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**Integration and coordination of efforts by the
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and by
Member States in the field of crime prevention and
criminal justice: other activities in support of the
work of the United Nations Office on Drugs and
Crime, in particular activities of the United Nations
crime prevention and criminal justice programme
network, non-governmental organizations and
other bodies**

Report of the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute

Note by the Secretary-General

The report of the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) was prepared pursuant to article IV, paragraph 3 (e), of the statute of UNICRI and approved by a decision of the Board taken at its meeting held on 29 and 30 October 2025, for submission to the Economic and Social Council, through the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice.

* [E/CN.15/2026/1](#).



Results achieved by the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute

Report of the Board of Trustees

I. Introduction

1. The United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) was established as a United Nations entity and part of the United Nations system pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution 1086 B (XXXIX) of 1965. It is governed by its Board of Trustees, which provides strategic direction and sets priorities.
2. Under its broad mandate to develop and implement improved policies in the areas of crime prevention and control, UNICRI strives to promote justice, strengthen the rule of law and address security threats, in support of peace and sustainable development.
3. UNICRI focuses on specialized niches and selected areas related to transnational organized crime, criminal justice, counter-terrorism and security. The Institute contributes to United Nations policy and operations and supports Member States through its specialized and action-oriented research, training initiatives and capacity-building programmes. Through its action-oriented approach to research, the Institute serves as a conduit for innovative solutions to traditional and emerging challenges, channelling expertise from within and outside the United Nations system.
4. Following an oral report of UNICRI to the Economic and Social Council, delivered in accordance with Council decision 2022/338, the Council, in its resolution [2023/8](#), acknowledged the role of UNICRI as a valuable component of the United Nations system and a contributor to the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In the same resolution, the Council encouraged UNICRI to continue its efforts to advance evidence-based and data-centric approaches to address the global challenges of transnational organized crime in its many evolving dimensions and to promote the rule of law.
5. The present report of the Board of Trustees contains a summary of the work carried out by UNICRI in 2025 in line with the UNICRI Strategic Programme Framework for 2023–2026.

A. Strategic Programme Framework for 2023–2026

6. On the basis of its research, needs assessments and analyses of evolving trends, as well as engagement and consultations with Member States, United Nations entities and international organizations, academic and government institutions, subject-matter experts, non-governmental organizations, programme partners, and beneficiaries of UNICRI projects and research, UNICRI identified the following interrelated transnational crime and justice threats and challenges in its Strategic Programme Framework for 2023–2026:
 - (a) Rising insecurity and terrorism;
 - (b) Reach of organized crime;
 - (c) Role of new and emerging technologies;
 - (d) Human rights abuses and exploitation.
7. Responding to those threats and challenges, the Framework contains the following five strategic priorities, which govern the activities described in the present

report and also reflect the critical importance of gender, climate change and youth as cross-cutting considerations:

- (a) Preventing and countering transnational security threats, terrorism and points of nexus;
- (b) Countering criminal enterprises, illicit financial flows and corrupt practices;
- (c) Promoting the responsible use of new and emerging technologies to address crime and exploitation;
- (d) Preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalization;
- (e) Promoting the rule of law and safeguarding access to justice.

8. The Institute's work under the priorities set out in the Strategic Programme Framework directly aligns with and supports the implementation of the Pact for the Future, adopted by the General Assembly in 2024, and the 2030 Agenda. That alignment is particularly evident in relation to Sustainable Development Goal 16, on peace, justice and strong institutions.

B. UNICRI Gender Strategy

9. Complementing the Strategic Programme Framework for 2023–2026, the UNICRI Gender Strategy outlines the Institute's commitment to gender as a cross-cutting theme and highlights its focus on gender equality and the empowerment of women.

10. The Gender Strategy acknowledges that effective gender-specific action must be adaptable to the diversity among people, cultures and localities. As a living instrument, the Strategy evolves and adapts to the rapidly changing world, making it ideally suited to the complex and dynamic aspects of the Institute's work in the areas of transnational crime, security and justice, including their myriad intersections. In addition, tools, guidelines and resources are included in an addendum to the Strategy in order to guide its application and realize its objectives.

C. Delivery model: from research to practice

11. In 2025, UNICRI delivered on its mandate by adopting an integrated, cross-sectoral approach that combined action-oriented research, knowledge exchange, capacity-building, technical assistance, strategic partnerships and policy engagement. That model underpins all the results described in the present report and enabled the Institute to respond effectively to complex and evolving threats in the fields of crime prevention, justice and security while ensuring that its activities remained grounded in real-world needs.

12. As the foundation of the model, UNICRI conducted research in order to generate insights into specialized areas of risk and support the design of evidence-based interventions. In 2025, the Institute produced the following six research publications:

- (a) *Right- and Left-Wing Violent Extremist Abuse of Digital Technologies in South America, Africa and Asia*;
- (b) *Access to Justice in the Digital Age: Empowering Victims of Cybercrime in Africa*;
- (c) *Crimes Associated with Critical Minerals in Southeast Asia: Trends, Challenges and Solutions*;
- (d) *Green Prisons: A Guide to Creating Environmentally Sustainable Prisons*;
- (e) *Level Up: Gaming and Violent Extremism in Africa*;

(f) *Clicks & Links & Tricks, Oh My! How Serious Organized Criminals Exploit Digital Trust Pathways.*

13. Translating such research into practice, the Institute also developed a wide range of action-oriented research and technical tools to support practitioners and policymakers. Those included 14 products, namely:

(a) “Parents’ perceptions about the use of generative AI systems by adolescents”;

(b) “AI literacy: a guide for parents”;

(c) “Hidden links: facilitating criminal activities while exploiting e-commerce”;

(d) *Analysis of the Interconnected Risks of Climate Security and Violent Extremism: A Practical Guide for Mauritania*;

(e) “Strategies and partnerships for advancing the women, peace and security agenda between Mauritania and Italy”;

(f) “The social re-use of seized and confiscated assets: good policies and practices”;

(g) *15 Years of International Cooperation through the EU CBRN Risk Mitigation Centres of Excellence Initiative*;

(h) *Toolkit on Effective CBRN Planning and Response for Policymakers and CBRN Managers*;

(i) “Investigative guidelines on counterfeit products sold through social media”;

(j) “Investigative guidelines on counterfeit products sold through websites”;

(k) “Investigative guidelines on counterfeit products sold through e-commerce platforms”;

(l) “Investigative guidelines on counterfeit products sold through regular shops and market stalls”;

(m) “Investigative guidelines on import of counterfeit goods by wholesalers for subsequent distribution to retailers”;

(n) Five investigative reference documents for prosecutors on counterfeit goods, each aligned with the five distribution scenarios referred to in points (i) to (m) above.

14. With that evidence base, the Institute’s research supported Member States in the formulation of targeted policies and interventions across thematic priorities. By disseminating qualitative and quantitative findings, UNICRI raised awareness of emerging risks, operational gaps and strategic opportunities in addressing complex criminal and security challenges.

15. UNICRI training and learning activities contributed directly to the dissemination of technical expertise acquired through its operational programmes. The Institute’s capacity to design, implement and evaluate specialized learning programmes, supported by a growing network of institutional and expert partnerships, enabled the delivery of over 60 in-person and online training activities.

16. Drawing on insights from its research and field work, UNICRI provided mentoring, policy advice and technical support on issues ranging from the protection of cultural heritage and counterproliferation financing to cyber-enabled crime and chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear threats. The Institute tailored its interventions to national, regional and international contexts, supporting a diverse range of stakeholders including law enforcement agencies, prosecutors, regulators and civil society actors.

17. As part of its long-term capacity-building and sustainability efforts, UNICRI engaged in outreach through activities such as the annual Summer School on Migration and Human Rights, regional and national workshops, international conferences and postgraduate programmes, including the Master of Laws in Transnational Crime and Justice and the Master of Laws in Cybercrime, Cybersecurity and International Law.

18. The work delivered by UNICRI in 2025 was funded entirely by voluntary contributions. Government donors included France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Norway, the Republic of Korea, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America. Additional support was provided by the European Union, the Asia and Far East Institute for the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders, the Organization of American States and a range of institutional and private sector partners, including SICPA, The Walt Disney Company, the Kay Family Foundation and the Consorzio ASI Caserta.

19. The Institute implemented that delivery model through its headquarters in Turin, Italy, and its liaison offices in Rome, Brussels and New York. It also maintained a project office in Brussels, the Security Improvements through Research, Technology and Innovation Knowledge Centre in Geneva, the Centre for Artificial Intelligence and Robotics in The Hague and the European Union Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Risk Mitigation Centres of Excellence in Abu Dhabi, Algiers, Amman, Manila, Nairobi, Rabat, Tashkent and Tbilisi. UNICRI remained actively engaged in United Nations system coordination mechanisms in each location where it has an official presence.

II. Results across the Institute's five strategic priorities

A. Preventing and countering transnational security threats, terrorism and points of nexus

20. Responding to evolving and interconnected global security threats, UNICRI continued to support national authorities, security services, law enforcement agencies and justice sector institutions in addressing key security risks and nexus points, with a focus on strengthening coordinated, evidence-based and sustainable responses at the national, regional and transnational levels.

1. Protection of public institutions, infrastructure and soft targets

21. The global security environment continues to present risks with regard to crowded spaces and other vulnerable targets, particularly in the context of major public and private events and tourism.

22. Through its ongoing cooperation with the Organization of American States and its Inter-American Committee against Terrorism, and in collaboration with the South American Football Confederation, UNICRI enhanced the capacity of Spanish-speaking States members of the Organization of American States to protect crowded spaces and manage security risks associated with tourism and major events by boosting preparedness, coordination and preventive security planning.

23. In the Caribbean and Latin America, UNICRI strengthened national capacities to protect vulnerable targets and improve preparedness for major public events. In the Dominican Republic, national authorities improved their ability to conduct structured risk assessments, enhance inter-agency coordination and engage effectively with private sector stakeholders in the tourism sector, enabling more balanced approaches to safeguarding public venues while taking into account economic and social considerations. In Paraguay, UNICRI reinforced national preparedness for large-scale public events by strengthening coordination mechanisms, contingency planning and crisis communication among relevant authorities and partners. At the regional level,

activities in Barbados strengthened knowledge-sharing and promoted the practical application of tools to improve the protection of tourism-dependent environments.

24. Across those activities, UNICRI promoted approaches grounded in various technical tools, which ensured that human rights, gender considerations, community engagement and environmental awareness were included in national security planning frameworks to ensure their effectiveness in responding to evolving risk profiles. Those tools include a living guidance document and an electronic planning tool designed to facilitate information-sharing and cooperation among public authorities and private stakeholders in the security planning for major events.

2. Chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear safety and security

25. UNICRI advanced global efforts to mitigate the risks associated with chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear materials and weapons through a multidimensional approach combining policy engagement, technical assistance and capacity-building. Programming addressed both structural and operational needs, with an emphasis on national ownership, inter-agency coordination and regional cooperation, supporting strategic coordination and the implementation of newly developed or strengthened law enforcement practices across a network of 63 partner countries to mitigate risks stemming from the natural, accidental or inadvertent release of chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear agents.

26. Key milestones included the International Meeting of the Heads of Secretariat of the European Union Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear Risk Mitigation Centres of Excellence Initiative in Nairobi and the tenth International Meeting of the National Focal Points in Brussels. Those gatherings enabled national authorities and international partners to reflect on 15 years of cooperation and adapt to emerging chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear threats. A total of 46 countries had finalized national chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear action plans, with 12 formally adopting them, reflecting growing institutionalization and policy maturity across regions.

27. In Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Moldova, Tajikistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan, the Institute supported the development of sustainable national training systems, including the adoption by official institutions of specialized curricula, the delivery by national instructors of pilot training and the provision of advanced technical capacity-building for front-line agencies.

28. UNICRI strengthened national and regional capacities to address disinformation and communication risks associated with chemical and biological incidents. In South-East Asia, a regional tabletop exercise on crisis communication supported eight countries in improving strategic communication practices, enhancing coordination among competent authorities and strengthening engagement with the media during emergency situations. In parallel, an education-focused programme on disinformation was developed and piloted, contributing to increased awareness of disinformation risks and promoting more resilient approaches to information integrity in school settings.

29. The Institute continued to strengthen the evidence base for policymaking through the publication of several key knowledge products. They included the *Toolkit on Effective CBRN Planning and Response for Policymakers and CBRN Managers*, which offers step-by-step guidance on designing and operationalizing national strategies to address chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear threats. Regional action plans on chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear risks for South-East and Eastern Europe, the Middle East and the African Atlantic façade region, to be published later in 2026, will provide region-specific guidance for enhancing legal, technical and institutional responses to such risks.

30. UNICRI also increased awareness of and strategic dialogue on counterproliferation financing related to chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear threats, organizing a series of workshops focused on identifying and

mitigating proliferation financing risks. In Armenia and Kazakhstan, the Institute delivered introductory sessions engaging national stakeholders from ministries of foreign affairs, financial intelligence units, prosecutors and regulatory authorities. Those sessions were aimed at mapping needs and priorities for future capacity-building. In the Gulf region, UNICRI convened a high-level exchange on risk patterns, emerging threats and strategic cooperation between the United Arab Emirates, UNICRI and the United States Defense Threat Reduction Agency. Those activities represent early steps in a broader effort to align financial oversight systems with global non-proliferation objectives. In parallel, the Institute organized a regional workshop for States members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to foster shared understanding of sanctions obligations relating to weapons of mass destruction, improve operational coordination, and build collective readiness against sanctions evasion activities, proliferation financing and cyber-enabled threats.

31. UNICRI co-organized Africa Shield 2025, a landmark counterproliferation workshop involving 100 participants from 13 countries. The event focused on threats posed by weapons of mass destruction, border management and regional capability gaps, and laid the groundwork for a follow-up event in 2026.

32. Finally, the fourth issue of the *1540 Compass* e-journal was published, offering thought leadership on the evolving landscape relating to the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and supporting the objectives of Security Council resolution 1540.

33. UNICRI also supported the launch of the third edition of the Executive Master's programme in Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Risk and Threat Management, under which 25 mid-career professionals from 11 African countries were trained in advanced threat and risk management.

3. Crime and security implications of complex global crises

34. UNICRI continued to address the crime and security implications of complex global crises, with a focus on the conflict in Ukraine and its impact on regulatory control, supply chains and transnational security threats. The protracted conflict has heightened vulnerabilities that can be exploited through diverse modalities, including the misuse of trade channels, falsified documentation and weakened import and export controls, with consequences for compliance with international sanctions regimes and the risk of diversion of sensitive materials.

35. UNICRI strengthened the capacity of Ukraine to detect and disrupt sanctions evasion-related activities in a complex crisis environment by providing training on disrupting supply chains for the procurement of components of weapons of mass destruction, which strengthened the operational capacity of relevant stakeholders to integrate enforcement and compliance measures into routine practice.

36. UNICRI also enhanced the capacity of Ukraine to prevent and mitigate risks related to the loss of regulatory control over radioactive sources. That was achieved through training on the security implications linked to the war, including vulnerabilities during the life cycle and movement of radioactive sources, covering production facilities, import and export, transport and licensing, and response mechanisms in the event of a loss of control.

4. Nexus between transnational organized crime and terrorism

37. UNICRI continued to address the nexus between transnational organized crime and terrorism through in-depth research, analysis and targeted interventions aimed at strengthening understanding of how criminal and terrorist actors exploit complex security environments. The Institute's work focused on examining the financial, logistical and operational intersections between crime and terrorism, particularly in fragile and crisis-affected contexts, and on supporting evidence-based responses at the community, national and regional levels.

38. In Africa, UNICRI examined the financial and logistical intersections between crime and terrorism, including illicit revenue streams such as fuel trafficking, illegal mining, livestock smuggling, extortion and kidnapping for ransom. The research combined desk-based analysis with fieldwork in vulnerable areas including northern Côte d'Ivoire, northern and central Benin and north-western Nigeria, contributing to the identification of context-specific vulnerabilities and protective factors shaping the nexus between terrorism and criminal activities.

39. Building on those analytical findings, UNICRI supported the translation of knowledge into preventive and operational responses at both the community and institutional levels. That included the design of a small-scale projects scheme involving nine civil society organizations for the implementation of diverse initiatives aimed at strengthening community resilience, social cohesion and economic empowerment through vocational training, livelihood opportunities and awareness-raising campaigns.

40. In the Andean region, UNICRI strengthened, through a specialized training programme, the capacity of criminal justice and law enforcement authorities in Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Colombia, Ecuador and Peru to counter organized crime structures operating across borders and posing serious security threats.

41. UNICRI also contributed to regional coordination by supporting the organization of the second high-level strategic meeting and the thirty-second meeting of the Andean Community, which focused on mineral crimes, their security implications and best practices in responding to such threats. Those activities underscored the role of illicit natural resource exploitation and related criminal economies as enabling factors for broader security risks, including those linked to the crime-terror nexus, and highlighted the importance of regional cooperation in addressing such threats.

B. Countering criminal enterprises, illicit financial flows and corrupt practices

1. Facilitating the seizure, confiscation and recovery of assets

42. The Institute continued to provide technical assistance and policy advice to prosecutors, investigators and other justice sector officials in relation to complex cases involving illicitly acquired assets, recognizing asset recovery as a critical tool for combating corruption, organized crime and illicit financial flows.

43. By providing support to countries of the European Union Eastern Partnership, including Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, UNICRI enabled them to adopt and implement modern asset recovery policies and practices. Such support included the provision of targeted technical advice to legislators and policymakers on legal frameworks governing asset recovery and management, with particular emphasis on extended confiscation, value-based confiscation and civil and other forms of non-conviction-based forfeiture. UNICRI also strengthened outcomes in seizure and confiscation proceedings by providing mentoring and practitioner-level support in relation to ongoing and pending cases, facilitating working group meetings and peer-to-peer exchanges aimed at improving coordination among competent authorities.

44. UNICRI further supported national authorities in advancing complex cross-border asset recovery cases involving high-value assets, including real estate and other converted assets located in foreign jurisdictions. The Institute facilitated cooperation between prosecutorial authorities and counterparts in other jurisdictions, including within the European Union, and provided ad hoc technical guidance to financial intelligence units on issues related to asset-laundering schemes and the liability of legal persons. Those activities contributed to reducing procedural obstacles, enhancing mutual legal assistance and strengthening trust and coordination among authorities involved in sensitive international cases.

45. In the European Union Southern Neighbourhood, UNICRI delivered comprehensive support for anti-corruption and asset recovery efforts, combining policy advice, capacity-building and operational assistance. The Institute improved the prevention, investigation and prosecution of corruption offences and enhanced the tracing, seizure and confiscation of assets linked to such offences in Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, the State of Palestine and Tunisia. UNICRI also strengthened cross-border cooperation, including by facilitating the accession by Algeria to the Asset Recovery Inter-Agency Network for the Middle East and North Africa, and provided targeted assistance in high-profile cases of international asset recovery, notably in Lebanon and Libya, involving assets concealed abroad and intended for return and use in fulfilling high-priority development needs.

46. In parallel, the Institute contributed to more transparent, accountable and socially beneficial approaches to the management and final disposition of recovered assets. UNICRI produced a publication entitled “The social re-use of seized and confiscated assets: good policies and practices”, which highlights how seized and confiscated assets can be channelled to benefit victims of crime and support public services, including in the health and education sectors, and identifies success factors, gaps and challenges in existing approaches. By offering policy-relevant guidance and practical examples from countries within and outside the European Union, the publication supports policymakers and practitioners in designing and implementing mechanisms that ensure that recovered assets are returned to society in a transparent and impactful manner.

2. Counterfeiting, fraudulent goods and supply chain integrity

47. UNICRI continued to strengthen national, regional and international responses to counterfeiting, illicit trade and the criminal infiltration of legitimate supply chains. These crimes, often driven by organized criminal groups, undermine consumer safety, market integrity, public health and government revenues, particularly as they exploit increasingly complex, transnational distribution networks.

48. As part of its broader efforts to prevent and respond to counterfeiting, organized crime and the protection of intellectual property rights and consumer safety, UNICRI supported the development of a suite of interactive investigative guidelines tailored to law enforcement and judicial authorities in Italy. Those resources address the main distribution channels exploited for counterfeit goods, namely social media, websites, e-commerce platforms, brick-and-mortar shops, market stalls and wholesale import operations for downstream distribution. The guidelines offer operational guidance on identifying criminal patterns, collecting and preserving evidence, tracing supply chains and coordinating investigative and prosecutorial action. Each guide is modular and scenario-based, incorporating specific techniques for digital, financial and cyber investigations to reflect the evolving tactics of organized criminal networks.

49. Complementing that effort, UNICRI produced five specialized reference documents for prosecutors, each aligned with a distinct distribution channel. Those tools help strengthen prosecutorial strategies by addressing evidentiary challenges and clarifying how counterfeit trade connects to broader criminal enterprises. By equipping prosecutors with practical guidance for specific types of crime, the documents support more effective action in cross-border cases involving multiple jurisdictions and complex supply chains.

50. In parallel, UNICRI advanced its work on supply chain integrity, particularly in relation to critical minerals. The Institute convened a regional workshop in Peru focused on illegal mining and trafficking in high-value minerals. The event brought together representatives from across Latin America, international organizations and private sector actors to explore vulnerabilities in mineral supply chains and the role of informal economies and organized crime. Sessions addressed legal and regulatory challenges, investigative techniques and the use of technology to improve traceability and supply chain security, while also exploring the role of public-private partnerships in preventing the infiltration by organized criminal groups of legitimate markets.

51. UNICRI also continued to promote cooperation between public authorities and private sector stakeholders involved in the production, distribution and verification of goods, particularly in high-risk, high-revenue sectors such as pharmaceuticals, food and beverages, spare parts and excise goods, where illicit activity threatens public health and erodes State revenues. Work by the Institute helped identify systemic vulnerabilities, improve traceability systems and strengthen verification and information-sharing mechanisms across borders.

3. Illicit finance and the global criminal economy

52. The Institute advanced its work on disrupting illicit financial flows and addressing the financial infrastructure that sustains organized crime, corruption and geopolitical destabilization. UNICRI made efforts to address the structural and systemic vulnerabilities exploited by criminal networks and to advance coordinated responses to illicit finance that integrate financial intelligence, legal reform and judicial action across regions.

53. In the Republic of Moldova, UNICRI enhanced national capacity to identify and respond to new forms of criminal activity, including cyber-facilitated financial crime. The focus of its work was on cross-sectoral cooperation among law enforcement authorities, financial regulators and prosecutors, and the work contributed to the development of integrated national strategies to detect and disrupt illicit finance.

54. In Libya, UNICRI improved national capacity to prevent and combat corruption and money-laundering. Activities supported national authorities in strengthening legislative frameworks, building operational capacity and improving inter-agency coordination to better address illicit financial flows in a transitional context. Similar efforts were also pursued in the European Union Southern Neighbourhood, where UNICRI worked to foster institutional transparency, integrity and oversight mechanisms across multiple partner countries.

55. UNICRI further explored the intersection of financial crime and environmental harm through the development of a strategic road map to counter trafficking in green minerals. That initiative, together with a research publication on criminal exploitation of critical minerals in South-East Asia, examined the role of natural resource trafficking in sustaining transnational illicit financial networks. The findings informed proposals for regulatory reforms, investigative techniques and enhanced international cooperation to address these complex, high-value crime economies.

56. In Italy, the Institute supported the Province of Caserta in strengthening public-private cooperation and social resilience against organized crime. The programme highlighted the value of community-level engagement and multi-stakeholder partnerships in preventing the financial entrenchment of criminal organizations within local economies.

C. Promoting the responsible use of new and emerging technologies to address crime and exploitation

57. Rapid advances in information and communications technologies, alongside the accelerated development and deployment of new and emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, robotics, immersive digital environments and decentralized systems, continue to reshape public safety, criminal justice and global security. As those technologies become more accessible and increasingly embedded in public and private systems, they generate significant opportunities to enhance the prevention and investigation of crime and the delivery of justice, while simultaneously creating new risks related to misuse, exclusion, accountability and human rights.

58. Against that backdrop, UNICRI continued to advance the responsible governance of artificial intelligence across the criminal justice sector by supporting law enforcement, judicial and other public authorities in strengthening ethical, legal and operational frameworks for its use.

1. Cybercrime and online harms

59. UNICRI supported practitioners in enhancing skills related to online investigations, digital evidence and cross-border cooperation to counter cybercrime and other criminal activities exploiting information and communications technologies. Those efforts were complemented by training on online and offline national and cross-border investigations into drug trafficking, reflecting the growing convergence of cybercrime and other forms of serious and organized crime.

60. Through analytical research and publications, including *Right- and Left-Wing Violent Extremist Abuse of Digital Technologies in South America, Africa and Asia, Clicks & Links & Tricks, Oh My! How Serious Organized Criminals Exploit Digital Trust Pathways* and “Hidden links: facilitating criminal activities while exploiting e-commerce”, UNICRI assessed how terrorist and organized criminal groups leverage mainstream platforms, encrypted services and trust-based digital pathways to support recruitment, propaganda, financing, operational coordination and offensive capabilities. That work underscored the increasingly transnational and adaptive nature of cybercrime and online harms, and the challenges faced by authorities in attribution and disruption. In the context of online counter-terrorism efforts, UNICRI advanced multi-stakeholder discourse on exploring alternative approaches to detecting, monitoring and responding to the use by terrorists of the Internet, with a focus on open source intelligence and community-driven content moderation.

61. UNICRI conducted research on online gaming ecosystems as part of its broader work on online harms affecting young people, resulting in the publication *Level Up: Gaming and Violent Extremism in Africa*. The research examined online gaming and gaming-adjacent spaces as influential digital environments in which social interaction, norms and behaviours are shaped, and assessed how those spaces might give rise to a range of online harms. Within that broader landscape, the research explored the specific subset of risks related to violent extremism, analysing how such environments might, in limited and emerging ways, be misused to normalize violence, reinforce extremist narratives or obscure harmful activity. The analysis identified potential risk pathways, including the gamification of propaganda and the overlap between extremist narratives and other online harms, while also highlighting the importance of early, preventive interventions to strengthen digital resilience, positive engagement and community-based protective factors.

62. In addition, UNICRI initiated exploratory work on “com networks” within its broader analysis of emerging online harms. The work is focused on loosely networked digital communities associated with extreme forms of online violence, coercive control, grooming and the normalization of serious criminal behaviour, including in some cases sexual exploitation and abuse of minors. As an initial step, UNICRI convened a closed-door expert briefing in New York, in cooperation with the Permanent Mission of Canada, to examine early observations, investigative challenges and conceptual gaps, laying the groundwork for future research and the development of clearer analytical frameworks and shared terminology across policy, law enforcement and prevention communities.

63. Complementing that work, publications such as “AI literacy: a guide for parents” supported broader societal understanding of digital risks and safeguards, reinforcing prevention-oriented approaches alongside enforcement and judicial responses.

64. UNICRI also fostered a rich understanding of how digital platforms are exploited to spread harmful content and undermine social cohesion through its Summer School on Misinformation, Disinformation and Hate Speech. In addition, the Institute supported awareness-raising and capacity-building beyond traditional law enforcement audiences through activities such as training for journalists and communications professionals on crimes that affect the environment and disinformation, recognizing the role of the media and civil society actors in detecting and exposing cyber-enabled criminality.

65. UNICRI also continued to invest in long-term capacity-building through advanced education and professional training. Through the Master of Laws in Cybercrime, Cybersecurity and International Law programmes for the 2024–2025 and 2025–2026 academic years, the Institute supported the development of specialized expertise among legal and justice sector professionals.

2. Artificial intelligence governance and frameworks

66. UNICRI continued its work to enhance the capacity of authorities to utilize artificial intelligence for public safety and justice while upholding transparency, accountability, human rights and public trust.

67. UNICRI advanced the practical implementation of responsible artificial intelligence governance in the law enforcement sector by engaging executive leadership and supporting measures to improve readiness for the adoption of artificial intelligence. In particular, the Institute focused on strengthening understanding among leadership of the opportunities, risks and governance requirements associated with the use of artificial intelligence in policing, working with Brazil, India, Kazakhstan, Nigeria and Oman in that regard. That included the organization of a leadership engagement dialogue, convened on the margins of the fifth Global Meeting on Artificial Intelligence for Law Enforcement. Through those activities, UNICRI supported participating agencies in initiating organizational readiness assessments based on the “Toolkit for responsible AI innovation in law enforcement”, laying the groundwork for the development of context-specific responsible artificial intelligence strategies and for sustained, structured engagement on artificial intelligence governance within law enforcement institutions.

68. Complementing that, UNICRI conducted research and data analysis to explore effective strategies for law enforcement agencies and related entities to inform and involve the public regarding the responsible use of artificial intelligence systems. As a result, it produced and peer-reviewed draft recommendations aimed at promoting transparency and building trust by strengthening communication and multi-stakeholder engagement relating to the use of artificial intelligence in law enforcement.

69. UNICRI further advanced its work on responsible and rights-based approaches to the development and deployment of anonymized crowd monitoring systems by developing and publishing a detailed use case analysis addressing the associated legal, ethical and societal considerations.

70. Furthermore, the Institute continued and expanded its work with law enforcement authorities on artificial intelligence-enabled child protection, focusing on the responsible integration of artificial intelligence tools into investigative workflows and on strengthening international cooperation to address technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse. Through training activities, including a regional training event in Argentina for 10 countries in Latin America, a specialized training seminar in Brazil and a regional training event in Romania for seven countries in Europe, the Institute built the capacity of practitioners to apply artificial intelligence-based tools responsibly in operational contexts. All the information provided as part of the training, including updated guidance on the responsible integration of artificial intelligence as well as artificial intelligence tools and capabilities available to investigators, was made available on the AI for Safer Children Global Hub, a secure platform that is continually maintained and updated by UNICRI for a growing community of over 1,200 investigators in 123 countries.

71. In addition to the aforementioned training, UNICRI further continued to examine emerging risks and trends associated with artificial intelligence, including through research such as the publication “Parents’ perceptions about the use of generative AI systems by adolescents”, which highlights how increased understanding among parents or guardians of children’s use of artificial intelligence can enhance child safeguarding in the digital environment.

72. UNICRI expanded its engagement beyond the law enforcement context, launching new work targeting the judiciary and the use of artificial intelligence within judicial settings. As a result, the Institute raised awareness among criminal court judges in Qatar of the opportunities and risks associated with artificial intelligence in judicial processes and court administration.

73. In parallel, UNICRI supported the application of artificial intelligence governance in diverse institutional settings through targeted partnerships and tailored programmes. That included collaboration with municipal governments to promote responsible public sector innovation through the use of artificial intelligence, as well as engagement with policymakers and practitioners to address associated governance challenges and regulatory approaches in context-specific ways.

74. Those cross-cutting efforts were reinforced through the Institute's continued delivery of specialized training on AI, ethics and human rights as part of its broader capacity-building activities. That included the Summer School on Artificial Intelligence, Ethics and Human Rights and the Winter School on Artificial Intelligence, Ethics and Human Rights, which brought together practitioners and stakeholders to strengthen understanding of ethical principles, human rights standards and governance considerations relevant to the use of artificial intelligence in criminal justice and wider public sector contexts.

3. Digital cooperation, digital inclusivity and the digital divide

75. The Institute expanded its focus on digital cooperation and inclusivity, recognizing that uneven access to digital technologies, legal frameworks and institutional capacity continues to shape how individuals and institutions experience justice in the digital age. The work of UNICRI addressed structural gaps that limit effective participation in digitally enabled justice systems, with particular attention paid to countries and populations disproportionately affected by the digital divide, including women and other vulnerable groups.

76. UNICRI published *Access to Justice in the Digital Age: Empowering Victims of Cybercrime in Africa*, which examined how inadequate legal frameworks, limited awareness and resource constraints hinder victims' ability to seek redress in countries such as Namibia, Sierra Leone, South Africa and Uganda. The research highlighted the gendered dimensions of online harms, noting that women are disproportionately affected by certain forms of cyber-enabled abuse, and emphasized the importance of inclusive, rights-based approaches to digital justice that strengthen institutional capacity while ensuring meaningful access for victims.

77. The Institute also advanced work on digital inclusion within custodial and rehabilitation settings, focusing on the responsible and equitable use of digital technologies in prison systems. Through research and training related to the potential introduction of artificial intelligence and related technologies into rehabilitation programming, UNICRI supported national authorities in assessing how digital tools can enhance rehabilitation outcomes while safeguarding human rights.

78. UNICRI translated that analytical work into practice by enhancing the institutional readiness of Namibian and Thai prison administrations and justice sector stakeholders to adopt digital rehabilitation tools responsibly, taking into account disparities in infrastructure, skills and resources. UNICRI emphasized the importance of digital cooperation across institutions and sectors to ensure that technological innovation contributes to rehabilitation, reintegration and access to justice rather than reinforcing existing inequalities.

D. Preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalization

79. Working with national authorities, civil society and local communities, UNICRI continued to address threats related to radicalization and violent extremism while deepening understanding of how such dynamics affect societies and vulnerable

populations. Particular attention was given to the ways in which climate-related stressors, socioeconomic pressures and gender dynamics can shape pathways to radicalization and be exploited by violent extremist groups, informing more context-sensitive and preventive responses.

1. Drivers of radicalization and violent extremism for young people

80. UNICRI examined factors contributing to the radicalization of young people, recognizing that such people are often disproportionately affected by social exclusion, polarization and exposure to violence, particularly in fragile and transitional contexts. The Institute's work focused on strengthening understanding of how local grievances and social environments can interact to create conditions that may be exploited by violent extremist actors.

81. The Institute's engagement emphasized the importance of prevention and resilience, with attention paid to the role of schools, faith-based communities and local authorities in mitigating risks linked to youth radicalization. UNICRI contributed to preparatory and coordination activities aimed at strengthening cooperation among relevant stakeholders and improving readiness for future policy engagement and awareness-raising efforts. The work included analytical input, stakeholder mapping and support for the development of approaches for structured dialogue at the governmental and policy levels.

2. Gender-based discrimination and violent extremism

82. UNICRI continued to strengthen its work at the intersection of gender-based discrimination and the prevention of violent extremism, building on evidence that gender inequality and exclusion can shape vulnerability to radicalization and influence the impacts of violent extremism on communities.

83. Drawing on field-based research and sustained engagement with national authorities and civil society actors in the Sahel, UNICRI further analysed the gendered dimensions of violent extremist narratives and practices, as well as the role of women and girls in both supporting and preventing violent extremism. That analytical work informed efforts to strengthen the integration of gender perspectives into prevention strategies, ensuring that responses were grounded in local realities and responsive to the different experiences of women, men, girls and boys.

84. In parallel, UNICRI supported capacity-building activities aimed at strengthening stakeholders' ability to apply gender-sensitive approaches in the prevention of violent extremism, with a focus on enhancing the role of religious actors as key partners in community-based efforts to prevent such extremism. Through capacity-building, dialogue and knowledge exchange, the work addressed gender equality, drivers of violent extremism and community-level vulnerabilities while promoting the design and communication of inclusive and gender-responsive interventions aligned with international normative frameworks.

85. UNICRI also advanced policy-oriented engagement between Italy and Mauritania to support cooperation and dialogue on the women, peace and security agenda in relation to preventing violent extremism. Through the identification of key stakeholders, the exchange of good practices and the development of strategic insights, those efforts contributed to strengthening bilateral and regional approaches that link gender equality, social inclusion and prevention. Building on the evidence generated, UNICRI laid the groundwork for the development of context-specific, gender-responsive training and policy support to be implemented in subsequent phases, aimed at enhancing the capacity of State institutions and civil society to address grievances and conditions that may be exploited by violent extremist actors.

3. Climate insecurity and the prevention of violent extremism

86. UNICRI advanced its work on the intersection between climate-related stressors and violent extremism by advancing field-based analysis and stakeholder engagement aimed at strengthening prevention and resilience in climate-affected contexts.

87. In Mauritania, UNICRI initiated a structured process to identify and validate high-priority areas exposed to overlapping climate, security and violent extremism risks. Findings from the desk research were subsequently presented and reviewed through consultations and a technical meeting held in Nouakchott, which brought together national and local authorities, civil society actors and United Nations partners to validate risk assessments and refine analytical assumptions.

88. UNICRI engaged in participatory and gender-sensitive field data collection across selected regions in order to gather information on community perceptions, lived experiences and local drivers of vulnerability and resilience. The resulting evidence strengthened understanding of how climate stressors, such as resource scarcity, desertification and livelihood pressures, can exacerbate existing tensions and create conditions that may be exploited by violent extremist actors.

89. UNICRI produced a set of publications in the field. *Analysis of the Interconnected Risks of Climate Security and Violent Extremism: A Practical Guide for Mauritania* provided a practical, gender-responsive framework to support structured risk analysis and the design of more informed and inclusive responses. A training tool on climate, peace and security, developed jointly with the United Nations System Staff College and to be made available later in 2026, will translate climate-security dynamics into an applied, participatory learning tool for supporting systems thinking and collaborative problem-solving.

E. Promoting the rule of law and safeguarding access to justice

90. Working with relevant justice institutions and authorities, such as the judiciary, law enforcement authorities, security forces and corrections services, UNICRI continued to promote the rule of law, access to justice and gender equality in all its programmes as key factors enabling the development of just, equitable societies and the promotion and protection of human rights.

1. Vulnerable populations in fragile, conflict-affected and climate insecure areas

91. UNICRI continued to assess how evolving security actors and arrangements affect vulnerable populations in fragile environments, including the role and contribution of private military and security companies, as well as the risks associated with accountability gaps, human rights abuses and weak regulatory oversight.

92. A forthcoming report focuses on contexts where institutional capacity is weak, authority is contested and risks to civilians are heightened. It examines how preventative approaches can strengthen accountability, improve coordination among security actors and enhance the protection of vulnerable populations. The report notes that crime prevention is a relevant consideration within broader efforts to address insecurity and instability in fragile and conflict-affected settings.

93. In parallel, UNICRI continued to explore ways to strengthen rehabilitation and reintegration in custodial settings, paying particular attention to vulnerable populations within prison systems. Building on earlier research, work on the potential introduction of artificial intelligence and related technologies in rehabilitation programming was focused on how digital tools could support reintegration while safeguarding human rights, proportionality and equality. The analysis emphasized that technological innovation in corrections must be accompanied by robust legal frameworks, transparency and ethical safeguards to avoid reinforcing existing vulnerabilities. That work was complemented by the publication *Green Prisons: A Guide to Creating Environmentally Sustainable Prisons*, which explores ways to

improve the environmental sustainability of prisons in order to, among other goals, reduce the negative impact that climate change and environmental instability have on existing vulnerabilities within correctional facilities.

94. UNICRI also examined the links between trafficking in cultural heritage, organized crime and insecurity, highlighting how the destruction of and illicit trade in cultural property undermine social cohesion and economic recovery in fragile contexts.

95. Complementary training initiatives included the Summer School on Migration and Human Rights, which explored the intersection of displacement, protection frameworks and criminal justice responses, and courses on crimes that affect the environment, which strengthened understanding of how environmental degradation and illicit exploitation intersect with security challenges, particularly in climate-affected and fragile regions.

2. International criminal law and justice education

96. UNICRI further consolidated international criminal law and justice education as a core pillar of efforts to promote the rule of law and enhance the effectiveness of criminal justice systems. Activities focused on building sustainable professional capacity among practitioners, policymakers and future justice leaders and supported a shared understanding of emerging trends in transnational crime and violations of international law.

97. Post-graduate education remained a central component of the Institute's approach to promoting peace and justice and strengthening the rule of law. Within that framework, UNICRI delivered the nineteenth edition of the Master of Laws programme in Transnational Crime and Justice, which included a specialized professional activity, the International Criminal Law Defence Seminar. The Seminar was organized in cooperation with the Office of Public Counsel for the Defence of the International Criminal Court and was delivered to students of the programme and external attorneys wishing to specialize in defence practices before international tribunals.

98. UNICRI also launched the third edition of the Master of Laws programme in Cybercrime, Cybersecurity and International Law, conducted exclusively online and designed to provide interdisciplinary experts with the skills necessary to analyse, prevent and combat cybercrimes from an international law perspective.

99. UNICRI strengthened operational and investigative skills in complex areas such as organized crime, trafficking and smuggling in radiological and nuclear material through train-the-trainer sessions and specialized courses, including in Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Andean region. Complementary specialized courses and seminars further supported the professional development of justice sector officials, defence practitioners, police advisers and diplomatic personnel.

100. The Institute strengthened rule-of-law capacities at the multilateral level through the Crime, Justice and Security Training Programme for Police Advisors and Diplomatic Personnel in New York. Launched in partnership with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and delivered through the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Policing and the strategic police advisory group, the programme equipped police advisers and staff of Permanent Missions with a shared understanding of crime prevention, criminal justice and security issues from a United Nations perspective. Delivered using a structured, modular format, the programme enhanced participants' ability to engage effectively in intergovernmental processes, follow complex justice- and security-related portfolios and contribute to informed, coordinated policy discussions across the United Nations system.

3. Supporting the Strategic Programme Framework for 2023–2026

101. The extensive portfolio of activities of UNICRI is funded exclusively through voluntary contributions from Member States and other donors. Most voluntary contributions are short-term, earmarked, project-specific funds, except for the annual voluntary contribution from the Government of Italy, the host country of UNICRI. The continued successful implementation of the ambitious Strategic Programme Framework for 2023–2026 will require continued pivotal support and voluntary contributions from Member States and other donors, to whom UNICRI is grateful.
