

Buy It, Steal It, Print It: How Right-Wing Extremists in Europe Acquire Firearms and What To Do About It

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International Centre for
Counter-Terrorism

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Internal editing by Tanya Mehra, Programme Lead Rule of Law Responses to Terrorism at ICCT, and Nils Duquet, Director of the Flemish Peace Institute.

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Abstract

This policy brief examines the methods of firearms acquisition by right-wing extremists (RWEs) in Europe between 2019 and 2024. Based on a dataset of 118 cases, it reveals that RWEs resort to diverse legal and illegal acquisition strategies, including the use of illicit markets, legal possession, theft from military and law enforcement sources, and private manufacture, particularly 3D printing. The policy brief further discusses current EU countermeasures and their effectiveness in addressing RWE-specific acquisition methods. It identifies gaps in existing policies and enforcement, particularly regarding background checks in issuing and reviewing weapon licences, screening of military and law enforcement personnel, and regulation of emerging technologies like 3D printing. The authors call for further research to increase the understanding of the RWE-firearms nexus and to develop more targeted prevention strategies.

Keywords: right-wing extremism, firearms acquisition, 3D-printed weapons, gun control, Europe

Introduction

Firearms have become the go-to weapon for many right-wing extremists (RWE), and are increasingly used in violent RWE attacks in Western Europe.¹ Firearm attacks are the deadliest on average.² In the European Union (EU), a number of recent firearms-based attacks have been particularly deadly, such as the shooting on the Norwegian island of Utoya in 2011 (69 dead),³ in a shopping centre in Munich in 2016 (nine dead),⁴ or in Hanau in 2020 (ten dead).⁵

Firearms seem to be the preferred instrument of violence for many right-wing extremists carrying out violent attacks. However, the fascination with firearms in the right-wing extremist milieu goes beyond their mere instrumental use. For many right-wing extremists, firearms also have a strong symbolic value, as they are seen as emblems of status, power, and masculinity.⁶ Researchers have highlighted how, for some right-wing groups, the fascination with guns has even been fully integrated into their extremist worldview.⁷ In some pathways of radicalisation, gun extremism and ideological extremism appear to have merged.⁸

Despite worrying signals about the increasing use of firearms by right-wing extremists, there has been limited research into how and why right-wing extremists acquire and use weapons. Previous research contributed to a better understanding of how jihadist and separatist groups gain access to firearms in Europe. They tend to acquire firearms through illicit arms markets, in which criminal connections play a crucial role.⁹ However, the dynamics and patterns of acquisition, possession, and use of firearms are different for other types of terrorist networks.¹⁰ For example, a threat analysis of extremist 3D-printed guns highlighted how this method of acquisition has been almost

1 An analysis of the incidents in the Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence (RTV) Dataset, which covers incidents in Western Europe between 1990 and 2022, shows how in the 1990s only a small proportion of RWE incidents involved the use of firearms. Since then, and particularly since 2017, this number gradually increased, surpassing the number of incidents involving explosives. A similar trend has been highlighted by Hoffman and Ware in their book 'God, guns and sedition' on the US. There, firearms have replaced explosives as the preferred weapon of choice for right-wing terrorists. Comparing the situation in the US and Europe is challenging, nevertheless, given the vastly different access to firearms. See: Bruce Hoffman and Jacob Ware, *God, Guns, and Sedition. Far-Right Terrorism in America*, New York, Columbia University Press, January 2024. The prevalence of firearms as a method of attack is also reflected in recent research on right-wing extremism in the United States. It is reflected in analyses based on terrorist attacks, arrest data and armed demonstrations. For example, research by the Anti-Defamation League found that the number of domestic extremist-related mass killings has greatly increased and that most of these mass killings were committed by right-wing extremists. See: Anti-Defamation League, "Murder & Extremism in the United States in 2022 Including an In-Depth Analysis of Extremist Mass Killings."; Everytown, an American nonprofit organisation which advocates for gun control and against gun violence, highlights how 82.9 percent of the extremists arrested in cases involving guns are adherents to the far right. See: Everytown, "Paranoia and Profit: Armed Extremism and the Gun Industry's Role in Fostering It," 7 December 2024, <https://everytownresearch.org/report/armed-extremism-paranoia-profit-gun-industry/>.

2 Use of Firearms in Terrorist Attacks: Differences Between the United States, Canada, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand; See: Oldrich Bures and Alexandr Burilkov "Armed to Kill: A Cross-Sectional Analysis Examining the Links between Firearms Availability, Gun Control, and Terrorism Using the Global Terrorism Database and the Small Arms Survey", *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 11 October 2023.

3 Stein-Erik Stormoen, Arild Færaas and Sindre Murtnes, "Navn på alle terrorofre offentliggjort," *VG*, 27 September 2011, <https://www.vg.no/nyheter/i/4MBJe/navn-paa-alle-terrorofre-offentliggjort>.

4 "Radical right-wing' motives in Munich 2016 attack," *Deutsche Welle*, 25 October 2019, <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-2016-munich-attack-had-radical-right-wing-motives-say-police/a-50991641>.

5 "Germany shooting: far-right gunman kills 10 in Hanau," *Guardian*, 20 February 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/19/shooting-germany-hanau-dead-several-people-shisha-near-frankfurt>.

6 Posing with weapons is for some more than a display of military strength or an expression of threat. For instance, for militant accelerationist movement (such as the Atomwaffen Division and The Base) the display of violence and weapons is integrative part of their larger apocalyptic world view; it contributes to a hypermasculine warrior culture, crucial for building a new world. For a member posing with weapons is a means of identity-building: a means to become a new man – "the hypermasculine warrior archetype" – that must work to hasten the collapse of society and rebuild a new state and society from its ashes. See: Marc-André Argentino, Amarnath Amarasingam and Emmi Conley, "'One Struggle': Examining Narrative Syncretism between Accelerationists and Salafi-Jihadists", *International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation*, January 2022, p. 16, <https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/ICSR-Report-One-Struggle-Examining-Narrative-Syncretism-between-Accelerationists-and-Salafi%E2%80%91Jihadists.pdf>.

7 For instance, Everytown – an American nonprofit organisation which advocates for gun control and against gun violence – has documented how firearms and related conspiracy theories have been central to the ideology and strategies of extreme right groups like the Oath Keepers and Proud Boys. They claim that the stockpiling of arsenals by some right-wing extremist groups should be seen as their response to an existential threat posed to their in-group by an all-powerful out-group (i.e., the government that implements the cabal's wishes by taking away weapons). This threat requires a response that involves as much violent force as possible. Therefore, in order to respond to the conspiracy against them, they need unfettered access to any and as many firearms as possible. See: "Paranoia and Profit: Armed Extremism and the Gun Industry's Role in Fostering It," *Everytown*, 7 December 2024.

8 "Armed Extremism in Buffalo. Online Gun Communities Provide a Path of Radicalization and Training to a Racist Shooter," *Everytown*, 8 December 2022, <https://everytownresearch.org/report/armed-extremism-buffalo-shooting/>.

9 Nils Duquet and Kevin Goris, "Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe. Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE," *Flemish Peace Institute*, 2019, https://www.flemishpeaceinstitute.eu/safte/files/vrede_syntheserapport_safte_lr.pdf.

10 Ibid.

exclusively adopted by right-wing extremists.¹¹ Left-wing and anarchist groups, on the contrary, appear to have largely abandoned firearms as their primary weapon of choice and have moved towards other modus operandi, in particular, arson with improvised explosive devices (IED) and improvised incendiary devices (IID).¹²

To adequately address the use of firearms by RWEs, it is important to understand how and why they acquire and use them. This policy brief, therefore, aims to provide a first analysis of the main ways in which right-wing extremists in Europe acquire their weapons as well as potential measures to counter these ways of acquisition. Additionally, this policy brief identifies important knowledge gaps which require further research to develop effective, rule-of-law-based interventions reducing the threat posed by armed right-wing extremists.

¹¹ Rajan Basra, "The Future is Now: The Use of 3D-Printed Guns by Extremists and Terrorists," *Insights GNET*, 23 June 2022, <https://gnet-research.org/2022/06/23/the-future-is-now-the-use-of-3d-printed-guns-by-extremists-and-terrorists/>.

¹² Europol, "European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2023 (TE-SAT)", Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, 6, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/publications-events/main-reports/tesat-report>.

Methodology

The analysis in this policy brief draws on a database of RWE incidents¹³ involving firearms occurring between January 2019 and April 2024, specifically the Gun-Terrorism Database, which compiles data from open sources, primarily media reports.¹⁴ This database has been crucial in identifying patterns in firearm acquisition and use. The research is further supported by case law, in-depth interviews with experts – particularly representatives from law enforcement, intelligence agencies, and researchers from various EU Member States – and existing research on the topic.

¹³ The dataset of RWE incidents involving firearms was compiled using J.M. Berger's definition of "extremism." According to Berger, extremism is the belief that an in-group's success or survival is inseparable from the need for hostile actions against an out-group, with these actions being integral to the in-group's notion of success. These hostile actions can vary, from verbal attacks and diminishment to discriminatory behavior, violence, and even genocide. Some incidents in the dataset overlap with other extremist ideologies, like anti-institutionalism, conspiracy beliefs, or hybrid ideologies. However, right-wing beliefs were consistently mentioned in the open-source data. The incidents in the dataset range from individuals expressing violent extremist beliefs, to others planning or executing violent attack, or being sentenced for terrorist activities like propaganda dissemination or violent acts. See, J. M. Berger, *Extremism*, MIT Press, 28 August 2018, p. 45.

¹⁴ The database currently covers incidents between 2019 and 2024 and is at the moment still limited to right-wing extremist incidents. Data is collected from various sources, in particular the Firearms Incident Monitor ([Gunviolence.eu](https://gunviolence.eu)), the RTV dataset (<https://www.sv.uio.no/c-rex/english/groups/rtv-dataset/>), specific country-reports, and other online sources. Each incident is manually and thoroughly researched by the same person and coded for a number of variables, such as incident type, number and types of firearms involved, methods of acquisition of the firearms, membership in shooting club, and military or law enforcement background.

A Diversified Picture of Weapon Acquisition

The analysis in this policy brief is based on a dataset of 118 cases in which RWE individuals or groups acquired or attempted to acquire, possessed, or used firearms.¹⁵ In 23 cases, open-source information on the methods of acquisition was lacking. However, for the cases with available information, multiple acquisition methods emerged, with individuals and groups often using a combination of legal and illegal means. Specifically, the majority of cases (76 cases) involved at least one illegally acquired firearm, while 41 cases included at least one firearm obtained through legal means (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Methods of firearms acquisition by right-wing extremists in Europe between January 2019 and April 2024 (n=118)

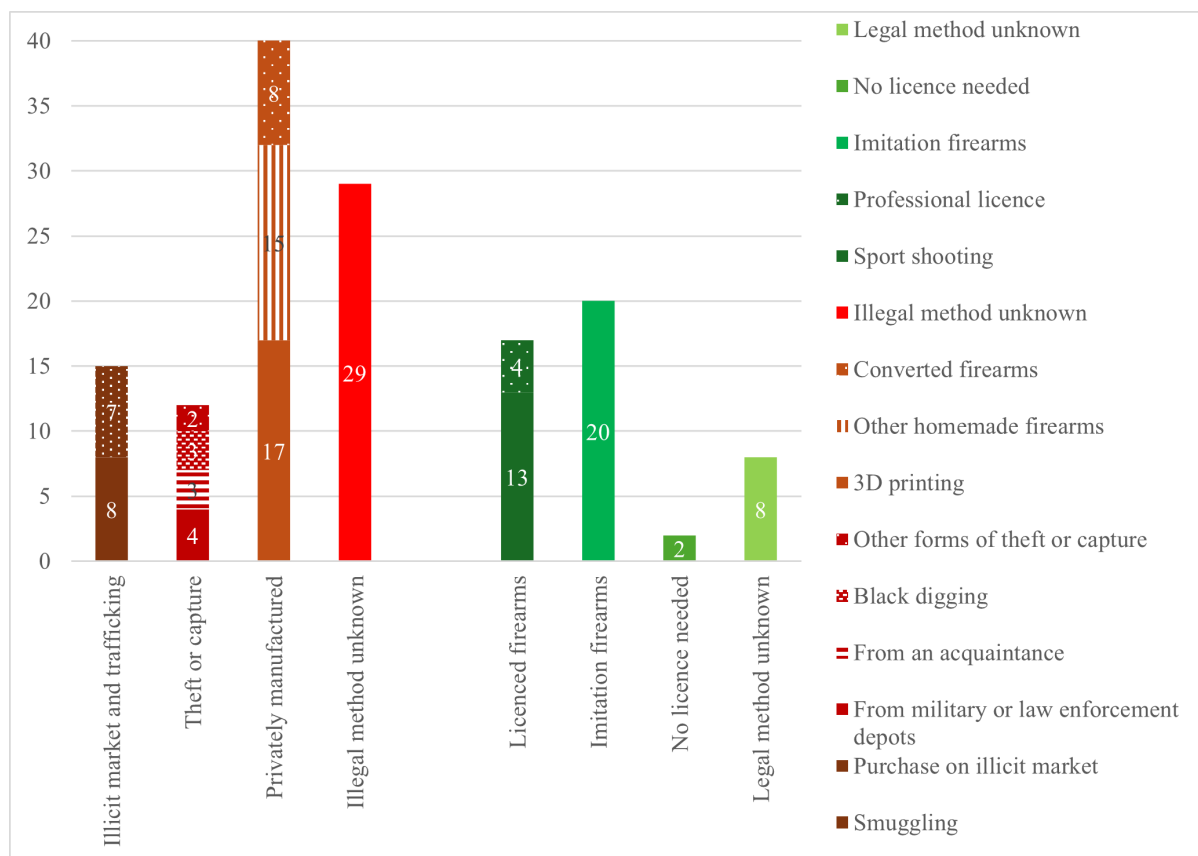


Both legal and illegal methods of acquisition can be further specified into various categories and sub-categories. Illegally acquired firearms were primarily obtained through the illicit market and trafficking, theft or capture, and private manufacturing.¹⁶ In contrast, legally held firearms typically included those acquired through a licence – mostly a sport shooting licence – as well as non-lethal imitation firearms (see Figure 2).

¹⁵ Most incidents involve individuals or groups possessing a single firearm (27 cases) or up to five firearms (nineteen cases). However, a significant number of cases show larger arsenals: Twelve incidents involve between five and ten firearms, twelve cases involve between ten and fifty firearms, seven incidents involve between fifty and one hundred firearms, and three cases involve more than one hundred firearms. Additionally, the dataset includes 21 incidents where the exact number of firearms is unknown, but in over half of these cases (thirteen cases), it is indicated that multiple firearms were accumulated.

¹⁶ In some cases, distinguishing between different categories of acquisition can be challenging due to potential overlap. This is evident, for example, in the distinction between legally and illegally acquired weapons. A firearm that was legally obtained can become illegal if, for instance, the licence expires or the weapon is modified. For the purpose of research, we have categorised cases with potential overlap as follows: (i) *Legal acquisition* includes firearms obtained under the owner's own valid licence, even if the licence has since expired, as well as non-lethal imitation firearms; (ii) *Privately manufactured firearms* refer to those produced by a person other than a licensed manufacturer, and includes all weapons that have undergone modifications or alterations by the owner (regardless of how they were originally acquired by that owner); (iii) *Weapons obtained through theft of capture from military or law enforcement depots* encompass all firearms acquired through connections to the military, law enforcement, or the (private) security sector.

Figure 2: Illegal and legal methods of firearms acquisition by right-wing extremists in Europe between January 2019 and April 2024 (n=95)¹⁷



Illicit Market and Trafficking of Firearms

Previous research found that terrorist groups in Europe access firearms through illicit markets.¹⁸ RWEs also employ this method. The dataset includes fifteen cases in which some firearms were obtained through illegal firearms markets and trafficking. Two primary methods emerged from the analysis.

Firstly, purchasing firearms on the illicit market. The dataset includes a few incidents (seven) involving individuals or groups who purchased or attempted to purchase firearms from illegal sources. Previous research has highlighted the role of darknet markets in facilitating access to firearms for terrorists,¹⁹ particularly after a 2016 right-wing terrorist attack that increased awareness of this threat. In that incident, an eighteen-year-old shooter killed nine people at a shopping centre in Munich, having obtained a pistol and ammunition from a fellow extremist on the darknet.²⁰ The dataset confirms online acquisition as one of the sources of firearms for RWEs, with five cases of individuals or groups purchasing or attempting to purchase firearms online.

¹⁷ The acquisition methods outlined in this graph correspond to 95 cases in the dataset, excluding the 23 cases for which the method of acquisition is unknown. Some cases involve more than one method of acquisition, which explains why the number of cases mentioned in the specific sections on each acquisition method may exceed the total of 95 cases. Our analysis shows that individuals and groups often use multiple methods to obtain firearms. This diversity in acquisition methods may be intentional – where individuals or groups deliberately seek to acquire firearms through various means – or unplanned, such as when firearms are obtained from different sources over an extended period of time.

¹⁸ Nils Duquet and Kevin Goris, “Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe. Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE”.

¹⁹ Giacomo Persi Paoli, Judith Aldridge, Nathan Ryan, Richard Warnes, *Behind the Curtain: the Illicit Trade of Firearms, Explosives and Ammunition on the Dark Web*, RAND Corporation, 2017, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR2000/RR2091/RAND_RR2091.pdf.

²⁰ This was a converted Flobert calibre pistol. See: Nils Duquet, Nino Kbiltsetskhlashvili, Isthiaq Khan and Eric Woods, “Armed To Kill. A comprehensive analysis of the guns used in public mass shootings in Europe between 2009 and 2018,” *Flemish Peace Institute*, 3 October 2019, p. 48, https://vlaamsvredesinstituut.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Report_Armed_to_kill_web.pdf.

One case involves a thirty-year-old man arrested in Hannover in March 2019 for possessing fifty functional firearms he had ordered online from a far-right arms dealer in Austria. This trend of RWEs purchasing weapons illegally from fellow extremists is also noted in various cases.

Secondly, data shows that RWEs are involved in arms smuggling.²¹ The dataset includes eight cases involving RWEs and arms smuggling. One case involves a duo with strong sympathies for Nazism and right-wing extremist movements, arrested in Kristiansand, Norway, in September 2019 for smuggling a large number of weapons from Germany. Another case uncovered an arms trafficking ring in Bavaria, Germany, where three men – two of whom were linked to the RWE scene – smuggled weapons from Croatia to Germany over three years.²²

It is worth mentioning the potential risk of weapons being smuggled from the conflict zone in Ukraine to other European countries. While that risk remains low at present, early indications of shifting firearms trafficking dynamics within Ukraine call for caution regarding future risks.²³ Two incidents in the dataset involve right-wing individuals arrested with war materials upon their return from Ukraine, where they claimed to have gone to fight.²⁴ Most interviewed experts, however, did not expect firearms to leave Ukraine in the near future.²⁵

The EU intensified its efforts to combat illicit firearms markets following the 2015 jihadist attacks in Paris and Copenhagen, where firearms were sourced from illegal markets. In 2015, an EU action plan against illicit trafficking and use of firearms and explosives²⁶ was adopted, and in 2017 the European Firearms Directive was amended to be more restrictive.²⁷ The amendments in 2017 were aimed at making it more difficult to legally acquire certain types of firearms and at improving the traceability of legally held firearms to reduce the risk of diversion into the illegal market.

In 2020, a new European action plan against firearms trafficking was adopted, explicitly aiming to reduce the illegal acquisition of firearms by criminals and terrorists. It focuses on increasing pressure on criminal markets, for example, by the establishment of national firearm focal points, on building a better intelligence picture, and on increasing international cooperation.²⁸

21 There is a difference between trafficking and smuggling of firearms. Trafficking is the broad activity of trading firearms illegally (which includes a wide range of activities such as the acquisition, sale, distribution or movement of firearms), whereas smuggling is specifically about moving firearms across borders illegally. Hence, we used the term 'trafficking' in the broader categorisation of this section '*Illicit market and trafficking of firearms*'. Here, on the other hand, we use the term '*smuggling*', given that the cases mentioned all concern the illegal cross-border movement of firearms.

22 The court of first instance found that there were no reasonable grounds to conclude that these weapons were trafficked to later commit right-wing extremist attacks. Bayerisches Staatsministerium der Justiz. "Strafverfahren gegen Alexander R. u.a. (Waffen-Netzwerk)." *Pressemitteilung* 30/2022, 1 June 2022, <https://www.justiz.bayern.de/gerichte-und-behoerden/oberlandesgerichte/muenchen/presse/2022/30.php>

23 Recent evidence shows early signs that organised arms trafficking is on the rise in Ukraine and that dynamics of firearms possession and proliferation among the general population are changing. See e.g., Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime, "Heavy metal. A new phase of arms trafficking in Ukraine", 23 September 2024, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/a-new-phase-of-arms-trafficking-in-ukraine/>; Small Arms Survey, "Locked but Loaded: Firearms Possession Dynamics in Ukraine. Situation Update Ukraine", September 2024, <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/resource/locked-loaded-firearms-possession-dynamics-ukraine>.

24 Ambre Lepoivre, "Arrêtés en possession de matériel de guerre à leur retour d'Ukraine, deux militants d'ultradroite condamnés à six mois de prison," *Le Figaro*, 24 April 2023, <https://www.lefigaro.fr/faits-divers/arretes-en-possession-de-materiel-de-guerre-a-leur-retour-d-ukraine-deux-militants-d-ultradroite-condamnes-a-six-mois-de-prison-20230424>; Massimiliano Peggio, "Armi da guerra e un missile sequestrati a militanti di estrema destra. Arrestato ex candidato di Forza Nuova," *Lastampa*, 15 July 2019, <https://www.lastampa.it/torino/2019/07/15/news/armi-da-guerra-e-un-missile-sequestrati-a-militanti-di-estrema-destra-arrestato-ex-candidato-di-forza-nuova-1.37025505/>.

25 The risk of arms smuggling from the Ukraine conflict by nationalist groups was underscored by one interviewee. Interview with researcher with geographical expertise on Central and Eastern Europe, conducted on 9 July 2024.

26 European Commission, "Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, Implementing the European Agenda on Security: EU action plan against illicit trafficking in and use of firearms and explosives," COM (2015) 624 final, 2 December 2015, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52015DC0624>.

27 European Parliament and Council, "Directive (EU) 2017/853 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 May 2017 Amending Directive 91/477/EEC on Control of the Acquisition and Possession of Weapons," Official Journal of the European Union L 137, 24 June 2017, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2017/853/oj>.

28 European Commission, "Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, 2020-2025 EU action plan on firearms trafficking," COM(2020) 608 final, 24 July 2020, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0608>.

Historically, the focus has been on the Western Balkans, a key source of illicit firearms in the EU.²⁹ In recent years the EU has increased its attention for the risk of Ukraine becoming a future source country for firearms trafficking.³⁰

The EU's current efforts to reduce illicit firearms markets may be effective in addressing RWE firearm acquisitions through these channels. However, certain aspects of RWE acquisition methods differ. Notably, some RWEs are directly involved in smuggling networks or obtain weapons from fellow extremists operating within the illicit market, which may require additional focus, for instance on criminal justice measures against individuals involved in the illicit market and smuggling networks.

Theft or Capture

Theft is a significant source of illicit firearms for European criminals and terrorists. Several recent public mass shootings and some jihadist attacks have involved firearms that were legally owned but later entered the illicit domain after a burglary or robbery.³¹ However, in the analysis of RWE incidents, only one case was found involving the theft of firearms from private gun owners or commercial actors, such as registered firearms dealers. Instead, other forms of theft or capture have surfaced from the twelve cases in the dataset, out of which three key types have been identified.

First, theft or capture from an acquaintance.³² In three cases, the firearms were obtained from an acquaintance who possessed them.³³ This includes individuals who stole the firearms from this acquaintance (e.g. when the acquaintance failed to lock the weapon securely) or had the gun given to them by this acquaintance. For example, the terrorist who killed two members of the local LGBTQ+ community in Bratislava in 2022 had stolen his firearm from his father's safe.³⁴ Similarly, the attacker in Baerum, Norway in 2019 – who killed his teenage stepsister and opened fire at a mosque – had stolen the gun from his father's cupboard.³⁵

Second, theft from military and law enforcement depots. In four incidents individuals used their involvement with the military or law enforcement to steal weapons from military or police stocks. One notable case concerns the Nordkreuz group, a right-wing prepper group made up of former or current soldiers, reservists, and police officers. This group is part of the Uniter network,³⁶ which was founded by a sergeant in the German military's elite Kommando Spezialkräfte (KSK) and aimed to coordinate like-minded people in the police and armed forces. Members of the Nordkreuz group had stockpiled weapons and ammunition in preparation for "Day X". Some of the ammunition came from police stocks and may have been used as payment to a like-minded shooting range owner for unauthorised tactical shooting training.³⁷

29 Europol, "Illicit firearms trafficking," last accessed 10 October 2024, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/crime-areas/illicit-firearms-trafficking>.

30 See, for instance, the 2020-2025 EU action plan on firearms trafficking, which constitutes a single action plan for both the EU and south-east Europe partners, including Ukraine. European Commission, "Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, 2020-2025 EU action plan on firearms trafficking".

31 For example, the deadly shootings against a cultural centre and a synagogue in Copenhagen in 2015 were committed with an automatic firearm stolen from a volunteer military organisation. The attacker in Toulouse and Montauban, France, in 2012 has also used a firearm previously stolen from a professional sport shooter's home. See e.g. Quitterie de Labbey, Nils Duquet, and Lore Smets, "Project DIVERT: Report. Stealing precious steel: Firearms theft in the European Union," *Flemish Peace Institute*, 26 May 2021, <https://vlaamsvredesinstituut.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/20210526-DIVERT2-FirearmsTheft.pdf>; Nils Duquet and Kevin Goris, "Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe. Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE".

32 The theft or capture of a firearm from an acquaintance is not only seen among RWE cases, but also in non-terrorist mass shootings. See, Nils Duquet, Nino Kbiltsetskhilashvili, Isthiaq Khan and Eric Woods, "Armed To Kill. A comprehensive analysis of the guns used in public mass shootings in Europe between 2009 and 2018".

33 Open-source information made it only in one case possible to determine that the firearms were legally possessed by that acquaintance.

34 Julia Kupper, Kacper Rekawek and Matthew Kriner, *Terrorgram's first saint. Analyzing Accelerationist Terrorism in Bratislava*, Accelerationism Research Consortium, 2023, p. 3, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/369618635_Terrorgram%27s_First_Saint_Analyzing_Accelerationist_Terrorism_in_Bratislava.

35 Magnus Braaten and Kenneth Fosshem, "Faren til Manshaus må i retten: Nektet å la politiet inndra terrorvåpnene", *TV2*, <https://www.tv2.no/nyheter/innenriks/faren-til-manshaus-ma-i-retten-nekter-a-la-politiet-inndra-terrorvapnene/11678017/>.

36 Florian Flade, "The Insider Threat: Far-Right Extremism in the German Military and Police," *CTC Sentinel*, vol. 14 no. 5, 3 June 2021.

37 Ibid.

Third, theft or capture of weapons with a historical dimension. The dataset contains three cases involving the capture of weapons with a historical dimension, in particular weapons related to the Second World War, that have been either stolen from a war history museum or dug up from former battlefields (so-called “black digging”). One interesting case is that of a 26-year-old right-wing extremist who was arrested in Frankfurt, Germany, in April 2023 for possessing three weapon caches. Investigators seized a large number of World War II remnants, including potential explosives, firearms and ammunition. These included a fully automatic submachine gun and an aerial bomb with an effective charge of around 68 kilograms of TNT mixture. According to media reports, the suspect had illegally dug up the weapons after searching with a metal detector around the site of disused ammunition depots of the former German Wehrmacht. He allegedly restored the partially functional explosives and firearms to working condition in order to sell them.³⁸

In recent years, the EU has taken important steps to harmonise safe storage and transportation rules for private firearm owners, particularly under the 2017 Firearms Directive. However, not all Member States have fully implemented these measures, resulting in different levels of firearms storage and transportation safety across the EU.³⁹

The secure storage of state stockpiles has also been addressed in some EU policy instruments.⁴⁰ Additionally, some member states have in parallel, strengthened their national policies on the matter in response to high-profile theft incidents. These measures include the disposal of surplus firearms and ammunition, enhanced security standards, stricter record-keeping and verification of stockpiles, and tighter regulations on taking service weapons home.⁴¹ However, in several European countries, off-duty police officers are permitted to carry their weapons,⁴² bearing a risk of apprehension, loss, or misuse for terrorist purposes.

Data further suggests the need for greater attention on addressing theft from military and law enforcement depots. While this has not recently been a significant source of weapons for jihadists or other terrorist groups in Europe,⁴³ it appears to be one of the possible avenues for RWE groups. Access may be gained through individuals with connections to, or infiltration of, the military or law enforcement. One in five incidents between January 2019 and April 2024 involved one or more suspects with a military, law enforcement, or security background.⁴⁴ This reinforces previous research on the presence of such backgrounds within RWE groups⁴⁵ and further underscores the need to address the risks concerning overlap between military personnel and violent right-wing extremist beliefs. Such overlap can occur when individuals with extremist beliefs or connections choose to enlist, or when military personnel develop extremist views during or after their service.

38 Hessenschau, “Mutmaßlicher Rechtsextremist wegen Anschlagplänen vor Gericht,” 14 May 2024, <https://www.hessenschau.de/panorama/waffenlager-in-frankfurt-mutmasslicher-rechtsextremist-wegen-anschlagsplaenen-vor-gericht-v1,frankfurt-prozess-waffen-umsturzplan-100.html>.
39 de Labbey et al., “Project DIVERT”, pp. 46-64.

40 For instance, the 2018 EU SALW Strategy pursues, among other objectives, the improvement of physical security and stockpile management for firearms and ammunition, including government stockpiles and civilian-owned firearms.

41 Quitterie de Labbey, Nils Duquet, and Lore Smets, “Project DIVERT: Report. Stealing precious steel: Firearms theft in the European Union”, p. 66.

42 In France, off-duty police officers are not only allowed to carry their weapons, they can also no longer be denied entry to public spaces such as festivals, cinemas, or restaurants while carrying their weapon, see: Assemblée Nationale, *Proposition de Loi* (L15B3452), Art. 25, https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/15/textes/l15b3452_proposition-loi#D_Article_25.

43 Military stockpiles have, however, been a significant resource of small arms and light weapons for jihadist groups in West Africa and Afghanistan, see: Tanya Mehra, Méryl Demuynck, Colin P. Clarke, Nils Duquet, Cameron Lumley and Matthew Wentworth, “Cashing in on Guns: Identifying the Nexus between Small Arms, Light Weapons and Terrorist Financing,” *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism*, 24 March 2021, p. 16f., <https://www.icct.nl/publication/cashing-guns-identifying-nexus-between-small-arms-light-weapons-and-terrorist-financing>; Annelies Pauwels and Nils Duquet, “Firearms, Conflict & Terrorism. A violent nexus,” in: *Illicit Firearms Markets and Organized Crime: Global, Regional, and Local Perspectives*, David Bright (ed.), Oxford University Press, forthcoming.

44 In thirteen cases, the individual was a former member of the armed forces or law enforcement agencies; in the other fourteen cases, the individual was still active in these agencies at the time of the incident.

45 Teun Van Dongen, Yannick Veilleux-Lepage, Eviane Leidig, Hanna Rigault Arkhis “Right-Wing Extremism in the Military. A typology of the threat,” *ICCT Research Paper*, May 2022, <https://www.icct.nl/sites/default/files/2022-12/Right-wing-extremism-in-the-military-1.pdf>;
Florian Flade, “The Insider Threat: Far-Right Extremism in the German Military and Police,” *CTC Sentinel*, vol. 14 no. 5, 3 June 2021, <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/the-insider-threat-far-right-extremism-in-the-german-military-and-police/>.

Additionally, RWE organisations may actively recruit current or former military members to leverage their skills, or individuals may join the military for strategic reasons, such as gaining access to weapons and expertise.⁴⁶

In recent years, several countries have implemented strategies to detect and remove violent extremists from these services, for instance by establishing focal points for reporting suspected violent extremist individuals within their armed forces.⁴⁷ Additionally, military agencies increasingly monitor extremist tendencies internally. Once a suspicion concretises, authorities can take disciplinary measures, carefully balancing freedom of expression against public security risks.⁴⁸ In doing so, those suspected of RWE connections must be subjected to due process. This means that allegations of violent extremism must be thoroughly investigated to establish that the individual in question not only holds extremist beliefs but indeed sees violence as an adequate means to pursue these beliefs. Additionally, members of the military must have access to an effective defence and be able to take remedies against a disciplinary decision. Even in cases of permanent removal from service, members of the military must be provided with a remedy against the measure.⁴⁹

To implement removal or disciplinary measures, effective communication along the ranks, within disciplinary boards, and between different security agencies is crucial. This was exemplified in the 2021 case of a Belgian soldier connected to the right-wing extremist milieu who stole weapons and ammunition from the military and threatened public figures.⁵⁰ Following this incident, the Belgian Military Intelligence Service announced in 2023 that it implemented stricter measures to combat violent extremism within the military, including tighter supervision of weapons and ammunition.⁵¹

Against this background, continuous educational and awareness-raising programmes are essential to sensitise members of the military and law enforcement to signs of radicalisation among peers and former members, and the concrete threats to defence and public safety stemming from radicalised military and law enforcement members.⁵²

46 Abigail R. Hall, Jerod Hassel and Chivon Fitch, "Militarized Extremism, the Radical Right and the War on Terror", *The Independent Review*, vol. 26 no. 2, 1 June 2021, p. 10, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3857771.

47 For example, the Swiss Fachstelle Extremismus in der Armee (FS EX A) acts as focal point for the general public as well as members of the administration or the military to report suspected extremist behaviour within the military or to ask for support on prevention or disciplinary issues. See: "Fachstelle Extremismus in Der Armee," 16 May 2024, <https://www.vtg.admin.ch/de/fachstelle-extremismus-in-der-armee>.

48 OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, "Human Rights of Armed Forces Personnel: Compendium of standards, good practices and recommendations," *Report*, 4 March 2021, https://www.osce.org/files/f/ documents/6/5/480143_1.pdf.

49 See for example Article 1 of the 2023 amendment of the German Law on Soldiers which provides a removal from service for soldiers with more than four years of service through an administrative act, Gesetz zur Beschleunigung der Entfernung von verfassungsfeindlichen Soldatinnen und Soldaten aus der Bundeswehr sowie zur Änderung weiterer soldatenrechtlicher Vorschriften, BGBl. 2023 I Nr. 392, 22 December 2023, <https://www.recht.bund.de/bgbl/1/2023/392/VO.html>. While this amendment is aimed at reducing the average duration of removal procedure from four years, the availability of remedies will likely not lead to significantly shorter removal periods, see Simon Gauseweg, "Extremisten Schneller Raus Aus Der Bundeswehr," *Legal Tribune Online*, 24 September 2023, <https://www.lto.de/recht/hintergruende/h/extremismus-bundeswehr-verfassungsfeinde-aus-der-truppe-entfernen-referentenentwurf-verteidigungsministerium>.

50 Lauren Waljer, "Jürgen Conings: One Year Since Nation-Wide Manhunt Gripped Belgium," *Brussels Times*, 31 August 2024, <https://www.brusselstimes.com/225234/jurgen-conings-one-year-since-nation-wide-manhunt-gripped-belgium>. Communication concerning disciplinary measures of alleged extremist military and law enforcement members is not only required when interacting with the individual in question to prevent frustration and further radicalisation. A subsequent investigation by the Belgian Standing Committee on the Supervision of the Intelligence- and Security Services in 2021 revealed significant miscommunication and lack of communication by Military Intelligence. See: Vast Comité ven toezicht op de inlichtingen- en veiligheidsdiensten, "Notitienuummer 2021.283", 01 July 2021, 13f., <https://www.comiteri.be/images/pdf/publicaties/RAPP%20UNCLASS%20JC%20NL%2001%2007%202021.pdf>.

51 Société Générale de Surveillance (SGS), *Rapport Annuel 2023*, June 2023, 48, https://www.sgrs.be/wp-content/uploads/2023_Jaarrapport.pdf.

52 Daniel Koehler, "A Threat From Within? Exploring the Link Between the Extreme Right and the Military," Policy Brief, *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism*, September 2019, 20f., <https://www.icct.nl/sites/default/files/import/publication/ICCT-Koehler-A-Threat-from-Within-Exploring-the-Link-between-the-Extreme-Right-and-the-Military.pdf>.

Privately Manufactured or Converted Firearms

Previous research has demonstrated that advancements in technology and information sharing make privately manufactured firearms (PMFs) a more viable option for criminal and terrorist groups, serving as substitutes for factory-built firearms.⁵³ However, extremist and terrorist groups in Europe tend to use only certain types of PMFs, particularly converted firearms,⁵⁴ which have been used in recent high-profile jihadist attacks.⁵⁵ In contrast, 3D-printed and other homemade weapons have so far largely been absent from the arsenals of jihadist groups.⁵⁶

RWEs, on the other hand, predominantly use three categories of PMFs as methods of firearms acquisition. The present database includes 31 incidents⁵⁷ involving PMFs, with most of these cases relating to 3D-printed firearms. Specifically, seventeen incidents involve some level of engagement with 3D printing, ranging from searching for, downloading, and sharing 3D-printed firearms designs to the actual attempted production of 3D-printed weapons. In ten of these incidents, the suspect successfully produced 3D-printed firearms or components. The firearms, in these cases, vary in the proportion of 3D-printed components used in their construction.⁵⁸

A notable amount of incidents also involve other types of improvised and craft-produced weapons. The dataset includes fifteen incidents where homemade firearms (and ammunition) were used, none of which were produced using 3D printing.⁵⁹ The identified cases of homemade firearms vary in their level of sophistication, ranging from very rudimentary designs to more sophisticated homemade firearms. A notable case of rather sophisticated homemade production involves four members of the Alsatian far-right movement La Meute who were arrested in June 2022 for arms trafficking. The Gendarmerie found a large quantity of weapons and ammunition in their homes (including over a tonne of ammunition). They also uncovered a sophisticated ammunition production workshop, featuring three presses, a casing heating machine, and precision scales.⁶⁰

Last, converted firearms are mentioned in eight incidents. These include cases where a suspect reactivated a firearm that had been modified not to fire live ammunition, converted a gas gun

53 In Europe, PMFs primarily include converted firearms, basic homemade firearms, and a smaller number of 3D-printed guns. See: Matt Schroeder, Nicolas Florquin, Anne-Séverine Fabre and Andrea Edoardo Varisco, "Privately Made Firearms in the European Union," Project Insight, November 2023, 7, https://gunviolence.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Project_INSIGHT_Emerging-Threats_DEF.pdf.

54 Converted firearms refer to the modification of objects that are incapable of firing a projectile into ones that can. This includes both the conversion of originally non-lethal imitation firearms (such as alarm weapons and airsoft guns) and the reactivation of firearms previously downgraded to smaller 'Flobert' calibres or modified not to fire live ammunition (such as surplus government weapons modified for the civilian market). See: Nicolas Florquin, and Benjamin King, *From legal to lethal. Converted Firearms in Europe, Small Arms Survey*, Geneva: Small Arms Survey, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, April 2018, pp. 50-52, <https://smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/resources/SAS-Report-7-Converted-Firearms-REV5-WEB.pdf>.

55 There have been a number of recent high-profile terrorist attacks in Europe involving converted weapons, such as the January 2015 terrorist attack in Paris. The perpetrator of the Montrouge and Hypercacher attacks used firearms sold in Slovakia as acoustic expansion weapons – live-firing weapons modified to prevent their use with regular ammunition – before they were reactivated and eventually smuggled to France. A reactivated pistol was also among the weapons seized from the perpetrator of the March 2012 attacks in Toulouse and Montauban, France. See: Florquin and King, *From legal to lethal*, p. 38.

56 Stefan Schaufelbühl, Nicolas Florquin, Denis Werner and Olivier Delémont, "The emergence of 3D-printed firearms: An analysis of media and law enforcement reports," *Forensic Science International: Synergy* 8, p. 100464, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10998078/>; Basra, "The Future is Now".

57 The dataset includes 31 incidents involving PMFs as method of firearms acquisition. Some of these incidents involve multiple types of PMFs (e.g., both 3D printing and the conversion or reactivation of firearms). Hence, the number of incidents mentioned here does not correspond to the numbers in Figure 2, which focuses specifically on the methods of acquisition and not the incidents.

58 3D-printed firearms can be classified in three categories: fully 3D-printed firearms (F3DP), hybrid 3D-printed firearms, and parts kit completions (PKC). F3DPs usually only feature few metal components, lack pressure-bearing components and only last a few shots. Hybrid 3D-printed firearms on the other hand incorporate easily accessible, unregulated metal components and can perform comparably to mass-produced firearms. One of the most cost-effective and prominent hybrid 3D-printed firearms is the FGC-9 (short for "Fuck Gun Control" 9mm). Lastly, PKCs combine 3D-printed receivers with factory-made pressure-bearing components. While they are more reliable than other types of 3D-printed weapons, they are more costly in production and might require factory components that cannot be legally purchased. See: G. Hays, Ivan T., and N.R. Jenzen-Jones, "Desktop Firearms: Emergent Small Arms Craft Production Technologies," *Armament Research Services (ARES)*, 2020, 13-16, <https://www.icct.nl/sites/default/files/import/publication/ARES-Research-Report-8-Desktop-Firearms.pdf>.

59 In some of these cases, suspects were involved in both 3D printing firearms and crafting non-3Dprinted weapons.

60 Paul Conge, "Livres antisémites, munitions, «bunker» : deux membres de l'ultra droite mis en examen en Alsace," *Marianne*, 3 June 2022, <https://www.marianne.net/societe/police-et-justice/livres-antisemites-munitions-bunker-deux-membres-de-lultra-droite-mis-en-examen-en-alsace>.

into a live-firing firearm, and modified firearms to function as (semi-)automatic firearms. Unlike the jihadist shootings, where perpetrators obtained already modified weapons from the illicit firearms market, the suspects in these cases carried out the conversion themselves.

The European Firearms Directive stipulates that only authorised persons are allowed to manufacture or assemble firearms, their essential components, and ammunition.⁶¹ The manufacture without such an authorisation is criminalised across the EU.⁶² Nonetheless, enforcing these laws is challenging, as extremists are unlikely to seek licenses and based on the dataset, no right-wing extremists who were caught in the manufacture of firearms faced charges for licence violations.⁶³

The EU has also implemented specific measures concerning converted firearms. Notably, Member States have been required to implement legislation qualifying weapons that “may be converted to expel a shot, bullet or projectile” as firearms.⁶⁴ Additionally, record-keeping by retailers concerning sales of deactivated weapons or alarm and acoustic weapons has proven crucial to law enforcement operations tackling conversion workshops and arms trafficking networks.⁶⁵

To effectively restrict 3D-printed firearms, legislation must address the entire production chain, from online manuals to manufacture. Two key developments, in particular, have driven recent advances in 3D-printed firearms, requiring specific attention: (i) the release of the FGC-9 in March 2020 and subsequent improvements to its design accompanied by detailed instruction manuals, the fact that most components are freely accessible, and the prominence of its initial designer, making it one of the most popular semi-automatic homemade firearms to construct, with equal lethality as an industrially manufactured semi-automatic firearm⁶⁶ and (ii) the expansion of peer-to-peer networks within the 3D-printing community, enabling the sharing of gun designs, technical knowledge, and support.⁶⁷ Early research, however, indicates that States around the globe have mainly applied two approaches: criminalising unlicensed firearm manufacture as described above and regulating blueprint dissemination.⁶⁸

It can be argued that files of 3D firearms blueprints, just like (parts of) 3D-printed firearms, fall under EU firearms export legislation.⁶⁹ Member states must domestically regulate export licencing and

61 EU Directive 2021/555 requires member states to implement laws mandating licences for all private and commercial weapon manufacturers. See Art. 4 (4) EU Directive 2021/555.

62 Similarly, the UK Firearms Act 1968 criminalises the manufacture of firearms without licence, see: UK Parliament, *Firearms Act 1968*, c. 27, Art. 1, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1968/27/contents>.

63 Schroeder et al., “Privately Made Firearms in the European Union,” p. 12.

64 Arts 1 (1), 14 EU Directive 2021/555 requires member states to implement laws mandating licences for all private and commercial weapon manufacturers, European Parliament and Council, “Directive (EU) 2021/555 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 March 2021 on control of the acquisition and possession of weapons (EU Directive 2021/555),” <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32021L0555>. For information on regulatory framework on convertible weapons preceding the 2021 Directive, see Florquin and King, *From legal to lethal*, pp. 50-52.

65 Florquin and King, *From legal to lethal*, p. 53.

66 According to officials the FGC-9 Mod-II was the most found 3D-printed firearm as of late 2023. The FGC-9 (which stands for ‘Fuck Gun Control’) can be made entirely at home with the addition of a few commercially available components and is comparable to industrially manufactured semi-automatic firearms. See: Rajan Basra, “Behind the Mask: Uncovering the Extremist Messages of a 3D-Printed Gun Designer,” *International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation*, October 2023, <https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/ICSR-Report-Behind-the-Mask-Uncovering-the-Extremist-Messages-of-a-3D%E2%80%91Printed-Gun-Designer.pdf>; Rueben Dass, “3D-Printed Weapons and the Far-Right: The Finnish Accelerationist Cell,” *Insights GNET*, 6 October 2023, <https://gnet-research.org/2023/10/06/3d-printed-weapons-and-the-far-right-the-2023-finnish-accelerationist-cell/>; Matt Schroeder et al., “Privately Made Firearms in the European Union,” *Project Insight*, November 2023, 7, https://gunviolence.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Project_INSIGHT_Emerging-Threats_DEF.pdf.

67 Nicolò Miotto, “The Role of Online Communities in Supporting 3D-Printed Firearms,” *Insights GNET*, 25 August 2021, <https://gnet-research.org/2021/08/25/the-role-of-online-communities-in-supporting-3d-printed-firearms/>.

68 Yannick Veilleux-Lepage, “CTRL, HATE, PRINT: Terrorists and the Appeal of 3D-Printed Weapons,” *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism*, 13 July 2021, <https://www.icct.nl/publication/ctrl-hate-print-terrorists-and-appeal-3d-printed-weapons>.

69 ML 22 of the *Common Military List of the European Union*, adopted by the Council on 17 February 2020, Official Journal of the European Union C 85/1, 13 March 2020, [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2020.085.01.0001.01.ENG&toc=OJ:C:2020:085:TOC; Council Common Position 2008/944/CFSP of 8 December 2008 defining common rules governing control of exports of military technology and equipment, Official Journal of the European Union L 335/99, 13 December 2020, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32008E0944>. Additionally, files of 3D-firearms blueprints just like \(parts of\) 3D-printed firearms are listed as dual-goods by international agreements on arms exports, such as the Wassenaar Agreement, see Wassenaar Arrangement Secretariat, “Wassenaar Arrangement on Export Controls for Conventional Arms and Dual-Use Goods and Technologies: Volume II - List of Dual-Use Goods and Technologies and Munitions List,” 2023, <https://www.wassenaar.org/app/uploads/2023/12/List-of-Dual-Use-Goods-and-Technologies-Munitions-List-2023-1.pdf>.](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2020.085.01.0001.01.ENG&toc=OJ:C:2020:085:TOC; Council Common Position 2008/944/CFSP of 8 December 2008 defining common rules governing control of exports of military technology and equipment, Official Journal of the European Union L 335/99, 13 December 2020, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32008E0944)

retransfer restrictions of small arms and light weapons and for dual-use goods.⁷⁰ Nonetheless, the digital nature and the wide availability of these files make the identification of the “exporter”, namely the individual who initially uploaded the files, and of the “end user”, namely the person who downloads these files, nearly impossible.⁷¹

At the same time, many states have not criminalised the possession or dissemination of 3D-printing manuals per se,⁷² but rather qualify these actions as complicity in or preparation of certain crimes.⁷³ These offences, as well as violations of manufacture licencing laws, are often not prosecuted in cases of RWEs producing, possessing, or using 3D-printed or otherwise privately manufactured firearms, which leads to lower visibility of the threat. Similarly, the prosecution of these offences has little impact on the accessibility of such manuals due to easy online dissemination and limited law enforcement capacities to detect them and identify responsible individuals.⁷⁴

EU Member States could consider applying existing laws to remove terrorist and other illegal and harmful content online. Regulation (EU) 2022/2065, the so-called Digital Services Act (DSA), requires them to implement domestic legislation obliging online platforms and search engines to Very Large Online Platforms (VLOPs) and Very Large Online Search Engines (VLOSEs) to detect, moderate, refer, and remove harmful online content, including illegal content.⁷⁵ 3D-printed firearms pose a serious risk to public safety and the lives of individuals. Thus, manuals enabling the manufacture of such firearms could be seen as harmful removable content, as outlined in Art. 34 (1) DSA.⁷⁶ As such, VLOPs and VLOSEs must detect and remove these files.⁷⁷ Yet, smaller platforms and search engines with less than 45 million users in the EU do not have these obligations, allowing for continued dissemination of these files elsewhere.

70 Dual use goods are items and technology that can be used for both civilian as well as military purposes. As such, they bear the risk of being misused for grave human rights violations, including by terrorist organisations. For more information on EU regulation of dual use goods, see European Union, *Regulation (EU) 2021/821 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 setting up a Union regime for the control of exports, brokering, technical assistance, transit and transfer of dual-use items*, Official Journal of the European Union L 206/1, 20 May 2021, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32021R0821>.

71 Schroeder et al., “Privately Made Firearms in the European Union,” p. 13. Since there has so far only been one publicly known case in which 3D-printed firearms components were smuggled across international borders – namely from China and Italy to Sweden – export licencing is more relevant in relation to blueprint files than physical components. On the trafficking case, see: “Men in Sweden Charged With Smuggling DIY and 3D Printed Glock Parts From China,” *Impro Guns*, 4 March 2023, <https://homemadeguns.wordpress.com/2023/03/04/men-in-sweden-charged-with-smuggling-diy-and-3d-printed-glock-parts-from-china/>. For more details on technical arrangements in export licencing in relation to 3D-printed firearms and blueprints, see: Kolja Brockmann, “3D-Printable Guns and Why Export Controls on Technical Data Matter,” *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*, 1 August 2018, <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/blog/2018/3d-printable-guns-and-why-export-controls-technical-data-matter>.

72 In 2021, Singapore criminalised the possession of digital 3D firearms printing manuals: Bill no. 44/2020, *Guns, Explosives and Weapons Control Bill*, <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Bills-Supp/44-2020/Published/20201103?DocDate=20201103>.

73 This approach is for example being taken by the Netherlands, see: “Politie Constateert Toename 3D-geprinte Wapens,” *politie*, 24 May 2022, <https://www.politie.nl/nieuws/2022/mei/23/11-politie-constateert-toename-3d-geprinte-wapens.html>.

74 Yannick Veilleux-Lepage, “CTRL, HATE, PRINT: Terrorists and the Appeal of 3D-Printed Weapons,” *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism*, 13 July 2021.

75 European Union, *Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on a Framework for the Digital Markets Act (DSA)*, Official Journal of the European Union L 270, 25 October 2022, 1–47, section 5, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2022/2065/oj>.

76 Art. 34 (1) DSA indicates that service providers shall minimise “actual or foreseeable negative effects” of content on “the exercise of fundamental rights”, “the civic discourse and electoral processes, and public security”, and “gender-based violence, [...] and serious negative consequences to the person’s physical and mental well-being.”

77 Notably, Meta has already listed 3D firearms blueprints as restricted goods and services under the Facebook Community Standards, see Meta, *Community Standards: Regulated Goods*, accessed 23 September 2024, https://transparency.meta.com/en-gb/policies/community-standards/regulated-goods/?source=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.facebook.com%2Fcommunitystandards%2Fregulated_goods%2F.

Another approach which has not yet received much attention is to oblige print manufacturers to implement filters in their software to block weapon component printing.⁷⁸ This would require continuous efforts to keep track of new designs and repeatedly implement software updates to ensure the blocking of the newest designs.⁷⁹

Legal Acquisition of Firearms

Terrorist groups and individuals typically avoid acquiring firearms through legal means, given their criminal nature, and instead opt for illegal options.⁸⁰ However, the data analysed for this policy brief shows that RWEs significantly rely on legally obtained firearms. These weapons have also been used in several high-profile attacks by RWEs, including the Utøya, Hanau, and Macerata shootings.

The dataset includes 41 cases between January 2019 and April 2024 involving at least one legally acquired firearm. Media reports indicate that many of these firearms were purchased with a sport shooting licence (thirteen cases) and, to a lesser extent, with a professional authorisation. In eight cases, the type of licence remains unknown. Previous research suggests that sport shooting is regularly used as a pretext by individuals who simply want to own a gun or have one for self-defence rather than for the actual sport.⁸¹ Joining a shooting club is sometimes viewed as the easiest way to legally obtain a firearm.⁸²

The dataset includes twenty incidents involving non-lethal imitation firearms, such as alarm guns and airsoft guns, which can be purchased without authorisation in many European countries.⁸³ These weapons were often used to intimidate victims or for target practice and were found alongside live or converted firearms and other weapons or as a precursor to acquiring live firearms. Additionally, the conversion of non-lethal imitation firearms into live-firing weapons poses a significant challenge across the EU.⁸⁴ This risk is underscored by a total of four incidents of conversion in the dataset.

The European Firearms Directive stipulates that only persons “who are not likely to be a danger to themselves or others, to public order or to public safety” are allowed to possess firearms that require a license.⁸⁵ Yet, criteria and information used to assess the reliability of licence holders and applicants concerning their danger to public order and safety vary across, and sometimes within, Member States. In Germany, for instance, judicial reviews of license revocation revealed

78 Recent research indicates that integrating blocking mechanisms in slicer software is technically feasible and if pursued through public-private partnership and uniform legislation can at least limit the options in producing 3D-printed firearms or components thereof, see Yannick Veilleux-Lepage, “Blocking the Blueprint: Technological Barriers Against 3D-Printed Firearms,” *Insights GNET*, 6 November 2024, <https://gnet-research.org/2024/11/06/blocking-the-blueprint-technological-barriers-against-3d-printed-firearms/>; Deutscher Bundestag, “Bericht des Ausschusses für Bildung, Forschung und Technikfolgenabschätzung (18. Ausschuss) gemäß § 56a der Geschäftsordnung: Technikfolgenabschätzung (TA) Additive Fertigungsverfahren ‘3-D-Druck29’ August 2017, Drucksache 18/13455, p. 185, <https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/18/134/1813455.pdf>.

79 Daniel C. Tirone and James Gilley, “Printing Power: 3-D Printing and Threats to State Security,” *Journal of Policing Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*, vol. 10, no. 2 (3 July 2015): 112f., <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/18335330.2015.1089636?src=recsys#d1e293>.

80 For example, the majority of terrorist shootings by jihadist actors are conducted using illegal firearms. A recent analysis of 23 mass shootings in Europe between 2009 and 2018 found that all jihadist-related shootings included in the study were committed with illegally obtained firearms. See: Nils Duquet, “Public mass shootings in Europe: how did the weapons fall into the wrong hands?” *Flemish Peace Institute*, 3 October 2019, https://vlaamsvredesinstituut.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Factsheet_A2K_EN.pdf.

81 Nils Duquet, “Een schot in de roos? Uitdagingen inzake de regulering van de schietsport in Vlaanderen,” *Flemish Peace Institute*, November 2018, p. 68-69, https://vlaamsvredesinstituut.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/rapport_schietsport_web.pdf.

82 In Italy, for example, a recent analysis of the numbers of sport shooting licence compared with the number of registered members of shooting clubs showed that the vast majority of those who hold a shooting license do not actually practice the sport: of the 548,000 shooting license holders registered by the State Police in 2019, less than half were registered members of shooting clubs and less than a fifth actually went to the shooting range. See: Adil Mauro, “Quante armi legali circolano in Italia,” *L'Essenziale*, 20 May 2022, <https://www.internazionale.it/essenziale/notizie/adil-mauro/2022/05/20/armi-legali-in-italia#:~:text=Luca%20Traini%2C%20autore%20della%20tentata,per%20armi%20da%20tiro%20sportivo>

83 We include non-lethal imitation firearms in the category of legal acquisitions. However, not all imitation firearms are automatically considered legally acquired. According to the EU’s 2021 Firearms Directive, imitation devices that cannot be easily converted to fire a shot are neither licensed nor prohibited firearms. Nonetheless, member states may introduce stricter laws than those outlined in the Directive, resulting in varying licensing requirements for imitation weapons across the EU. Media reports, however, often lack the detail needed to determine whether a specific firearm requires a licence in a particular member state, or if the suspect possessed the necessary licence.

84 Florquin and King, *From legal to lethal*.

85 Article 5 of EU Directive 2021/555.

uncertainties in existing legislation regarding the level of engagement with violent extremism that would constitute the pursuit of anti-constitutional acts, a ground for being unreliable to own a weapon. While one court held that due to the negative implications, the mere attendance in right-wing gatherings can be considered as a pursuit against the democratic legal order,⁸⁶ another court found that being considered a RWE by intelligence services does not per se imply a readiness to misuse weapons and is hence insufficient to revoke a licence.⁸⁷ However, recent jurisprudence seems to depart from this view, as in August 2024, the Administrative Court of Cologne confirmed the licence revocation from a former shareholder of the right-wing magazine *Compact*,⁸⁸ which the regional intelligence service had classified as a right-wing extremist movement.⁸⁹

The present dataset also highlights the need for better screening and information-sharing related to mental health and criminal behaviour. While unaddressed mental health concerns combined with violent extremist beliefs present a broader concern, the risks are significantly heightened when highly lethal firearms are involved. Some individuals who legally possessed firearms had (long-term) mental health problems that went unrecognised or were acknowledged too late by authorities, while others were able to keep their licence even after engaging in violent and criminal behaviour or previous convictions (among others, for firearms-related offences). Others still possessed a firearm, despite having their licence expire. For example, the perpetrator of the Hanau shooting, despite his known mental illness and prior police encounters, was allowed to own and carry guns for sport shooting activities and carry them across EU borders.⁹⁰ He also participated in combat training with a private security company in Slovakia and regularly practised at a shooting club in Germany.⁹¹

Lastly, withholding and revoking weapon licences can be a crucial tool for EU Member States to counter threats from violent extremists.⁹² However, enforcement remains challenging. Firstly, any revocation or withholding of licences relies on inter-agency cooperation and information sharing between administrative authorities, law enforcement, intelligence agencies, and the judiciary.⁹³ Without access to criminal records and intelligence, administrative authorities cannot sufficiently assess a person's reliability to own and carry a firearm.⁹⁴ Secondly, the confiscation of firearms from RWEs who were stripped of their licence may be a dangerous endeavour. Law enforcement tasked to do so are sometimes faced with violent resistance.⁹⁵

86 Case B 1 K 19.204, Verwaltungsgericht Bayreuth, Judgment, 27 October 2022, <https://www.gesetze-bayern.de/Content/Document/Y-300-Z-BECKRS-B-2021-N-22543?hl=true>.

87 Case 6 S 988/22, Verwaltungsgerichtshof Baden-Württemberg, Decision, 4 July 2022, paras 12f., <https://www.landesrecht-bw.de/bsbw/document/NJRE001509031>.

88 For more information about the nature of the magazine and its (temporary) banning, see Dr. Markus Sehl and Joschka Buchholz, "Compact Vorm BVerwG: Vereinsverbot Teilweise Ausgesetzt," *Legal Tribune Online*, 12 September 2024, <https://www.lto.de/recht/nachrichten/n/6vr124-bverwg-compact-verbot-bmi-sofortvollzug-ausgesetzt>.

89 The decision can still be appealed and is not yet final. Case 20 L 1131/24, Verwaltungsgericht Köln, Decision, 9 August 2024, http://www.justiz.nrw.de/nrwe/ovgs/vg_koeln/j2024/20_L_1131_24_Beschluss_20240809.html.

90 The perpetrator appeared in 15 police and prosecutorial files over the years, in one-third of them as a defendant. These include an assault against a police officer in 2002 when he was committed to a psychiatric hospital, an assault against a university's security guard in 2007, and threatening behaviour towards a sex worker in 2018. See: Julia Kupper, Patricia Cotti, and J. Reid Meloy, "The Hanau Terror Attack: Unraveling the Dynamics of Mental Disorder and Extremist Beliefs," *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management*, vol. 11 no. 3, 149–185, 2023, <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2023-66538-001>, p. 27-28.

91 Kupper et al., "The Hanau Terror Attack".

92 Merlina Herbach, "Banning, Designating, Disarming? Legal Implications of countering the Reichsbürger Movement," *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism*, 7 June 2023, <https://www.icct.nl/publication/banning-designating-disarming-legal-implications-countering-reichsbuerger-movement>.

93 For practical examples on inter-agency cooperation on terrorism and firearms in Romania and the United Kingdom, see: Roxana Albisteanu, Alexandru Dena and Matthew Lewis, "Romania: Firearms and Security at the EU Eastern Boarder," in: *Triggering Terror: Illicit Gun Markets and Firearms Acquisition of Terrorist Networks in Europe*, Nils Duquet (ed.), Flemish Peace Institute, 17 April 2018, 338-341, https://vlaamsvredesinstituut.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/boek_safte_bw_lowres.pdf; Paul Holtom, Paul James and Connor Patmore, "From the IRA to ISIS: Exploring Terrorist Access to the UK's Illicit Firearms Market," in: *Triggering Terror: Illicit Gun Markets and Firearms Acquisition of Terrorist Networks in Europe*, Nils Duquet (ed.), Flemish Peace Institute, 17 April 2018, 383-388, https://vlaamsvredesinstituut.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/boek_safte_bw_lowres.pdf.

94 The crucial role of information sharing between different authorities has also been reflected in the 2021 amendment of the EU Directive on control of the acquisition and possession of weapons, Preamble of Directive (EU) 2021/555.

95 In 2023, the Higher Regional Court Stuttgart sentenced a 'Reichsbürger' to over fourteen years imprisonment, among others for attempted murder, resistance against law enforcement, and violations of weapon laws. In April 2022, he fired at police officers during a search of his premises in Boxberg-Bobstadt, where special forces aimed to confiscate a firearm which he refused to hand in after his license had been

Conclusion

Based on a dataset compiling 118 open-source cases of firearms incidents involving right-wing extremists in Europe between January 2019 and April 2024, this policy brief provides a first overview of the diverse acquisition methods of right-wing extremists and applicable countermeasures in Europe. While right-wing extremists purchase firearms through illicit markets like other ideological currents, data suggests that they also employ distinct means of firearms acquisition: legal possession, engagement in arms smuggling networks, private manufacture of firearms, and deprivation from law enforcement and military stockpiles.

EU Members States are already taking measures to put pressure on the illicit market and limit weapon trafficking, restrict access to illicit markets, and minimise civilian firearms access. Yet, the specific acquisition methods used by right-wing extremists, as identified in this research, require additional efforts to effectively prevent their access to firearms. This, for example, relates to enhanced background checks in issuing and reviewing licences, or improved screening and removal of violent extremists within law enforcement and military. Emerging technologies such as 3D printing call for innovative approaches and public-private partnerships to prevent unauthorised firearms manufacture in the future.

The need for a better intelligence picture regarding terrorist access to firearms was highlighted in both the EU Action Plan on Firearms Trafficking⁹⁶ and the EU Counter-Terrorism Agenda.⁹⁷ The preliminary research conducted for this policy brief confirmed this need, in particular regarding the nexus between firearms and right-wing extremism. Among others, this involves further research on the role that firearms play in the right-wing extremist milieu, the demographics and drivers of various acquisition means, on the nexus between mental health issues, criminal behaviour, and firearms-related offences by right-wing extremists, and on innovative means to deter the dissemination of manual for 3D-printed firearms.

revoked. See: Oberlandesgericht Stuttgart, “7. Strafsenat: Angeklagter wegen versuchten Mordes zur Gesamtfreiheitsstrafe von 14 Jahren und 6 Monaten und vorbehaltener Sicherungsverwahrung verurteilt,” 15 November 2023, <https://oberlandesgericht-stuttgart.justiz-bw.de/pb/,Lde/19265146/?LISTPAGE=19264905>.

96 European Commission, “Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, 2020-2025 EU action plan on firearms trafficking,” sect. 4.2.2.

97 European Commission, “Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, A Counter-Terrorism Agenda for the EU: Anticipate, Prevent, Protect, Respond,” COM(2020) 795 final, 9 December 2020, sect. II.1, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0795>.

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