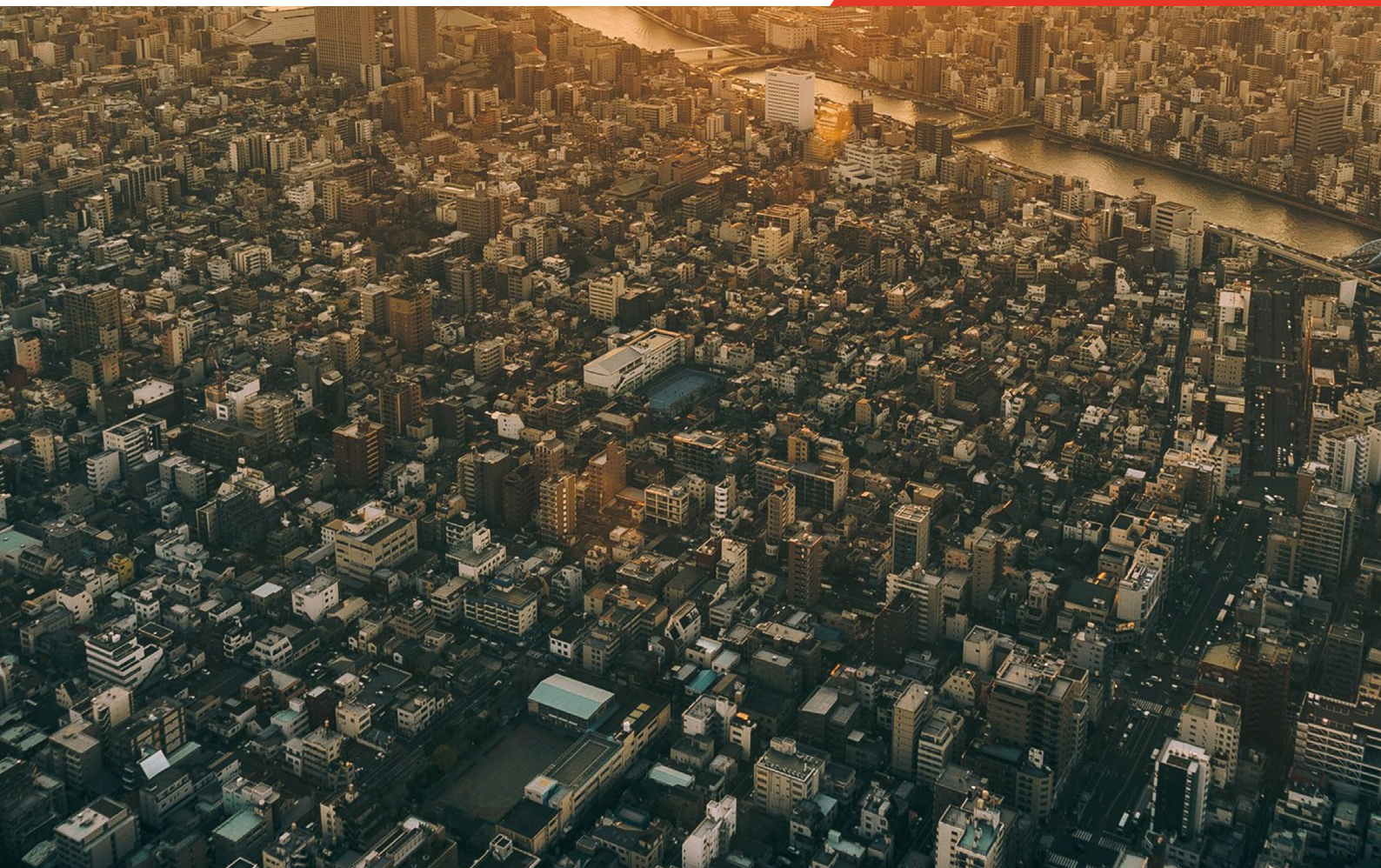


# The Serious Organised Crime and Anti-Corruption Evidence (SOC ACE) Research Programme:

*TRANSNATIONAL THREATS,  
POLITICALLY INFORMED  
RESPONSES.*



**SOC ACE CURRENT  
PROJECTS AND PUBLICATIONS**

**SOC  
ACE** Serious Organised Crime &  
Anti-Corruption Evidence  
Research Programme



The Serious Organised Crime & Anti-Corruption Evidence (SOC ACE) research programme aims to help ‘unlock the black box of political will’ for tackling serious organised crime, illicit finance and transnational corruption through research that informs politically feasible, technically sound interventions and strategies.

Funded by the UK’s Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), SOC ACE is a new component in the Anti-Corruption Evidence (ACE) research programme, alongside SOAS ACE and Governance & Integrity ACE. SOC ACE is managed by the University of Birmingham, working in collaboration with a number of leading research organisations and through consultation and engagement with key stakeholders.

SOC ACE is funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office.

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**SOC ACE research focuses on developing politically feasible approaches for countering organised crime, illicit finance, and corruption. These transnational threats have often devastating consequences for local communities, national security, and geopolitics alike, creating vulnerabilities that undermine the resilience of states, societies and economies around the world.**

We start by being problem-led, rather than starting with preconceived ideas about the ‘right’ tactics and solutions. We aim to think differently about prevention through developing better understanding of the ways in which organised crime and corruption provide solutions to the everyday problems people face, ones that often have deep social, structural, economic, and political roots, particularly in resource-scarce environments.

In particular, we look at practical and feasible ways that policymakers and practitioners can move beyond seeing a lack of political will as a barrier to effective response. This doesn’t mean that our research avoids challenging those in power who block meaningful reform, or refrains from asking difficult questions about often intractable challenges. Instead, it means that the approach we take is sensitive to context and explicitly considers tensions, trade-offs and the potential for negative unintended consequences. We think and work politically in our research and our engagement, considering the potential need for compromise as seriously as the need for collective action.

Discover more about the SOC ACE approach, our full range of publications, engagement and events, as well as how to get started with our research by visiting our website at <https://www.socace-research.org.uk/>, where you’ll find fresh content and exciting updates. We’re constantly adding more, so stay tuned for the latest developments.

**Professor Heather Marquette**  
SOC ACE Director, University of Birmingham



# About SOC ACE

The Serious Organised Crime & Anti-Corruption Evidence (SOC ACE) Research Programme is one component of the broader Anti-Corruption Evidence (ACE) Programme funded by the UK government, with two sister programmes: the SOAS, University of London-led ACE Research Consortium (SOAS-ACE) and the Governance & Integrity ACE (GI-ACE), led by University of Sussex' Centre for the Study of Corruption.

SOC ACE launched in June 2021 and is based in the School of Government at the University of Birmingham. The programme is led by Professor Heather Marquette, and a number of research projects from teams based in leading organisations around the world.

The research focuses specifically on organised crime, illicit finance, kleptocracy and corruption in relation to transnational threats, both state and non-state. It spans several regions including Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Eastern and South Africa, Western Europe, South and East Asia and Latin America.

So far, SOC ACE has worked with 24 organisations and at least 54 researchers, across 10 countries. The programme has funded 43 research projects, producing over 97 publications to date.



# Current SOC ACE Projects

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## Addressing organised crime and security sector reform & governance: Linkages, processes, outcomes, and challenges.

**Huma Haider (Independent Researcher).**

This project provides an in-depth review of the evidence base on the connections between organised crime and security sector reform and governance and how they influence and impact one another, positively and adversely.

## Assessing the effectiveness of sanctions as a tool to disrupt serious organised crime.

**Cathy Haenlein (Royal United Services Institute - RUSI), Tom Keatinge, Elijah Glantz; and Anton Moiseienko (Australian National University).**

This project seeks to address gaps in evidence on the effectiveness of sanctions for tackling SOC. It has understood which factors influence the effectiveness of SOC-focused sanctions, most notably political will, and is exploring which factors drive or hinder political will in support of such sanctions.

## Developing government information and accountability systems for combating serious organized crime: Medellín demonstration project.

**Prof. Christopher Blattman (University of Chicago) and Prof. Santiago Tobón (Universidad EAFIT).**

The project recognises that counter-SOC efforts often focus on what is measured. In response, the research is working to demonstrate the feasibility of collecting a wide variety of SOC metrics that can be used to inform the design of further counter-SOC interventions.

## Addressing security actors' involvement in serious and organised crime.

**Dr Liam O'Shea (Royal United Services Institute - RUSI), Dr Louis-Alexandre Berg (Georgia State University), Dr Alexander Kupatadze, (King's College London - KCL) and Dr Lucia Tiscornia (University College Dublin).**

This project examines what drives political elites to curtail political and security actors' involvement in serious organised crime as well as which types of reforms are most effective, with research in Colombia, Georgia and South Africa.

## Exploring the consequences of organised crime and illegal trade displacement in Eurasia.

**Dr Erica Marat (The College of International Security Affairs, National Defense University – CISA, NDU) and Dr Alexander Kupatadze (Kings College London - KCL).**

This project examines how Russia's war on Ukraine and sanctions on Russia have led to displacement, alterations, and the emergence of illegal activities in neighboring countries. Countries included in the research are Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, and Ukraine.

SOC  
ACE

## Illicit finance and Russian foreign policy: New dynamics and linkages.

**Prof. David Lewis, Dr Tena Prelec (University of Rijeka) and Olivia Allison (Independent Researcher).**

This project conceptualises how Russia uses illicit finance in political interference and information campaigns around the world and how these dynamics have changed the new context of the war in Ukraine, including its role in Russia's military strategy and in the occupation of Ukrainian territory.

## Information manipulation and organised crime.

**Dr Tena Prelec (University of Rijeka).**

This project examines the ways in which organised crime groups manipulate information to achieve their objectives and those of actors connected to them. The research examines the varying degrees of proximity between criminal actors and the state through case studies in Albania, Russia, Transnistria (formally Moldova) and Ukraine, as well as Wagner.

## Interoperability, multi-agency sensemaking and the potential of AI for more politically feasible & effective strategies and operations.

**Prof. Christopher Baber, Prof. Andrew Howes and Prof. Heather Marquette (University of Birmingham).**

This project aims to use sensemaking to better understand some of the interoperability challenges faced in multi-agency thinking and working when addressing SOC. It seeks to support improvements in integrated working, particularly through thinking and working more politically in policy, strategy, and operations.

## Negotiating with criminal groups: Colombia's Total Peace policy

**Felipe Botero Escobar, and Mariana Botero Restrepo (Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime – GI-TOC); Juanita Durán and Gina Cabar cas Macía (Laboratorio de Justicia y Política Criminal); Juanita Vélez, Kyle Johnson and Ángela Liliana Olaya Castro (Conflict Responses – CORE).**

This research examines the relationship between formal and informal institutions in the implementation of the Colombian government's Total Peace ('Paz Total') policy, using evidence from three municipalities.

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## Organised crime as irregular warfare: A framework for assessment and strategic response.

**Dr David H. Ucko and Dr Thomas A. Marks (The College of International Security Affairs, National Defense University – CISA, NDU)**

This project establishes commonalities between OC and irregular warfare – their shared nature and the pitfalls relating to response, and adapts a strategic framework originally designed by NDU to counter threats. The project tests the application of the adapted framework with practitioners, providing a proof of concept and policy-relevant analysis for assessing and responding to the challenge of organised crime in context.

## Para-statal armed groups, illicit economies and organised crime.

**Prof. Jonathan Goodhand and Dr Patrick Meehan (School of Oriental and African Studies – SOAS).**

This project examines what drives political elites to curtail political and security actors' involvement in serious organised crime as well as which types of reforms are most effective, with research in Colombia, Georgia and South Africa.

## Power Brokers and Illicit Markets in the Frontiers: Balochistan, Borderlands and the Taliban

**Dr John Collins, Maria Khoruk, Dr Arian Sharifi and Prem Mahadevan (Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime - GITOC).**

This research project seeks to investigate how illicit markets shape and are shaped by the local political, power, patronage and frontier dynamics in Balochistan - the area spanning the frontier regions of three countries: Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.

## Smuggling along the new silk road: The role of Global Trade Hubs.

**Dr Sami Bensassi, Dr Adam Cox, Dr Mayya Konovalova and, Dr Arisi Raz (University of Birmingham).**

This research aims to assess smuggling activities emanating from global trade hubs along the "New Silk Road" by measuring trade gaps between these hubs and their partners. Hubs included are Netherlands/ Belgium, Morocco, Malta, Greece, Egypt, Djibouti, Kenya, Tanzania, Seychelles, Maldives, the United Arab Emirates, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Singapore and China.



### Understanding State Threats.

**Matthew Redhead**  
(Royal United Services Institute - RUSI)

This project addresses the need for a more nuanced definition of state threats, and a better grasp of the scale, scope and character of current state threats faced.

### The evolution of SOC and Development: Interactions in policy and practice.

**Sasha Jespersen (Independent Researcher)**

This research is unpacking the relationship between SOC and development in policy and practice. It looks at how the relationship has evolved and why, the implication of this evolution for SOC-development linked responses, and what this could mean for the future of the policy agenda.

### Understanding functionality for more effective SOC & corruption strategies and interventions.

**Prof. Heather Marquette (University of Birmingham) and Dr Caryn Peiffer (University of Bristol).**

This research project aims to improve our understanding of how functionality operates in realworld settings to help ensure anti-corruption and counter-SOC operational approaches are more effective, more sustainable and produce fewer negative unintended consequences.

### Unlocking the black box of political will on IFFs: Going beyond technical responses.

**Tuesday Reitano, Michael McLaggan and Kristina Amerhauser (Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime – GI-TOC)**

This project establishes a new 'IFFs pyramid' framework to explain the three dominant means by which illicit financial flows (IFFs) are enabled, moved and held: financial flows, trade flows and informal flows, testing the utility and applicability of the framework in East and Southern Africa and the Mekong region.

### Whistleblower incentivisation schemes in the fight against corruption: Global lessons for economic crime policy.

**Eliza Lockheart and Kathryn Westmore (Royal United Services Institute - RUSI)**

This research examines the effectiveness of financial incentivisation schemes for whistleblowing, with a focus on its utility in terms of generating actionable information and intelligence that could support enablement of the UK's economic crime bill.

# SOC ACE Publications

## RESEARCH PAPERS

### SOC ACE RESEARCH PAPER NO. 1

**Targeted sanctions and organised crime: Impact and lessons for future use, May 2022. Cathy Haenlein, Sasha Erskine, Elijah Glantz, Tom Keatinge.**

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**Can messaging help us to fight serious organised crime and corruption in Albania?, May 2022. Professor Nic Cheeseman and Dr Caryn Peiffer.**

### SOC ACE RESEARCH PAPER NO. 3

**The illicit financialisation of Russian foreign policy: Mapping the practices that facilitate Russia's illicit financial flows, May 2022. Dr Catherine Owen, Dr Tena Prelec, Dr Tom Mayne.**

### SOC ACE RESEARCH PAPER NO. 4

**Organised crime as irregular warfare: Strategic lessons for assessment and response, May 2022. Dr David Ucko and Dr Thomas A. Marks.**

### SOC ACE RESEARCH PAPER NO. 5

**Combatting money laundering: Does implementing the Financial Action Task Force recommendations bite? May 2022. Dr Sami Bensassi and Arisyi Fariza Raz.**

### SOC ACE RESEARCH PAPER NO. 6

**Evaluating Afghanistan's past, present and future engagement with multilateral drug control, May 2022. Dr John Collins and Ian Tennant.**

### SOC ACE RESEARCH PAPER NO. 7

**Drug trafficking, violence and corruption in Central Asia, May 2022. Dr Erica Marat and Dr Gulzat Botoeva.**

### SOC ACE RESEARCH PAPER NO. 8

**Transnational governance networks against grand corruption: Cross-border cooperation among law enforcement, May 2022. Professor Elizabeth Dávid-Barrett and Dr Slobodan Tomić.**

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Narcotics smuggling in Afghanistan: Links between Afghanistan and Pakistan, June 2022. Shehryar Fazli.

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Human trafficking in the Afghan context: Caught between a rock and a hard place?, May 2022. Thi Hoang.

## SOC ACE RESEARCH PAPER NO. 11

Illicit financing in Afghanistan: Methods, mechanisms and threat-agnostic disruption opportunities, May 2022. Jessica Davis.

## SOC ACE RESEARCH PAPER NO. 12

State capture and serious organised crime in South Africa: A case study of the South African Revenue Service (2001-21), March 2023. Dr Zenobia Ismail and Robin Richards.

## SOC ACE RESEARCH PAPER NO. 13

Illicit markets and targeted violence in Afghanistan, May 2022. Ana Paula Oliveira.

## SOC ACE RESEARCH PAPER NO. 14.

Political won't? Understanding the challenges of countering IFFs: A global evidence review, June 2022. Tuesday Reitano.

## SOC ACE RESEARCH PAPER NO. 15

Why incorporating organised crime into analysis of elite bargains and political settlements matters: Understanding prospects for more peaceful, open and inclusive politics, May 2022. Alina Rocha Menocal.

## SOC ACE RESEARCH PAPER NO. 16

How to seize a billion: Exploring mechanisms to recover the proceeds of kleptocracy, March 2023. Dr Maria Nizzero.

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New dynamics in illicit finance and Russian foreign policy, August 2023. Professor David Lewis and Dr Tena Prelec.

## SOC ACE RESEARCH PAPER NO. 18

Under the Radar: How Russia outmanoeuvres western sanctions with help from its neighbours, August 2023. Dr Alexander Kupatadze and Dr Erica Marat.

## SOC ACE RESEARCH PAPER NO. 19

A Framework for countering organised crime: Strategy, planning and the lessons of Irregular Warfare, September 2023. Dr David Ucko and Dr Thomas A. Marks.

## SOC ACE RESEARCH PAPER NO. 20

Economic crime and illicit finance in Russia's occupation regime in Ukraine, September 2023. Prof. David Lewis.

## SOC ACE RESEARCH PAPER NO. 21

Illuminating the role of third-country jurisdictions in sanctions evasion and avoidance (SEA), October 2023. Dr Liam O'Shea, Olivia Allison, Gonzalo Saiz and Alexia Anna Hack.

## SOC ACE RESEARCH PAPER NO. 22

Information manipulation and organised crime: Examining the nexus, October 2023. Dr Tena Prelec.

## SOC ACE RESEARCH PAPER NO. 23.

A new exodus: Migrant smuggling from Afghanistan after the return of the Taliban, October 2023. Prem Mahadevan, Maria Khoruk and Alla Mohamad Mohmandzaï.

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Lost in transition: Gold mining and the political economy of Takhar, Afghanistan, November 2023. Marcena Hunter and Alastair MacBeath.

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Coercive brokerage: The paramilitary-organized crime nexus in borderlands and frontiers Working Paper I, December 2023. Dr Patrick Meehan and Professor Jonathan Goodhand.

## SOC ACE RESEARCH PAPER NO. 27

Opioid market trends in Afghanistan: Poppy cultivation, policy and practice under the new regime, December 2023. Prem Mahadevan, Maria Khoruk, Alla Mohammad Mohmandzai and Ruggero Scaturro.

## SOC ACE RESEARCH PAPER NO. 28

Coercive brokerage: Paramilitaries, illicit economies and organised crime in the frontiers of Afghanistan, Colombia and Myanmar - Working Paper II, January 2024. Professor Jonathan Goodhand, Dr Patrick Meehan, Camillo Acero and Jan Koehler.

## SOC ACE RESEARCH PAPER NO. 29

Addressing illicit financial flows in East and Southern Africa, January 2024. Michael McLaggan.

## SOC ACE RESEARCH PAPER NO. 30

Illicit financial flows in the Mekong, January 2024. Kristina Amerhauser.

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### BRIEFING NOTE NO. 1

Moving ‘from political won’t to political will’ for more feasible interventions to tackle serious organised crime and corruption, May 2022. Professor Heather Marquette.

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Targeted sanctions and organised crime: impact and lessons for future use, May 2022. Cathy Haenlein, Sasha Erskine, Elijah Glantz & Tom Keatinge.

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Measuring organised crime: challenges and solutions for collecting data on armed illicit groups, May 2022. Professor Christopher Blattman, Dr Benjamin Lessing, Juan Pablo Mesa-Mejía & Dr Santiago Tobón.

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How do Albanians feel about corruption and serious organised crime in 2022?, May 2022. Professor Nic Cheeseman & Dr Caryn Peiffer

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Russian illicit financial flows and political influence in South Eastern Europe: How financial flows and politics intersect in Montenegro and Serbia, May 2022. Dr Tena Prelec.

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Russian illicit financial flows and influence on Western European politics, May 2022. Dr Thomas Mayne.

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Organised crime as irregular warfare: Strategic lessons for assessment and response, May 2022. Dr David Ucko & Dr Thomas A. Marks.

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Future Engagement with the Taliban on Drug Control and Organised Crime – mapping the Taliban’s views, international options, and alternative approaches, May 2022. Dr John Collins & Ian Tennant.

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Incorporating organised crime into analysis of elite bargains and political settlements: Why it matters to understanding prospects for more peaceful, open and inclusive politics, June 2022. Alina Rocha Menocal.

### BRIEFING NOTE NO. 22

Politics, uncertainty and interoperability challenges: The potential for sensemaking to improve multi-agency approaches, August 2022. Professor Christopher Baber, Professor Andrew Howes, Dr James Knight & Professor Heather Marquette.

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Exploring mechanisms to recover the proceeds of kleptocracy, March 2023. Dr Maria Nizzero.

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Organised crime groups, criminal agendas, violence and conflict: Implications for engagement, negotiations and peace processes, May 2023. Huma Haider.

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Under the Radar: How Russia Outmanoeuvres Western Sanctions with Help from its Neighbours, August 2023. Dr Alexander Kupatadze & Dr Erica Marat.

## BRIEFING NOTE NO. 26

Testing to see if an awareness messaging campaign about 'social bads' will actually work: Why experimental techniques are best, February 2024. Dr Caryn Peiffer & Professor Nic Cheeseman.

## BRIEFING NOTE NO. 27

Civil society and organised crime, February 2024. Ian Tennant & Prem Mahadevan.

## BRIEFING NOTE NO. 28

Migrant smuggling, March 2024 (publication coming soon). Tuesday Reitano & Prem Mahadevan.

## SOC ACE BRIEFING NOTE NO. 29

Human rights and organised crime agendas: Four areas of convergence for policymaking, March 2024 (publication coming soon). Ana Paula Oliveira.

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## EVIDENCE REVIEW PAPERS

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Political will and combatting serious organised crime, May 2022. Dr Iffat Idris.

## EVIDENCE REVIEW PAPER NO. 2

Corruption, crime and conflict in eastern Ukraine, May 2022. Dr Iffat Idris.

## EVIDENCE REVIEW PAPER NO. 3

Armed conflict and organised crime: The case of Afghanistan, published under GI-TOC. May 2022. Professor Annette Idler, Frederik Florenz, Ajmal Burhanzoi, Dr John Collins, Marcena Hunter, & Antônio Sampaio.

## EVIDENCE REVIEW PAPER NO. 4

Organised crime groups, criminal agendas, violence, and conflict: Implications for engagement, negotiations and peace processes, May 2023. Huma Haider.

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Militarised approaches to serious organised crime: approaches and policy implications, November 2023. Dr Luke Kelly

## SOC ACE EVIDENCE REVIEW PAPER NO. 6

Addressing organised crime and security sector reform & governance: Linkages, processes, outcomes and challenges, March 2024 (publication coming soon). Huma Haider.

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