



IcARUS

IcARUS Policy Brief

Building Resilient Communities: The Local Roots and Impacts of Organised Crime





Welcome to the IcARUS Policy Briefs, where the project's partners present their key findings

These policy briefs are designed to provide political decision-makers at local, regional, national, and European levels with insights and recommendations from the EU-funded and Efus-led IcARUS project. They cover the five areas that were explored through the project and are of primary concern for crime prevention policy-makers and stakeholders, i.e., social innovation, juvenile delinquency, organised crime, public spaces, and radicalisation leading to violent extremism.

Building resilient communities: The local roots and impacts of organised crime

Introduction

According to the Council of Europe's 2015 White Paper on transnational organised crime, some 3,600 international organised criminal groups are active in Europe. The Council stresses that organised crime is one of the most serious threats faced by Europe because of its adaptability, sophisticated tools, violence, diversity of crime type and ability to forge alliances and operate across borders in all parts of Europe.¹ The transnational nature of organised crime calls for Europe-wide and global responses and indeed, countering it is one of the top priorities of the Council of Europe and multilateral organisations such as the United Nations Convention Against Organised Crime (UNTOC). However, in the end, it is always at a local level that organised crime is most directly felt, whether because a neighbourhood is rife with drug trafficking, or money laundered through local businesses or real estate projects, or gangs exchanging gunfire in the streets.²

In our globalised, interconnected world, international and national events and trends have a direct impact on communities at a local level, in particular as regards issues of safety and security, as shown by the research conducted through the IcARUS project.³ This is why it is fundamental to act locally to protect communities against harmful international forces such as organised crime, and why it is indeed possible to do so. The local level is both the place where transnational forces manifest themselves and where authorities can act concretely to protect citizens. On the issue of drugs, for example, the EU drugs strategy 2021-2025 stresses the relevance of working at the local level to tackle organised crime and prevent people and businesses from being exploited by criminal networks.⁴

¹ Council of Europe, 2015. [White paper on transnational organised crime](#)

² [European Forum for Urban Security \(Efus\), November, 2022. Concrete political, legislative and financial support to tackle organised crime](#)

³ IcARUS D2.1, (2022). [The changing face of urban security research: a review of accumulated learning](#)

⁴ [EU drugs strategy 2021-2025](#)





Given that organised crime affects multiple sectors of society, efforts to prevent and counter it must involve a wide array of stakeholders from public authorities and law enforcement to private businesses and civil society. This is true both at the transnational and local level, where it is crucial to develop multi-agency cooperation and initiatives.

What is organised crime?

There is no universally accepted definition of what constitutes organised crime. As underlined in the IcARUS project's State of the Art Review, definitions vary between agencies and organisations across different administrative levels. The Council of Europe stresses that, *“there are numerous definitions of ‘transnational organised crime’, ranging from those that identify it with only mafia-type criminal organisations, to those that refer to any kind of criminal structure where more than three persons act in a coordinated way. The same applies with the meaning of ‘transnational.’”*

The European Union, in the Framework decision 2008/841 - Fight against organised crime published in the Official Journal of the European Union in October 2008, defined a criminal organisation as a *“structured association, established over a period of time, of more than two persons acting in concert with a view to committing offences which are punishable by deprivation or detention order [...] to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit”*.⁵

In the IcARUS project, the partners defined the focus area of preventing and reducing trafficking and organised crime as follows:

*“Strategies and measures that seek to prevent the smuggling and delivery of illegal goods and services by organised criminal groups in urban settings. [...] This includes interventions aimed at reducing the risk factors conducive to individual involvement in or exploitation by organised criminal activities.”*⁶

Indeed, experience shows that strengthening cooperation between local stakeholders and public agencies can help develop the resilience of local communities against organised crime, but local authorities must be better equipped to lead and coordinate such local partnerships. In particular, they can act to protect citizens against the impact of criminal activities on their security of and quality of life.

⁵ Official Journal of the European Union (2008). [Framework Decision 2008/841/JHA on the fight against organised crime](#)

⁶ IcARUS D2.1, (2022). [The changing face of urban security research: a review of accumulated learning](#)





The involvement of not only local authorities and law enforcement agencies but also civil society is fundamental to design tailored local solutions to the complex phenomenon of organised crime.⁷

Problem context

Experience shows that a multidisciplinary and integrated approach is effective to minimise the local impact of organised crime. However, such an approach should not only encompass the judicial, administrative and fiscal measures, but also policies aimed at strengthening social cohesion and the resilience of local communities^{8,9}. Building cohesive and resilient local communities will reduce the prevalence and impact of organised crime over time.

Recommendations

To tackle organised crime efficiency at local level, local authorities can work together with civil society and the private sector, adopting an integrated approach and using a range of regulatory tools. Furthermore, they can work with local actors to strengthen social cohesion and empower local communities to be more resilient.

Recommendations to local authorities:

- **To promote and develop partnership and multi-agencies approaches** with a large array of local stakeholders¹⁰. Local authorities can establish and lead partnerships with the private sector (both business owners and employees), and police. This requires a clearly defined framework of responsibilities and accountability among partners; good quality data sharing; setting out clear expectations, and establishing open and supportive lines of communication.¹¹
- **To identify and map out through local audits the drivers of trafficking and the protective factors** that could help increase resilience¹² in order to design tailored and flexible prevention solutions based on concrete observations.
- **To combine criminal justice responses, the protection of victims, the administrative approach that focuses on economic and social levers, and**

⁷ IcARUS D2.2 (2022). Report describing the inventory of tools, practices and lessons learned, University of Leeds

⁸ IcARUS D2.3, (2022) Report describing the results from the workshop for assessing requirements, CAMINO

⁹ IcARUS D3.7, (2024). Tools defined with a design approach - Version 2, University of Salford

¹⁰ Forum Français pour la Sécurité Urbaine (FFSU), 2022. [Livre blanc pour la sécurité des territoire - prévention, sanction et cohésion sociale](#)

¹¹ IcARUS Facts Sheet N°7, (2022). [Spotlight on Preventing and Reducing Trafficking and Organised Crime, University of Leeds](#)

¹² IcARUS D2.4, (2022). [Roadmap for the improvement dans definition of tools. University of Leeds](#)



solid, integrated prevention actions.¹³ This contributes to innovative solutions that involve a whole range of local stakeholders (municipal police, local elected officials, business owners, employees, civil society organisations...). The central tenet is to reduce crime opportunities for criminal groups and limit their infiltration in government organisations and the legal economy.

- At the EU member states level: **to adopt common measures to prevent criminal organisations from using or benefiting from ill-acquired assets.** The confiscation of assets that were used or made available for committing crime is a key tool against organised crime. These assets can be used by local authorities for social projects, which has the double effect of helping financing such projects and making the benefits of public actions against organised crime visible at the local level. This in turn increases citizens' trust in their local institutions and strengthens social cohesion.

How the recommendations can be implemented in practice

In practice: The Rotterdam tool, The Spaanse Polder Café (Netherlands)

The Rotterdam tool is a collaborative and interactive approach to engage local stakeholders (mainly business owners and employees) of the large Spaanse Polder Business Park, which lies by the port. The idea is to facilitate exchanges between businesses and police, and encourage the former to take part in ensuring the security of this vast business park situated near Europe's largest seaport, which is used by international trafficking organisations as a point of entry for drugs aimed at the European market.

The exchange platform designed in Rotterdam takes the form of a regular café meeting based on the World's Café methodology, during which participants can share information and get feedback on actions taken by the local authority and police against organised crime

> More information on <https://www.icarus-innovation.eu/tools-insights/public-reports/>

In practice: Observatory on Organised Crime and the Promotion of a Culture of Legality, Rimini, Emilia Romagna Region, Italy

¹³ IcARUS D2.2, (2022). Report describing the inventory of tools, practices and lessons learned, University of Leeds





There are several observatories on organised crime and the culture of legality in the Emilia Romagna Region: at the University of Parma, the municipalities of Bologna, Forlì and Parma, and in the Province of Rimini. In the Province of Rimini, the Observatory on Organised Crime and the Promotion of a Culture of Legality was established in 2013 with support from the Emilia Romagna Region. It gathers representatives of various provincial municipalities, as well as of associations engaged in fighting the Mafia, business associations, trade unions and other local actors. The Rimini Riviera is a tourism hotspot and an area that attracts organised crime. The city of Rimini itself has about 148,000 permanent residents, but its population goes up to 700,000 in the summer.

The Rimini Observatory studies criminal infiltration in the social and economic fabric of the province, offers training to public officials about anti-corruption and anti-money laundering regulations at the regional and national level. It also organises cultural events (conferences, public meetings, debates, cinema, photography and theatre) on the themes of legality, active citizen participation and the fight against mafias.

> More information on

<https://efus.eu/topics/organised-crime/three-questions-to-ivan-cecchini-member-of-the-board-of-the-observatory-on-organised-crime-rimini-italy/>

In practice: "VILLA BERCETO" – a positive case history of social reuse of an Italian confiscated asset; City of Berceto, Italy

Villa Berceto represents one of the most well-known examples of the re-use of confiscated assets for social projects in Italy.

The asset is a villa that was owned by Vincenzo Busso, a real estate promoter who was arrested in 2009 as a member of the Camorra. This asset was seized by the authorities and re-used as a public venue. It now houses a large public library as well as a public fitness centre, indoor and outdoor pools and a guest house (5 bedrooms), and has been made available for events.

>More information on

https://www.confiscation.eu/site/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/TI-IT_CaseStudy1_VillaBerceto_en.pdf

<https://efus.eu/topics/organised-crime/the-italian-approach-to-organised-crime-seizing-assets-and-investing-them-in-social-projects/>

Conclusion





This policy brief underlines the major role of local authorities in countering organised crime because of their strategic position as the level of governance closest to citizens on the ground and the high impact of organised crime on local communities. Strengthening the resilience of local communities and social cohesion through an integrated multi-stakeholders approach is key to tackle organised crime networks. Local authorities can work together with police and civil society organisations and use regulatory measures to prevent criminal infiltration in the public and private sector.

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University of York

The IcARUS project (Innovative Approaches to Urban Security) aims to rethink, redesign and adapt existing tools and methods to help local security actors anticipate and better respond to urban security challenges. This factsheet is based on the IcARUS Review of Accumulated Learning and cross-analysis of urban security.



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