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Original research article

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20544/uklop.2026.637>

Received: 11.02.2026 • Accepted after revision: 12.03.2026 • Published: 10.05.2026



#UKLO
Annual **International**
Scientific Conference

TACKLING ORGANIZED CRIME AND THE NEED TO PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: According to the 2030 Agenda, "To achieve sustainable development, peace and security are necessary; and peace and security will be at risk without sustainable development." The paper will contribute to building Security, peacebuilding and resilience in the context of sustainable development.

Methods: When preparing the paper, the author uses general methods, including descriptive, normative, comparative, and content analysis methods.

Results: In the final part of the paper, the author concludes that the Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime builds a global strategic approach to tackling organized crime by strengthening political commitment to addressing the challenge, building an evidence-based base on organized crime, and developing networks of resilience in affected communities.

Discussion: The widening gap between crime authorities and resilience efforts highlights the urgent need to adopt practical strategies to combat organized crime globally. A primary tool for combating organized crime is the ability to develop and manage an effective response strategy.

Keywords: The Global Organized Crime Index, measurement indicators, Global Initiative Strategy (2024-2026)

INTRODUCTION

Today, the world faces a number of serious and often interconnected threats and challenges, including violent conflict, climate change, growing inequality, the impact of rapid technological innovation, and mass migration. Organized crime is either an enabler of these trends or makes a profit from them. It thrives in the cracks of our broken world. (See: <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/global-initiative-gitoc-strategy-2024-2026/>).

For example, criminals transport weapons into and out of conflict zones from Afghanistan to Ukraine and from the Democratic Republic of Congo to Sudan. Criminal groups are increasingly used as a tool to support or overthrow governments, to undermine opponents, or to wage hybrid or proxy warfare. They contribute to the destruction of the natural environment through illegal logging, overfishing, and illegal dumping. They prey on the poor through extortion or by luring victims into human trafficking.

The scientific justification of the paper is – The paper provides an interdisciplinary and critical understanding, analysis of organized crime that is increasingly infiltrating legal economies, and emerging as a powerful economic and social force. The need to promote international cooperation and develop innovative strategies is vital to mitigate this threat (This threat requires a global response). The paper contributes to building security, peace building and resilience in the context of sustainable development or, more specifically, analyzes the relationship between organized crime, corruption and the achievement of sustainable development.

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The author uses the Descriptive Method – a general method that allows for a deeper insight and study of the nature of the phenomenon itself, which is the subject of the research; (this method contributes to the development of science). The subject of research is organized crime and how to provide an effective response in dealing with organized crime. Dealing with this threat is an important condition for achieving global peace, security and stability.

Normative method - As a basic methodological procedure or technique for collecting data, the author uses content analysis of legal documents - European Union regulations, international documents, reports and internet sources, analysis of strategies, etc.

Comparative method – the author analyzes the global index of organized crime and analyzes the activities undertaken by The Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime – proposes new methodologies for analyzing organized crime and designing more effective strategic and political responses to prevent it.

Through the Method of Analysis, the subject of research is broken down into its component parts, its factors, its connections and relationships in a specific space and at a specific time, thus enabling a more substantial understanding of the phenomenon being researched. As a basic methodological procedure or technique for collecting data, the author uses content analysis of domestic and international references, research papers, publications, reports, conference materials, reports and analyses of various articles, journals and content analysis of websites, legal documents - regulations of the European Union, analysis of strategies, international documents, reports and Internet sources.

URGENT NEED FOR RESEARCH AND CREATION OF AN EFFECTIVE RESPONSE TO DEAL WITH ORGANIZED CRIME

Organized crime, in its many different forms, is presented as a threat to political, economic and social development; it can cause violence and corruption, undermine the rule of law, good governance and democratic processes; can endanger economic growth and poverty reduction and pose significant risks to public health and environmental sustainability (Gerginova, 2021) and (See: Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime programme framework, 2016).

Today, there is an urgent need for research and action on organized crime - promoting new thinking and responses that have a particularly important criminal-political function: setting up a criminal law framework for a proportionate response to increasingly serious and organized forms of crime by increasing the efficiency of prevention, detection and prosecution measures – This facilitates the work of the institutions responsible for implementing the laws, providing clearer direction and tends to increase their efficiency in their work and contributes to reducing the loss of human and financial resources.

Organized crime is a growing threat to security, development, governance and the environment. It is considered an increasingly serious threat to the rule of law, democracy, the rule of law, international peace and stability. In order to solve this security problem, it is necessary to act from the perspective of national security and the protection of national interests, as well as from the perspective of achieving the protection of the interests and values of human and international security (Piccarelli, 2008 : 462).

Despite the global nature of this threat, there is no strategy to prevent and address it. This hinders the ability of states to deal with this serious problem, - it undermines noble goals such as achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, slowing climate change, as well as resolving conflicts and building peace. Therefore, GI-TOC is leading a process to formulate the building blocks of a global strategy against organized crime. (See: <https://globalinitiative.net/initiatives/strategy/>).

Through “organized corruption,” state-embedded criminal actors use all possible means to cling to power and exercise patronage at the expense of public resources and institutions. Furthermore, criminal actors are quickly adapting to the latest technology, using ransomware and artificial intelligence, or moving money or sending messages using encryption.

By 2040, significant progress and reach of organized crime is expected, through the exploitation of climate crises, geopolitical conflicts and technological advances.

Some authors (such as Phil Williams) point to a so-called "fifth wave" of organized crime – organized capital will capitalize on markets of scarcity, taking advantage of disruptions in basic resources such as water, minerals and energy caused by climate change.

Criminal networks can infiltrate legitimate markets, blur the lines between legal and illicit activities, and use scarcity as a driving force for growth (See: The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime WMO Building, 2nd Floor 7bis, Avenue de la Paix CH-1211 Geneva 1 Switzerland).

Using new tools such as artificial intelligence, autonomous vehicles and 5G technology, criminal organizations have reached new levels of sophistication. This makes it more difficult for law enforcement agencies to counter their reach and resilience. Meanwhile, geopolitical tensions are exacerbating the situation, as some authoritarian regimes use criminal networks as an extension of state power, offering criminal organizations safe havens and strategic support in exchange for destabilizing activities abroad.

The “Fifth Wave” raises urgent questions about global preparedness to combat the possible evolution of organized crime and challenges policymakers, law enforcement agencies, and international organizations to rethink their approach to organized crime in a rapidly changing world. Stresses the importance of proactive strategies that go beyond traditional crime-fighting tactics. The Fifth Wave advocates for comprehensive international cooperation, adaptive policymaking, and innovative technology to address this deep-rooted threat.

THE GLOBAL ORGANIZED CRIME INDEX 2023

The next content that I analyze in the paper is about The Global Organized Crime Index 2023. This index, reveals the reach and complexity of transnational organized crime (assesses the capacities of 193 UN member states to counter criminal threats). Along with the original 10 indicators of the criminal market, the Organized Crime Index 2023 introduced five new indicators for measuring criminal activity: financial crime, cyber-related crimes, illicit trade in excise goods, counterfeit goods and extortion and racketeering.

(See: <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/ocindex-2023/> and See: <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/conflict-fragility-resilience-organized-crime-index/>).

The Global Index also includes private sector actors as a new type of “criminal actor.” The Global Index provides a broader perspective on emerging threats and emphasizes a commitment to providing critical data that can help support the identification of effective response strategies. By using data-driven tools, the Index now offers more comprehensive and refined analysis and improves collective understanding of the illicit economy and capacities for building resilience. With the publication of the Global Organized Crime Index in 2023, the aim is to encourage global actors (from policymakers to civil society) to adopt effective, evidence-based strategies in the fight against organized crime. The latest edition of the Global Organized Crime Index (2023) reveals that greater attention must be paid to tackling financial crime – now ranked as the world’s largest criminal market. Furthermore, it is vital to identify and disrupt the role of professional facilitators in the private and public sectors who operate at the border between illegal and legal markets.

THE GLOBAL INITIATIVE AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

The next content I analyze is about The Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime - this initiative was established in 2013. Its vision is to mobilize a global strategic approach to tackling organized crime by strengthening political commitment to addressing the challenge, building an analytical evidence base on organized crime, disrupting criminal economies, and developing networks of resilience in affected communities (See: <https://globalinitiative.net/about-us/network/>).

Today, GI-TOC is the only civil society organization dedicated to analyzing and responding to illegal economies. It began as a small network, mostly composed of members of the police force, concerned about the harm caused by illegal economies (See: <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/The-2024%E2%80%93932026-strategy-GI-TOC-February-2024.v4.pdf>).

GI-TOC has a Resilience Fund that supports more than 170 organizations and individuals, in 55 countries; Creates an annual output of more than 90 high-quality and influential publications that shed light on a wide range of criminal markets and actors from different parts of the world; GI-TOC has published the first Global Organized Crime Index, covering all 193 UN member states, with the additional feature of measuring each country's resilience to organized crime; GI-TOC is a leader in proposing new methodologies for analyzing organized crime and designing more effective strategic and policy responses to prevent and combat it; GI-TOC has developed more direct measures to protect communities and reduce organized crime, by strengthening community resilience and disrupting criminal markets.

The mission of GI-TOC is to provide relevant and timely analysis and adoption of recommendations based on best practices, real-world experience, and innovation. Solutions are proposed at local, national, regional, and global levels among policymakers and change makers.

GI-TOC has identified four focus areas: 1. Better analysis and evidence 2. Market disruption 3. Building resilience 4. Inclusive networks of action.

Advancing the work of GI-TOC in all four areas, collaborating with partners and relevant institutions, and building networks for action, represents the best strategy for combating organized crime and reducing its impact. The primary goal set out in the strategy is to reduce organised crime and mitigate its negative impact on people, the environment, business and states. Any positive change needs to be based on solid current information and evidence that provides an understanding of the local political economy embedded in the global geopolitical context.

The GI-TOC Network constitutes the Annual General Meeting of the Global Initiative and serves as a forum for influence, collaboration, coordination and expertise. It is a common

space where honest debate can take place, experiences can be shared, connections can be developed across institutional lines and support can be sought from all those affected by the impact of organized crime. Membership in the Network ensures strengthened global responses to the challenges of organized crime.

The Resilience Fund complements the ongoing work of the Global Initiative to Incubate Resilience in Communities Damaged or Threatened by Criminal Governance. The Resilience Fund identifies and empowers key civil society actors and builds their operational capacity to create resilience networks in communities affected by organized crime and violence (See: <https://globalinitiative.net/initiatives/resiliencefund/>).

Recognizing the importance of resilience at the local level, the GI-TOC Resilience Fund launched the fifth edition of its Resilience Fellowship (this fellowship provides a platform for cross-sectoral, global, and interdisciplinary collaboration between civil society actors, human rights activists, journalists, artists, scholars, policymakers, grass-roots community leaders, and others working to counter the effects of organized crime.

GLOBAL INITIATIVE STRATEGY FOR COMBATING ORGANIZED CRIME, PLANNED FOR THE PERIOD 2024 - 2026

The 2024-2026 strategy maps out the goals that GI-TOC intends to pursue (this organization aims to improve the knowledge and evidence base on illicit economies and strengthen resilience and multilateral responses).

The objectives of the strategy are to: (See: <https://globalinitiative.net/initiatives/strategy/>)

- Increase understanding, analysis and anticipation of organized crime;
- Encourage “global” approaches to preventing and countering organized crime; namely local and global efforts that are more networked, inclusive and effective;
- Energize the global debate around transnational organized crime and mobilize action to reduce the harmful impact on people, the environment, businesses and states;
- Collect and share good practices in order to have a toolbox of actionable responses relevant for different stakeholders around the world, who are dealing with a wide range of criminal markets;
- Enhance cross-border law enforcement cooperation based on new thinking, innovation, and coordination of responses to TOC;
- Empower local initiatives to affect positive change and build more crime-resilient communities.

The objectives set out in the strategy are aimed at addressing some of the vulnerabilities highlighted by the 2023 Global Organized Crime Index and building on the recommendations made by the GI-TOC on possible elements of a global strategy against transnational organized crime.

STRATEGIC GOALS FOR 2024–2026

In the paper, I also analyze content related to strategic goals in order to achieve better analysis and address certain vulnerabilities; identify possible market disruptions; identify inclusive networks of action – all of this is ultimately related to building community resilience to organized crime as a contemporary threat.

First strategic goal is Improving analysis and evidence base - Policies on illegal economies will be researched – this will contribute to developing better analysis and enriching the evidence base to guide informed responses and set priorities.

Over the next three years, GI-TOC will continue to publish high-quality reports on illegal economies. This will be done by expanding its geographical and thematic focus.

GI-TOC will focus its work on topics, regions and countries where illicit economies have a growing impact. This includes financial crime, environmental crime, extractives, state-embedded actors, urban organized crime, arms trafficking, facilitators along supply chains, and the relationship between violent conflict and illicit economies. To ensure truly global coverage, GI-TOC will increase its presence in Asia and Latin America (including in the Amazon) and increase its focus on Western Europe, Central Asia and Afghanistan.

In 2025, GI-TOC released the third edition of the Global Organized Crime Index. This flagship publication will allow GI-TOC to refine its methodology and measure progress against the results of the first two editions (2021 and 2023). Furthermore, over the strategic period, the Index team will seek to use the data from the Global Index in creative ways to identify emerging trends and the connection between illicit economies and global megatrends. GI-TOC will strive to make a meaningful contribution to the 15th UN Crime Congress, scheduled for 2026.

The second strategic goal is - DEVELOP INNOVATIVE PROGRAMMING FOR MARKET DISRUPTION OVERALL OBJECTIVE:

Develop programming for disruption and reduction of criminal markets. Although organized crime is a global menace, there is no global strategy to counteract it. That is why the GI-TOC will publish a report mapping out ideas of a global strategy against organized crime, which includes actions for governments, law enforcement agencies, the private sector and civil society to more effectively prevent and counteract organized crime.

MAIN GOAL - The growing availability of information in the public domain allows for the democratization of information collection and analysis on illegal economies, while technology can be used as a tool for good, not just as an enabler for criminal actors.

During the strategy implementation period, GI-TOC will continue to use open source intelligence (OSINT) and satellite data to enhance intelligence gathering. It will also use technological tools to identify and attempt to disrupt online markets.

The third strategic objective is- STRENGTHENING RESILIENCE IN VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES

GENERAL GOAL: - To reduce the harmful impact of organized crime by highlighting the plight of victims and survivors, and by supporting - and, where necessary, initiating - community-based initiatives that strengthen resilience to organized crime.

GI-TOC is a civil society network designed to help members of civil society confront and build resilience to organized crime.

To this end, one of the most important pillars of GI-TOC is the Resilience Fund, which has supported over 170 individuals and civil society organizations in 55 countries around the world.

Between 2024 and 2026, GI-TOC will seek to expand the Resilience Fund – both in terms of its resources and its geographical reach. A particular focus will be placed on countries that score low on the Global Resilience Index. Furthermore, innovative pilot projects will be launched to promote community resilience and disruption in hotspots identified in GI-TOC research, for example in West Africa. GI-TOC will maintain a strong focus on human rights in relation to organised crime.

The fourth strategic objective is EXPANDING ACTION NETWORKS

MAIN OBJECTIVE: - Building coordinated, multi-stakeholder and inclusive networks of action and integrity, with global impact and reach.

Generating debates around proposals for a global strategy against organized crime will enable the GI-TOC to strengthen its networks of action. For example, a triangular relationship could be strengthened between the GI-TOC, UNODC and INTERPOL to spearhead the strategy formulation process, capitalizing on the possibility of putting organized crime on the agenda of the Future Summit, scheduled to take place in 2024, and events leading up to and marking

the 25th anniversary of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime in 2025 and the 15th UN Crime Congress in 2026.

The fifth strategic objective is IMPROVING OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY

MAIN OBJECTIVE: - Strengthening the operational efficiency of the organization to ensure good governance, effective oversight and accountability, sustainable growth, safe and motivated staff, and professional, high-profile results.

DISCUSSION

The widening gap between crime authorities and resilience efforts highlights the urgent need to adopt practical strategies to combat organized crime globally. A primary tool for combating organized crime is the ability to manage and develop an strategy for providing an effective response.

Regarding the implementation of future research, I propose the topic related to the concept of strategy and what principles a strategy for dealing with a particular threat should be based on - in my paper - dealing with organized crime.

-As subtopics for future research, I propose - research into the factors that enable organized crime to gain support in society.

-Organized crime markets need to be mapped, specifically, the various sectors, goods, services, enablers and infrastructure, which together constitute criminal economies.

-to conduct an analysis of organized crime groups - along with their structure, activities, cooperative and competitive relationships with other organized crime groups located within the country, and outside the country (the latter requires the development of international cooperation). Certain approaches help to better understand the connections between various organizations and key enablers.

Strategies are useful tools, as they offer a mechanism through which multiple actors from across society can come together (these actors are of varying capabilities in pursuit of common visions and goals) (See: Handbook on strategy against organized crime, 2021). They also represent a strong signal of political intent at the national and international levels, justifying greater action and mobilization of efforts and resources.

By bringing together different sectors and nations, national and regional strategies can effectively help build international resilience networks that offer protection from the problem at both local and global levels. Strategies also form the basis for a more effective response and can be used with a variety of tools, tactics and techniques to achieve defined objectives. The study of organized crime, and more specifically, what constitutes an effective response to the phenomenon, remains a subject of ongoing research and debate. Similarly, existing strategies vary considerably in emphasis, detail, and scope, a product of differing political priorities, legal frameworks, resources, and cultural norms.

A strategic analysis of organized crime should encompass at least three dimensions:

First, it should understand the structural drivers of organized crime – factors that enable organized crime to gain support in society and to become entrenched in various structures of society. These include instability, economic inequality, political or social exclusion, lack of access to key services, (endemic) corruption, etc. Such an approach can help identify the sources of legitimacy of organized crime, as well as the role of criminal actors and interests in underpinning the existing political system.

Second, the results of the analysis should map organized crime markets, specifically the various sectors, goods, services, enablers, and infrastructure that together constitute criminal economies. Examples of sectors could include: the financial sector, which includes various mechanisms for transferring funds; the real estate sector, which provides a conduit for acquiring property as well as for money laundering; and transport services, which are crucial

for the movement of illicit goods. Geographical hotspots, such as border areas, urban centres and transshipment points, should also ideally be identified at this stage.

Third, the analysis should encompass organized crime groups, along with their structure, activities, collaborative and competitive relationships with other organized crime groups located both within and outside the country (the latter requires the development of international cooperation). Certain approaches, such as mapping organizations on social networks, help to better understand the connections between various organizations and key enablers.

Together, these different components lead to a more nuanced understanding of the political economy of organized crime, as well as an understanding of the different risks and trade-offs associated with the various interventions and policies contained in the strategies. An effective strategy, above all, needs to be clear about its overall goal – to define the desired change in relation to organized crime and work backwards from there – an approach sometimes called a “theory of success.” While each country and region is unique, analysis of strategies and responses to organized crime around the world suggests four overarching principles that are broad enough to apply in most contexts.

They are useful because they act as broad pillars and conceptual starting points against which different goals and opportunities can be located.

These principles are as follows:

PREVENTING organized crime from (re)infiltrating communities, economies and political institutions. The aim of this principle is to build resilience to organized crime, denying it the opportunity to penetrate society.

PROSECUTION of organized crime groups and their illicit profits, as their activities increase business costs and risks. This principle should reduce and disrupt the economy of organized crime.

PROTECTION of vulnerable persons and victims from (further) harm. This principle highlights the harm and injuries that organized crime inflicts on people with a victim-centered approach that incorporates human rights and gender perspectives.

PROMOTING partnerships and cooperation at all levels, including across international borders – a whole-of-society approach. This principle, which lies at the core of the Organized Crime Convention, emphasizes the importance of partnerships at local, national and international levels, operating across governmental, non-governmental and private sectors.

Although these principles are relatively universal, their application and the balance of efforts and resources between them will need to be adapted depending on the characteristics of the problem in the country or region.

Strategies to combat organised crime also set specific objectives - rigorously defined specific objectives and clear deliverables are key to ensuring that they lead to the type of systemic change needed to address the phenomenon of organised crime. It follows that the specific objectives should work together as an integrated and systematic response by addressing the various weaknesses identified in the analysis phase, which constitute the various components and enablers of the organised crime system.

CONCLUSION

In the final part of the paper, the author concludes – Organized crime manifests itself differently in different contexts, including conflict settings. The resilience indicators in the Global Organized Crime Index 2023 are multi-sectoral, targeting areas of society at risk of exploitation by criminal groups through political, economic, legal and social measures. There is a continuing and urgent need for research and action on organized crime to promote new thinking and responses to understanding criminal markets, actors and ecosystems.

The Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime builds a global strategic approach to tackling organized crime by strengthening political commitment to addressing

the challenge, building an analytical evidence base on organized crime, disrupting criminal economies, and developing networks of resilience in affected communities. It will contribute to promoting sustainable development, improving the management of global commons, reducing the impact of environmental degradation, and strengthening multilateral cooperation.

The strategy for combating organized crime planned for the period 2024 – 2026 is designed to provide direction for GI-TOC for the next three years. It should also enable GI-TOC to help the world develop a clearer direction for mitigating the worst effects of the growing problem.

By summarizing the contents of the paper, and taking into account the strategic goals and key activities outlined in the strategy for tackling organized crime (planned for the period 2024 – 2026), we can determine the main measures of success (which are expected to be implemented by the end of 2026):

Recognition of the GI-TOC as the leading global civil society partner in combating organized crime; Close strategic partnerships between the GI-TOC and key actors, including UNODC and INTERPOL, as well as regional organization; Adoption of a global strategy against organized crime; Use of the Global Index as the basis for measuring improvements in combating organized crime; A Resilience Fund with annual capital of at least €2 million; Enhanced in-house expertise on financial crime and the impact of technology on illicit economies; A network of GI-TOC observatories with truly global coverage; Recognition of the GI-TOC's work on the use of technology to disrupt criminal markets, particularly through the ECO-SOLVE project; A foresight group recognized for innovative strategic anticipation.

It is necessary to Develop an online tool to collect and share good practices in preventing and combating organized crime; Promote policies that address the threat posed by state-embedded actors; and encourage more common approaches to reduce the links between organized crime and corruption.

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