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# INTRODUCTION



Young men receive vocational training as part of UNODC and Ministry of Social Solidarity rehabilitation and reintegration programmes at the Marg Institution for young male offenders in Cairo, Egypt. Photo: © UNODC

The Regional Framework for the Arab States 2023-2028 (henceforth 'the Regional Framework') sets out UNODC's mission to contribute to peace and security, human rights, and development by making the region safer from drugs, crime, corruption, and terrorism, including by reducing violence and inequalities within society.

This document acts as the overarching strategic framework for cooperation between UNODC, 18 participating Member States<sup>1</sup> and the League of Arab States (LAS). It frames how UNODC will strengthen, prioritize, customize, and deliver support to the Arab region in effective response to some of the most pressing challenges faced by these countries and in connection with UNODC's mandates and specialities. It lays out a roadmap to guide UNODC programming and to accelerate progress towards Agenda 2030 in pursuit of key Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and deliver better in response to latest recommendations issued by the fifth meeting of the Steering and Follow-up Committee for the Regional Programme for Arab States to Prevent and Combat Crime, Terrorism and Health Threats and Strengthen Criminal Justice Systems in Line with International Human Rights Standards (2016-2022).

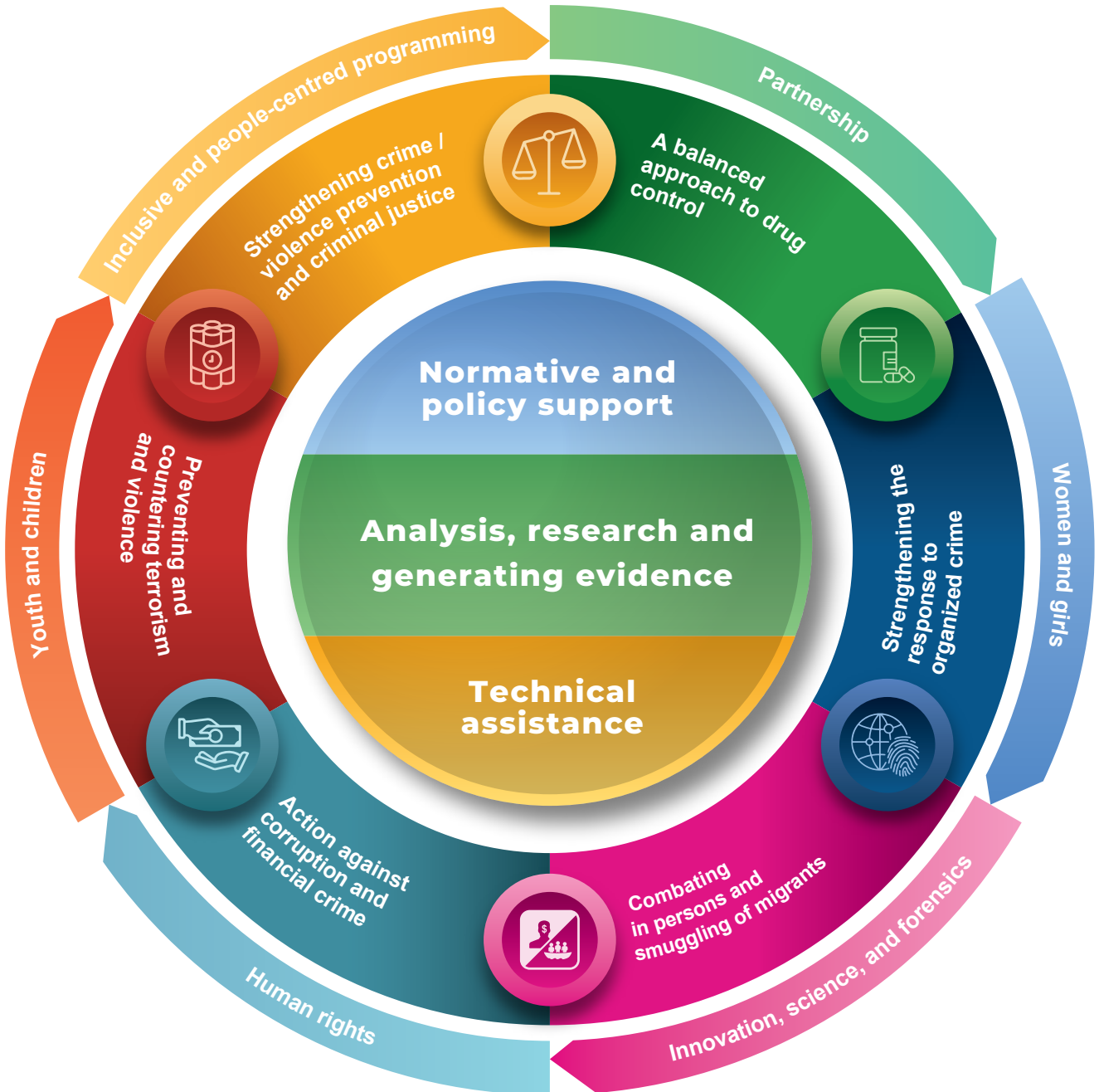
The wider Arab region covers 10 percent of the world's land area and is home to around 460 million people. From the

west, the region extends from Morocco on the Atlantic coast of North Africa, across Egypt, the Syrian Arab Republic, Jordan and Palestine in the Levant (or Mashreq) to Iraq, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) States and Yemen on the Arabian Peninsula. Many similarities, challenges, and opportunities are shared between countries which can be leveraged to drive collaboration, cooperation, and enable shared solutions to regional-wide challenges. In recognition of the political will and determination of the LAS, Member States and their citizens, the present document articulates the need for a flexible, collaborative, and innovative approach, reliant on strengthened multi-country cooperation and partnerships, and encourages collaboration and initiatives at the regional and national levels.

Drawing on results and lessons learned from previous UNODC programming cycles, the Regional Framework ensures that UNODC's programmatic approaches and responses are people-centred, leave no one behind, are underpinned by evidence-based best practices and in line with international standards. Importantly, UNODC proposes engagement of all sectors of society to work together both within countries and across borders promoting a whole-of-society approach to overcome some of the drug, crime, corruption, and terrorism challenges the region faces.

<sup>1</sup> The Regional Framework covers 18 Member States in the region: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

The Regional Framework articulates six focus areas for guiding UNODC-implemented programming at the regional and national levels, whilst applying six key accelerators across all programmatic interventions to speed up progress and maximize efforts towards fast-tracking the SDGs:



# INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS

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## 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda were developed to provide Member States with a clear roadmap for a better future - an inclusive and prosperous world for people and the planet where no one is left behind. The Regional Framework will continue to contribute towards the Arab States' achievement of those SDGs set forth in the 2030 Agenda, and most significantly across:



Since 2015, Member States in the Arab region have undertaken efforts to reach the SDGs. As a result, six Member States have achieved 60 percent of the SDGs<sup>2</sup>. However, the levels of progress made vary between countries in the region, with conflict-affected countries facing more difficulties to advance the SDGs. At the regional level, challenges remain in SDG 5 (Gender equality), SDG 3 (Good health and well-being) and SDG 16 (Peace, justice, and strong institutions). Greater efforts and cooperation across the region are needed for the Arab States to reach the targets set by the 2030 Agenda.

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<sup>2</sup> 2022 Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboard Report [https://www.arabsdgindex.com/static/downloads/files/MBRSG-UNSDSN-AGDA\\_2022\\_SDG\\_Index\\_and\\_Dashboard\\_En\\_w.pdf](https://www.arabsdgindex.com/static/downloads/files/MBRSG-UNSDSN-AGDA_2022_SDG_Index_and_Dashboard_En_w.pdf)

# UN STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS

IN ADDITION TO THE 2030 AGENDA, THROUGH THIS FRAMEWORK, UNODC WILL SUPPORT MEMBER STATES' EFFORTS TO IMPLEMENT AND ADHERE TO THE FOLLOWING UN-SYSTEMWIDE INITIATIVES AND PRIORITIES:

## Our Common Agenda

[Our Common Agenda](#) is an agenda of action, designed to strengthen and accelerate multilateral agreements – particularly the 2030 Agenda – and make a tangible difference in people's lives. Our Common Agenda contains recommendations across four broad areas for renewed solidarity between peoples and future generations, a new social contract anchored in human rights, better management of global commons, and global public goods that deliver equitably and sustainably for all. The Regional Framework integrates these recommendations in its policy and programmatic objectives.

## Secretary-General's Call to Action on Human Rights

[Secretary-General's Call to Action on Human Rights](#) is a transformative vision for human rights. Underpinning the work of the entire UN system, human rights are essential to addressing the broad causes and impacts of all complex crises, and to building sustainable, safe, and peaceful societies. Focusing on seven thematic areas, the Call to Action recognizes human rights as central to our most pressing issues: the urgent achievement of sustainable development; the protection of all people regardless of their circumstances; tackling gender inequality once and for all; ensuring robust civic space for everybody; creating a healthy environment for future generations; ensuring a safe digital world – all pitching in together to make this a reality.

The Regional Framework takes a people-centred and human rights-based approach, actively reinforcing trust between Member States and their citizens and promoting a comprehensive vision of human rights. This includes the active and equal participation of women and girls, as well as strengthening crime prevention and criminal justice institutions in line with international standards, including human rights standards. It also supports arrangements that deliver better public services.

## The UN strategy on Youth (Youth2030)

[The UN strategy on Youth \(Youth2030\)](#) promotes youth engagement in enhancing human rights, economic development, peace, and security, as actors and as beneficiaries of the actions of UN agencies and Member States. This Framework thus foresees the engagement of youth in its work as agents for positive change and will actively promote their meaningful inclusion in policy/ programme design and implementation to enhance drug, crime, terrorism, and corruption prevention and criminal justice reform.<sup>3</sup>

## The Youth Empowerment Accelerator Framework (YEA!)

[The Youth Empowerment Accelerator Framework \(YEA!\)](#) affirms UNODC's commitment to empowering youth as part of the UNODC Strategy 2021-2025.

The Framework underlines UNODC's commitment towards strengthening ongoing and develop new youth mainstreaming actions to promote the meaningful engagement of young people in programmes and projects at the planning, implementation, and evaluation stages.

## The UN Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS)

The [UN Disability Inclusion Strategy \(UNDIS\)](#), adopted by the Secretary General in 2019, provides the foundation for sustainable and transformative progress on disability inclusion through all pillars of the work of the UN.

<sup>3</sup> UNODC uses the definition of "youth" provided by the UN Security Council resolutions 2250 (2015), 2419 (2018) and SCR 2535 (2020) as "persons of the age of 18-29 years old".





**Human rights** as central to our most pressing issues

The Youth Empowerment Accelerator Framework

**YEA!**

affirms **UNODC's** commitment to empowering youth as part of the **UNODC** Strategy **2021-2025**



Agenda  
**2030**

## UNODC INTER-GOVERNMENTAL BODIES

The governing bodies of UNODC are the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) and the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ). These bodies bring together practitioners, policy makers, and other experts from all over the world on the issues of drugs and crime and thus offer Member States platforms for policy dialogue and for exchanging expertise, experience, and information in these areas. The CND and CCPCJ play a key role in fostering international cooperation and take concrete action through resolutions and decisions. UNODC acts as the Secretariat to these bodies and provides them with substantive and technical support.

The UN Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice is the world's largest and most diverse gathering of its kind and is held every five years. In the margins of the Crime Congress, a Youth Forum is held, bringing together young people from all over the world, to participate in discussion on youth engagement in preventing and addressing crime, with recommendations presented to the wider Crime Congress. Along with the CND and CCPCJ, the Crime Congress provides an invaluable source and driving force for developing key standards and norms in the fields of drugs and crime.

# UNODC STRATEGIES

## Strategy (2021-2025) and Strategic Vision for Africa 2030

The [Strategy \(2021-2025\)](#) and [Strategic Vision for Africa 2030](#) provide strategic direction of action towards achieving the 2030 Agenda, underlining UNODC's pledge for, and commitment to, transformative approaches, fostering cooperation and strengthening coordination. Guiding the Office to deliver results effectively and with accountability, they propose elevated levels of support to Member States in order to build just, inclusive, and resilient societies with the principle of leaving no one behind at the centre.

## Strategic Partnership with the Gulf Cooperation Council Countries

The [Strategic Partnership with the Gulf Cooperation Council Countries](#) provides the primary framework to support UNODC's engagement and collaboration with the six Member States and Secretariat of the GCC in order to maximize their responses to drug and crime related challenges within the GCC and beyond, while contributing to the objectives set by the regional framework for the Arab States.<sup>4</sup>

The updated strategic vision for the GCC, currently under finalization, remains guided by GCC countries' national strategies, the 2030 Agenda, as well as relevant UNODC strategies and frameworks. It also promotes how UNODC and the GCC will further build on strategic partnerships and develop synergies to enhance support and cooperation on wider regional issues, including proposed mechanisms for the GCC to exchange, provide, and share expertise and experiences with other countries.

## UNOV/UNODC Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (2022-2026)

The [UNOV/UNODC Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment \(2022-2026\)](#) provides an up-to-date institutional framework, detailing priority areas for guiding UNODC to support Member States to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. The strategy also ensures stronger gender analysis, highlights the need for generating gender-sensitive knowledge, redressing gender discriminatory laws and policies, and articulates the importance of engaging further with Member States to overcome instances of gender inequality and exclusion.

## UNOV/UNODC Action Plan on Disability Inclusion

The [UNOV/UNODC Action Plan on Disability Inclusion](#) guides the Office's implementation of the UNDIS, helping to ensure effective mainstreaming of disability inclusion. This is being achieved by addressing 15 indicators in four core areas, namely leadership, strategic planning, and management; inclusiveness; programming; and organizational planning.

## Innovation Strategy (2021-2025)

UNODC has developed an [Innovation Strategy \(2021-2025\)](#), which underlines the Office's commitment to harnessing and scaling up innovative initiatives and articulating how to better leverage and deliver innovation-based technical expertise across all mandated areas.

**UNODC STRATEGIES**

- Strategy 2021-2025 and Strategic Vision for Africa 2030
- UNOV/UNODC Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment 2022-2026
- UNOV/UNODC Action Plan on Disability Inclusion
- Innovation Strategy 2021-2025

Strategic **Partnership** with the **Gulf Cooperation Council** Countries

<sup>4</sup> The Regional Programme for Arab States (2016-2022) and the Regional Framework for the Arab States (2023-2028).

# VALUE PROPOSITION

## NORMATIVE AND POLICY SUPPORT



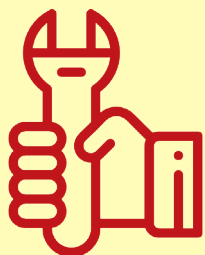
In terms of **normative and policy support**, UNODC serves as guardian of several international conventions and other legal instruments and is the secretariat to global policy bodies on drug control, organized crime, terrorism, and corruption. As the guardian of UN standards and norms in crime prevention and criminal justice, UNODC also provides normative support to Member States for ratification and implementation of new instruments. UNODC supports the development of domestic legislation and provides services to intergovernmental policy making bodies. This support extends to strengthening legal, strategic, and policy frameworks, including with the involvement of civil society, and supporting an impartial and evidence-based justice system approach based on strengthened chain of custody and judicial governance.

## ANALYSIS, RESEARCH, AND GENERATING EVIDENCE



UNODC strives to build shared knowledge on drugs and crime, based on reliable and impartial evidence, to make people safer globally and locally. Its work on **analysis, research, and generating evidence** includes strengthening States' and regional capacities in disaggregated data collection and analysis to monitor trends in the field of drugs and crime but also to measure SDG indicators. The promotion of inter-agency collaboration and communication on multifaceted challenges is a key component and in collaboration with national governments, UNODC produces authoritative research products, analysis, and reports. UNODC publications include survey reports in the fields of illicit drug cultivation and production, drug trafficking and use, smuggling of migrants, trafficking in persons, and firearms trafficking among other transnational organised crimes, victimization and corruption, comparative regional and international analysis of disaggregated data related to crime and drugs, as well as methodological tools and standards in the field of drug and crime statistics. Elevated support in these areas will also enable a better understanding of the interlinkages between crime, drugs, terrorism, and other phenomena including conflict, fragility, stability, and socio-economic development.

## TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE



UNODC's approach to delivering **technical assistance** relies on an agile, tailored, and evidence-based model combining global and field-based expertise while promoting South-South and triangular cooperation. Through the promotion and application of evidence-based best practices, UNODC contributes to sustainable technical skills and system building as well as capacity enhancement. In its effort to build capacities more sustainably, UNODC commits to furthering the growth of champions and mentors from Arab Member States.

# KEY NORMATIVE DOCUMENTS

## Crime- and Drug-Related Treaties and Terrorism-Related Instruments:

- UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) and its three Protocols (the Trafficking in Persons Protocol, the Smuggling of Migrants Protocol, and the Firearms Protocol)
- UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC)
- Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1954 as amended by the 1972 Protocol
- Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971
- UN Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988
- International legal instruments against terrorism and relevant UN Security Council Resolutions

## Compendium of UN Standards and Norms in Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, in particular:

- Updated Model Strategies and Practical Measures on the Elimination of Violence against Women in the Field of Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice
- UN Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-Custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules)
- UN Principles and Guidelines on Access to Legal Aid in Criminal Justice Systems
- UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (The Nelson Mandela Rules)
- UN Guidelines for the Prevention of Crime
- UN Guidelines for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency (The Riyadh Guidelines)
- UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (The Beijing Rules)
- UN Kyoto Declaration on Advancing Crime Prevention, Criminal Justice and the Rule of Law: Towards the Achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

# REGIONAL CONTEXT

A wide range of challenges affect the region albeit to varying degrees, including conflict and its spill-over effects, protracted humanitarian crises, civil unrest, increasing demand on resources particularly water, consequences of climate change, surging demand for energy, food insecurity, unemployment, and rapid urbanization, with these factors both causing and enabling organized crime, drugs, terrorism, and corruption. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and coupled with a collapse in oil prices, the region has seen grave economic instability. Based on available indicators, the World Bank estimated that in 2020 alone, poverty in the region increased from around 12 to 15 million at the middle-income poverty line of living on USD 5.50 a day.

The past decade has seen widespread conflicts across the Arab region, including terrorist threats posed by the Islamic State (IS), also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh), undermining prospects for sustainable development and compromising safety and security. In this context, the linkages between illicit arms, organized crime and armed conflict as well as terrorism are symptomatic. Several countries suffering various conflicts and environmental pressures have witnessed internal displacement. According to UNHCR, the Arab region is the largest region globally in terms of producing and hosting refugees.

Alongside these challenges, the MENA region also presents a vast array of opportunities for achieving more sustainable security and peace and reaching greater levels of rule of law, human rights, development, and health. It is a region with a fast-growing and energetic young population that lends enormous potential for growth and prosperity.

Incremental changes towards gender equality and women and girls empowerment have been documented over the past decades as well.

Considering the role they can play as agents of change and innovation in society, investing in youth, women, and girls is key to countering the challenges faced in the region and supporting progress towards the achievement of the SDGs.

In recent years, the Arab States have been reinforcing intra-regional cooperation by organising dialogue and sharing of experience and good practices under the umbrella of the LAS, while creating new partnerships with other types of entities at the national, regional, and international level, which provides solid ground for further developing and reinforcing partnerships for supporting the development of the region. Importance given to digitization and emerging technologies within the region also shows a great potential for effectively countering drugs and crime by using new technologies and innovation.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, LAS and Member States' numerous plans and strategies on issues related to drug control, organized crime, corruption, criminal justice and crime prevention, and terrorism, as well as the stronger convener Arab States have become at the global scale by hosting several key international platforms and events show great potential for the region.

Overall, the Regional Framework will support the Arab States with addressing the challenges they are facing in making the MENA safer from drugs and crime by building on the national and regional potential and opportunities and supporting a conducive environment for such development through interventions tailored to the regional context and needs.

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<sup>5</sup> All these opportunities listed are among the 'key accelerators' identified by UNODC which will be mainstreamed throughout UNODC programming and implementation under the new RF, with the objective of taking advantage of the opportunities in the region to unleash its potential in advancing towards the 2030 Sustainable Agenda.

# PIVOTAL PARTNERSHIPS

## THE LEAGUE OF ARAB STATES (LAS)

The LAS is the oldest regional organization in the Arab region. The LAS plays a leading role in supporting the implementation of the UN Security Council's core mandate to maintain international peace and security. Within its charter, the LAS commits to strengthening relations between its Member States towards coordinated policies and closer cooperation on issues such as drug control, organized crime, corruption, and terrorism.<sup>6</sup>

Grounded in a shared and common mission and vision, UNODC and the LAS have formed a partnership for responding to drug, crime, corruption, and terrorism-related challenges, determining UNODC's priorities and responses, for tracking progress and for galvanizing Member States' support and buy-in. In the framework of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in 1989 and renewed in 2018, UNODC together with the LAS have put in place robust mechanisms for ensuring mutual responsibility towards the achievement of results.

Under the present Regional Framework, UNODC proposes enhanced cooperation and partnership with LAS Member States, in respect of their organization's treaties and in a commitment to strengthening support towards operationalizing relevant LAS frameworks, strategies, initiatives, standards, plans, events, and decisions, in alignment with and including but not limited to:

- The Arab Convention to Fight Corruption, 2010;
- The Arab Convention on Combating Information Technology Offences, 2010;
- The Arab Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2012;
- The Arab Convention for the Suppression of Terrorism, 1998;
- The Arab Strategy for Combating Violence against Women (2011-2020);
- The Arab Strategy for the Prevention and Response to All Forms of Violence in Asylum Context, especially Sexual Violence against Women and Girls, 2021; and
- The Arab Strategy on Health and the Environment (2017-2030), 2017.

## ARAB INTERIOR MINISTERS' COUNCIL (AIMC)

The Arab Interior Ministers' Council (AIMC) is a LAS body and specialized ministerial council enjoying administrative and financial autonomy. With five specialized offices stationed across the region, as well as an academic and scientific body – the Naif Arab University for Security Sciences (NAUSS) based in Riyadh –, the AIMC aims to strengthen pan-Arab cooperation in the fields of crime and security. AIMC and UNODC have a long-standing partnership having signed an MoU in April 2000 and cooperating to prevent and address organized crime, drugs, corruption, and terrorism, particularly through strengthened criminal justice responses. UNODC holds observer status at the opening of the Annual Session of the Council and delivers technical expertise in areas such as prison reform, management of violent extremist prisoners, and women in prisons. In 2022, the AIMC adopted a new regional counter-terrorism strategy, which aims to support efforts to prevent and counter terrorism and violent extremism in the region.

UNODC stands ready to scale up cooperation with the AIMC, expand collaboration, and support a reinvigorated MoU, which could oversee joint programming and exchange of shared expertise. UNODC and AIMC can also explore opportunities to develop and deliver joint technical assistance throughout the region with NAUSS positioned as prime partner in the different areas of UNODC's mandate.

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<sup>6</sup> League of Arab States, Charter of Arab League, 22 March 1945, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b3ab18.html>

# ORGANIZATION OF ISLAMIC COOPERATION (OIC)

The OIC was established in 1969 to represent the Muslim world to protect and safeguard vital interests of Muslims globally towards improved peace, security, and harmony as well as inter-faith dialogue. The organization maintains various affiliated, specialized, and subsidiary organs within the framework of its Charter.<sup>7</sup> [The OIC Programme of Action 2025](#) seeks to promote peace and security, counterterrorism, science and technology, climate change, empowerment of women, human rights and good governance among its priorities. Seventeen Arab countries are currently members of the OIC<sup>8</sup> and the organization's headquarters is based in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The OIC adopted the [Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam](#) as well as the [OIC Convention on Combating International Terrorism](#), and launched the Women Development Organization (WDO), which UNODC supports in the areas of violent extremism, anti-corruption, economic empowerment, and responses to violence against women and girls.

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<sup>7</sup> Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, OIC Charter, 25 August 1969, [https://www.oic-oci.org/page/?p\\_id=53&p\\_ref=27&lan=en](https://www.oic-oci.org/page/?p_id=53&p_ref=27&lan=en)

<sup>8</sup> Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen (Syria suspended)

# GUIDING THE UNODC RESPONSE – SIX FOCUS AREAS



## FOCUS AREA 1

A BALANCED APPROACH TO DRUG CONTROL



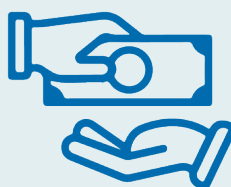
## FOCUS AREA 2

STRENGTHENING THE RESPONSE TO ORGANIZED CRIME



## FOCUS AREA 3

COMBATING TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS AND SMUGGLING OF MIGRANTS



## FOCUS AREA 4

ACTION AGAINST CORRUPTION AND FINANCIAL CRIME



## FOCUS AREA 5

PREVENTING AND COUNTERING TERRORISM AND VIOLENCE



## FOCUS AREA 6

STRENGTHENING CRIME/VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE





# FOCUS AREA 1

## A BALANCED APPROACH TO DRUG CONTROL

The production, trafficking, and illicit use of drugs are inextricably linked and negatively impact public health, security, stability, the environment, and the enjoyment of human rights. The resilience of drug markets during the COVID-19 pandemic signalled traffickers' capabilities to adapt quickly to changing environments and crises. The pandemic and its associated socioeconomic consequences have brought increasing economic hardship, which could enable increased levels of drug cultivation and production, denying those in need with access to drug prevention and critical treatment services, as well as pushing others into drug use and involvement in the illicit drug trade.

The UNODC World Drug Report (WDR), the Office's flagship annual publication, collects, analyses, and compiles detailed statistics, which help draw conclusions to better inform balanced drug control responses. The report includes official data from 14 Member States from the MENA region, which lies across key transnational heroin and cocaine trafficking routes. According to the 2022 report, seizures of the amphetamine-type substance (ATS) 'Captagon' (illicitly manufactured amphetamine with adulterants such as caffeine) are reportedly increasing.<sup>9</sup> Cannabis, ATS and a low level of opiates are produced in the region.<sup>10</sup>

The WDR also highlights that globally most people who use drugs continue to be men, but women make up more than 40 percent of people who use ATS and who engage in non-medical use of pharmaceutical stimulants, pharmaceutical opioids, sedatives, and tranquillizers. The gender treatment gap remains a global problem and is particularly acute for women who use ATS.<sup>11</sup>

The past-year prevalence of opiate use and non-medical use of pharmaceutical opioids (particularly tramadol) is reported as above the global average for the regions of North Africa and the Near-and-Middle East. Opioids are widely available and produced at low cost and national experts suggest 'Captagon' is among the most prevalent and harmful drugs in the Middle East sub-region.<sup>12</sup> The HIV epidemic in the

<sup>9</sup> UNODC World Drug Report 2021 and 2022.

<sup>10</sup> Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime, A rising tide: trends in production, trafficking and consumption of drugs in North Africa - research report, 2020.

<sup>11</sup> UNODC World Drug Report 2022.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> UNAIDS, 2020 Global AIDS Update— Seizing the moment: Tackling entrenched inequalities to end epidemics, 6 July 2020. [https://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media\\_asset/2020\\_global-aids-report\\_en.pdf](https://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/2020_global-aids-report_en.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> International Narcotics Control Board (INCB), Availability of Internationally Controlled Drugs: Ensuring Adequate Access for Medical and Scientific Purposes, 2016.

MENA region is growing and highly concentrated among key populations, which include people who inject drugs (PWID), and their sexual partners.<sup>13</sup>

Concentrated HIV epidemics among PWID were observed in some countries. Compared to the general population, the risk of acquiring HIV is on average about 29 times higher for people who inject drugs, with UNAIDS reporting that 43 percent of new infections in the region are occurring among people who inject drugs.<sup>14</sup> Similar to other parts of the world, drug demand reduction policy and programming in the region, including HIV prevention, treatment and care, falls short of the levels required to deliver effective responses for adults, youth and children at risk of using drugs, those requiring treatment for drug use disorders and for people who inject drugs. The availability of pharmaceutical opioids for medical consumption remains limited in many parts of the world including in the Arab region.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, accessibility to substances under international control for medical and scientific purposes also require revision and intensification of actions.

The LAS and UNODC signed an MoU in 2018, which provides a comprehensive framework of cooperation in the areas of prevention of drug abuse, treatment, and care for drug abuse disorders, including HIV / AIDS prevention, in a commitment to relevant SDG 3 indicators of the 2030 Agenda.

### OBJECTIVE 1

#### ENHANCED KNOWLEDGE OF MEMBER STATES ON DRUGS, FALSIFIED MEDICAL PRODUCTS, AND HIV RELATED ISSUES

#### PRIORITIES

- Increase the capacities of relevant national entities to conduct disaggregated data collection, analysis, reporting, and exchange of information related to drugs (incl. manufacturing, trafficking, and use), falsified medical products, and HIV issues (including other infectious diseases).

- Increase the access to and use of relevant data at the national level through support provided for the establishment of national reporting mechanisms, observatories, and/or other relevant national coordination mechanisms or entities.
- Support the production and dissemination of updated research and technical reports on drug trafficking and use, providing mainstreamed gender analysis.

## OBJECTIVE 2

### **MORE EFFECTIVE RESPONSES TO DRUG TRAFFICKING, MANUFACTURE, AND PRODUCTION, INCLUDING THROUGH ENHANCED REGIONAL/ INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION**

#### **PRIORITIES**

- Strengthen national legal frameworks related to drug control and drug trafficking.
- Enhance operational responses to detect, seize, investigate, and disrupt drug trafficking networks, including through strengthened maritime, air, and land border control.
- Strengthen special investigation techniques, including criminal intelligence and cyber-investigations and forensic services capacities such as drug trafficking related crime scene management and clandestine laboratories management, drug profiling analysis and mapping.
- Strengthen the capacity of law enforcement, prosecutions services, and the judiciary to investigate, prosecute, and adjudicate drug trafficking.
- Increase regional and international cooperation, dialogue, and exchange of information on operational and legal matters related to the production and trafficking of illicit drugs in line with international human rights standards and the rule of law.

## OBJECTIVE 3

### **EVIDENCE-BASED, INCLUSIVE, AND HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED PREVENTION, TREATMENT, CARE, AND RECOVERY SERVICES FOR PEOPLE WITH DRUG USE DISORDERS**



Methadone drug treatment provision in Tipaza, Algeria as part of partnership between UNODC and Ministry of Health. Photo: © UNODC

#### **PRIORITIES**

- (Re)align national strategies on prevention of drug use and treatment of drug use disorders as per the recommendations of the related UNODC/WHO International Standards.
- Increase the access to evidence-based drug prevention programmes in schools and at the community level, particularly for women, children/youth and their families, including refugees and families living in humanitarian settings.
- Increase the access to quality science-based treatment, care, and rehabilitation services for people with drug use disorders in line with the UNODC/WHO International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders in a variety of settings, with a focus on the needs of marginalized and vulnerable groups.
- Increase the access to treatment as an alternative to conviction or punishment for people with drug use disorders in contact with the criminal justice system.
- Strengthen regional and national platforms to discuss and address issues of shared concern relating to drug prevention, treatment, care and recovery and social impacts of drug use with a view to bolster cooperation between Member States.



# FOCUS AREA 1

## A BALANCED APPROACH TO DRUG CONTROL

### OBJECTIVE 4

**EVIDENCE-BASED, INCLUSIVE, AND HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED HIV/AIDS, PREVENTION, TREATMENT, AND CARE AMONG PEOPLE WHO USE/INJECT DRUGS AND WORKING AND LIVING IN CLOSED SETTINGS**

#### PRIORITIES

- Increase the access to evidence-based, comprehensive, and gender-responsive packages of HIV prevention, treatment, and care interventions for people who use/inject drugs with a focus on the needs of marginalized and vulnerable groups.
- Promote and implement inclusive quality prison health services, including science-based treatment of drug use disorders, HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment, and care.
- Support comprehensive HIV/AIDS services among people who use/inject drugs and among people living and working in prisons and other closed settings in conflict and humanitarian emergency settings.
- Scale up gender-responsive HIV/AIDS services among women who use/inject drugs in the community and in prisons and other closed settings.
- Strengthen regional and national platforms to discuss and address issues of shared concern relating to HIV/AIDS, prevention, treatment, and care among people who use/inject drugs and its social impacts with a view to bolster cooperation between Member States.

### OBJECTIVE 5

**IMPROVED ACCESS AND AVAILABILITY OF INTERNATIONALLY CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES FOR MEDICAL AND SCIENTIFIC PURPOSES**

#### PRIORITIES

- Ensure more secure and targeted supply chains of controlled drugs for medical purposes.
- Strengthen the capacity of policymakers and healthcare professionals to increase access to controlled drugs for medical purposes through better visibility and strengthened partnerships.

### OBJECTIVE 6

**EFFECTIVE AND INTEGRATED RESPONSES TO ADDRESS CRIMES RELATED TO FALSIFIED MEDICAL PRODUCTS**

#### PRIORITIES

- Strengthen/develop national and regional integrated strategies to prevent and combat crimes related to falsified medical products.
- Enhance criminal justice response to detect, investigate, prosecute, and adjudicate crimes related to falsified medical products.
- Promote public-private partnerships, regional and international collaboration, and cooperation to interdict and disrupt crimes related to falsified medical products.



Medical examination at Shalah Federal Prison in El Fasher, Sudan. Photo: © Hamid Abdulsalam UNAMID



## FOCUS AREA 2

### STRENGTHENING THE RESPONSE TO TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

Serious and organized crime is an ever-evolving transnational challenge, which is directly linked to other forms of crime such as terrorism and corruption and threatens peace, safety, security, and stability in every Arab country. Conflict-affected and fragile countries as well as contexts of political instability are even more vulnerable and more likely to experience weak border control combined with a lack of capacity among law enforcement, as well as within the justice and security sector to prevent and counter serious and organized crime.

Serious and organized crime types in the region are largely cross-cutting, cross-border, and interlinked. They include, but are not limited to, trafficking in drugs, persons, firearms, counterfeit goods, cultural property, and crimes against the environment such as illicit trafficking in renewable (wildlife, forestry, and fishery) and non-renewable resources, NRBC<sup>16</sup> related crimes and in chemicals and hazardous waste, digital and cybercrimes, including online child exploitation.

Illegal arms trafficking is especially prevalent in the MENA region, partly in response to conflict and instability situations. From 2016 to 2020, Algeria, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, Qatar, and Tunisia reported the seizure of 11,010 arms.<sup>17</sup> Firearms trafficking is a lucrative business, which enables and fuels armed conflict and terrorism in the region and facilitates other forms of serious and organized crime such as trafficking in persons and drug trafficking by increasing the potential violence level of criminal groups. Even more profitable is counterfeit goods trafficking. By feeding counterfeit products in supply chains, this form of trafficking impedes anti-money laundering efforts while endangering users who may not receive quality goods. Since the Arab States present a rich collection of antiquities and cultural artifacts, the region is particularly prone to cultural property trafficking and several sites are targets for looting, theft, smuggling, and illicit trade.

Furthermore, crimes against the environment, such as wildlife and fishery crime, and waste trafficking, among other illicit activities, are a serious and growing issue in the region, which threatens biodiversity, impacts climate change, affects health and livelihoods, and in some contexts, compromises food security.



The UNODC Global Maritime Crime Programme supports Yemen's Coast Guard (YCG) to build the required Maritime Law Enforcement skills. Photo: © UNODC GMCP

The Arab States are both destination and origin countries for wildlife trafficking.<sup>18</sup> Major airports in the region are among the main wildlife trafficking transit hubs in the world, with Middle Eastern airports being prominent for trafficking in ivory, rhinoceros horns, and pangolins.<sup>19</sup> Given its highly lucrative nature, illicit trafficking in all the above-mentioned goods is often associated with other criminal activities as organized criminal and terrorist groups heavily rely on such trafficking to finance their other illegal activities.

Linking global regions for trade, transport and travel, several major airports in the region act as key transnational trafficking hubs. Porous land borders and weak maritime border management offer criminals and traffickers easier opportunities to traffic illicit goods. Accordingly, effective border control and cross-border cooperation across the region at sea, land, and air borders are key elements in countering transnational organized crime.

Cybercrime is a complex and fast changing form of transnational crime as criminal networks use information technology to access and create new online criminal markets and facilitate their offline serious and organized crime activities. Most countries in the region lack the capacity to investigate cases of cybercrime.

<sup>16</sup> NRBC: Nuclear, Radiological, Biological and Chemical elements.

<sup>17</sup> Algeria: 700 (2016), 772 (2017); Kuwait: 29 (2018); Lebanon: 1,359 (2016), 1,548 (2017); Libya: 224 (2016), 247 (2017); Morocco: 144 (2016), 162 (2017), 115 (2018), 107 (2019), 585 (2020); Qatar: 71 (2016), 78 (2017), 33 (2018); Sudan: 998 (2016), 1,361 (2017); Tunisia: 935 (2016), 635 (2017), 907 (2018). Data collected from national authorities through the annual Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire (AFQ). <https://dataunodc.un.org/dp-firearms-arms-seized>

<sup>18</sup> CITES Illegal Trade Database and UNODC World WISE Database. <https://dataunodc.un.org/dp-wildlife-seizures>

<sup>19</sup> [https://www.traffic.org/site/assets/files/10858/in\\_plane\\_sight.pdf](https://www.traffic.org/site/assets/files/10858/in_plane_sight.pdf)



## FOCUS AREA 2

### STRENGTHENING THE RESPONSE TO TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

Of particular concern in the Arab region is online child sexual exploitation (OSCE), due to the high share of children and youth in the population.<sup>20</sup> Overall, reliable data on child sexual exploitation of children across the region is scarce, but the data available shows that the problem is wide and growing. Many Arab countries are vulnerable to cybercrime and several lack the necessary frameworks, policies, and capabilities to prevent and counter cybercrime.<sup>21</sup> As a result, criminals exploiting children online often act with impunity.

Effective justice systems with evidence-based policies and practices and strong transnational judicial cooperation are key in combating transnational organized criminal networks, while strengthening prevention through strong regional threats analysis, strategies, and mechanisms to knowledge-based prevention of serious and organized crime, with particular attention to vulnerable and marginalized groups.

The Arab States are largely committed to countering serious and organized crime, as shown by the drafting of the Arab Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime in 2012. Furthermore, all countries covered by the Regional Framework ratified or accessed the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC), and ten ratified or accessed its Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms. To ensure effective implementation of the UNTOC and its Protocol, allow State Parties to identify specific needs for technical assistance, and encourage international cooperation, the Conference of the Parties of the UNTOC established the Mechanism for the Review and Implementation of the UNTOC and the Protocols thereto.

#### OBJECTIVE 1

##### IMPROVED MONITORING AND ANALYSIS OF CHALLENGES POSED BY SERIOUS AND ORGANIZED CRIME

#### PRIORITIES

- Reinforce the capacities of relevant national entities to conduct disaggregated data collection, analysis, and exchange of information related to serious and organized crime aiming at supporting relevant national authorities with the development of national strategies and roadmaps.

- Support the conduct and dissemination of updated research, threat assessment, and trends analysis aiming at increasing the understanding of national, regional, and international threats.



Forensics training in Morocco as part of project to dismantle human trafficking and migrant smuggling criminal networks. Picture: © UNODC

#### OBJECTIVE 2

##### STRENGTHENED LEGAL FRAMEWORKS, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMMES IN LINE WITH UNTOC AND THE PROTOCOLS THERETO AND INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORKS AND IMPROVED REGIONAL/ INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION TO PREVENT AND COUNTER SERIOUS AND ORGANIZED CRIME

#### PRIORITIES

- Strengthen participation in the UNTOC Review Mechanism at the regional and national level to improve its implementation in coordination with the Secretariat of the Review Mechanism.
- Enhance evidence-based national legislative and strategy frameworks on serious and organized crime.
- Increase the capacities in the formulation, monitoring, and evaluation of national strategies and legislations, including the participation of civil society organizations (CSOs).
- Establish and support international cooperation mechanisms among central and competent authorities pertaining to serious and organized crime.

<sup>20</sup> 76 percent of respondents to the AYS 2021 indicated being 'very' or 'somewhat' concerned about online safety. <https://arabyouthsurvey.com/wp-content/uploads/whitepaper/AYS-2021-Top-10-Findings-English.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> ECPAT International, Regional Overview: Sexual Exploitation of Children in the Middle East and North Africa. <https://ecpat.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Regional-Overview-Sexual-Exploitation-of-Children-in-the-Middle-East-and-North-Africa-ECPAT-research.pdf>

### OBJECTIVE 3

#### ASSISTANCE TO AND PROTECTION OF VICTIMS OF SERIOUS AND ORGANIZED CRIME

##### PRIORITIES

- Establish/strengthen victim assistance/protection mechanisms and procedures responsive to their differentiated individual needs, roles, and capacities.
- Enhance awareness and capacity of relevant actors, including beneficiaries and civil society, on victim assistance and protection mechanisms and procedures responsive to their differentiated individual needs, roles, and capacities, including gender, age, and other intersectional characteristics, as appropriate.

### OBJECTIVE 4

#### IMPROVED DETECTION, INVESTIGATION, PROSECUTION, AND ADJUDICATION OF SERIOUS AND ORGANIZED CRIME CASES, ACHIEVING JUSTICE IN LINE WITH HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORKS

##### PRIORITIES

- Enhance the capacities of criminal justice practitioners and other relevant stakeholders on serious and organized crimes.
- Develop and implement SOPs/guidelines on combatting serious and organized crimes in line with international standards and best practices.

- Enhance participation of female practitioners and promotion of diversity in criminal justice and law enforcement.
- Enhance the effectiveness and integrity of the supply chain with all relevant actors, including public and private entities.
- Enhance the capacities/capabilities of competent authorities in forensics sciences and chain of custody technology-enabled criminality, law enforcement, and legal actors.

### OBJECTIVE 5

#### EFFECTIVE MECHANISMS TO KNOWLEDGE-BASED PREVENTION OF SERIOUS AND ORGANIZED CRIME, WITH PARTICULAR ATTENTION TO VULNERABLE AND MARGINALIZED GROUPS

##### PRIORITIES

- Develop and distribute appropriate gender-sensitive advocacy materials, including awareness raising/events regarding serious and organised crimes to increase social and economic resilience.
- Establish adequate reporting measures/mechanisms on serious and organized crime.
- Develop youth-focused interventions and disseminate knowledge in the educational sector through institutional partnerships.



Mock trial activity as part of training on facing organized criminal groups with participants from Morocco and Niger. Photo: © UNODC



## FOCUS AREA 3

### COMBATING TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS AND SMUGGLING OF MIGRANTS (TIP AND SOM)

Trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants (TIP and SOM) are two of the most pervasive forms of organized crime in the Arab States. The UNODC Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020 found that 30 percent of detected victims in the region are trafficked for sexual exploitation, another 30 percent for forced labour, and 29 percent for exploitative begging.

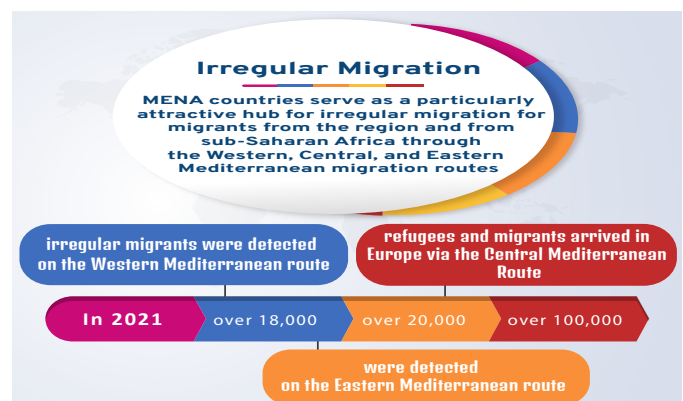


Women make up most of the victims for sexual exploitation and two thirds of the victims of forced labour. The most frequently detected victims of trafficking in the MENA are adults (69 percent in North Africa and over 90 percent in the Middle East). While Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries detected mainly men (52 percent), the remaining Middle Eastern countries detected a larger share of women victims of trafficking (69 percent). Detection of children as victims remains more frequent in North Africa (31 percent) than in the Middle East (8 percent in GCC countries and 5 percent in the rest of the Middle East).<sup>22</sup>

Factors such as poverty, conflict and lack of equal opportunity make some individuals, especially women and children, at greater risk of trafficking. Given their situation, irregular migrants are more vulnerable to smuggling and trafficking and they make up for 60 percent of the detected victims of trafficking in the Middle East and 25 percent in North Africa.<sup>23</sup> The Arab States are particularly prone to TIP and SOM as countries of the region are origin, transit, and destination countries for irregular migration. Given their close proximity to Europe, MENA countries serve as a particularly attractive hub for irregular migration for migrants from the region and from sub-Saharan Africa through the Western, Central, and Eastern Mediterranean migration routes. In 2021 alone, over 18,000 irregular migrants were detected on the Western

Mediterranean route, over 20,000 were detected on the Eastern Mediterranean route, and over 100,000 refugees and migrants arrived in Europe via the Central Mediterranean Route, which saw a 90 percent increase in migrants crossing compared to the previous year.<sup>24</sup>

At the hands of unscrupulous traffickers, many refugees and migrants have been exploited, abused, or have even lost their lives while attempting to reach their destinations. Many human traffickers operate with high levels of impunity placing many vulnerable people, including women and children, at a high level of exposure to risks of being trafficked and smuggled. UNODC's 2020 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons reported a six percent increase in the number of detected victims of trafficking from North Africa to Europe.



Despite existing normative international and continental frameworks, many Arab countries continue to face challenges in preventing and countering TIP and SOM, and how to address their drivers and enablers. This can be attributed to the lack of capacities, capabilities, sufficient financial resources, and regional coordination and cooperation to prevent and counter TIP and SOM, coupled with a lack of accurate and updated data and evidence-based research on flexible and changing migration patterns and routes, all necessary to inform policy planning and decision making. TIP and SOM is of particular concern for the LAS, which tackled the issue of human trafficking in three conventions, namely the Arab Charter on Human Rights of 2004, the Arab Convention to Combat Information Technology Crimes of 2010, and the Arab Convention on Combating Transnational Organized Crime of 2012. Some Arab countries are yet to domesticate the UNTOC and the Protocols.

<sup>22</sup> UNODC, Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, 2020. [https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tip/2021/GLOTiP\\_2020\\_15jan\\_web.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tip/2021/GLOTiP_2020_15jan_web.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Data from Frontex (2022) retrieved from Frontex's annual risk analysis reports summarized under 'Migratory Routes – Central Mediterranean Route', retrieved online on 9 July 2022 from <https://frontex.europa.eu/we-know/migratory-routes/central-mediterranean-route/>

## OBJECTIVE 1

**LEGISLATION, POLICIES, AND STRATEGIES ARE EVIDENCE-BASED, GENDER-SENSITIVE, AND ALIGNED WITH THE UNTOC, ITS PROTOCOLS, AND INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORKS**

### PRIORITIES

- Solid disaggregated data and information on TIP and SOM is available and accessible to Member States for the purpose of policy, strategy development, and programming.
- Support the development and implementation of multi-agency strategies, policies, and action plans to prevent and respond to TIP and SOM.
- Improve national capacities to align TIP and SOM legislative frameworks with the UNTOC and the Protocols thereto, with full respect to human rights, and in line with identified good practices.

## OBJECTIVE 2

**INCREASED NATIONAL CAPACITY TO DETECT, INVESTIGATE, PROSECUTE, PROTECT, AND ADJUDICATE TIP AND SOM CASES ADOPTING A HUMAN RIGHTS, GENDER EQUALITY, AND VICTIM-CENTRED**

### PRIORITIES

- Support the development and/or adoption of comprehensive and sustainable capacity building strategies and tools on the detection, investigation, prosecution, and adjudication of TIP and SOM cases.
- Strengthen the capacity, including knowledge and skills, of criminal justice practitioners to detect, investigate, prosecute, and adjudicate TIP and SOM cases.

- Provide Member States with human rights compliant and gender-sensitive training resources, tools, and materials related to the identification, investigation, prosecution, and adjudication of TIP and SOM. approach

## OBJECTIVE 3

**EFFECTIVE INTER-AGENCY COOPERATION ON THE NATIONAL LEVEL AS WELL AS COOPERATION BETWEEN MEMBER STATES TO PREVENT AND COMBAT TIP AND SOM**

### PRIORITIES

- Support bi-lateral, regional, trans-regional, and international cooperation in this area.
- Support multi-stakeholder policy dialogues and networking on issues relating to TIP and SOM.

## OBJECTIVE 4

**INCREASED NATIONAL CAPACITY TO PREVENT TIP AND SOM AS WELL AS TO IDENTIFY, REFER, AND PROTECT TIP VICTIMS AND THE RIGHTS OF SMUGGLED MIGRANTS**

### PRIORITIES

- Enhance Member States' and their CSOs' capacity to identify, assist, and protect TIP victims, in line with the TIP Protocol and international human rights frameworks.
- Increase Member States' and their CSOs' capacity to protect the rights of smuggled migrants, in line with the SOM Protocol and international human rights frameworks.
- Increase Member States' and their CSOs' capacity to protect people in vulnerable situations, including women and children, within TIP and SOM responses.
- Raise awareness on TIP and SOM crimes and on relevant protection mechanisms available to the public, including people in vulnerable situations.

The most frequently detected victims of trafficking in the MENA are adults







## FOCUS AREA 4

### ACTION AGAINST CORRUPTION AND FINANCIAL CRIME

Corruption and financial crimes, including money-laundering and the financing of terrorism, threaten democratic institutions, hamper socioeconomic development, fuel and facilitate terrorism and organized crime, and hence are driving insecurity, instability, and impeding good governance.

UNESCWA's Arab Governance Index 2021 measures governance through three pillars including:

- (i) the rule of law and ease of access to justice;
- (ii) institutional accountability and effectiveness; and
- (iii) participation and reveals that countries that do well on the index generally have low levels of corruption.<sup>25</sup>

Many citizens across the Arab region are directly confronted with financial exploitation through corruption, fraud, and bribery and are indirectly affected by the misappropriation of public funds. The ASDA\A BCW Arab Youth Survey 2021 revealed corruption as a major obstacle facing the region with 77 percent of respondents 'very' or 'somewhat' concerned about the issue.<sup>26</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic also led to an increase in financial crimes such as fraud, misdirection, and/or exploitation of government funds, thus creating new sources of proceeds for illicit actors.

During this period, the government and private sector's abilities to implement anti-money laundering and counter terrorist financing (AML/CFT) obligations and responses were also impaired.

The vast majority of Arab countries are parties to the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), and they are committed to fully implement its provisions and the resolutions adopted by the Conference of States Parties, including Sharm-El-Sheik Declaration adopted at the ninth session, which aims at strengthening cooperation to prevent, identify, investigate, and prosecute corruption during times of crisis. OIC Member States are prioritizing anti-corruption in a quest to address the devastating and wide-ranging impacts felt because of corruption.



University students organize awareness raising activities on the role of youth in countering corruption as part of the UNODC GRACE initiative in Egypt. Picture: © UNODC/Cairo University

The UNODC publication "The time is now: Addressing the Gender Dimensions of Corruption" examines the relation between corruption and women's empowerment and highlights how corruption and its gender dimensions are poorly understood and inadequately addressed. The report underlines how an effective and sustainable corruption response is only possible with a gender perspective.

UNODC, as the lead entity in the UN system on countering corruption<sup>27</sup>, provides tailored technical assistance to Member States to prevent and counter corruption and financial crimes. UNCAC country reviews have been providing States parties with evidence-based assessments and constitute a valuable tool for identifying strategic deficiencies in their anti-corruption legal and institutional regimes. The assistance provided by UNODC ranges from legislative advice to assistance in the development, implementation and monitoring of anti-corruption policies and strategies; from strengthening the capacity of States and relevant stakeholders to promoting international cooperation including in asset recovery.

UNODC, including through the Stolen Asset Recovery Initiative (StAR), a joint initiative with the World Bank Group, is also actively engaged in assisting several Arab countries in developing strategies, improving interagency coordination, engaging in international cooperation and in facilitating their efforts to recover stolen assets.

<sup>25</sup> UNESCWA, Arab Governance Index, 2021 available at <https://www.unescwa.org/sites/default/files/pubs/pdf/arab-governance-index-english.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> ASDA\A BCW Arab Youth Survey, Hope for the future, 2021. <https://arabyouthsurvey.com/wp-content/uploads/whitepaper/AYS-2021-Top-10-Findings-English.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> Paragraph 65 of the UNGASS political declaration entitled "Our common commitment to effectively addressing challenges and implementing measures to prevent and combat corruption and strengthen international cooperation" annexed to the present resolution.

## OBJECTIVE 1

### **STRENGTHENED LEGAL, POLICY, AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS TO PREVENT AND COUNTER CORRUPTION AND FINANCIAL CRIMES TAKING INTO ACCOUNT, INTER ALIA, THE OUTCOMES OF THE UNCAC IMPLEMENTATION REVIEW MECHANISM AND OTHER RELEVANT ASSESSMENTS**

#### **PRIORITIES**

- Support Member States with the review and development of laws, regulations, and policies to prevent and counter corruption, money laundering, financing of terrorism, and other financial crimes.
- Assist Member States in establishing/supporting strong institutions preventing and countering corruption, money laundering, financing of terrorism, and other financial crimes.
- Assist Member States with the development of the institutional and operational priorities and requirements to enable women and youth to take an active role in preventing corruption and financial crime in their societies.

## OBJECTIVE 2

### **EFFECTIVE AND INCLUSIVE ACTION TO PREVENT AND COUNTER CORRUPTION AND FINANCIAL CRIME TAKEN BY RELEVANT NATIONAL AUTHORITIES AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS**

#### **PRIORITIES**

- Upgrade tailored skills among national authorities in detecting, investigating, prosecuting, and adjudicating corruption and financial crimes, including those committed through the use of modern technology.
- Increase the capacity of national authorities to conduct parallel financial investigations in all forms of proceeds-generating crimes.
- Support civil society, media, sports organizations, academia, and other relevant stakeholders' active engagement in preventing and reporting corruption and financial crimes and promoting anti-corruption education.
- Encourage the private sector to take a more active role in preventing and reporting corruption and financial crimes, including through private- public-sector dialogues.

- Support relevant financial and non-financial institutions to detect and report suspected money-laundering, financing of terrorism, and other financial crimes.
- Support the mainstreaming of anti-corruption measures in national development strategies and technical assistance programmes, including through UN Country Teams.

## OBJECTIVE 3

### **INCREASED INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION AND REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION TO PREVENT AND COUNTER CORRUPTION, MONEY-LAUNDERING, FINANCING OF TERRORISM AND OTHER FORMS OF FINANCIAL CRIMES BETWEEN MEMBER STATES**

#### **PRIORITIES**

- Support cooperation and sharing of information between competent authorities at the national, regional, and international levels on preventing, investigating, prosecuting, and adjudicating corruption and financial crimes.
- Support cooperation and sharing of information between competent authorities at the national, regional, and international levels on identifying, tracing, seizing, freezing, confiscating, recovering, and managing illicitly obtained stolen assets and addressing illicit financial flows, including through the Stolen Asset Recovery Initiative (StAR).
- Enhance Member States' knowledge of regional and international good practices on addressing corruption and financial crimes.

## OBJECTIVE 4

### **KNOWLEDGE-BASED APPROACHES TO PREVENT AND COUNTER CORRUPTION AND FINANCIAL CRIME**

#### **PRIORITIES**

- Increase Member States' capacities to gather, produce, analyse, and manage disaggregated data on corruption and other related crimes in order to establish and run effectively monitoring mechanisms.
- Increase Member States' understanding of the emerging forms of corruption and financial crimes and the impact of corruption during times of emergencies.
- Increase competent authorities and relevant private sector institutions capacities to conduct corruption and money-laundering risk assessments, apply risk-based approaches, and adapt/develop risk management systems in relevant sectors.



## FOCUS AREA 5

### PREVENTING AND COUNTERING TERRORISM

The threat of terrorism in the Arab region remains high and is jeopardizing development efforts, the legitimacy of national institutions, democracy, and governance. Over the past two decades, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (hereafter 'Da'esh') and associated individuals and groups, were considered the deadliest terrorist group in the region. Despite the defeat of its so-called 'caliphate' in 2019 and despite significant losses at the leadership level, Da'esh continues to exploit security gaps and any vulnerabilities conducive to the spread of violent and extremist ideologies. This leaves conflict situations and neighbouring countries particularly vulnerable to the threat posed by Da'esh. Notwithstanding, Da'esh also poses direct threats to non-conflict countries as it encourages attacks on such territories. The terrorist group established its main organizational structures in Iraq and Syria from where it manages its networks operating globally, including branches in Libya, which covers parts of North Africa and the Sahel, in Yemen, which covers the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>28</sup>

Terrorist groups continue to exploit the Internet and increasingly use digital space to radicalize, recruit, and train subjects, spread hateful content and call for violence, move and manage funds, coordinate operations, and plan attacks. New technologies, and the continued emergence of new tools and forms of communication online, continue to challenge effective counter-terrorism efforts. Furthermore, these groups took advantage of the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as the increased use of hybrid and virtual formats, and further increased their efforts in recruiting, radicalizing, and organizing via online platforms. The pandemic also gave way to heightened vulnerabilities to terrorism by causing deteriorated socio-economic conditions and increasing political tension.<sup>29</sup> Growing disparities, grievances with the State and rising poverty left victims exposed and are enablers for terrorists to gain new recruits, including among women, children, and youth. Through their persuasive use of propaganda, terrorist organizations recruit individuals to fight for them. These foreign terrorist fighters include men, as well as women, children, and youth, and can pose a serious threat to national and regional security on their return to their country of origin or relocation.

<sup>28</sup> UN Security Council, S/2022/576, Fifteenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat, 26 July 2022. <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N22/430/78/PDF/N2243078.pdf?OpenElement>

<sup>29</sup> UN Security Council – Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC), Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on terrorism, counter-terrorism and countering violent extremist, Update from December 2021. <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/news/impact-covid-19-pandemic-terrorism-counter-terrorism-and-countering-violent-extremism-update>

<sup>30</sup> [https://www.unodc.org/pdf/terrorism/FTFs\\_manual\\_final\\_version\\_09.04.2021\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/pdf/terrorism/FTFs_manual_final_version_09.04.2021_ENG.pdf)

Terrorism in the region remains linked to the returning fighters. In fact, an estimated

**15,000** **35%** were women  
persons of whom % and children

travelled to Iraq or Syria from the MENA region between 2012 & 2017



Terrorism in the region remains linked to the returning fighters. In fact, an estimated 15,000 persons, of whom 35 percent were women and children, travelled to Iraq or Syria from the MENA region between 2012 and 2017. Individuals facing economic and social difficulties and/or marginalization make up a significant share of foreign terrorist fighters, especially young males.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, women and girls are particularly at risk of experiencing violence from terrorist and violent extremist groups, predominantly through acts of sexual and gender-based violence including rape, sexual slavery, and forced marriage.

The Arab States are committed to promote mutual cooperation in the elimination of terrorist offences through the signature of the Arab Convention for the Suppression of Terrorism in 1998. The region's dedication to fighting terrorism is illustrated by the implementation of several counter-terrorism operations and policies across the region. Despite the success of such actions recorded in terms of impact on the operational capacities of Da'esh, the terrorist threat persists, and more efforts remain to be done to address it. The UN, in line with Security Council [Resolution 2253 \(2015\)](#), is determined to tackle the threat posed by

Da'esh to international peace and security and to support Member States' efforts in countering terrorism and violent extremism conducive to terrorism.

## **OBJECTIVE 1**

### **EFFECTIVE, ACCOUNTABLE, AND VICTIM-CENTRED CRIMINAL JUSTICE RESPONSES TO TERRORISM**

#### **PRIORITIES**

- Increase capacities to conduct and support research and analysis on terrorism prevention, including on perceptions of terrorism-related insecurity, paths to violent extremism, terrorism trends and ways different groups of people are affected, victimization, and to better understand the interlinkages between terrorism, financing of terrorism (CFT), organized crime, and other phenomena relevant to UNODC's mandates.
- Increase capacity of criminal justice officials, including first responders, forensic services, investigators, and magistrates to effectively detect, investigate, prosecute, and adjudicate terrorism offences in accordance with the rule of law and human rights.
- Increase interagency coordination and collaboration among relevant stakeholders, on the operation level and command centre level, to prevent terrorism and enhance the capacity of national officials - at all levels - to coordinate and communicate in response to acts of terrorism, including complex crime scene management, health, and sanitary rescue areas.
- Increase capacity of Member States to effectively advance accountability for terrorism atrocities through an evidence-based approach to ensure its legality and admissibility before the specialized courts, in accordance with national legislation and in line with international human rights standards.
- Facilitate the rehabilitation and reintegration of persons associated with terrorist groups and their families in accordance with the rule of law and human rights.
- Strengthen criminal justice response to terrorism through the provision of legal and psychological support to victims of terrorism to participate in criminal proceedings and reintegrate into their communities, enabling them to contribute to building safer societies.

- Increase capacity and participation of women officials in the counter-terrorism sector and mainstreaming gender dimensions in counter-terrorism responses within policy, criminal justice, and law enforcement institutions.

- Increase capacity to prevent the exploitation of natural resources and protecting critical infrastructure against emerging terrorist threats.

- Increase capacity to investigate, prosecute, and counter terrorism offences, with a focus on those committed through the internet, social networks, and the use of electronic/digital evidence, in accordance with human rights and the rule of law, while promoting cross-border information sharing and cooperation to prevent and counter terrorism.

## **OBJECTIVE 2**

### **INCREASED INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION RELATED TO TERRORISM**

#### **PRIORITIES**

- Increase capacity of criminal justice and other counter-terrorism officials for effective cooperation in terrorism matters across borders, including through mutual legal assistance and extradition, and enhance cooperation between law enforcement and criminal justice officials through regional networking, coordination, and collaboration.

- Increase capacity of national officials working on intelligence, criminal justice, and border security to cooperate across borders to detect, prevent, and respond to acts of terrorism.

- Enhance exchange of experiences and best practices between states and enhance their capacities in the field of international judicial cooperation in counter-terrorism matters.

## **OBJECTIVE 3**

### **MORE WIDESPREAD AND EFFECTIVE APPLICATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS COMPLIANT MEASURES TO PREVENT TERRORISM, INCLUDING VIOLENT EXTREMISM CONDUCTIVE TO TERRORISM**



## FOCUS AREA 5

### PREVENTING AND COUNTERING TERRORISM

#### PRIORITIES

- Support criminal justice and other national officials to prevent terrorism and violent extremism conducive to terrorism and to adopt a victim-centred approach in investigations and prosecutions involving victims and those who are vulnerable.
- Provide youth, families, and vulnerable groups with tools for building resilience to terrorism and violent extremism conducive to terrorism both in communities and digital space through sports, education, and media and collective decision making.
- Provide support for the development and implementation of evidence-based and survivor-centred strategies, policies, and action plans to provide justice and rehabilitation to victims of terrorism.
- Provide support for reintegration strategies to enable the voluntary reintegration of adults associated with terrorist groups.
- Enhance strategic communication on the national, regional, and international levels and capacity to develop effective counter and alternative narratives to prevent violent extremism leading to terrorism.

#### OBJECTIVE 4

##### **STRENGTHENED HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED, EFFECTIVE, AND ACCOUNTABLE LEGAL, POLICY, AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS, STRATEGIES, AND APPROACHES**

#### PRIORITIES

- Provide legal, policy, and programmatic support services to Member States to prevent and counter terrorism in accordance with relevant regional and international conventions, instruments, and standards, including implementation of the relevant Arab Summit Resolutions.
- Support gender mainstreaming in counterterrorism and prevention of violent extremism frameworks and mechanisms to ensure the consideration of different needs and experiences of women and girls in all their diversity, including within the framework of regional and national action plans for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and subsequent UN Security Council resolutions.

- Assist Member States in the creation of strong and human-rights compliant institutions addressing terrorism, as well as mechanisms or bodies for overseeing their performance.
- Assist Member States with advancing accountability for terrorist atrocities through available human rights compliant legal avenues and capacity building for justice in accordance with the rule of law, including strong forensic chain of custody for evidence-based and impartial approach, especially in complex terrorism cases.
- Support advocacy and facilitation for both the development and implementation of human rights compliant, gender-sensitive, and evidence-based policies, strategies, and approaches for preventing and countering terrorism and violent extremism conducive to terrorism.
- Support enhanced legal and policy frameworks to facilitate rule of law based and international standards-compliant prosecution, rehabilitation, and reintegration.



Nadia Murad, UNODC Goodwill Ambassador for the Dignity of Survivors of Human Trafficking, details her fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) as part of a UNODC panel discussion.  
Photo: © UN/Manuel Elías



## FOCUS AREA 6

### STRENGTHENING CRIME/VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE

In recent years, many Arab countries have made remarkable efforts to introduce more social developmental strategies to prevent crime and strengthen the rule of law and the effectiveness and accountability of their criminal justice systems and made strides to ensure their citizens – including the most poor and vulnerable – have access to human-rights compliant, fair, and effective justice. However, many countries in the region still face challenges in designing and implementing effective crime prevention and criminal justice strategies, which are evidence-based, gender-responsive, human rights compliant, and respect the rule of law. Available, reliable, and comparative data on crime, safety, victimization, crime drivers, and the conditions, which enable crime to thrive, impacts on citizens' safety and security, is lacking and thus weakens crime prevention responses.

Despite efforts that have been undertaken over the past years across the region to improve women's access to justice as well as their rights, there is still room for improvement of legal systems in many Arab countries in terms of granting women and girls the same rights and access to justice as men and boys. Unequal laws and law enforcement practices contribute to women and girls' social and economic disempowerment and in turn, curtailing the region's human development and economic growth. Arab women and girls are at a higher level of risk of violence compared to those in other regions: 37 percent of women in the MENA region have reported experiencing physical violence at least once<sup>31</sup> and over 50 percent of countries in the region do not criminalize violence against women<sup>32</sup> nor marital rape.<sup>33</sup> Globally, crimes involving violence against women are under-reported and less likely to result in a conviction.

Youth and children are particularly vulnerable to crime and victimization. Member States in the region need to make a greater effort towards ending all forms of violence against children (e.g. sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism, domestic violence, forced labour, child trafficking, sexual online exploitation, etc.).

A particularly serious form of violence against children, emerging increasingly in recent years, is the recruitment and exploitation of children by criminal and armed groups,

<sup>31</sup> WHO, 2013 "Global and Regional Estimates of Violence Against Women: Prevalence and Health Effects of Intimate Partner Violence and Non-Partner Sexual Violence". <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/85239>

<sup>32</sup> UN Women, 2018 (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women) Regional Office for the Arab States and North Africa (2018). "Facts and Figures: Ending Violence against Women and Girls".

<sup>33</sup> ESCWA, 2017 ESCWA (Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia) (2017). "The State of Gender Justice in the Arab Region". [www.unescwa.org/publications/state-gender-justice-arab-region](http://www.unescwa.org/publications/state-gender-justice-arab-region)

<sup>34</sup> UNODC, "Statistics and Data—Unsentenced Detainees", <https://dataunodc.un.org/dp-prisons-persons-held>

including those designated as terrorist and violent extremist groups. Children in contact with the justice system are particularly vulnerable and special vigilance is required with regard to the specific situation of these children, especially when deprived of their liberty.

UNODC data has shown a high proportion of adult pre-trial detainees remaining unsentenced in most Arab countries in the last decade.<sup>34</sup> Long pre-trial detention, harsh detention conditions, and lack of adequate rehabilitation and reintegration programmes impede the social reintegration of offenders and increase their chances of recidivism and/or radicalization to violent extremism or terrorism. The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare a multitude of challenges facing criminal justice systems across the world, including in the Arab region, denying and delaying swift and effective access to justice for scores of people in contact with the justice system. Prisons, many of which are already overcrowded, were especially hard hit with prisoners more vulnerable to virus transmission. Many prisons in the region accommodate vulnerable and high-risk prisoners, including those individuals transitioning to more serious forms of crime, including violent extremism. In many prison settings, the needs of women prisoners are not fully met nor reflected in prison management and operations.

#### OBJECTIVE 1

#### MORE EFFECTIVE, HUMAN RIGHTS-, COMMUNITY- AND KNOWLEDGE-BASED CRIME PREVENTION

#### PRIORITIES

- Support the development of strategic and policy frameworks related to crime prevention, including frameworks that address key risk factors of violence, crime and drug-use and the drivers of violent extremism.
- Increase the capacities of governmental entities and CSOs to develop and implement evidence-based, gender-responsive, and comprehensive national and local crime prevention strategies and interventions.
- Support implementation of holistic, multiagency, and people-centred initiatives to prevent youth crime and



## FOCUS AREA 6

### STRENGTHENING CRIME/VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE

victimization by all relevant actors, including governmental entities and CSOs.

- Support and empower youth-led crime prevention initiatives.
- Support evidence-based prevention including through strengthening monitoring and evaluation frameworks and impact assessment studies.

#### OBJECTIVE 2

##### **STRENGTHENED ACCESS TO JUSTICE THROUGH MORE EFFECTIVE, FAIR, HUMAN RIGHTS BASED, GENDER-RESPONSIVE, AND ACCOUNTABLE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEMS**

#### PRIORITIES

- Support law enforcement institutions to provide human rights-based, accountable, gender-responsive, and inclusive policing.
- Strengthen the integrity, accountability, and independence of the judiciary.

- Strengthen the effectiveness and inclusiveness of the administration of justice while upholding human rights, including through e-justice, by supporting prosecution and forensic services, including the chain of justice and judiciary.
- Enhance the capacity of criminal justice actors, including legal aid providers, to organize, coordinate, and deliver quality legal aid services.
- Promote and support the implementation of restorative justice.
- Enhance legislation, policy and support services provided by governmental actors and CSOs for the benefit of victims, witnesses, and experts.
- Enhance the capacities of concerned/relevant entities, including judicial institutions to facilitate and expedite international cooperation in criminal matters, particularly judicial cooperation.

#### OBJECTIVE 3

##### **VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS (VAW&G) IS PREVENTED, AND ACCESS TO GENDER-RESPONSIVE JUSTICE TO WOMEN AND GIRL VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE OR IN VULNERABLE SITUATIONS IS INCREASED**



A girl takes part in a play as part of the rehabilitation through art efforts by UNODC for youth within juvenile institutions in Egypt – the scene shows her entry to the institution and the sign reads “social care institution for children.” Photo: © UNODC

## PRIORITIES

- Increase awareness on harmful practices and attitudes that aims to perpetuate and validate VAW&G.
- Improve legislation, policy, and institutional frameworks on VAW&G, taking into consideration data collection and analysis, in order to ensure an effective and evidence-based response to such practices.
- Increase institutional capacities to prevent and effectively respond to VAW&G by providing necessary equipment to execute their functions.
- Enhance coordination, partnerships, and referral mechanisms between criminal justice entities and CSOs to provide victim-centred services.
- Promote gender balance in the criminal justice sector by encouraging increased participation of women and women agencies in criminal justice and law enforcement institutions, mechanisms, and decision-making platforms.

## OBJECTIVE 4

### **STRENGTHENED ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR CHILDREN, PREVENTION, AND RESPONSES TO VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN, INCLUDING BY TERRORIST AND VIOLENT EXTREMIST GROUPS**

## PRIORITIES

- Improve legislation, policy, and institutional frameworks on justice for children, in line with international norms and standards.
- Increase the capacity of governmental stakeholders and CSOs to protect children, prevent, and respond to violence against children, including cyber-exploitation, in a coordinated manner.
- Promote and implement restorative justice and non-custodial measures for the best interest of the child.

- Develop gender- and age-sensitive legislation and regulations to improve the treatment of children in conflict by relevant institutions, in accordance with international law, provided that such legislation and regulations include rehabilitation and reintegration programmes.
- Increase the capacity of children and their environment to resist crime and violence (including recruitment and exploitation) and/or successfully reintegrate into society.

## OBJECTIVE 5

### **COMPREHENSIVE AND GENDER-RESPONSIVE PENAL AND PRISON REFORMS IMPLEMENTED TO REDUCE THE OVERUSE OF IMPRISONMENT AND PRISON OVERCROWDING AND ENHANCE REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION SERVICES AS WELL AS ADDRESSING VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN PRISONS**

## PRIORITIES

- Improve detention conditions and enhance management's capacity to provide safe, humane, and gender-sensitive services, in line with international human rights norms and standards.
- Improve rehabilitation and reintegration programmes of prisoners (including violent extremism) in cooperation and coordination with national institutions and CSOs, through promoting effective and positive environments and community-based support services.
- Promote and enhance access to evidence-based health services, including treatment of drug use disorders, HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment, and care from the point of arrest through to post-release.
- Strengthen/develop internal and independent prisons inspection mechanisms to support adequate human rights based and gender-sensitive reports and recommendations.



# TRANSFORMING THE APPROACH – LEVERAGING SIX KEY ACCELERATORS

UNODC Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa (ROMENA) aims to support Member States with their international and regional development goals impactfully and sustainably by mainstreaming six accelerators across its programming. These accelerators are symbiotic and can be deployed as standalone levers or in combination. The six accelerators listed lie at the core of UNODC programmatic approaches throughout the Arab region.



STRONG PARTNERSHIPS



WOMEN AND GIRLS



INNOVATION, SCIENCE AND  
FORENSICS



HUMAN RIGHTS



YOUTH AND CHILDREN



INCLUSIVE AND PEOPLE-CENTRED  
PROGRAMMING

# SIX KEY ACCELERATORS



## STRONG PARTNERSHIPS

Challenges in the Arab region, in connection with UNODC's mandate, span a number of inter-related pillars notably security, rule of law, peace, human rights, development, and health. UNODC's contribution to peace and stability in the region requires the Office to expand partnerships towards the development of innovative integrated responses to organized crime, terrorism, and corruption. UNODC will expand, broaden, and deepen partnerships and collaboration with national, regional, international, and multilateral stakeholders and institutions, representative of UN agencies, public institutions, civil society, national women machineries, the private sector, academia, research, and the donor community.

In support of the UN Development System reform and as a stronger and more present UN Country Team partner, the Office seeks to scale up work through joint UN programmes with a focus on conflict-affected and fragile countries and contexts. Together with the LAS, regional organizations, Member States, and other key partners, UNODC will focus support towards strengthening systematic South-South and triangular cooperation between countries as well as facilitating mutually reinforcing partnerships, networks, and platforms with the private sector and civil society.

An important initiative supported by UNODC is the annual Aswan Forum for Sustainable Peace and Development spearheaded by Egypt in 2019 with a focus on Africa. The initiative brings together several hundred participants from all over the world representing around 70 countries as well as international and regional organizations. Given the clear linkages between peace, security, climate change, and organized crime groups, human trafficking, and terrorist groups penetrating Africa, UNODC supports the Aswan Forum and its platform role in the dialogue. Their Secretariat, the Cairo International Centre for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding (CCCCPA) is co-organizer, and also a valued partner for technical assistance delivery to Member States across areas relevant to all UNODC's mandates and based on priorities generated through the Aswan Forum.



UNODC partners with CSOs in Tunisia to provide Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) programmes to prison health staff to improve rehabilitation and decrease recidivism. Photo: © UNODC



UNODC partners with the media in Iraq to enhance their role in prevention of terrorism. Photo: © UNODC



# WOMEN AND GIRLS

The Arab region demonstrates a commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment, as seen by Member States' adherence to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and to Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS), following which several countries in the region adopted national action plans and the LAS adopted a Regional Action Plan (2015) on WPS. Furthermore, the LAS developed the Cairo Declaration for Arab Women (2014) and the Strategic Plan of Action of the Cairo Declaration for Arab Women: the post-2015 Agenda (2015).<sup>35</sup> The latter is the implementation document of the former and it is based on international conventions, notably CEDAW and its appendices, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action issued at the Fourth World Conference on Women, the UN Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals, the Cairo Declaration on Population and Development (2013), as well as the principles of sustainable development and the post-2015 development goals.

The OIC Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women (OPAAW, 2016) and recent creation of the Egypt-based Women Development Organization (WDO) support the gender equality and women's' empowerment architecture of OIC Member States. In cooperation with WDO, UNODC will scale up support in four specified areas with a view to improving the safety, security, health, and rights of women and girls across the Arab region through supporting:

- 1 Advancement of women's economic empowerment,
- 2 Elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls,
- 3 Women leadership in promoting peaceful and inclusive society,
- 4 Strengthening the role of women in fighting corruption.

Over the coming five years and in alignment with the [UNOV/UNODC Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment \(2022-2026\)](#), the Office will build on existing efforts and identify new opportunities to harness the potential of women and girls as partners and agents of change as well as enabling improved access to gender-sensitive justice, health, and protection services. Adopting an intersectional approach, UNODC, the LAS, the OIC, civil society, UN agencies, and other key partners will together deliver programmes and support efforts, mechanisms, and initiatives, which challenge the discrimination faced by women and girls, improve inclusion, and ensure the wider representation and participation of women in the justice and security sectors and as decision makers and leaders. Programming, which engages with men as well as with women to help challenge social norms and gender stereotypes, will be scaled up with the support of expanded collaboration with national counterparts and partners across the UN system and from civil society.



Female law enforcement in Jordan take part in a training by UNODC's Airport Communications programme (AIRCOP) on gender equality and the empowerment of women in law enforcement in airports. Photo: © UNODC



Algerian Officer presents to fellow officers the collective efforts needed to face different criminal networks. Photo: © UNODC

<sup>35</sup> League of Arab States, Cairo Declaration for Arab Women and the Strategic Plan for Women Empowerment in the Arab Region- 2030 Development Agenda. [https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/sites/violenceagainstchildren.un.org/files/children\\_on\\_the\\_move/cairo\\_declaration\\_for\\_arab\\_women\\_e\\_1.pdf](https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/sites/violenceagainstchildren.un.org/files/children_on_the_move/cairo_declaration_for_arab_women_e_1.pdf)



# INNOVATION, SCIENCE AND FORENSICS

During this unprecedented era of digitalization, scientific advancement, and technological developments, UNODC will responsibly strengthen responses, which leverage digitalization, science, technology, and forensics guided by human rights-based, ethical, and inclusive standards. The Office will increase security, justice, and the health sectors' accountability, effectiveness, coordination, information sharing, and knowledge base regionally and nationally through managed digitalization of processes and with the use of related emerging technologies. UNODC promotes the deployment of digitalization in a manner that aligns with human rights standards, privacy laws, and do no harm principles.

UNODC will work with the LAS, Member States, regional organizations such as NAUSS and other relevant OIC organs as well as the Arab region's scientific and tech community, to increase support in forensic science capabilities and capacities towards the prevention and detection of organized crime and terrorism. Strong forensic processes, allied to good policing, are capable of creating a climate of deterrence for potential criminals and increasing public confidence in the criminal justice system. Digital forensics has become one of the principal strands of forensic science and offers significant opportunities to combat crime and by so doing, strengthens public and judicial trust in the rule of law.

Investments will be made to support and scale up the use of frontier technologies, including home-grown initiatives from around the Arab region and their private sector, for the purposes of security, disrupting and detecting illicit activity, identifying trends in illicit markets, strengthening integrity of several forms of organized crime, as well as delivering technical assistance more effectively, for example through virtual reality. Therefore, UNODC also promotes the deployment of innovation, science and supporting forensic capabilities and capacities in a manner that aligns with human rights standards, privacy laws, and do no harm principles. The Office will empower and involve citizens from all segments of society to leverage innovation and science against crime, drugs, terrorism, and corruption.



Forensic science laboratory expert Rawan Tomalieh conducts a microscopic examination in Ramallah, West Bank. Photo: ©HAYA Joint Programme/Samar Hazboun.



Training in Jordan on utilizing artificial intelligence to enhance the capacities of frontline officers as part of the Integrated Border Management (IBM) programme. Photo: © UNODC



# HUMAN RIGHTS

The protection and promotion of human rights is a key principle guiding UNODC programme implementation and evidence generation across the Office's mandated work. UNODC will strengthen its engagement with Arab countries towards upholding human rights norms and laws and promoting a holistic approach in its obligation to respect, protect, and promote human rights.

The Office will help to deepen a systematic understanding of equality, non-discrimination, participation, and inclusion among partners and stakeholders and will identify new ways to build upon the foundations of multilateralism and human rights. Part of UNODC's support will include support to Member States to create enabling social and legal environments, which are accessible to people who require effective, fair, and non-discriminatory services.

UNODC will align its work with the UN-system wide Human Rights Due Diligence Policy on UN Support to non-UN Security Forces (UNHRDDP) to ensure that UNODC activities with and for security forces are carried out following thorough examination and assessment of the human rights situation and risks. Furthermore, UNODC will adopt a conflict-sensitive approach to programming in support of the do no harm principle to increase project acceptance and help mitigate risks.



Migrants attend an awareness raising session in Lebanon on protection and assistance needs of refugees and displaced persons vulnerable to trafficking in persons in Lebanon and Jordan. Photo: © UNODC



# YOUTH AND CHILDREN

The Arab region is the region with one of the youngest populations in the world. According to UNICEF, children and young people<sup>36</sup> account for nearly half the region's population with two-thirds of the region's population under the age of 35.<sup>37</sup> This bulge brings enormous productivity potential with 271 million children and youth expected to inhabit the MENA region by 2050. For the vast majority, finding gainful employment is - and will continue to be - a challenge. The dual shock of the 2020 COVID-19 crisis and collapse in oil prices have led to an economic downturn bringing additional challenges to the region affecting young men, boys, women and girls disproportionately. According to ILO (2020), the MENA region has the highest youth unemployment rate globally with little under a third of youth unemployed. In North Africa and the Arab States, 87.5 and 85.1 percent of youth, respectively, were in informal employment in 2016.<sup>38</sup> The threats of crime, violence, and drugs will hinder economic opportunities for young men and women as well as risking health, stability, security, and governance in the MENA region. If not managed well, youth bulges can exacerbate existing socioeconomic challenges in contexts of poor economic performance, social stress, and institutional fragility, which can lead to instability, violence, and displacement<sup>39</sup> At the same time, young people have great potential to act as agents for change with the potential to make a considerable contribution to development, peace, and security in the region. The ASDA'A BCW Arab Youth Survey 2021 revealed nearly three-quarters of young Arabs feel their voice matters to their respective countries' leadership, with young people in Egypt, Kuwait, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE most confident.<sup>40</sup> UNODC will intensify efforts to involve, support, and empower youth and children across the Arab region to build resilience from, and be agents of change against drugs, crime, terrorism, violence – including violent extremism – and corruption. The Office will add focus on areas including supporting data, education, research, and analytical capacities towards improved policies and programmes responsive to the needs of youth and children, enhancing youth- and child-centred legal, policy, and institutional frameworks, empowering youth as agents of change, and supporting whole-of-society solutions and initiatives. In 2022, UNODC ROMENA launched the regional 'Youth 4 Impact' project to help young men and women, including those marginalized and at risk, to become more empowered to face life's challenges and be more resilient against crime, violence, and drugs. 'Youth 4 Impact' is the first UNODC regional project specifically aimed at supporting young men and women. The initiative is an example of UNODC's commitment to expanding engagement with and for youth as well as to supporting Member States' institutional capacity-building in prevention under the umbrella of this Regional Framework.



Children in Palestine participate in a marathon as part of the Youth 4 Impact programme by UNODC, which utilizes sports to increase children and youth resilience against drugs, crime and violence. Photo: © UNODC

<sup>36</sup> Human beings under the age of 18 years, in accordance with article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). General Assembly, Convention on the Rights of the Child, 20 November 1989, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1577, No. 27531

<sup>37</sup> UNICEF (2019), MENA Generation 2030.

<sup>38</sup> ILO (2020) Global Employment Trends for Youth 2020: Technology and future of jobs.

<sup>39</sup> United Nations and World Bank (2018) Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict, Washington, DC; ISS, Violence in Africa Trends, drivers and prospects to 2023, Aug 2018; GRID Global Report on Internal Displacement 2019; UNHCR Crisis in the Sahel: UNHCR emergency and protection response, Feb 2020.

<sup>40</sup> ASDA'A BCW Arab Youth Survey, Hope for the future, 2021. <https://arabyouthsurvey.com/wp-content/uploads/whitepaper/AYS-2021-Top-10-Findings-English.pdf>



# INCLUSIVE AND PEOPLE-CENTRED PROGRAMMING

In an elevated commitment to leaving no one behind, UNODC will scale up responses, which integrate a gender-sensitive approach, promote inclusion, reduce stigma and discrimination, strengthen whole-of-society approaches, and address the structural barriers for vulnerable groups, including minorities, migrants, refugees, prisoners in correctional centres, people with disabilities, and those facing disproportionate discrimination and exclusion from accessing services, protection, and justice.

Across its programming, the Office will scale up interventions involving whole-of-society responses and will expand partnerships with and involve civil society and people with lived experiences of crime, drugs, and terrorism, as well as promoting their participation from the point of programme design through to delivery.



Law enforcement officer presents her idea of a day in the life of a leader who empowers women and their presence in a training by UNODC's Airport Communications programme (AIRCOP). Photo: © UNODC



25 frontline representatives from CSOs and NGOs in Lebanon, who work with children, youth and families in vulnerable situations, take part in the UNODC Strong Families training. Photo: © UNODC

# BUSINESS MODEL TOWARDS MORE EFFICIENCY AND SUSTAINABLE IMPACT

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UNODC commits to an inclusive and agile Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa, supported by strong country level presence, which is transparent, open, innovative, responsible, effective, and impactful to ensure the levels of transformational change to meet expectations from the region. The improved programmatic approach will be supported through:

**Integrated programme development and delivery** – in the context of the UN Reform, UNODC will work towards a coherent and efficient integration with the UN system in the field, delivering through joint UN programming. The Office will continue strengthening engagement with regional development coordinator offices, Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams ensuring Common Country Assessment and UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) processes address the challenges and responses linked to UNODC mandate areas as guided by Agenda 2030.

Whole-of-government and -society approaches enable government sectors, citizens, civil society, academia, and the private sector to use their powerful collective and combined impact in contributing to sustainable development outcomes. Agenda 2030 calls for governments and their public bodies to work beyond their more traditional programming models and collaborate with a multitude of government and non-government partners adopting integrated and inter-agency approaches attuned to specific contexts. UNODC can support governments to ensure a partnership enabling environment and implement programmes and projects, which leverage multi-stakeholder engagement based on government and societies' capacities, strengths, and contributions. Programming under this Regional Framework will seek to diversify partners, including involvement of new key ministries in areas of UNODC's work such as the Ministries of Education, Youth, Social Affairs/Solidarity, and Sports.

**Stronger research, evidence-based policy, and data analysis** – effective responses to drug, crime, corruption, and terrorism challenges require a strong evidence-base, yet data relating to these challenges is limited. UNODC will contribute further towards building research capacities and capabilities across all disciplines across the Arab region, supported by scientific and technical expertise and oversight in its headquarters in Vienna, to contribute to an evidence-based and improved policy response, and quality and sustainable impact in line with international and best practices. UNODC will work closely with the LAS to strengthen and expand partnerships with national, regional,

and international research institutions and academia towards building sustainable capacities in research, data, and analysis, leveraging innovation for data, as well as building sustainable capacities locally and regionally.

**Improved communications, advocacy, and visibility** – UNODC programming will utilize the following communication tools and mediums:

- Web pages and stories, which are impact- and result-focused, storytelling in style, and include appropriate visuals and media in respect of privacy and do no harm principles considering UNODC's diverse audiences, including those with disabilities, varying levels of literacy, and limited internet access;
- Corporate social media accounts that provide content in Arabic, English, and French (the latter when applicable) with messages appropriate and accessible to all demographics of the audience;
- Press relations and networks to widely disseminate relevant news of the Office implementation and partnerships.

The UN Communications Group (UNCG) is the working group responsible for supporting the UN Country Teams to achieve the UN's "One Voice" component. As a member, UNODC will take part in all relevant meetings and coordination as well as utilize the UNCG as a channel to join in UN efforts, expand UN sister partnerships, and communicate its common efforts. UNODC will work with all implementing partners to ensure visibility of joint impact and results as well as communicating coherently and in adherence to relevant LAS, UNODC, UN system and donor communication and visibility requirements, standards, and publishing protocols. A set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are put in place to report on the status of UNODC's communications results across the region. Such KPIs include social media analytics of reach, engagement, and views. Such reports will allow for continuously making improvements to communications based on data and analyses.

**Resource mobilization** – this Framework will be underpinned by a fundraising plan aimed at opening up new avenues for diversifying and broadening UNODC's donor base. The Office will collaborate with Arab Member States' national counterparts and regional organizations to identify needs and specific areas requiring normative support, technical assistance and to expand research and analysis capacities.



Nested within the UNODC’s Strategic Vision for Africa 2030, the Africa Initiatives are eight thematically aligned initiative areas which serve to concentrate UNODC’s operational resources, objectives, and desired outcomes, and through which UNODC can both provide expertise and technical capabilities to mobilize and champion change across Africa. The Initiatives individually cover:

- 1 Health
- 2 Safety and Security
- 3 Economic Crime and Corruption
- 4 Protecting Natural Resources
- 5 Gender
- 6 Youth
- 7 Livelihoods and Employment
- 8 Innovation

**Conflict-affected and fragile environments** – UNODC commits to increasing its support in humanitarian settings and in contexts of conflict and fragility. UNODC’s work contributes towards better protecting people from terrorism, armed and non-armed violence, and all forms of organized crime, building resilient and inclusive institutions, enhancing the protection and assistance to victims and witnesses of crime and terrorism, and supporting the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders and their access to justice. UNODC will place increasing emphasis to ensure that the Office’s involvement in conflict and fragile contexts is human-rights based, gender-responsive, conflict-sensitive, respects the do no harm approach, and makes a positive contribution to peacebuilding.

## IMPLEMENTATION Programming

This Framework guides the next generation of programming for the Arab region in accordance with their specific needs and priorities and in line with recommendations from the LAS, Member States, and other key stakeholders. Projects and activities of UNODC Regional, Global and Country Programmes will be closely aligned with this Framework and tailored to the needs of the Arab Member States.

## UNODC AND THE REGIONAL RESPONSE

UNODC technical assistance and cooperation services to 18 Member States in the Arab region are delivered through the UNODC Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa (ROMENA)<sup>40</sup> and in close partnership with the UNODC Office for the Gulf Cooperation Council Region (OGCCR)<sup>41</sup>,

and UNODC Global Programmes. ROMENA will work closely with OGCCR to further identify and mainstream synergies and partnerships between Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and other Arab States towards facilitating and maximizing support for broader regional outcomes.

ROMENA will coordinate with UNODC HQ and other UNODC regional and/or country offices in a conscious effort to promote South-South cooperation. Efforts will be geared towards expanding and consolidating UNODC’s presence in the region and at country level to enhance delivery in all UNODC mandated areas.

UNODC ROMENA will lead on, and manage the Regional Framework and programming, under the direct oversight of the UNODC Regional Representative, and with support from the Regional Section for Africa and the Middle East (RSAME) and the Integrated Programme and Oversight Branch in the Division of Operations at UNODC headquarters in Vienna. In addition to project implementation, ROMENA will engage with counterparts to obtain Member States’ political ‘engagement’; raise the visibility of the Regional Framework, programme portfolio, and UNODC’s profile amongst counterparts, donors, and recipients.

UNODC Liaison Offices provide support with UNODC strategic partners based in Brussels and New York. In Brussels this includes the European Union, the Government of Belgium, and the World Customs Organization. In New York, UNODC coordinates with the UN Secretariat, General Assembly Committees, Security Council, Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and other UN bodies to coordinate policies and to promote inclusion of UNODC priorities in broader UN policies.

## STEERING AND FOLLOW- UP COMMITTEE

The Steering and Follow-Up Committee (SC) oversees the implementation of the Regional Framework and programming in the region and is hosted and co-organized by the LAS annually to review UNODC ROMENA’s strategy, programmes, challenges, and priorities as well as to issue recommendations. The SC will ensure that there is no duplication of effort in the areas of drug control, crime prevention, and criminal justice reform in the region and assist in mobilizing resources for initiatives under this Regional Framework.

<sup>40</sup> Arab States covered by UNODC ROMENA: Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen.

<sup>41</sup> Arab States covered by UNODC OGCCR comprise the Member States of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf i.e., Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates.



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