–2015	Eight firearms were reported stolen from armouries of the Ministry of Defence between 2011 and 2015. Most of them were Glock 17 pistols, which are popular among criminals. Other stolen weapons included a CZ 70 pistol and a Colt C7 gun. Some of the guns were recovered later. The thief committed at least one murder with one of the stolen Glock pistols. As part of his former position within the military, he had stolen several weapons in Afghanistan from a military base. During the investigation, it became clear that the control of access, provision and receipt of weapons had not always been handled according to the rules. Armoury registers of entry and exit of defence personnel were incomplete. In addition, some weapons were stored in different armouries than what was indicated in the registers. ⁵³⁴
2011	In September 2011, the house of a weapon owner in the Hague was burgled. According to witnesses, three men broke into the house with bags. The suspects took various weapons, including rifles. The police started an investigation in an attempt to recover the weapons. ⁵³⁵
2010	In February 2010, a license holder with an authorisation for weapon collection was burgled in Haaglanden (a conurbation surrounding the Hague). A large number of firearms were taken, including rifles, pistols and revolvers. ⁵³⁶
2009	In June 2009, 182 weapons were stolen from a shooting club in Amsterdam. The heist included 97 pistols, 73 revolvers and 12 rifles. Soon after the criminal act, the investigation found a suspect, through an undercover agent. In addition, the suspect noted that all stolen weapons were sent to a person in Haarlem. The investigation team dug out one weapon from the garden of the above-mentioned suspect in Haarlem. Over a year and a half later only two other weapons from the stolen arsenal had been found in the Netherlands. The prosecutors could not determine whether the action did or did not take place with the help of the owners of the shooting club. Moreover, law enforcement failed to categorize the guns found in one of the suspects' garden. Because of this lack of details, the suspects were not convicted for illegal possession. ⁵³⁷

2005	In April 2005, 206 service guns were stolen from the armoury at the Gilze Rijen airbase. 6 of the 206 stolen Glock 17 pistols were never recovered. It is possible that these 6 weapons were sold to illicit users. The other 200 were found in a bag on the roadside. Former soldiers were involved in this theft. ⁵³⁸
?	Criminals violently took firearms from a legal owner in Kerkrade. The owner was threatened with a pistol and forced by two men to give them his three firearms and ammunition from his safes. ⁵³⁹
Poland	
2018a	In 2018, two men stole a hunting shotgun from a parked car in Rejowiec (Eastern Poland). ⁵⁴⁰
2018b	In 2018, firearms were stolen from an aircraft hangar that was being rented out for use as a warehouse by a private arms dealership. Though information on the case is currently limited, it is suspected the firearms were pistols as well as Polish PM-63 machine guns from the 1970s. It has been suggested that the warehouse area was not under constant protection. ⁵⁴¹
2008	In 2008, thieves burgled a watchmaker's house, taking with them the damaged safe locks to conceal their methods. The thieves are reported to have specifically been targeting the armoured safe where firearms and ammunition were stored. Ultimately, they stole four firearms and ammunition, as well as jewellery and valuables. ⁵⁴²
2006	In a case of attempted theft that was disclosed in 2006 in Poland, five workers from the Archer – Radom Arms Factory organised the theft of 170 firearms components, hid them in the cladding of the production hall and in tool cabinets. The system was organised so that the records of the production factory showed no discrepancies, but there was no evidence that the production records were forged. The components were intended for criminal groups from central Poland. The group was active from 1998 to 2005 and managed to assemble at least 17 sub-machine guns of which 15 were sold. ⁵⁴³
1995a	In 1995, 26 pieces of military weapons from the weapon warehouse on the Polish vessel, ORP Grunwald, were stolen. The ship was moored at the port at the time. Security measures on the day had lapsed and the thief, a former soldier, was able to take the weapons without any obstacles. The perpetrator sold the weapons through an intermediary in Nowogard to OCGs via old police contacts. ⁵⁴⁴
1995b	In 1995, a burglary was committed at a military base in Bemowo, in which the 42nd Air Regiment was stationed. 75 pistols, 828 munitions, and 148 magazines were stolen. The perpetrators gained access through a hole in the fence and a window in the locker room. Three guards were at a disco at the time. ⁵⁴⁵
Portugal	
2017a	In 2017, an investigation was triggered by the fact that a drug dealer was identified in possession of a police Glock pistol. The investigation

	revealed that 57 pieces of 9mm Glock pistols had been stolen from the gunsmith of the Lisbon Police in the National Directorate. Two officers who were responsible for storing the weapons were put in custody as well as a civilian who allegedly received the firearms and sold them illicitly. ⁵⁴⁶
2017b	Two warehouses of the Portuguese Army Tancos Barracks have been targeted by thieves. Together with other items such as tear gas grenades, 1,450 pieces of 9mm cartridges were also taken. ⁵⁴⁷ The theft could be linked to another theft where several Glock pistols were taken and which occurred 6 months earlier, as a possible source of ammunition. ⁵⁴⁸
2012	In 2012, 33 rifles and shotguns were stolen from a shooting club in Monsanto (Eastern part of Portugal). The theft occurred during a holiday period when the shooting club was closed and not all safe storage requirements were met. ⁵⁴⁹
2011	In 2011 at a marine base in Alfeite, a case of weapons theft was detected during a security inspection. The weapons stolen included two rifles, two machine guns and two pistols which had been stored in a display whose door had been forced. ⁵⁵⁰ In another case from 2011, ten military weapons were stolen from the Army, including 2 HK G3, 2 HK MP5, UZI machine guns and Walther P38 pistols. ⁵⁵¹
Romania	
2018	Cases of firearms theft from the gendarmerie were reported during a demonstration which occurred in Bucharest in December 2018. ⁵⁵²
2009	In January 2009, members of an organized crime group stole 62 firearms from a military stockpile. These weapons were then distributed among the members of the group in support of their illicit drug trafficking operations. Eventually, one of the suspects was caught trying to sell 27 of these firearms (pistols and automatic rifles) to a police informant. During subsequent investigations 35 firearms were found in December 2009 and another 15 in January 2011. ⁵⁵³
Slovakia	
2019	A museum in Trencin was found to be missing some 250 weapons, including 84 rifles, 12 submachine guns, 1 machine gun and 1 heavy machine gun DS-39, 1 machine gun base Hotchkiss model 1914, 6 signal guns, 14 revolvers, 21 percussion pistols, 7 automatic pistols and 2 Flobert pistols. How the firearms were stolen or lost is still unclear. It is suspected that the inventorying of the weapons was not accurate. ⁵⁵⁴
2017	Reports from 2017 highlight that several items were found to be missing from two Slovakian army warehouses. In Trencin, 120 grenades and some RPG launchers went missing. It was later discovered that some 300,000 rounds of small calibre ammunition were missing from a warehouse in Skleny. There is little further information

	though the lost arsenals are being investigated by the National Crime Agency. ⁵⁵⁵
2010a	A hunter in Želiezovce (Levice district, South-West Slovakia) had a rifle, shotgun and small-calibre rifle stolen after a thief broke into his house and took the weapons from the secured locker, in addition to other valuable items. ⁵⁵⁶
2010b	In Lučenec district (southern Slovakia), a thief tore out the safe from the house and stole 2 firearms, ammunition, valuables and 10,000 euros in cash. ⁵⁵⁷
2010c	In Rožňava district (South-East Slovakia), a thief broke into a house and stole four firearms, 20,000 euros in cash, jewellery and a laptop. ⁵⁵⁸
2010d	In Turčianske Teplice district (northern Slovakia), a thief broke into a family house and stole 5 firearms from a wooden wardrobe in addition to other hunting equipment. ⁵⁵⁹
2010e	In Ilava (North-West Slovakia), 2 thieves broke into a family home and stole five firearms from the vault. ⁵⁶⁰
2010f	Finally, in Bytča (Northern Slovakia), thieves stole several firearms and money from a home. ⁵⁶¹
2004	In 2004, 21 historic rifles and 17 pistols were stolen from Červený Kameň Castle in Bratislava. The thieves had suppressed the museum security measures with one hiding in the museum at night whilst the other gained access. Some of the weapons were sold on to illicit users in the Czech Republic, Austria and Germany. ⁵⁶²
Slovenia	
2019	In January 2019, there was a break in at a Ljubljana gun shop, during which the thieves stole several weapons, most of which were handguns, as well as two grenade launchers. ⁵⁶³ Reportedly, the gun shop lacked security measures such as motion detectors making the shop vulnerable to thefts. ⁵⁶⁴ The thieves have not been identified. The incident led at least one newspaper to argue that regulations on weapons traders in Slovenia are insufficient. ⁵⁶⁵
2009	In June 2009, a major case of theft of government-owned firearms and explosives occurred at the warehouse of a Slovenian military training range near the town of Pivka. Unidentified persons had broken into the warehouse and stolen several weapons—mainly grenades and grenade launchers—from the facility. ⁵⁶⁶ In October one of the stolen grenades was used in an attack outside of a nightclub in the city of Kranj, injuring 10 persons. ⁵⁶⁷ The following investigation revealed the connection with the theft from the warehouse and identified three suspects, aged 20, 25 and 29 who were detained following the attack and another two suspects, aged 19 and 20. The suspects had tried to sell the weapons, but they only succeeded for a small number of them. Most of the weapons were recovered from a shed near the orchard of the 20-year-old leader of the group. At least 20 grenades are still

	missing. Several of the suspects had prior convictions including drugs trafficking. ⁵⁶⁸
Spain	
2019	Five short firearms and 150 cartridges of calibre 9mm were stolen from the barracks of the Guardia Civil in the rural area of Láchar (Granada). All the weapons were later recovered, and one suspect was detained. ⁵⁶⁹ The theft took place during the weekend when the barrack was closed. A news article argues that the theft is partly a result of the dismissal state of the barracks and a lack of personnel in rural areas. ⁵⁷⁰ Better security provisions had been requested by a professional organization within the Guardia Civil before the theft. The organization bemoaned that the barrack stores weapons and seized narcotics but is not guarded in the weekend, and has no alarm system, cameras or reports monitoring the security. ⁵⁷¹
2018	In January 2018, the Civil Guard was able to bust an organised criminal network specialising in the theft of firearms from country houses in the Seville region. During the operation, a shotgun, ten long guns, two-alarm guns and two handguns were seized. Materials and ingredients for the manufacture of drugs were also seized. The Civil Guard was able to link 11 robberies in the region to the seizures. It was also revealed that firearms stolen by the group had ended up with heroin and cocaine traffickers in the Seville region. They were mostly used to guard houses and warehouses of drug shops. ⁵⁷²
2017a	In 2017, an agent stationed at the police station in La Bisbal, in the Baix Empordà, reported the theft of his service pistol from his home in Girona. According to the Mossos d'Esquadra (Catalonian regional police), he could face a sanctioning procedure for this reason. ⁵⁷³
2017b	A robbery took place in the largest gun shop of Madrid. 80 rifles and a big amount of telescopic weapon sights, valued about 50,000 euros, were taken. Most weapon were of historic value, handmade and handcrafted hunting rifles, which made the police suspect that the robbery was commissioned by a dedicated hunter, a collector or both. It was not assumed that these weapons were stolen for criminal or terrorist use. The theft was committed in a very professional way, leaving no trace and using a thermal lance to open the safe, which, according to police, not many robbery groups possess. Further robberies in gun shops took place in 2014 in Orcasitas and 2016 in Chamberí, although no further details were publicly available. ⁵⁷⁴
2016	Three weapons were stolen inside the National Police Station located in Campo Madre de Dios, in the capital of Córdoba in April 2016. The weapons were stolen out of the lockers where officers keep their belongings. ⁵⁷⁵
2014-2015	Between 2014 and 2015 four pistols and two revolvers disappeared from the bunker of the police station in the Spanish town of Ourense. The theft was not reported internally, but only after an anonymous tip off

	to the media. The police station in the town had been under investigation because its narcotic squad had supported a local drug ring. One police officer committed suicide in the police station, using one of the stolen weapons and confessing the theft. ⁵⁷⁶ Judicial proceedings are still ongoing and the notion that the bespoken officer committed suicide (rather than killed by two ex-colleagues) is debated in current proceedings. ⁵⁷⁷
2014a	A gun shop was robbed in the outskirts of Madrid in 2014. Thieves only managed to break the front window of the shop and were able to take replicas and toy weapons. ⁵⁷⁸
2014b	A shooting gallery was burgled in Madrid in 2014. Almost 100 firearms were stolen along with a big amount of ammunition. The majority of weapons stolen were Smith & Wessons pistols of calibre 9mm. The weapons came from a Basque security company which had gone bankrupt and were stored for sale in the shop. The total value of the guns stolen is estimated at a maximum of 300.000 euros. ⁵⁷⁹ Police investigations propose that the theft was staged and that the company owner left the lockers open to facilitate the theft. ⁵⁸⁰
2011	The theft of 20 HK rifles and ten pistols was reported in a military barrack in Badajoz. Four soldiers on duty during the night of theft were arrested for negligence. The ministry of defence stated before the upper house that their extensive security provisions were in place (including cameras, motion sensors, monitors to watch cameras, multiple alarm systems). However, a professional organisation within the armed forces, and a senator posing question in the upper house disagreed and argued that there were issues with security provisions as well as negligence by personnel. ⁵⁸¹ The Guardia Civil later arrested 5 suspects. They were Spanish thieves related to organized crime who acted as a group and were responsible for a chain of major robberies in banks and ATMs. The team was completed by an ex-military stationed in the barrack, who also provided the thieves with detailed information on security measures. ⁵⁸² The majority (but not all) of the weapons was recovered as part of the investigation. According to the Guardia Civil investigators at a press conference, there are no indications that, for now, the detainees intended to sell the weapons. In fact, the rifles were found in quite poor condition after they had been buried in the ground. On the other hand, the pistols were wrapped in plastic and the Army's numbering and shields had been erased, although they have not been used later either. ⁵⁸³
2009	The regulatory pistol of an agent stationed in Cerdanya, Girona, was stolen from a leisure premises in Barcelona in 2009. ⁵⁸⁴
?	Ten small arms were stolen from a Naval Base in Las Palmas. The Guardia Civil later arrested a soldier and one accomplice as suspects. The weapons have been recovered. ⁵⁸⁵
?	In a case involving local Mafia structure, the Guardia Civil revealed that thefts also take place within the criminal milieu. Hence, one criminal

	group involved in the hashish trade had stolen up to 27 firearms from a clandestine workshop of another criminal actor located in Espiel in Córdoba. ⁵⁸⁶
Sweden	
2019	In October 2019, the Swedish police were notified that 6 Glock 17 pistols and 300 pieces of ammunition had been stolen from a safe in the Prime Minister's office in Stockholm several months before, in March the same year. The private security company Securitas was employing the security personnel at the Prime Minister's office and was in charge of storing their service weapons safely. ⁵⁸⁷
United Kingdom	
2019	In January 2019 a shop located in Sheffield was subject to a targeted burglary during which 20 guns were stolen, worth £25,000 in South Yorkshire, England. ⁵⁸⁸
2018a	In September 2018, two shotguns and a rifle were stolen during the burglary of a house in North Yorkshire. All weapons were licenced and stored in a gun cabinet. ⁵⁸⁹
2018b	In March 2018, a shop was the target of a burglary in North Warwickshire, during which a number of guns were stolen, including two handguns, one submachine gun, four hand grenades and an array of combat knives. The source did not clearly indicate if these were live-firing guns. ⁵⁹⁰
2018c	In February 2018, six shotguns were stolen in a raid at a house in Southampton. Burglars broke the guns out of locked cabinets. As a result of the raid, firearms (mostly hunting firearms or replicas), ammunition, a quantity of cash and other items were also stolen from the house. ⁵⁹¹
2018d	Together with hundreds of ammunitions reported lost or stolen by the British military in 2018, a Glock 17 handgun was reported stolen from an armoury in Barbados. Among them, 168 pieces of 5.56 x 45 mm cartridges, which are used in M16 assault rifles and the M4 carbines have disappeared. ⁵⁹²
2018e	In May 2018, a former cadet ransacked a Fife army base. He took a firearms haul including three training rifles (imitation) that he intended to sell. He was locked up for other matters and the investigation found a map indicating the location of guns. After police examined the weapons, which were recovered in summer 2018, they discovered that they were easily convertible to live-firing firearms. The Ministry of Defence realised that their drill-purpose weapons – intended for parade and training for cadet units – did not meet the deactivation standards. This resulted in all cadet drill-purpose rifles, which amount to around 10,000 to be reclassified as live assault rifles and prohibited under the 1968 Firearms Act. Action was taken to recall the weapons. ⁵⁹³

2018f	<p>In November 2018, several state officials were put on trial for the alleged theft of automatic and sniper rifles from the Ministry of Defence. While they kept some of the weapons, they passed other weapons to criminals. At the time of writing, none of these weapons had been recovered or linked to crime scenes. In this case, a former police officer was on trial for 13 counts of theft and one of handling stolen goods between 1998 and 2016. He has worked as an armourer for the Ministry of Defence Small Arms School Corps Infantry Weapons Collection at Warminster, where some of the weapons were stolen. He did not have the authorisation to handle the weapons.⁵⁹⁴</p> <p>The items stolen include weapons and parts of weapons, of which a number of SA80 rifles and sniper rifles. Some bore serial numbers of weapons which had been recorded as having been destroyed. The court heard that he sold three rifles to Fultons, a firearms dealership in Bisley, Surrey, for £19,750. In one case, forged signatures were found on a document authorising the release of an assault rifle from the school to Fultons. The defendant said he gave himself the permission to release the weapons.⁵⁹⁵</p> <p>The thief kept some of the weapons at his address where they were found by police. He was acquitted of nine counts of theft and one of handling stolen goods (to a police officer). The jury at Winchester Crown Court was unable to reach verdict on four other theft offences against him.⁵⁹⁶</p> <p>The police officer who bought some stolen weapons faced six counts of handling stolen goods. The jury also failed to reach verdict on him on one count of handling stolen goods and acquitted him on five remaining charges.⁵⁹⁷</p> <p>Another former soldier received a sniper rifle valued £50,000, which he exchanged with another gun enthusiast who sold it for £30,000. He was accused of one count of handling stolen goods but was acquitted in January 2019.⁵⁹⁸</p> <p>Lastly, a firearms dealer was said to have received two SA80 rifles, but it is not known where or when they have been stolen from. He was cleared in January 2019 of three counts of handling stolen weapons.⁵⁹⁹</p>
2017	<p>A member of the Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment was sentenced to three years of imprisonment in 2017 for stealing and possessing British Army 9 mm ammunition. He attempted to sell them to an undercover police officer and told him that he could also provide him with a reactivated AK 47-type rifle. The ammunition was stolen during a live-firing exercise in Northern Ireland and was not returned.⁶⁰⁰</p>
2016a	<p>The gun used in the murder of Jo Cox, a British Labour Party Member of Parliament, in 2016, was a German-made 0.22 calibre bolt-action rifle that had been stolen from a car in Keighley. After this theft, the length of the weapon had been reduced to 12 inches so that it could be used more easily with one hand.⁶⁰¹</p>

2016b	In 2016, a Royal Marine was sentenced to 14 years and six months of imprisonment for selling loaded guns and grenades stolen from a British naval base. He had served in Iraq and Afghanistan and was a reservist from the British naval. The items included a lethal frag grenades, a fully automatic assault rifle, two shotguns and a pistol, and thousands of rounds of ammunition. He sold them to a NCA undercover officer for £10,000. ⁶⁰²
2014	In December 2014, members of a gang were sentenced to imprisonment for the theft in April 2014 of 77 weapons from a lorry in Basildon's Burnt Mills Industrial Estate. They took 53 rifles and 24 shotguns. The weapons were sold to a 'criminal kingpin' who sold them onto the criminal market. One of the weapons was identified as being used in an East London shooting. The gang was not expecting to find guns, but 'easy pickings' that they intended to sell. The author did not find the information if the weapons were stored safely in the lorry. ⁶⁰³
2011	In September 2014, police discovered a large stockpile of weapons dating back to WWI and WWII. Police suspect a man to have obtained these artefacts through illegal metal detecting, which is a heritage crime. The man is also suspected to have stolen items from a former prisoner of war camp. Items include hand grenades, rifles, mortar shells, guns and ammunition and have been found in his garage in Hertfordshire. ⁶⁰⁴
2010	A National Shooting Centre in Bisley was victim of theft in January 2014, when sniper rifle parts were stolen. The bolt and scope of a Mauser K89 ZF went missing. This Centre is one of the most popular venues for shooting in the UK and has a broad spectrum of ranges and a large armoury. The rifle belonged to a National Rifle Association (NRA) member – the centre allows users to store their weapons on site. Thousands of weapons are stored. The NRA alerted more than 30,000 members of the loss, but never received any information on what they became. ⁶⁰⁵

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