In recent periods, West Africa has emerged as a hot spot for criminal activities, especially drug smuggling, human trafficking and international terrorism. Its geographical location on the Atlantic Ocean makes this region a transit hub between Africa, Europe and the Americas. Hence, improving security in this area is not only a matter of regional, but also global interest. Implemented by INTERPOL with funding from the European Union, the West Africa Police Information System (SIDAO/WAPIS) Programme aims at strengthening information exchange and coordination among the region's law enforcement agencies (Police, Gendarmerie, Customs, Immigration Services, etc.) in the 15 ECOWAS Member States, Mauritania and Chad, supporting their efforts in preventing and combating transnational organised crime and terrorism.

Rolled out in 2015 in four pilot countries (Benin, Ghana, Mali and Niger), and progressively extended to other West African countries, the WAPIS system enables West African law enforcement agencies to access critical police information from their national criminal databases and from databases of countries across the region, thus improving the identification of criminals and supporting ongoing investigations.

The programme is articulated at three levels: national, regional and global. At national level, WAPIS provides local law enforcement authorities with an electronic national police information system allowing them to create, manage and share files connected to crimes and offences. Data concern criminal cases and events; suspects, victims and witnesses;legal proceedings; weapons and objects; vehicles; identity documents. National systems are networked into a regional information sharing platform that allows the real-time exchange of data among countries of the region, thereby enhancing cooperation and rapid action. This centralised system also allows police to collate crime statistics more easily and analyse trends affecting the region, so that effective anti-crime strategies can be developed by national level. Lastly, each national police data system will be connected to INTERPOL's secure global police communications system (I-24/7). As such, law enforcement officers will be able to share authorised national data globally and to perform checks against INTERPOL's databases.

WAPIS reveals connections between crimes and criminals that previously were not possible. For example, an officer performing a name check on a national suspected of drug trafficking may learn by the system that that individual is researched in another country, beyond the region, for similar criminal activities. Interconnection through the I-24/7 system helps strengthen the operational link between West African law enforcement and the rest of the world, which is crucial to effectively combating transnational organised crime and terrorism.