

UNODC inputs to the SG report on oceans and the law of the sea (2025)

The present contribution showcases the work carried out by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) between September 2024 to August 2025 to support Member States in the implementation of the General Assembly resolution 79/144, entitled “Oceans and the law of the sea”.

Section II: Capacity-building

***Operative Paragraph 34:** Welcomes ongoing activities for capacity-building so as to address maritime security and protection of the marine environment of developing States, and encourages States and international financial institutions to provide additional funding for capacity-building programmes, including for transfer of technology, including through the International Maritime Organization and other competent international organizations.*

Maritime crime and maritime security

- In the Pacific, UNODC deepened its long-term support to **Fiji, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia (Federated States of), Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu** advancing national capacity to investigate and disrupt maritime crime. Through sustained engagement during the reporting period, law enforcement agencies demonstrated strengthened operational responses to maritime crime scene management, vessel ownership tracing, and cases involving drug trafficking and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. The initiative contributed to improved maritime law enforcement coordination, case handling, and overall maritime domain awareness.
- UNODC equipped **Fiji** with its first remotely operated vehicle, significantly enhancing sub-surface surveillance and vessel inspection capacity. As a result, Fijian authorities improved their ability to detect underwater threats, contributing to more effective maritime border security. In parallel, coastal communities in **Fiji, Tonga, and Tuvalu** reported increased identification and reporting of marine pollution and resource exploitation by foreign fleets, reflecting greater community engagement and ownership in marine environmental protection efforts.

Crimes in the fisheries sector

- Under the FishNET project, UNODC supported national and regional systems in 16 countries to better address crimes in the fisheries sector. This included:
 - **Angola:** Ongoing analysis of the fisheries value chain is informing national anti-crime and compliance strategies.
 - **Benin, Ghana, Namibia, Togo, the United Republic of Tanzania, and Viet Nam:** Countries implemented new investigative and coordination mechanisms that increased detection and enforcement actions against illegal activities in the fisheries sector.
 - **Kenya:** Law enforcement and regulatory agencies demonstrated greater alignment in fisheries oversight, while the Kenya Fisheries Service operationalized new anti-corruption safeguards, including a Corruption Prevention Policy and Whistleblowing Policy.

- **South Africa:** Inter-agency operational coordination was significantly enhanced through targeted support, leading to improved monitoring and enforcement in coastal zones.
- **West Africa:** A sub-regional initiative advanced data collection frameworks and policy development for fisheries protection, enabling more evidence-based governance.
- In South-East Asia, legal and enforcement institutions recorded improved adjudication and cross-border collaboration in fisheries enforcement. In **Indonesia**, the judiciary strengthened its handling of cases related to maritime resource protection, contributing to greater accountability for environmental offences. A regional forum hosted in **the Philippines** facilitated enhanced cooperation among maritime enforcement agencies, fostering unified strategies to protect regional fisheries and ecosystems.
- UNODC also continued strengthening the legal and policy environment at national and regional levels. The Legislative Guide on Addressing Crimes in the Fisheries Sector, developed with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), informed legal reforms and institutional strengthening in multiple countries, including through a francophone Africa regional dialogue in **Togo**. In **Kenya**, legal review processes were accelerated to align fisheries law with international standards.

***Operative Paragraph 35:** Recognizes the considerable need to provide sustained capacity-building assistance, including on financial and technical aspects, by relevant international organizations and donors to developing States, with a view to further strengthening their capacity to take effective measures against the multiple facets of international criminal activities at sea, in line with the relevant international instruments, including the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols thereto.*

Research on Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants

- Throughout the reporting period, the UNODC Observatory on Smuggling of Migrants continued to carry out data collection, monitoring, research and analysis on smuggling of migrants on sea routes from **Africa to Europe**.
- In 2024, the UNODC Observatory conducted an analysis using an innovative methodology to estimate overall extent of [smuggling of migrants by sea on the Central Mediterranean](#) route from North Africa to Europe. The analysis showed that on this route in 2023, around 100,000 more people departed for Europe from North Africa (254,400) than arrived in Italy and Malta (150,700). The Observatory estimates that the majority of people using this route are smuggled (from 77 to 93 per cent for people departing from Libya; and 66 to 89 per cent from Tunisia). This suggests that smuggling offences were committed to facilitate the journeys of around 175,000–228,000 people on this route in 2023.
- **Ukraine:** In February 2025, UNODC published the “[Study on Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants in the Context of the Displacement Caused by the War Against Ukraine](#)”. This covers smuggling of migrants involving Ukrainian men as the object of smuggling as well as Ukrainian perpetrators of smuggling of migrants by sea, mostly on the Eastern Mediterranean route from Türkiye to Europe.

Capacity-building of law enforcement

- In **Libya**, UNODC is providing support to Libyan maritime authorities to improve coordination of maritime law enforcement and rescue at sea operations. UNODC endeavours not only to equip Libyans with technical skills, but also to strengthen monitoring and reporting mechanisms to increase transparency and human rights compliance in their actions.
- In **Benin, Ghana, and Togo**, under the Passenger and Cargo Control Programme (PCCP), UNODC conducted on-site exercises to build the capacity of law enforcement agencies to tackle crimes in the fisheries sector in containerized cargo shipments. The activities contributed to raising awareness on the serious nature and broader implications of fisheries-related crimes and to reinforce the regional network of qualified women engaged in the sector.
- In **Gabon**, UNODC raised awareness among law enforcement actors working at the port to strengthen their capacities to combat illicit traffic of timber.
- In West and Central Africa, and particularly in the **Gulf of Guinea**, UNODC is leading ongoing cooperation with the EU's Seaport Cooperation Project (SEACOP), Enhanced Maritime Action in the Gulf of Guinea (EnMAR), and SCOPE Africa, as part of broader efforts to harmonize and streamline border management approaches across the region.
- UNODC also supported the participation of female officers from the port control units of the port of Tema, **Ghana**, and of the port of Dakar, **Senegal**, in two conferences for female officers in maritime security organized by EnMAR, bringing together aspiring and experienced law enforcement and showcasing empowerment.
- In the Mediterranean, UNODC enhanced regional maritime law enforcement effectiveness and interoperability. In **Cyprus, Egypt, and Lebanon**, improved visit, board, search and seizure practices and the operational deployment of remotely operated vehicles (ROVs) contributed to stronger interdiction and inspection protocols. In **Lebanon**, naval forces increased their operational readiness through improved vessel deployment, restored maintenance infrastructure, and the introduction of upgraded patrol capabilities. These measures collectively improved regional threat response coordination and resilience.
- In **Libya**, UNODC enabled the maritime authorities to adopt more integrated, rights-based enforcement practices. Improved command and control structures, enhanced communication protocols (including maritime English), and the development of standard operating procedures in line with international frameworks (e.g., IAMSAR) have contributed to more coherent and effective maritime governance. The delivery of Arabic-language legal tools and an e-learning platform for the Attorney General's Office has further strengthened prosecutorial effectiveness and rule-of-law adherence in maritime operations.
- Through its work in **Morocco**, UNODC supported national and regional commitment to environmental protection, with strengthened awareness and coordination on marine pollution and environmental crime. A regional table-top exercise in **Cyprus** advanced operational cooperation among Cyprus, Egypt, Lebanon, and Libya, enhancing preparedness in joint search and rescue and maritime law enforcement. Maritime investigations in **Algeria, Egypt, and Lebanon** saw greater inter-agency collaboration and investigative follow-through.
- In **West and Central Africa**, UNODC reinforced the operational capacity of maritime law enforcement agencies across Zones E, F, and D of the Yaoundé Architecture.
- Across the Western Indian Ocean and Central Africa, national authorities improved detection and response capacities to combat IUU fishing and maritime trafficking. Support to **Kenya, Madagascar, Mozambique, South Africa, and Tanzania** led to enhanced utilization of

maritime domain awareness tools, while operational readiness was significantly bolstered through tactical training at the regional centre in **Seychelles** and specialized riverine support to **Democratic Republic of the Congo** enforcement agencies along the Congo River.

- In South-East Asia, countries enhanced their ability to detect, interdict, and prosecute maritime crimes. With new technologies—including the **Philippine** Coast Guard’s first uncrewed surface vessel—operational surveillance improved markedly. Parallel legal advisory support enabled prosecutors and legal officers to more effectively address complex maritime crime cases, while regional coordination mechanisms matured through focused dialogues and scenario-based forums.
- In Latin America and the Caribbean, UNODC facilitated strategic maritime and riverine security cooperation across 23 countries. In the Northern Caribbean, targeted interventions contributed to disruption of criminal networks operating between **Haiti** and neighboring states. In the **Amazon River Basin**, increased intelligence-sharing and joint analysis between enforcement and environmental agencies led to a more coordinated response to trafficking in drugs, timber, and gold. A holistic security approach in the Southern Cone advanced integrated port and maritime security, further strengthening regional responses to transnational organized crime.

Section VIII: Maritime Safety and Security and Flag State Implementation

***Operative Paragraph 118:** Recognizes the crucial role of international cooperation at the global, regional, subregional and bilateral levels in combating, in accordance with international law, threats to maritime security, including piracy, armed robbery against ships at sea and terrorist acts against shipping, offshore installations, submarine cables and pipelines and other critical infrastructure and maritime interests, through bilateral and multilateral instruments and mechanisms aimed at monitoring, preventing and responding to such threats, the enhanced sharing of information among States relevant to the detection, prevention and suppression of such threats, and the prosecution of offenders with due regard to national legislation, and the need for sustained capacity-building to support such objectives [...].*

Latin America and the Caribbean

- UNODC strengthened regional maritime security and cooperation in the region by supporting joint exercises that enhanced operational coordination and tactical readiness against transnational maritime crime. In 2024, UNODC provided training for GALAPEX, a regional exercise focused on combating fisheries crime and facilitated Event Horizon 2024, which was a landmark multi-domain, multi-country operation led by **Jamaica**. This initiative brought together maritime and air enforcement agencies from over a dozen countries and territories, including the **Bahamas, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Panama, Trinidad and Tobago, and Canada**. By fostering interagency collaboration, shared practices, and coordinated responses, these exercises significantly bolstered the region’s collective capacity to detect, deter, and disrupt maritime threats.
- Additionally, UNODC has strengthened regional cooperation and intelligence-sharing in Latin America by supporting the Orion Naval Campaign, fostering operational ties among **Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Panama**. Through its engagement, UNODC facilitated intelligence exchanges between maritime law enforcement officers, prosecutors, and investigators, contributing to over 60 active investigations and resulting in the execution of at least one INTERPOL red alert. Additionally, UNODC is advancing strategic and operational initiatives

to counter transnational organized crime along key river corridors, including the Amazon and Paraná Rivers, by supporting **Brazil, Colombia, Peru, and Paraguay** in enhancing riverine security. This includes maritime domain assessments and port security support in critical hubs such as Rosario and Buenos Aires (**Argentina**), Asunción (**Paraguay**), and Montevideo (**Uruguay**), reinforcing a coordinated regional response to illicit trafficking.

West and Central Africa

- UNODC strengthened maritime security and the rule of law through a series of coordinated capacity-building and legal review initiatives. In support of the US-led OBANGAME Express 2025, UNODC conducted simulated drug trafficking trials in **Cabo Verde** and **Côte d’Ivoire**, reinforcing national judicial systems’ readiness to deliver legal finish for maritime interdictions. By participating in OBANGAME Express 2025 and other joint exercises, countries enhanced interagency coordination and responsiveness to illicit maritime activity, contributing to greater maritime domain control and deterrence of transnational crime.
- Additionally, UNODC facilitated a high-level Stock Taking meeting under Italy’s G7++ Friends of the **Gulf of Guinea** Presidency, gathering over 50 stakeholders to assess progress and emerging challenges in Gulf of Guinea maritime security. In collaboration with UNOWAS and UNOCA, UNODC led a comprehensive review of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct, evaluating over a decade of implementation and presenting actionable recommendations to Regional Economic Communities. To further boost operational readiness, UNODC commissioned a second Ship-In-A-Box simulator at **Ghana**’s Naval Training Command in 2024, enhancing practical training for maritime law enforcement personnel across Zone F countries.

Operative Paragraph 124: *Encourages States to ensure effective implementation of international law applicable to combating piracy, as reflected in the Convention, calls upon States to take appropriate steps under their national law to facilitate, in accordance with international law, the apprehension and prosecution of those who are alleged to have committed acts of piracy, including the financing or facilitation of such acts, also taking into account other relevant instruments that are consistent with the Convention, and encourages States to cooperate, as appropriate, with a view to developing their national legislation in this regard.*

- To ensure a full legal finish, UNODC conducted legal training for prosecutors, judges, and magistrates, including simulated trials and tabletop exercises. Supporting **Seychelles**’ role under the broadened mandate of EUNAVFOR ATALANTA, UNODC is also working with the EU to enhance detention and prosecution infrastructure on Marie Louise Island, enabling the region to more effectively process and hold maritime crime suspects, and strengthening interagency coordination from interdiction to adjudication.

Operative Paragraph 141: *Recognizes that some transnational organized criminal activities threaten legitimate uses of the oceans and endanger the lives of people at sea, as well as the livelihoods and security of coastal communities.*

- UNODC, under the FishNET II project, is in the process of finalizing an updated edition of the publication “Rotten Fish: A Guide on Addressing Corruption in the Fisheries Sector”. The guide was updated through interviews with experts, desk research and expert group meetings. This edition strengthens the guide’s practical relevance by elaborating on the cross-cutting challenges that hinder anti-corruption efforts in the fisheries sector and cross-cutting solutions that require action at government level. The guide further includes a revised version of the

corruption risk assessment tool. The guide will increase knowledge and awareness of how corruption manifests itself in the fisheries sector and how to effectively address it.

- In addition, UNODC, in partnership with Open Ownership, has published a policy brief on beneficial ownership transparency in the fisheries sector. The brief outlines actions that can be taken by various stakeholders, including governments, fisheries management organizations, civil society organizations and private sector, to operationalize the use of beneficial ownership information in the fisheries sector.

***Operative Paragraph 142:** Notes that transnational organized criminal activities are diverse and may be interrelated in some cases and that criminal organizations are adaptive and take advantage of the vulnerabilities of States, in particular coastal and small island developing States in transit areas, and calls upon States and relevant intergovernmental organizations to increase cooperation and coordination at all levels to detect and suppress crimes such as smuggling of migrants, trafficking in persons and illicit trafficking in firearms, in accordance with international law.*

- In 2024, UNODC enhanced South Asia’s capacity to combat illicit trade in strategic goods by delivering three targeted Strategic Trade and Export Control (STEC) workshops in **Bangladesh, the Maldives, and Sri Lanka**, training nearly 50 customs and law enforcement officers to better identify and interdict firearms and other high-risk items. Building on this progress, UNODC supported the establishment of the South Asia Strategic Trade Network (SASTN), a formal information-sharing platform designed to enable real-time, cross-border cooperation among Customs and Cargo Control Units to disrupt the movement of weapons, chemical agents, and nuclear materials. The final draft Memorandum of Understanding for SASTN was circulated for official review by **Bangladesh, the Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka**, marking a critical step toward regional collaboration and enhanced trade security.

***Operative Paragraph 143:** Recognizes the importance of enhancing international cooperation at all levels to fight transnational organized criminal activities, including illicit traffic in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, within the scope of the United Nations instruments against illicit drug trafficking, as well as the smuggling of migrants, trafficking in persons and illicit trafficking in firearms and criminal activities at sea falling within the scope of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols thereto.*

- Regarding the promotion of international cooperation and the strengthening of capacity to combat the problem of transnational organized crime committed at sea, UNODC continued to implement the joint UNODC-INTERPOL project “TURQUESA”. The TURQUESA initiative combats human trafficking and the smuggling of migrants across **Latin America and the Caribbean**, where countries serve as origin, transit, and destination points for these crimes. The project strengthens regional cooperation to dismantle criminal networks through enhanced detection, investigation, and transnational operations. It leverages specialized networks such as the Ibero-American Network of Prosecutors (REDTRAM) to improve cross-border coordination while safeguarding the rights of migrants and victims. By fostering joint investigations and prosecutions, TURQUESA empowers authorities to disrupt trafficking and smuggling flows and hold organized crime groups accountable. Funded by Canada, this initiative is a two-year project ending in 2025.
- UNODC strengthened **Haiti**’s maritime security by delivering a comprehensive capacity-building and cooperation package to the Haiti Coast Guard, a critical force confronting the

region's complex illicit flows of people, arms, and drugs. By the end of 2024, over 60 per cent of the Coast Guard's core operational personnel had been trained, enhancing Haiti's ability to disrupt criminal networks and safeguard stability across the Caribbean.

- In January 2025, UNODC convened the Mozambique Channel Security Talks in Dar es Salaam, catalysing high-level engagement among officials from **Iran, Pakistan, Mozambique, Tanzania**, and regional maritime coordination bodies. The dialogue marked a strategic step forward in countering maritime drug trafficking along the Southern Route in the Indian Ocean. Participating states jointly committed to operationalizing enhanced information-sharing protocols, strengthening inter-agency cooperation, and scaling up maritime domain awareness. Crucially, the talks reinforced the leadership role of regional fusion centres—RMIFC and RCOC—as intelligence hubs, laying the groundwork for more integrated surveillance and interdiction operations. This initiative significantly advanced the region's collective capacity to disrupt transnational drug trafficking networks operating through the Mozambique Channel.
- In 2024, UNODC significantly strengthened frontline drug interdiction efforts by equipping and training national units at 192 key border points worldwide. Through advanced scientific training and deployment of cutting-edge tools like RAMAN TRUNARC spectrometers, officers enhanced their ability to detect synthetic drugs and precursors safely and accurately. These improved capabilities led to 2,613 drug seizures totalling over 380 tonnes of illicit substances - including cocaine, opioids, cannabis, and synthetic drugs - demonstrating a substantial impact in the global fight against drug trafficking.

Operative Paragraph 145: *Notes with grave concern the recent proliferation of, and endangerment of lives through, the smuggling of migrants by sea, underscores the necessity to address such situations in accordance with applicable international law, and encourages States, acting nationally or through relevant global or regional organizations, as appropriate, to provide technical assistance and capacity-building to flag, port and coastal States, upon request, to enhance their capabilities to prevent smuggling of migrants and human trafficking by sea.*

- As a member of the UNHCR-led Inter-Agency Group on Protection of Refugees and Migrants Moving by Sea, UNODC continues to contribute to and disseminate the group's work to advance protection of life at sea in line with international obligations, including the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air. The recommendations contained in the statement "Distress at sea: a call for a humanitarian and precautionary approach", which was produced in the context of Inter-Agency Group and published in December 2024, have been incorporated by UNODC in the forthcoming second edition of its Legislative Guide for the Implementation of the Protocol Against the Smuggling of Migrants, which will have a strong component on protection and assistance for smuggled migrants.
- In the reporting period, UNODC convened two online expert consultations to collect inputs and recommendations from 72 participants, including government representatives, UN agencies, regional organizations and civil society, to inform the review and update process of its Model Law against the Smuggling of Migrants and the Legislative Guide for the Implementation of the Protocol on the Smuggling of Migrants. Based on these consultations, UNODC is enhancing its normative guidance on prevention of smuggling of migrants by sea and protection of lives, including by addressing issues related to jurisdiction, smuggling of migrant on the high seas, and interception of stateless vessels.
- Please refer to the paragraph above concerning strengthening Haiti maritime security (OP 143).

Operative Paragraph 171: *Encourages greater dialogue and cooperation among States and the relevant regional and global organizations through workshops and seminars on the protection, and laying and maintenance of submarine cables and pipelines to promote the security of such critical infrastructure.*

- In January 2025, UNODC advanced regional cybersecurity by convening a forum with **Kenya, Seychelles, Mauritius, Comoros, Djibouti, Madagascar, Mozambique, Tanzania, and South Africa** to develop and share best practices that strengthen the security and resilience of critical undersea cable networks, thereby safeguarding vital communication infrastructure across the region.

Section IX. Marine Environment and Marine Resources

Operative Paragraph 188: *Notes the need for actions to support sustainable fisheries and sustainable aquaculture for sufficient, safe and nutritious food, recognizing the central role of healthy oceans in resilient food systems and for achieving the 2030 Agenda.*

- In the **Dominican Republic**, UNODC and FAO, under the Human Security Framework, forged a strategic partnership with the Ministry of Defense, Navy, and local cooperatives to provide boats that advance sustainable fishing practices. This initiative not only promotes environmental stewardship but also strengthens local security through enhanced cooperation between public and private sectors, fostering a resilient and secure maritime community along the Southern Coast.
- UNODC advanced **Tanzania's** maritime security by implementing a targeted programme under the Regular Programme for Technical Cooperation (RB 24) focused on preventing destructive fishing and strengthening inter-agency coordination. Through community engagements in Tanga, the programme identified enforcement gaps, conducted detailed assessments of destructive fishing impacts, and supported the development of effective inter-agency coordination mechanisms, significantly enhancing Tanzania's capacity to protect its marine resources and uphold sustainable law enforcement.
- UNODC spearheaded capacity-building efforts across West Africa to strengthen the criminal justice response to fisheries crimes. Through a series of workshops and a High-Level Regional Conference in **Dakar**, prosecutors, judges, and fisheries officials from multiple countries collaboratively analyzed domestic legal frameworks, debated criminalization of serious fishing offences, and identified key reforms. These initiatives fostered enhanced inter-agency cooperation and peer learning, culminating in a regional roadmap aimed at legislative harmonization, capacity-building, and professional networking. This strategic approach marked a critical shift toward criminal accountability and reinforced regional collaboration to combat transnational organized crime in the fisheries sector.
- UNODC is driving impactful progress in combating environmental crimes, including fisheries offenses and hazardous waste trafficking, in support of healthy oceans, resilient food systems, and the 2030 Agenda. By strengthening detection and interdiction capacities at key seaports and airports, fostering inter-agency coordination, and enhancing cross-border cooperation in South-East Asia, UNODC has significantly boosted national enforcement capabilities. Through strategic partnerships with the Green Customs Initiative, the BRS Secretariat, and UNEP, this effort led to the seizure of over 10 tonnes of hazardous waste in 2024 alone, safeguarding marine ecosystems and public health from environmental threats.

- UNODC is breaking new ground with the first-ever Global Analysis on Crimes that Affect the Environment, spotlighting critical threats to the marine environment. Part 3b of the Global Analysis focuses on Marine Pollution Crime, revealing who is responsible and how illegal discharges from vessels occur at sea. In partnership with FAO, Part 4a and its Spotlight examines illegal fishing, uncovering perpetrators, methods, and the profound impacts on communities in three Pacific Island countries. These vital studies are set for publication in late 2025, providing actionable insights to inform global responses. Building on this momentum, UNODC also released a key 2024 issue paper entitled “[The international regulation of marine plastics pollution and criminal law](#)”, developed in the framework of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) on Plastic Pollution, reinforcing its leadership in combating environmental crime.
- As part of its efforts to support the ratification and implementation of the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement), UNODC is developing an issue paper entitled “Effective Maritime Law Enforcement in Marine Protected Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction”. A two-day Expert Group Meeting will be held in Vienna in June 2025 in partnership with the Environment and Climate Research Hub at the University of Vienna to gather key experts and diverse stakeholders for identifying best practices and challenges in implementing Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA), Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance (MCS), and Maritime Law Enforcement (MLE) in Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (ABNJ).