

# Transnational organised crime: Deepening and broadening our understanding

## Call specification

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### Summary

As part of its contribution to the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) Partnership for Conflict, Crime and Security Research (PaCCS) (<http://www.paccsresearch.org.uk/>), the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) wishes to commission up to four research grants that will deepen and broaden our understanding of the complex issues related to Transnational Organised Crime (TNOC) and its inter-relation with other licit and illicit activities. The key questions this call poses are:

- Which factors enable and facilitate TNOC, and how is this evolving?
- Which factors disrupt and impede TNOC?
- How do societal and cultural values shape TNOC, and conversely how does TNOC shape social and economic structures and cultures, deliberately or otherwise?

PaCCS aims to deliver high-quality and cutting-edge research to help improve our understanding of current and future global security challenges. This call will contribute to this aim by funding research and networking activities with the potential to achieve economic and societal impact and shed new insights on TNOC. **Up to £1.55 million is available for this call.**

These grants are intended to generate innovative approaches, and we encourage the submission of proposals which take a range of approaches and research perspectives. In the context of this call these approaches may include work which brings together, compares or reinterprets diverse literatures and/or data, capacity-building activities, exploratory and pilot studies, as well as conceptual and methodological development. Cross-disciplinary research projects are also welcome, in particular proposals which span the remits of the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) or the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). Please refer to guidance on cross-disciplinary approaches below.

**Please note** that applicants must demonstrate that their proposed approach is grounded in the social sciences and suitable for ESRC funding (<http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/guidance-for-applicants/is-my-research-suitable-for-esrc-funding/>).

TNOC is a complex issue and the co-design and co-production of knowledge with policymakers and practitioners, and engagement between researchers and users of research in the public and private sectors and civil society is critical. All projects are therefore **strongly encouraged** to involve non-academic stakeholders in the design, implementation and dissemination of the proposed research. Non-academic stakeholders may be co-investigators, project partners and/or members of project advisory groups, as appropriate. If you are considering including co-investigators from business, third sector or government bodies in your research proposal please refer to the following guidance: <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/guidance-for-applicants/inclusion-of-uk-business-third-sector-or-government-body-co-investigators-on-proposals/>

Please note that the TNOC Research Integrator, Dr Tristram Riley-Smith, is available to speak to prospective applicants about such collaborations. He can be contacted at [tr356@cam.ac.uk](mailto:tr356@cam.ac.uk). The research integrator has started the process of building a database of researchers and non-academic stakeholders who are open to collaborate in this call: you can register to appear on this database via this link: [www.paccsresearch.org.uk/transnational-organised-crime-theme-funding-call-2018-offers-collaboration/](http://www.paccsresearch.org.uk/transnational-organised-crime-theme-funding-call-2018-offers-collaboration/)

When the database goes live, it will be announced on the PaCCS website ([www.paccsresearch.org.uk/news](http://www.paccsresearch.org.uk/news)) and on Twitter [@paccsresearch](https://twitter.com/paccsresearch).

Because of the international nature of organised crime and its interactions with issues such as international development, collaborations with researchers and stakeholders beyond the UK are strongly encouraged. If your project is to include non-UK co-investigators please refer to the following guidance: [www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/guidance-for-applicants/inclusion-of-international-co-investigators-on-proposals/](http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/guidance-for-applicants/inclusion-of-international-co-investigators-on-proposals/)

The closing date for proposals is **16.00 on 14 June 2018**. Any proposal received after this deadline will not be considered for funding.

**Proposals are invited for grants between £200,000 and £450,000 (100% fEC (full economic costs))** of which the funders will fund 80% and the balance must be guaranteed by the research organisation.

**Projects can be up to 36 months in duration.**

Grant start dates must be **from 1 November 2018 to 1 January 2019**.

## **Background and scope**

Transnational Organised Crime (TNOC) is a term that is currently in common usage but lacks a single agreed definition for operational or research purposes. Broadly speaking, TNOC is organised crime that is devised and carried out across geographical borders or jurisdictional boundaries. The cultural and cross-cultural context within which TNOC operates is complex, with types of activities and relationships being many and varied; moreover, physical and virtual terrains evolve, with some criminals adeptly anticipating and adapting to changing socio-political and socio-technical environments which offer new national and transnational criminal opportunities.

TNOC presents a significant and persistent threat to populations and economies. A 2013 UK Government study estimated that organised crime costs the UK at least £24 billion every year<sup>1</sup> and possibly more. Combating TNOC, tackling illicit financial and arms flows and reducing bribery and corruption are key targets within the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development:

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>.

The operation and reach of organised crime is often no longer confined to individual states and is becoming increasingly international. The diversity of criminal activities that organised crime groups and networks are responsible for continues to extend to include the illegal movement of people, goods, money and data across international borders; human trafficking and illicit trafficking of arms and drugs; cross-border money laundering, bribery, corruption and financing of criminal and terrorist activities; international art, conservation and heritage crime; transnational sexual exploitation; trade in counterfeit identities and goods, to list a few.

Some of these transnational crimes and networks have long histories and/or are deeply embedded in cultures or communities. Reacting to global changes and issues, new transnational organised networks are also emerging and some existing networks are extending into new areas of activity such as cyber-enabled and dependent crime, collusion with terrorist networks, and environmental crime including the dumping of hazardous waste. The range of organised criminal activities, their volume and severity, as well as complexities of group structure, spanning across national borders, continues to grow. This in turn may diversify effects of TNOC on the economy, sustainable development, safety, cohesion, culture and well-being of populations.

In 2016, the first PaCCS TNOC call was launched by the ESRC and the AHRC to “extend our understanding of how TNOC has evolved through time and in different cultural contexts, why and how it extends across borders, what impact it has on populations and sustainable international development, and effective ways of preventing and mitigating its impact”. Eleven innovative cross-disciplinary projects were funded. The ESRC and the AHRC

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<sup>1</sup> See HM Government, Serious and Organised Crime Strategy, (October 2013) and National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015

commissioned Professor David Wall, University of Leeds, to produce an academic synthesis of the funded work, in order to identify common research themes and areas of interest across the II projects. Professor Wall's report also identified research questions worthy of further investigation. The report is available on the PaCCS website:

[www.paccsresearch.org.uk/news/understanding-transnational-organised-crime/](http://www.paccsresearch.org.uk/news/understanding-transnational-organised-crime/)

## **Thematic content**

This call draws on and extends the themes that Professor David Wall identified in his synthesis report as deserving of further investigation. These themes were developed further and refined into questions with the input of a panel of experts including Dr Tristram Riley-Smith, TNO Research Integrator. This two-stage process highlighted a number of topics that would benefit from closer examination, indicative of the complex and often-changing nature of organised crime. The call aims to encourage research which addresses these fast-moving issues and has the potential to impact on policy and practice in a wide range of contexts.

Assembled under the three key themes below we have suggested particular research questions of interest. We recognise that these questions are diverse and could be explored in a number of ways. Some issues may be explored in full, while others will require different approaches and activities that may include conducting new small-scale research at exploratory level and pilot studies; synthetic work bringing together, comparing or re-interpreting diverse literatures and/or data; capacity-building activities; and conceptual and methodological development.

Please note that the questions listed below are indicative and are intended to generate ideas among prospective applicants; projects are *not limited to these research questions* and applicants are welcome to address other research questions so long as they will help to inform responses to one or more of the themes that have been identified.

### **Factors that enable and facilitate TNO, and how it is evolving:**

- Have there been specific social, economic, technical or policy background changes that have led to new TNOs emerging?
- How is it evolving (e.g. online, offline, and/or in new areas of activity such as online gaming etc.)? What is the role of organised crime in the growth of cybercrime?
- How will anticipated technological, socio-political or environmental changes impact organised crime?
- What is known about the organisational structure of the specific TNOs being researched?
- How important are 'traditional' organised crime groups in major economic crime?
- How do legitimate financial and market structures, and power structures, interact and overlap with organised crimes? How are organisations, states, legal systems, businesses, institutions and communities implicated in transnational organised crime?
- How can we explore new innovative research methods for exploring TNOs, such as Social Network Analysis, Open Source materials, game theory, or how can we apply existing methods in an innovative way or in a new context?

### **Factors that disrupt and impede TNO:**

- What are the formal and informal structures of organised criminal actors, networks, groups and the wider environments in which they operate, how are these evolving over time; how might a greater understanding of these help inform policy and practice aimed to bring their disruption?
- What are the pressing issues involved in policing and regulating TNOC?
- How do TNOC actors perceive and respond to regulatory, law enforcement and surveillance challenges?
- Which disruptive factors are most effective, measured by cost or other variables?
- How have transnational organisations, states, legal systems, businesses, institutions and communities responded and adapted over time to the challenges of transnational organised crime and what can we learn from experience of responding to changing patterns of transnational organised crime?

**How do societal and cultural values shape TNOC, and conversely how does TNOC shape social and economic structures and cultures, deliberately or otherwise?:**

- How is TNOC influenced by social structures and economic or political dynamics within and between nations, or by cultural values and ideologies?
- How are transnational criminal groups legitimised in certain localities, for instance as providers of community-level social security?
- What is the impact that media and social media have on perceptions and definitions of TNOC? What is the role of social media in harnessing transnational organised crime?
- What role does TNOC play in inhibiting international development, poverty alleviation and the achievement of global sustainable development goals, and how might this be addressed?
- What are the factors incentivising individuals to be drawn in and out of criminal activities, or communities to take action against or support transnational criminal groups?
- In what ways could uncovering the hidden narratives of TNOC, including those of its perpetrators and/or of marginalised victims, help to change or deepen our understanding of its evolution and impacts?
- How do TNOC actors communicate (in terms of both language and technology)?

As noted above, applicants should not restrict themselves to answering the questions set out above and are welcome to address any research questions that will help to inform responses to the themes that have been identified.

We are emphasising the need for innovative ideas coming from research groups and networks, drawing from a wide range of disciplines and subject areas across the social sciences and potentially in collaboration with the arts and humanities and/or engineering and physical sciences. The call is open to proposals that address the human security dimension of any form of TNOC, and the intersections between them and with other security challenges. In addition, it is open to proposals focused on TNOC anywhere in the world and to projects involving a wide range of international collaborations. This may require new research activities and/or synthetic and translational work based on analysis and re-interpretation of existing literatures and data that may be enhanced by the introduction of cross-disciplinary dimensions.

TNOC is the principal focus of the call. However, we welcome proposals which explore linkages with other PaCCS themes, such as conflict and cyber-security, as well as with wider questions of human security at a community, national, regional or global scale. This call also provides an opportunity to learn lessons and share knowledge between diverse research communities working on, for example, counter-terrorism, transitions from conflict, or organised crime and international development.

## Cross-disciplinarity

All proposals must include research which is suitable for ESRC funding, with social sciences comprising between 51% and 100% of the project focus. However, the call welcomes proposals which address a broad range of approaches and research perspectives. In particular cross-disciplinary proposals which include work that crosses into the remits of the EPSRC and/or AHRC may be eligible for co-funding by the EPSRC or the AHRC<sup>2</sup>:

- The EPSRC is willing to consider co-funding projects on a case-by-case basis if the work proposed crosses into its remit (<https://www.epsrc.ac.uk/funding/applicationprocess/basics/remit/>). Where appropriate, proposals may therefore involve collaboration with technical experts such as mathematical and computer scientists, as long as they also have a social science component of no less than 51%.
- The AHRC is willing to consider co-funding projects on a case-by-case basis where they fall within its remit ([www.ahrc.ac.uk/funding/research/subjectcoverage/ahrc-disciplines/](http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/funding/research/subjectcoverage/ahrc-disciplines/)) **and** are compliant with the funding requirements under the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) (<https://www.ukri.org/research/global-challenges-research-fund/>), i.e. their primary objectives are the promotion of long-term sustainable growth of countries on the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) list: <http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/daclist.htm>. Again, the social science component of such projects should be no less than 51%.

All successful projects will be funded and managed through research grants issued by the ESRC, irrespective of their individual scopes.

## International collaboration

International collaboration is particularly welcomed to address these issues, which are of global importance and scope. The call welcomes proposals from research groups that include academics and stakeholders outside the UK. If your project will include non-UK co-investigators please refer to the following guidance:

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<sup>2</sup> To be eligible for AHRC co-funding projects must align with the AHRC's remit and must be compliant with the funding requirements under the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) (<https://www.ukri.org/research/global-challenges-research-fund/>), i.e. their primary objectives are the promotion of long-term sustainable growth of countries on the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) list.

## Stakeholder engagement

The Partnership for Conflict, Crime and Security (PaCCS) Research seeks to fund research with the potential to achieve economic and societal impact. This call will contribute to this aim by encouraging co-design and co-production of research with policymakers and practitioners, and engagement between researchers and users of research in the public and private sectors and civil society.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to involve non-academic stakeholders in the design, implementation and dissemination of the proposed research. Non-academic stakeholders may be co-investigators, project partners or members of project advisory groups, as appropriate.

Applicants should present clear plans to engage with relevant stakeholders and to communicate the outcomes of their work to users beyond the academic community. Applicants should present within their Pathways to Impact plans for developing an impact strategy, promoting knowledge exchange, public engagement and effective communication with key stakeholders. Applicants should make provision in their proposed budgets for stakeholder engagement and impact generation.

Within the impact summary and Pathways to Impact applicants should outline:

- who might benefit from this research. For example, the defence and security sector; UK or other national governments; international organisations; third sector organisations; at national and international level; other civil society actors (UK or overseas), as well as other key audiences.
- how they might benefit from this research. For example, how might the research benefit defence/national security capability or international aid and development strategies?
- what will be done to ensure that potential beneficiaries have the opportunity to engage with the research.

The development of a clear impact strategy will be important to ensuring research impact is achieved. It is therefore recommended that a minimum of 10% of the overall budget should be dedicated to delivering the activities outlined in the Pathways to Impact.

Further guidance is available at: [www.esrc.ac.uk/research/evaluation-and-impact/what-is-impact/](http://www.esrc.ac.uk/research/evaluation-and-impact/what-is-impact/). The TNO research integrator is available to advise on and help facilitate collaborations with potential non-academic partners: please contact Tristram Riley-Smith on [tr356@cam.ac.uk](mailto:tr356@cam.ac.uk)

## Research engagement

The TNO research integrator will act as a coordinator between the successful transnational organised crime projects and – where appropriate – the projects funded under

the first PaCCS TNOC call for research innovation grants. The integrator's role is to support:

- networking and collaboration between the projects
- the development of synergies, cross-disciplinary working and cross-cutting research themes
- and synthesis of outcomes and enhanced accessibility of research outputs.

The integrator works to raise the profile of transnational organised crime research and, in partnership with other PaCCS thematic leads and fellows, to maximise impact and knowledge exchange and enhance engagement with policy-making and professional practice on behalf of the projects as a collective.

## **Open access policy**

UKRI have a published policy on open access to publications and data:

<https://www.ukri.org/funding/information-for-award-holders/open-access/>. Researchers funded under this call will be expected to comply with the requirements outlined in this policy. Applicants are no longer able to apply for Article Processing Charges (APCs) as part of a research proposal, but instead funds are provided to research organisations at an institutional level as block grants in order to set up publication funds.

## **Publication and Intellectual Property Rights (IPR)**

Publication and IPR will be handled in accordance with normal ESRC guidelines outlined in the research funding guide (<https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/research-funding-guide/>). All research findings should be made freely and openly available. UKRI policy statements on IPR, impact and knowledge exchange can be found at <https://www.ukri.org/>.

## **Research ethics**

Applicants must ensure that the proposed research will be carried out to a high ethical standard, and must clearly state how any potential ethical issues have been considered and will be addressed, ensuring that all necessary ethical approval is in place and all risks are minimised before the project commences.

All applicants must demonstrate how their proposal complies with the ESRC Framework for Research Ethics: [www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/guidance-for-applicants/research-ethics/](http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/guidance-for-applicants/research-ethics/)

## **UK Official Development Assistance (ODA) reporting**

The research councils' host government department BEIS (the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy) requires that we report on any funded project which proposes research which meets the criteria for ODA. Projects which have been recommended for funding and appear to meet this criteria, will be invited to complete a



one-page ODA statement which will help us ascertain whether the project does indeed fall into this category, and to facilitate our reporting.

## How to apply

### Eligibility

Proposals are invited from research organisations eligible for ESRC funding across the UK, see <https://www.ukri.org/funding/how-to-apply/eligibility/>. Further details of eligibility are given in ESRC's research funding guide: <https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/research-funding-guide/>. Proposals may be submitted by individuals who are not established members of the proposed host institution. In these circumstances, by submitting the proposal the research organisation confirms that, in the event that a grant is awarded, it guarantees to provide facilities for such an individual as if for an established member of staff for the duration of the grant.

Individuals can be associated with up to two proposals to this call, but can only be the principal investigator on one proposal. Applicants associated with multiple proposals must attach a brief note to this effect to each proposal, and provide confirmation that they will not be overcommitted in the event that all are funded.

International co-investigators and co-investigators from UK business, civil society or government bodies are eligible under this call, see <https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/inclusion-of-international-co-investigators-on-proposals/> and [www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/guidance-for-applicants/inclusion-of-uk-business-third-sector-or-government-body-co-investigators-on-proposals/](http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/guidance-for-applicants/inclusion-of-uk-business-third-sector-or-government-body-co-investigators-on-proposals/)

The ESRC does not allow the resubmission of previously unsuccessful proposals to any schemes, unless the applicant has been explicitly invited to do so.

### Application process

The closing date for proposals is **16.00 on 14 June 2018**. Any proposal received after this deadline will not be considered for funding.

All proposals must be made through the Joint Electronic Submission (Je-S) system, at <https://je-s.rcuk.ac.uk/eforms/secure/Login.asp>. Only those proposals submitted through the Je-S system will be accepted for processing. Proposals must be costed and approved by the relevant institutional authority at the research organisation before submission.

Je-S is the electronic submission system which is used by all research councils to provide a common electronic system that supports research administration. More detailed information can be found at <https://je-s.rcuk.ac.uk/>. In particular, applicants should note the registration requirements to make a Je-S submission.

In order to use the Je-S system, principal investigators, co-investigators and their organisations need to register on the system. Registration of both the principal investigator's organisation and their own details must be completed before the proposal can be formally submitted to the ESRC.

Please ensure that the online form is completed correctly. Proposals that are not completed correctly may be rejected by the ESRC office. Guidance for applicants can be found in the Je-S application guidance document on the call webpage. The ESRC may require applicants to amend parts of proposals, such as the length of attachments or the inclusion of missing mandatory attachments, as a condition of acceptance for processing.

All applicants are strongly advised to follow the Je-S guidance for this call and consult the ESRC's research funding guide (<https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/research-funding-guide/>), which sets out the rules and regulations governing its funding. The full Je-S guidance for this call is available at <https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/funding-opportunities/transnational-organised-crime-deepening-and-broadening-our-understanding/>

### **Assessment**

Once accepted by the ESRC Office, proposals will be reviewed by three expert academic peer reviewers. Applicants are invited to nominate up to two academic peer reviewers from outside their institution(s) who can provide expert comment on the proposal, one of whom will normally be selected as a reviewer. Applicants may also provide details of up to two user reviewers who can comment on the utility of the research outcomes.

Anonymised reviewer comments will be made available to applicants for response before proposals are considered by members of a specially convened commissioning panel.

Decisions on funding will be made at a meeting of the commissioning panel in September 2018.

The panel may wish to apply conditions on grants and there may be subsequent negotiations on the details of the support offered.

### **Assessment criteria**

- Fit to the call remit and PaCCS programme, including:
  - the degree to which the proposal demonstrates a high degree of innovation
  - relevance to one or more of the three key themes identified in this specification
  - the appropriate involvement of non-academic stakeholders in the design, implementation and dissemination of the proposed research project
  - well thought-through plans for the co-design and co-production of knowledge with policymakers and practitioners, and engagement between researchers and users of research in the public and private sectors and civil society
- Research quality of proposal:
  - Research merit and contribution to knowledge, such as appropriate research methods, originality and innovation (specific case on what makes the project innovative needs to be made in the case for support), and added value to existing research and/or the research context
  - Demonstrable capacity to undertake high-quality research, drawing on combinations of disciplinary and multi-disciplinary expertise and approaches
  - The extent to which the proposed research is cross-disciplinary
  - Clear work plan with realistic, testable milestones, clear deliverables, convincing strategic and project management and probability of success.

- Details and track record:
  - Appropriate expertise to undertake the proposed work
  - Project planning and management skills
  - Previous successful delivery of projects through co-design and production.
- Value for money
- Pathways to Impact:
  - Evidence of engagement with users at the project planning and inception stages through to completion of the project.
  - Evidence of well thought-through and realistic engagement and dissemination plans to maximise academic/societal/economic impact

## Commissioning timetable

- Call opens - 5 April 2018
- Call closes - **16:00 on 14 June 2018**
- Peer review complete - July 2018
- PI response to reviewer comments - early August 2018
- Commissioning panel meeting - September 2018
- Applicants informed of decisions - late September 2018
- Grants commence - 1 November 2018 to 1 January 2019

## Contact Information

Please send any queries or requests for further information to: [TNOC@esrc.ac.uk](mailto:TNOC@esrc.ac.uk)

ESRC contacts:

- Lyndy Griffin  
Telephone: +44 (0)1793 413135
- Theresa Osman  
Telephone: +44 (0) 1793 413052
- Francesca Lace  
Telephone: +44 (0) 1793 413102

Enquiries relating to the Je-S proposal procedure should be addressed to:

- The Je-S Helpdesk  
Email: [jeshelp@rcuk.ac.uk](mailto:jeshelp@rcuk.ac.uk)  
Telephone +44 (0)1793 444164

The Helpdesk is staffed Monday to Friday 9.00 to 17.00 (excluding public and other holidays).