

First comprehensive study on gun violence in Europe identifies alarming trends

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The steady decline in lethal gun violence in the EU came to halt in 2012 and some countries, such as Sweden, have even noticed an increase since then. An arms race among drug criminals and an increase in the

availability of illegal firearms could lead to more criminal and gun violence. This is one of the noteworthy conclusions from Project TARGET, a new, extensive European study coordinated by the Flemish Peace Institute in which Marieke Liem and Katharina Krüsselmann participated on behalf of Leiden University.

Commissioned by the European Committee, [Project TARGET](#) provides the very first baseline study into the impact of the illegal arms trade on gun [violence](#) in Europe. Not a moment too soon, now that [policy makers](#) from several European countries are frantically searching for policy responses to shootings and disturbing evolutions in firearms trafficking.

Market being flooded with cheap and illegal weapons

Highlighting dozens of examples from all over Europe, Project TARGET shows, among other things, how a constant flow of cheap weapons is drastically transforming the illegal firearms market and possibly making it even more profitable. Most often it concerns converted or reactivated weapons, coming in from Turkey and from Central and Eastern Europe, or postal packages containing gun parts being shipped from the U.S. ending up in the wrong hands. But 3D printing is also becoming more important. Last month, the Dutch Police raided a clandestine workshop and confiscated nine 3D printers that were used to print gun parts. Criminals are also increasingly making use of the Internet to purchase weapons, both on and off the so-called Dark Web.

Gun violence as means to earn respect

Marieke Liem, Professor Social Resilience and Security, discusses the study's outcomes: "Our findings suggest that loosely structured or criminal groups without a structural organization are inclined to use

firearms at an earlier stage and tend to consider gun violence as a means to earn respect. This is demonstrated by the sudden eruptions of gun violence in large urban areas in the Netherlands and Sweden. Perceived insults by criminals can lead to sudden eruptions of gun violence, while also claiming bystanders as victims. Given these circumstances, gun violence can easily become endemic."

Nils Duquet, director at the Flemish Peace Institute: "Illegally acquiring firearms is becoming easier and available locally, as is shown by our research. The available supply that exists today is sufficient for even low-ranking criminals to arm themselves. Additionally, the competition between drug criminals is intensifying. Setting in motion an [arms race](#) in which even heavier weapons are being purchased by those higher up on the ladder."

Gun violence is rarely seen as a national security priority, according to the researchers. Duquet: "The social impact of the violence it entails can be very sudden and disruptive. Within Europe, progress is currently being made on a structural, proactive approach. But there are many blind spots and problem areas that require an increase in capacity, sharing of information, research and the elimination of legal loopholes. This report adds an important piece to this puzzle."

More information: Targeting gun violence & trafficking in Europe: [vlaamsvredesinstituut.eu/wp-co ... ET-OnlineVersion.pdf](https://vlaamsvredesinstituut.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/ET-OnlineVersion.pdf)

Provided by Leiden University

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