

WHAT HAPPENED TO DEMAND? GETTING SMALL ARMS CONTROL BACK ON TRACK

CALLUM WATSON AND ALINE SHABAN*

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the 1990s, various arms-related instruments, such as the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects (POA, adopted 2001), the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunition, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (Firearms Protocol, entered into force 2005) and the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT, entered into force in 2014), have called attention to the persistent human suffering caused by the illicit trade and misuse of small arms and light weapons (SALW).¹ These instruments have been implemented through a range of measures such as physical security and stockpile management, diversion prevention through strengthened border control, customs and law enforcement, and responsible disposal of weapons surpluses.² Collectively, these activities have led to the

¹ United Nations, General Assembly, Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, A/CONF.192/15, adopted 20 July 2001; United Nations, General Assembly, Report of the Eighth Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, A/CONF.192/BMS/2022/1, 12 July 2022; UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), 'Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition', *United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols Thereto* (UN: New York, 2004); and United Nations, General Assembly, The Arms Trade Treaty, adopted 2 Apr. 2013, entered into force 24 Dec. 2014.

² See e.g. United Nations, General Assembly, A/CONF.192/BMS/2022/1 (note 1), para. 77.

*The authors would like to acknowledge the contribution of David Atwood and Emile LeBrun to the development of this paper, as well as the guidance from Nivedita Raju, Wilfred Wan and other reviewers.

SUMMARY

In the last twenty years the United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms, the UN Firearms Protocol and the Arms Trade Treaty have drawn the attention to the human suffering caused by the illicit trafficking and misuse of small arms and light weapons (SALW). While there has been some progress, these instruments are yet to fully realize their potential. Despite the initial consensus on the importance of addressing both supply- and demand-side factors in achieving effective control of SALW, these instruments have focused almost exclusively on technical supply-side factors.

This paper outlines how reviving discussions on demand-side factors could accelerate progress in preventing SALW-related human suffering by drawing insight from fields such as criminology, anthropology, sustainable development and community violence prevention. It concludes with some recommendations on how gender could provide a promising entry point to restart these discussions, and how the European Union is well positioned as a potential champion.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Callum Watson (Switzerland/United Kingdom) is a Gender Coordinator and Programme Manager at the Small Arms Survey. He works on fostering linkages between small arms control and the women and peace and security agenda, while gender mainstreaming within the Survey more broadly. His previous work on gender and security focused on peacekeeping, military education, men and masculinities, and gender bias in the justice sector.

Aline Shaban (Belgium) is an Associate Researcher at the Small Arms Survey and has a background in transnational organized crime, criminology and human rights. She works on the prevention of illicit proliferation, with a focus on civilian firearm registries, craft production and arms trafficking dynamics. Her past work focused on transparency practices and small arms exports.

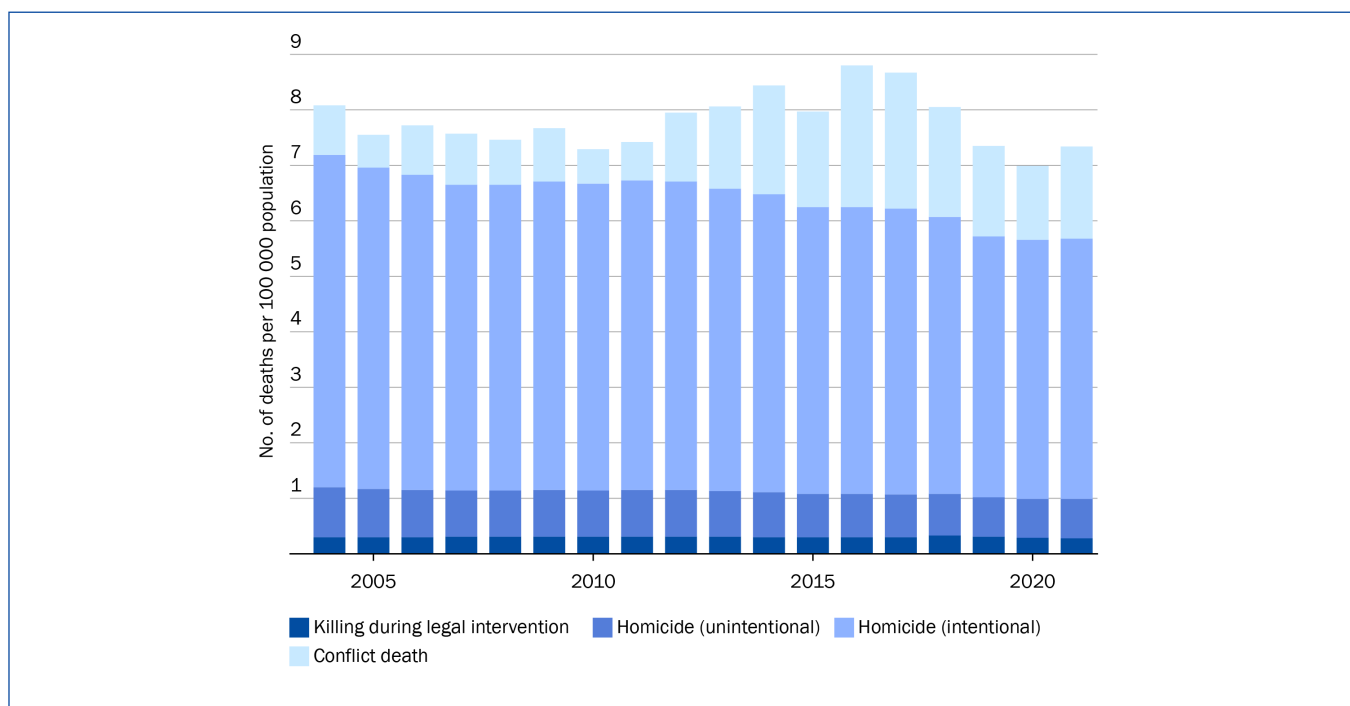


Figure 1. Number of global violent deaths, by type of death, 2004–21

Source: Hideg, G. and Boo, G., ‘Turning tides: A new surge in global violent deaths’, Small Arms Survey Blog, 4 Dec. 2023.

establishment of small arms control as a ‘profession’ requiring skills that are often highly technical.

One way to assess the impact of these instruments is to look at progress towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Target 16.1 of the agenda’s sustainable development goals (SDGs) aims to ‘significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere’ by the year 2030. An overview of global violent death rates between 2004 and 2021 suggests that there has been some success towards achieving this objective (see figure 1), although this trend seems to have reversed as new figures gradually become available: 2022 was reportedly the worst year for conflict-related deaths since 1984.³

While conflict-related deaths are largely responsible for *fluctuations* in the overall number of violent deaths, the vast majority of violent deaths are linked to intentional homicide, and thus largely to civilian perpetrators. Although there has been a slow but steady downward trend in levels of violent homicides overall, the statistics are best characterized as a series of violent flashpoints that flare up in different, fairly localized hotspots across the globe for short periods

of time.⁴ In other words, violence is still getting much worse in some parts of the world, while in many non-conflict areas there has been little change. The upshot of this is that if a ‘business as usual’ approach is taken, only a small downward trend may be seen in the decade to come.⁵

Looking at these figures from a gender perspective, although only 16 per cent of violent death victims in 2021 were women and the rate of women being killed reached a low of 2.3 per 100 000 in 2020, substantial reductions in lethal violence do not tend to translate into significant reductions in the numbers of female victims.⁶ This is because, unlike for men, direct conflict is not a leading cause of violent death for women.⁷ Even in conflict zones characterized by high levels of gender-based violence (GBV), women are often at greater risk

³ Obermeier, A. M. and Aas Rustad, S., *Conflict Trends: A Global Overview, 1946–2022*, PRIO Paper (PRIO: Oslo, 2023), p. 7.

⁴ Hideg, G. and Alvazzi del Frate, A., ‘Still not there: Global violent death scenarios, 2019–30’, Small Arms Survey, Security Assessment in North Africa (SANA) Briefing Paper, Feb. 2021, p. 7; and Hideg, G. and Boo, G., ‘The calm before the storm: Global violent deaths update 2019–2020’, Small Arms Survey Blog, 7 July 2022.

⁵ Hideg, G. and Alvazzi del Frate, A., ‘Darkening horizons: Global violent deaths scenarios, 2018–2030’, Small Arms Survey Briefing Paper, May 2019, p. 7.

⁶ Small Arms Survey, ‘Global violent deaths in 2021’, 2022, updated Dec. 2023.

⁷ Hideg and Alvazzi del Frate (note 4), p. 9.

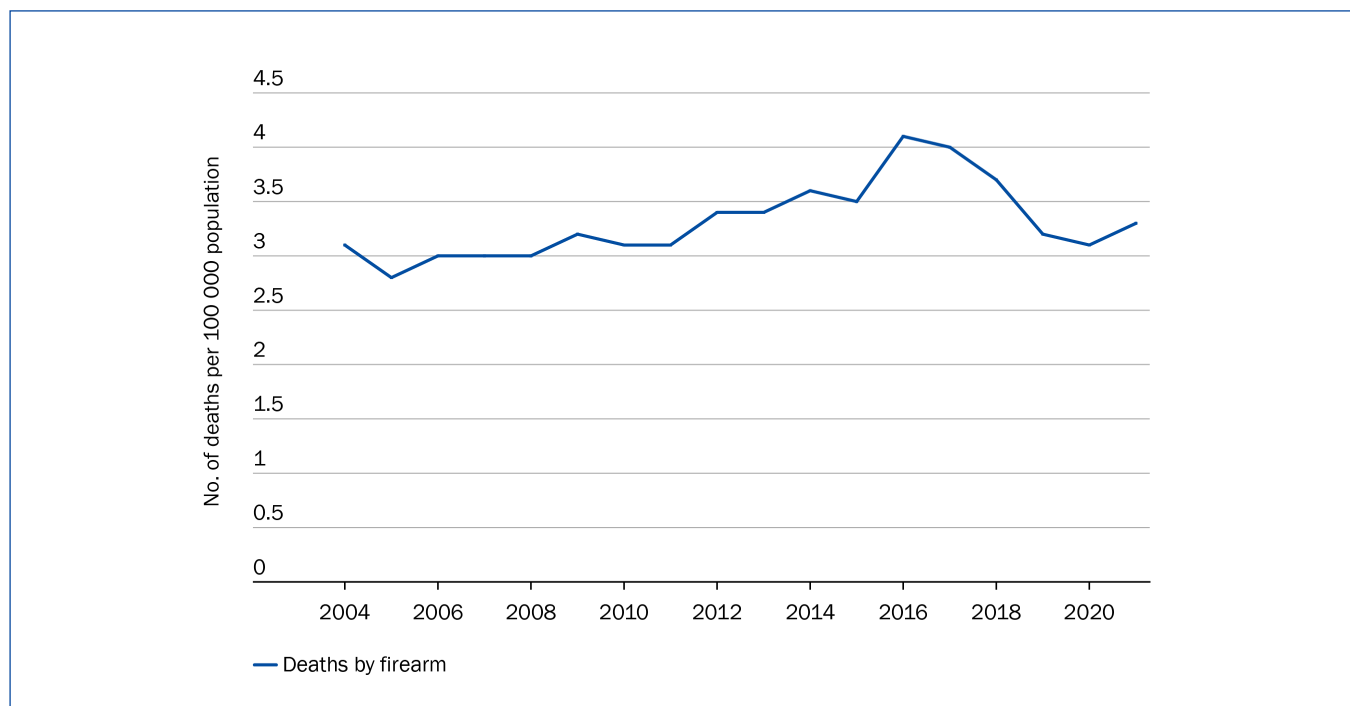


Figure 2. Number of global firearms-related deaths, 2004–21

Source: Small Arms Survey, ‘Global violent deaths in 2021’, 2022, updated Dec. 2023.

of being killed at the hands of an intimate partner through acts of domestic violence.⁸ This highlights the importance of gender-responsive approaches to reduce differentiated threats to women and men such as gender-based, and especially domestic, violence.

Firearms were used in 45 per cent of all violent deaths (excluding suicides) in 2021, meaning they are a leading contributor to such killings. Since 2004, the rate of firearms-related deaths has fluctuated, although it was on a downward trajectory from 2016 to 2020 (see figure 2). Again, the data shows that trends vary significantly across the world with firearms being responsible for 81 per cent of violent deaths in North America versus 32 per cent in Southern Asia.⁹ In addition, while 8 per cent of firearms-related deaths in 2021 involved female victims, the rate of women killed by firearms has fluctuated between 0.5 and 0.7 per 100 000 since 2004 with no real change in the long-term.¹⁰ Female deaths represent the tip of the iceberg when it comes to firearms-related violence against women and girls. Beyond fatalities, firearms can also be

⁸ Myrntinen, H., ‘Gender and the gun: Gender-responsive small arms programming’, ed. E. LeBrun, *Gender-responsive Small Arms Control: A Practical Guide* (Small Arms Survey: Geneva, 2019), p. 33.

⁹ Small Arms Survey (note 6).

¹⁰ Small Arms Survey (note 6).

used to facilitate domestic and sexual violence, among other abuses.¹¹

When attempting to grasp the broader perspective, it is also worth considering that of the approximately one billion firearms thought to be in circulation as of 2017, estimates suggest that 857 million were held by civilians—up from 650 million in 2006—but only 100 million of these were reportedly registered.¹² Assuming that the majority of those held by militaries and law enforcement are properly registered, this means that around three quarters of all firearms are not registered with any national authority, thus making them very difficult to control. Moreover, firearms ownership is highly gendered: the vast majority of firearms owners are men and, in some contexts, owning a gun is considered inherent to being a man.¹³

¹¹ UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), *Securing Our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament* (UN: New York, 2018), p. 39.

¹² Karp, A., ‘Estimating global civilian-held firearms numbers’, Small Arms Survey Briefing Paper, June 2018, pp. 3–4.

¹³ Shaw, M., ‘Too close to home: Guns and intimate partner violence’, eds E. LeBrun et al., *Small Arms Survey 2013: Everyday Dangers* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2013), p. 30; and Schöb, M. and Myrntinen, H., ‘Men and masculinities in gender responsive small arms control’, Gender Equality Network for Small Arms Control (GENSAC) Issue Brief no. 2, Mar. 2022, pp. 6, 8.

A quarter of a century after concerted efforts began to address human suffering caused by the illicit proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons, including firearms, the gains achieved have been modest and, in the current security context, may turn out to be short-lived.¹⁴ There also seems to have been little progress when it comes to firearms-related violence against women. Looking ahead to the next 25 years, and more immediately to the fourth review conference of the POA in June 2024, this paper reflects on the discourse of small arms control since the turn of the century and makes some suggestions regarding how policymakers could bring efforts ‘back on track’. It does so with a view to leveraging good practices from both the small arms field and elsewhere in order to continue—and hopefully accelerate—the downward trend in small arms-related violence.

This paper is structured as follows: section II revisits the original mandate and motivations behind the establishment of some of the key international mechanisms that regulate small arms control and how the discourse has subsequently evolved to focus disproportionately on supply-side factors. Section III outlines how and why gender could be leveraged to revive a balanced focus that also explores demand-side factors. It then looks at how this could open the door to more multidisciplinary insights and what the benefits of this might be. Finally, section IV provides European Union (EU) policymakers with suggestions to effectively support small arms control efforts by targeting demand-side factors. This is followed by a brief conclusion in section V.

II. OVERVIEW OF THE MAIN INTERNATIONAL APPROACHES TO SMALL ARMS CONTROL

The end of the cold war: A new hope?

A product of the post-cold war reprieve in international ‘great power’ tensions, international small arms

¹⁴ In this paper, the terms ‘small arms’ and ‘light weapons’ are defined in line with Article 4 of the International Tracing Instrument, whereas the term ‘firearms’ is defined in line with Article 3(a) of the Firearms Protocol. For all intents and purposes, *all* firearms are small arms or light weapons, and *most* small arms and light weapons are firearms. For a full discussion on definitions in the European Union (EU) context, see Poitevin, C., ‘European Union initiatives to control small arms and light weapons: Towards a more coordinated approach’, EU Non-Proliferation Consortium, Non-Proliferation Paper no. 33, Dec. 2014, p. 4.

control mechanisms emerged in recognition that illicit SALW, including firearms, posed a serious threat to peace, security and development at global, regional and national levels.¹⁵ Early advocates included Oxfam and Amnesty International, who approached the issue from a development, humanitarian and human rights perspective, as well as the World Health Organization and numerous national non-governmental organizations, who approached it as a public health issue.¹⁶

A 1997 report by a UN Panel of Government Experts on Small Arms reiterated this approach, noting that the conflicts and instability that led to the mass proliferation of SALW arose from ‘a number of accumulated and complex political, commercial, socio-economic, ethnic, cultural and ideological factors’, encompassing both the supply of and demand for SALW, the distinction between which is not always clear cut.¹⁷

Among the supply-side factors highlighted in the report is the availability of weapons from prior conflicts (which can include distribution of weapons to civilians for self-defence) coupled with incomplete disarmament programmes, uncontrolled exports from other states, and the post-cold war downsizing of militaries leading to surplus weapons being sold abroad and SALW manufacturers looking for new export markets.¹⁸

The demand-side factors include insurgency and terrorism, drug trafficking, self-defence in the absence of security provided by the state, subsistence, the ethnic or cultural symbolism of weapons and cultures of violence in which the armed resolution of conflicts

¹⁵ UNODC (note 1), preamble; and United Nations, General Assembly, A/CONF.192/15 (note 1), para I.2.

¹⁶ Coe, J. and Smith, H., *Action Against Small Arms: A Resource and Training Handbook* (Oxfam Publishing: Oxford, 2003), p. vii; Amnesty International UK, ‘SAVE LIVES: Stop gun running’, Press release, 11 June 2001; World Health Organization (WHO), *Small Arms and Global Health: WHO Contribution to the UN Conference on Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons July 9–20, 2001* (WHO: Geneva, 2001), pp. 1, 9, 13; Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue and Vivo International, ‘Trauma as a consequence—and cause—of gun violence’, Background Paper no. 1, 2006; HELP Network, ‘Disabilities from guns: The untold costs of spinal cord and traumatic brain injuries’, 2002; and International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA), *Implementation of the UN Program of Action (PoA) on Small Arms and Light Weapons: Civil Society Advocacy Guide* (IANSA: New York, 2017).

¹⁷ United Nations, General Assembly, Report of the Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms, A/52/298, 27 Aug. 1997, paras 38, 39.

¹⁸ United Nations, General Assembly (note 17), paras 40, 46–48.

is commonplace.¹⁹ The report also touched on the gendered nature of demand, noting that weapons could be ‘a sign of manliness’.²⁰ Made in 1997, this reference to gender echoes contemporary discussions both within civil society circles and among international policymakers on the gendered causes and impacts of conflict. It ultimately led to the passing of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women and peace and security (WPS) in 2000 and the engagement of the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) Women’s Network in the small arms sphere from at least 2003.²¹

The dominance of supply-side factors in international and regional mechanisms: Keeping in the comfort zone

This section explores how supply-side approaches came to dominate small arms control efforts. The major causes of this imbalance include the state’s tendency to address technical supply-side factors related to the weapons themselves, rather than the more political demand-side factors. Exploring the latter may reveal that civilians seek firearms due to a lack of trust in the state’s capacity to ensure security or because they view the state itself as a potential threat. In addition, discussions on supply-side factors tend to reiterate the state’s legitimacy in acquiring weapons and using armed force where it sees fit. Ultimately, exploring demand-side factors can result in difficult conversations about addressing political, social and economic inequalities to reduce the need for a state to use armed force in the first place.

Over time, these dynamics have led to small arms control becoming a profession in which expertise on supply-side factors is more prevalent. Despite several attempts to restore this balance, their impact has been limited or short-lived. This section unpacks why this is the case, with the proviso that the analysis primarily draws on official documents which provide few insights into the informal discussions and compromises between delegates.

The POA

The UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons (POA), often considered as the foundational document for international small arms control efforts, was adopted in 2001 as a set of politically binding global commitments.²² It was complemented by the International Tracing Instrument (ITI) in 2005, which pertains to SALW marking, recordkeeping and tracing.²³

Although the adoption of the POA by consensus gave it legitimacy, it meant that topics such as civilian firearm possession, the legal arms trade and human rights violations related to excessive accumulation, which had been raised by civil society organizations and the UN Panel of Government Experts on Small Arms, were left out.²⁴ In addition, the participation of civil society was limited to one plenary session—a move by some states to steer conversations away from human rights violations—and civil society itself was divided between a ‘small arms control’ lobby and a ‘gun rights’ lobby.²⁵

Paragraph I.7 of the resulting preamble stressed ‘the urgency of international efforts and cooperation aimed at combating this trade simultaneously from both a supply and demand perspective’.²⁶ However, the operative provisions focus on supply-side factors, with only one reference to demand-side factors whereby states and international and regional organizations are encouraged to ‘consider assisting and promoting conflict prevention’, including by addressing root causes in negotiated settlements.²⁷ The preamble also includes the only gender reference, where states express their grave concern over ‘the negative impact

²² United Nations, General Assembly, A/CONF.192/15 (note 1); and Pytlak, A., ‘Converging agendas: Global norms on gender, small arms, and development’, ed. E. LeBrun, *Gender-responsive Small Arms Control: A Practical Guide* (Small Arms Survey: Geneva, 2019), p. 33.

²³ Note that the POA focuses exclusively on supply-side factors by its very nature, which is why it is not discussed in more detail. UNODA, ‘Programme of action on small arms and its International Tracing Instrument’, accessed 17 Oct. 2023.

²⁴ United Nations, General Assembly, Report of the Group of Governmental Experts on Small Arms, A/54/258, 19 Aug. 1999, para. 132; and Parker, S. and Wilson, M., *A Guide to the UN Small Arms Process: 2016 Update* (Small Arms Survey: Geneva, 2016), pp. 41–43.

²⁵ Parker and Wilson (note 24), p. 45.

²⁶ United Nations, General Assembly, A/CONF.192/15 (note 1), para. I.7.

²⁷ United Nations, General Assembly, A/CONF.192/15 (note 1), para. III.4.

¹⁹ United Nations, General Assembly (note 17), paras 41, 42, 44.

²⁰ United Nations, General Assembly (note 17), para. 44.

²¹ UN Security Council Resolution 1325, 31 Oct. 2000.

on women and the elderly' with no reference to how gender norms influence SALW demand.²⁸

The Small Arms Survey, the Quaker United Nations Office and a number of states and civil society organizations attempted to reintroduce a 'demand optic' at the first POA review conference (2006), through a series of working papers and events culminating in a publication entitled 'Demanding Attention: Addressing the Dynamics of Small Arms Demand'.²⁹ These efforts were dashed, however, as a lack of consensus meant there was no outcome document.³⁰ In subsequent meetings, 'Demand and supply issues' only received a single mention in the outcome documents of both the third and fourth biennial meeting of states (BMS3, 2008; BMS4, 2010) within a long list of 'Other issues' of interest to certain states, and have not been explicitly mentioned since.³¹

The links between peace, security and development detailed in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development were a key talking point at the BMS6 (2016).³² Although states acknowledge the need to address 'the root causes of armed conflict, armed violence, terrorism and transnational organized crime', the remaining provisions focus exclusively on

preventing the supply of SALW to illegal groups.³³ In other words, the POA outlines how continuing its existing approach can contribute to Agenda 2030 rather than taking a balanced demand and supply focus. This approach was reflected at subsequent meetings, although gender references became progressively stronger (see section III).³⁴

The Firearms Protocol

The legally-binding Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunition (Firearms Protocol) was adopted as a supplement to the UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) in 2001, the same year as the POA was adopted.³⁵ Entering into force in 2005, it seeks 'to promote, facilitate and strengthen cooperation among States Parties in order to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms'.³⁶ Its focus, however, is on criminalizing the illicit production and manufacture of firearms, marking and tracing legal firearms, and ensuring the confiscation, seizure and disposal of illicit firearms.³⁷ Preventative measures are limited to supply-side factors such as tracing licit weapons, deactivating illicit weapons and regulating imports and exports.³⁸

Previous meetings of the UN Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders, which paved the way for the Firearms Protocol, had taken a broader stance by calling for promoting regulations on firearms with a view to protecting public health, diminishing violent criminality and even

²⁸ United Nations, General Assembly, A/CONF.192/15 (note 1), para. I.6.

²⁹ United Nations, 'Small arms and development', Working paper submitted by Ghana, Kenya, the Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland, Uganda and the United Kingdom, A/CONF.192/2006/RC/WP.5, 30 June 2006; United Nations, 'Proposal for an intersessional programme of work to enhance implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects', Working Paper submitted by Canada, A/CONF.192/2006/RC/WP.3, 26 June 2006; Jackman, D. and Atwood, D., 'Security together: A unified supply and demand approach to small arms control', Working paper, Feb. 2005; and Atwood, D., Glatz, A.-K. and Muggah, R., *Demanding Attention: Addressing the Dynamics of Small Arms Demand* (Small Arms Survey/Quaker United Nations Office: Geneva, 2006).

³⁰ United Nations, General Assembly, Report of the United Nations Conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, A/CONF.192/2006/RC/9, 12 July 2006, para. 30.

³¹ United Nations, General Assembly, Report of the Third Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, A/CONF.192/BMS/2008/3, 20 Aug. 2008, para. 28.

³² United Nations, General Assembly, Report of the Sixth Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, A/CONF.192/BMS/2016/2, 15 June 2016, para. 24.

³³ United Nations, General Assembly (note 32), paras 25, 26, 28, 30, 99.

³⁴ United Nations, General Assembly, Report of the Third United Nations Conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, A/CONF.192/2018/RC/3, 6 July 2018, para. 80; United Nations, General Assembly, Report of the Seventh Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, A/CONF.192/BMS/2021/1, 11 Aug. 2021, para. 13; United Nations, General Assembly, A/CONF.192/BMS/2022/1 (note 1), paras 9, 49–54, 79; and Pytlak (note 22), pp. 34–38.

³⁵ UNODC, 'The Firearms Protocol', accessed 17 Oct. 2023.

³⁶ UNODC, 'Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition', *United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols Thereto* (UN: New York 2004), Annex, Article 2.

³⁷ UNODC (note 36), Annex, articles 5, 6, 8.

³⁸ UNODC (note 36), Annex, articles 7–10.

reducing firearms-related accidents and suicides.³⁹ However, the drafters were keen to focus the content of the legally binding Firearms Protocol on crime prevention and law enforcement rather than on broader small arms control issues, for which they saw the POA as a more appropriate forum.⁴⁰

Following its adoption, Firearms Protocol-related policy discussions and implementation activities have been largely technical in nature, focusing almost exclusively on supply-side factors. However, in 2016, states parties recognized the ‘urgent need’ to ‘adopt integrated and comprehensive approaches to address the root causes of transnational organized crime, including illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms . . . taking into account, where appropriate, economic and social factors having an impact upon firearms-related crime . . . and to consider the gender dimension of such crimes’.⁴¹ This acknowledgement appears to be a response to the need to align the Firearms Protocol with Agenda 2030 and the Doha Declaration, both adopted one year prior in 2015.⁴² It is also worth mentioning that the first reference to gender within the framework of the Firearms Protocol was incorporated within a recommendation on demand-side factors of firearms control.

In 2017, the Working Group on Firearms made recommendations to adopt a holistic approach to preventing illicit firearms trafficking and diversion that ‘takes into account the socioeconomic development of Member States and addresses the fight against the root causes of those phenomena, where appropriate’.⁴³ In 2022, the working group suggested that it should consider the impacts on people’s wellbeing, social and economic development, and right to live in peace in future reports and recommendations. Moreover, it

called for further dialogue on the human dimension and humanitarian consequences of illicit firearms trafficking, as well as the negative impacts on women and girls.⁴⁴

Gender mainstreaming, victim-centred approaches and the relevance of the Firearms Protocol to Agenda 2030 have all been listed as possible topics for consideration by the Working Group on Firearms in the future, but have not yet been included on the agenda.⁴⁵ These topics could also be included in the review processes of the Firearms Protocol, which are currently being implemented.

The ATT

The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) of 2013 shares some of the POA’s objectives, namely ‘reducing human suffering’. Despite provisions to ‘Prevent and eradicate the illicit trade in conventional arms and prevent their diversion’, the nature of the ATT as a trade-oriented treaty limits its scope of application to supply-side factors such as preventing arms from reaching an unauthorized end user, rather than addressing the motivations to divert arms.⁴⁶

Nevertheless, from a gender perspective, the ATT is unprecedented in containing requirements for exporting states to consider the risk of arms being used to commit or facilitate serious acts of GBV and violence against women and girls.⁴⁷ In practice, however, this has been limited to situations where there is a high risk of serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law more generally, not to situations such as domestic violence where women face a gender-differentiated risk of firearms-related violence.⁴⁸

³⁹ United Nations, General Assembly, Report of the Ninth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders, A/CONF.169/16/Rev.1, 8 May 1995, Resolution 9, articles 7–11.

⁴⁰ Parker and Wilson (note 24), p. 37.

⁴¹ United Nations, Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, ‘Report of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime on its eighth session, held in Vienna from 17 to 21 October 2016’, CTOC/COP/2016/15, 7 Nov. 2016, Resolution 8/2, p. 17.

⁴² UNODC, *Doha Declaration on Integrating Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice into the Wider United Nations Agenda to Address Social and Economic Challenges and to Promote the Rule of Law at the National and International Levels, and Public Participation* (UN: New York, 2015).

⁴³ United Nations, Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, ‘Report on the meeting of the Working Group on Firearms held in Vienna from 8 to 10 May 2017’, CTOC/COP/WG.6/2017/4, 19 May 2017, Recommendation 2, p. 2.

⁴⁴ United Nations, Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, ‘Report on the meeting of the Working Group on Firearms held in Vienna on 4 and 5 May 2022’, CTOC/COP/WG.6/2022/4, 27 May 2022, recommendations 1, 3, p. 2.

⁴⁵ United Nations, Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, ‘Report on the meeting of the Working Group on Firearms held in Vienna from 10 to 12 May 2021’, CTOC/COP/WG.6/2021/4, 31 May 2021, recommendations 44, 47, pp. 7–8.

⁴⁶ United Nations, General Assembly, The Arms Trade Treaty, adopted 2 Apr. 2013, entered into force 24 Dec. 2014, articles 1, 2(1)(h), 11.

⁴⁷ United Nations, General Assembly (note 46), Article 7(4).

⁴⁸ Fabre, A-S. et al., ‘At whose risk: Understanding states parties’ implementation of Arms Trade Treaty gender-based violence provisions’, Small Arms Survey Briefing Paper, Mar. 2022.

EU mechanisms

The 1998 Council of the EU ‘Joint Action on the EU contribution to combating the destabilizing accumulation and spread of small arms and light weapons’ laid the foundations for the EU’s earliest collective efforts to address small arms. Guiding principles addressed both supply-side factors (ensuring national stockpiles conform to legitimate self-defence needs; responsible export policies; and efforts to prevent illicit transfers) and demand-side factors (a ‘commitment to challenge and reverse “cultures of violence”, by enhancing public involvement through public education and awareness programmes’; and confidence-building measures to encourage the voluntary surrender of surplus or illegally held small arms).⁴⁹

The first EU ‘Strategy to combat illicit accumulation and trafficking of SALW and their ammunition’ was adopted in 2005 as the Firearms Protocol entered force and the ITI was adopted.⁵⁰ It reflected the preceding joint action rather than these international mechanisms by taking a balanced approach to addressing supply- and demand-side factors.

While reiterating supply-side factors in the joint action, it also seeks to repurpose industrial sites producing cheap SALW.⁵¹ Additional demand-side factors pertain to addressing the root causes of instability related to ‘political conflicts, development aid, poverty reduction and the promotion of human rights’, as well as shortcomings in the rule of law ‘so as to limit the propensity of local people to provide for their own defence’.⁵²

When it comes to measures included in the ‘action plan’ section of the strategy, however, most focus on supply-side interventions that support the implementation of the international mechanisms mentioned above. Efforts to address demand-side factors are more vague, such as public education to address the culture of violence, ‘Appropriate measures to deal with the causes and consequences for human development of the illicit spread of SALW’ and support

for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) and security sector reform (SSR).⁵³ Gender-related aspects are limited to an acknowledgement that women (and children) were particularly affected by conflict-related violations of human rights and humanitarian law.⁵⁴

This balanced approach to supply- and demand-side factors was not reflected in the 2018 ‘EU Strategy Against Illicit Firearms, Small Arms and Light Weapons and their Ammunition’, despite opening language on the need for an integrated approach across external policies.⁵⁵

This strategy mentions that illicit SALW can have ‘adverse effects on good governance, law and order, access to education, healthcare, justice and other civil rights’, as well as on sustainable development.⁵⁶ The section on cross-cutting issues, however, does not discuss how gaps in these domains can contribute to cycles of armed violence and the demand for SALW. Rather it focuses on the lifecycle of SALW themselves, limiting its planned actions to intelligence sharing on trafficking and gun crime.⁵⁷ Similarly, the section on international cooperation and assistance mentions research on ‘the origins of illicit SALW in conflict zones’ but not on the origins of the conflict itself.⁵⁸ Cross-border cooperation pertains to ‘judicial and law enforcement authorities’, not to threats to cross-border communities.⁵⁹

There is a commitment to ‘incorporating gender and diversity aspects in SALW-control projects and actions’ and to ‘gender mainstreaming’, but the focus seems to be limited to applying the gender-related provisions of the ATT, as well as UN Security Council resolutions on WPS.⁶⁰

It is also worth noting that since 1991, the EU has sought to regulate the acquisition and possession of *civilian* firearms among its member states.⁶¹ Several amendments to the directive were implemented

⁴⁹ Council Joint Action 1999/34/CFSP on the European Union’s contribution to combating the destabilizing accumulation and spread of small arms and light weapons, *Official Journal of the European Union*, L9/1, 17 Dec. 1998, paras 3(g), 4(b).

⁵⁰ Council of the EU, EU Strategy to Combat Illicit Accumulation and Trafficking of SALW and their Ammunition, 5319/06, 16 Dec. 2005.

⁵¹ Council of the EU (note 50), Article 15.

⁵² Council of the EU (note 50), Article 15.

⁵³ Council of the EU (note 50), Article 20(b).

⁵⁴ Council of the EU (note 50), Article 10.

⁵⁵ Council of the EU, EU Strategy Against Illicit Firearms, Small Arms and Light Weapons and their Ammunition, 19 Dec. 2018, p. 3.

⁵⁶ Council of the EU (note 55), p. 11.

⁵⁷ Council of the EU (note 55), pp. 13–18.

⁵⁸ Council of the EU (note 55), p. 25.

⁵⁹ Council of the EU (note 55), p. 21.

⁶⁰ Council of the EU (note 55), pp. 9, 22, 23.

⁶¹ Directive (EU) 91/477/EEC of 18 June 1991 on control of the acquisition and possession of weapons (91/477/EEC), *Official Journal of the European Communities*, L256/51, 13 Sep. 1991.

over the years to respond to emerging threats and to align with international instruments such as the UN Firearms Protocol.⁶² Without explicitly addressing demand-side factors, the latest directive implies that legitimate ('good cause') reasons to own weapons are generally limited to hunting, target shooting (sport), historical re-enactment and antique collection.⁶³ It also implies that any demand for firearms which poses risks to public security, public order and firearms users themselves (e.g. suicide) is not legitimate, hence the need to provide criminal, medical and psychological records when requesting authorization.⁶⁴ The directive includes provisions that allow dealers and brokers the right to refuse transactions 'which they reasonably consider as suspicious'.⁶⁵ There are, however, no specific provisions on gender and it contains no references to the aforementioned 2018 EU strategy.

Efforts to rebalance supply-side and demand-side factors: Pushing the boundaries through complementary agendas

Despite demand-side factors not featuring prominently alongside supply-side factors in international documents, there have been attempts to revisit these topics in other international policy discourse related to small arms. This section provides an overview of some of these efforts.

The Geneva Declaration

In 2006, the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development, signed by 113 countries, reinigorated discussions on violence prevention and demand for small arms by using development as an entry point. It included a specific reference to 'deal effectively both with the supply of, and the demand for, small arms and light weapons', including through the POA and further international instruments.⁶⁶

⁶² LeBrun, E. and Shaban, A., *Effective and Innovative Practices among European Civilian Firearm Registries*, REGISYNC Report (Center for the Study of Democracy: Sofia, 2023), pp. 13, 53.

⁶³ 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 (codification), *Official Journal of the European Union*, L115/1, 24 Mar. 2021, articles 6(1), 9, 17(2).

⁶⁴ Directive (EU) 2021/555 (note 63), Article 6(a, b).

⁶⁵ Directive (EU) 2021/555 (note 63), Article 13(2).

⁶⁶ Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development, adopted 7 June 2006; and Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development website, 2016, accessed 26 Aug. 2023.

While the Geneva Declaration likely made a significant contribution to ensuring that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development incorporated provisions on reducing violence (16.1.1) and illicit arms flows (16.1.4), it did not succeed in bringing the topic of demand back into the SALW control agenda.⁶⁷

MOSAIC

The Modular Small-arms-control Implementation Compendium (MOSAIC, previously the International Small Arms Control Standards or ISACS) is a set of voluntary good practice notes compiled by the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) in partnership with UN agencies, governments, regional organizations, civil society organizations and private sector actors.⁶⁸ It is designed to support the implementation of the POA, the ITI, the Firearms Protocol and the ATT, and has been periodically expanded and updated over the last decade.⁶⁹

MOSAIC includes a module on regulating civilian access to SALW (03.30) and includes references to demand-side factors in modules on national action plans (04.10) and on linkages between SALW and SSR (02.20), and SALW and DDR (02.30). It also mentions demand-side factors in its cross-cutting modules on 'women, men and the gendered nature of SALW' (06.10) and on 'children, adolescents, youth and SALW' (06.20).⁷⁰ This does not appear, however, to have shaped international SALW policy and discussions on international cooperation and assistance.

The New Agenda for Peace

The need to consider demand factors for firearms and to 'Pursue whole-of-government approaches that integrate small arms and light weapons control into development and violence reduction initiatives at the national and community levels' was recently reiterated in the New Agenda for Peace policy brief.⁷¹ Whether this provides an entry point to revive this angle in future international policy discussions on SALW control remains to be seen.

⁶⁷ UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), 'Sustainable Development Goal 16', 2022, accessed 27 July 2023.

⁶⁸ UNODA, 'Modular Small-arms-control Implementation Compendium (MOSAIC)', accessed 19 Oct. 2023.

⁶⁹ UNODA (note 68).

⁷⁰ UNODA (note 68).

⁷¹ United Nations, *A New Agenda for Peace, Our Common Agenda Policy Brief no. 9* (UN: New York, July 2023), p. 23.

The current state of affairs

There is clearly a logic to simultaneously addressing supply and demand. In the words of the World Health Organization, ‘we can continue much as we have done and focus on attempting to control and curtail the supplies of small arms. Our alternative way forward is to recognize and develop those aspects that are underdeveloped, notably the call to simultaneously address demand for small arms’.⁷² Efforts to revive demand-side approaches, however, have not been successful. While this may have been due to reluctance to address civilian weapons in the early 2000s, especially in consensus-based documents, one possible explanation for the current situation is that as international small arms control has gradually become established as a predominantly technical profession. Meanwhile, demand-side factors have been sidelined largely because they have been absent in the mandates of international and, by extension, regional instruments.

Reincorporating demand-side factors would not necessarily be easy; it would require rethinking how different teams within ministries of defence and foreign affairs operate and cooperate with each other, as well as with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society.⁷³ According to one researcher:

The issue of the demand for weapons must be addressed, but as diplomats often note, this opens a whole new area of issues in conflict resolution, community development, justice reform, youth programming, post-war peace building and attitude change that is far beyond the experience of the ministries of defence and foreign affairs which normally deal with weapons control. . . . Much [NGO-based] demand-side activity is not focused intentionally on weapons control, but is conducted to end wars, control violence, increase development or empower marginalised populations.⁷⁴

Nevertheless, from an EU perspective, reflections on how to overcome these challenges would be critical to achieving an integrated approach (which is a hallmark of its current Global Strategy) to its SALW control policy.⁷⁵ There are ample opportunities to promote

⁷² Meddings, D., ‘Statement of the World Health Organization to the second biennial meeting of states’, July 2005, cited in Atwood, Glatz and Muggah (note 29), p. 7.

⁷³ Weiss T., ‘A demand-side approach to fighting small arms proliferation’, *African Security Review*, vol. 12, no. 2 (Jan. 2003), p. 14.

⁷⁴ Weiss (note 73).

⁷⁵ EU, *The European Union’s Global Strategy: Three Years On, Looking Forward* (EU: Brussels, 2019), pp. 25–26.

these new approaches from 2024 onwards as the ATT celebrates its tenth anniversary, the POA embarks on its fourth review conference, the Firearms Protocol seeks to address new topics through its constructive dialogues and the implementation of the new Global Framework on Through-life Conventional Ammunition Management begins, all against the backdrop of the Summit of the Future aimed at agreeing a new Pact for the Future.⁷⁶

The next section looks at work in other academic fields that points to the value of reviving the demand perspective in order to gain better outcomes in the area of SALW control. It also explores how gender—an emerging policy area in international SALW control—might provide new entry points to discuss demand-side factors in future international SALW discussions.

III. GENDER AS A CONDUIT TOWARDS INTEGRATING DEMAND-SIDE FACTORS AND MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES TO SMALL ARMS CONTROL

As discussed above, there has been more focus on supply-side factors, with limited attempts to address demand-side factors in SALW control. Small arms mechanisms have deflected these efforts by focusing on how the POA, the ITI, the Firearms Protocol and the ATT can contribute to complementary agendas such as conflict prevention and sustainable development, rather than framing the relationship as reciprocal. Gender provisions have also been referenced in a similar way, such as the recognition at the POA’s BMS7 that ‘eradicating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons is a key part of combating gender-based violence and sexual violence in conflict’.⁷⁷ This begs the question as to why using gender as an entry point could succeed where other approaches have seen only limited success. In the current context, there are three main

⁷⁶ See e.g. Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), ‘Tenth Conference of States Parties (CSP10)’, accessed 5 Feb 2024; UNODA, ‘Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons—Review Conference (2024)’, accessed 5 Feb 2024; UNODC, ‘Constructive Dialogue on Firearms—2024’, accessed 5 Feb 2024; United Nations, General Assembly, Final report of the open-ended working group to elaborate a set of political commitments as a new global framework that will address existing gaps in through-life ammunition management, A/78/111, 16 June 2023, Annex, paras 27–37; and United Nations, ‘The Summit of the Future in 2024’, accessed 5 Feb. 2024.

⁷⁷ United Nations, General Assembly, A/CONF.192/BMS/2021/1 (note 34), para. 77.

advantages to leveraging gender-responsive small arms control to address demand-side factors and the root causes of SALW-related violence.

Why would gender work if other frameworks have had limited success?

First, the WPS agenda, which carries weight as a UN Security Council document with historical endorsement from the five permanent members of the Council (P5) and explicitly references SALW control, incorporates **participation** as one of its four pillars.⁷⁸ This has translated into policy discussions with, for example, states ‘recogniz[ing] the need for the full, equal, meaningful, and effective participation of women in all decision-making and implementation processes relating to the [POA and ITI]’ at the BMS8.⁷⁹ Critically, this alters who is involved in policy discussions and implementation activities related to SALW control. Acknowledging the need for wider participation often creates an entry point for civil society more broadly, and thus provides an opportunity for participants from a wider variety of academic and professional backgrounds to engage in SALW-related activities.

Second, drawing on its political origins in the feminist movement and its academic basis in feminist, gender and (increasingly) men and masculinity studies, the gender equality agenda is oriented towards **shifting social norms and the power relations** between people. This is reflected in the evolution of POA outcome documents from gender-*sensitive* approaches (e.g. recognizing the impact of SALW on women, men, children and youth) towards more gender-*responsive* ones (e.g. collecting gender-disaggregated data to address the differing impacts of SALW on women, men, girls and boys) and ultimately evolving into fledgling gender-*transformative* approaches (e.g. recognizing women as agents of change).⁸⁰ In this way, gender can provide an entry

⁷⁸ See e.g. UN Security Council Resolution 2242, 13 Oct. 2015, para. 15; and Coomaraswamy, R., *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325* (UN Women: New York, 2015), p. 13.

⁷⁹ United Nations, General Assembly, A/CONF.192/BMS/2022/1 (note 1), para. 9.

⁸⁰ United Nations, General Assembly, Report of the [Second] United Nations Conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the

point to discuss the human dimensions of SALW rather than focusing on the weapons themselves.

Third, UN member states—many with feminist foreign policies—have increasingly shown **strong political will and a reluctance to compromise** on gender-related provisions in policy discussions on SALW.⁸¹ In addition, through national action plans on WPS, many have committed to gender mainstreaming in their international cooperation and assistance, including in areas related to SALW.⁸² At the most recent meetings of the POA, the ATT and the Open-Ended Working Group on Conventional Ammunition, UN member states made joint statements to support gender-responsive language (with 36–63 national co-sponsors), all of which succeeded in ensuring the inclusion of gender-responsive provisions in the outcome documents.⁸³ The EU has also been active in championing the incorporation of gender into SALW-related outcome documents.⁸⁴

Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, A/CONF.192/2012/RC/4, 18 Sep. 2012, paras I.14, II.2(i); United Nations, General Assembly (note 32), paras 60–61; and United Nations, General Assembly, A/CONF.192/BMS/2022/1 (note 1), para. 50. Gender-sensitive approaches can be understood as considering how something impacts people differently on the basis of their gender. Gender-responsive approaches can be understood as ensuring programmes and policies take into account gender dynamics (including inequalities and social norms). Gender-transformative approaches can be understood as those that address underlying gender inequalities and power imbalances that result in gender-differentiated levels of power and vulnerability. For a full discussion, see Schöb, M. and LeBrun, E. ‘What and why: Gender-responsive small arms programming’, ed. E. LeBrun, *Gender-responsive Small Arms Control: A Practical Guide* (Small Arms Survey: Geneva, 2019), p. 24.

⁸¹ UN Women, ‘Gender-responsive approaches to foreign policy and the 2030 Agenda: Feminist foreign policies’, Sep. 2023.

⁸² Research by the Small Arms Survey has identified WPS national action plans from 55 countries (of 111 identified) and 7 regional action plans (of 9 identified) that mention SALW in some way.

⁸³ POA: Costa Rica et al., ‘Joint Statement’, BMS8, 29 June 2023. (The EU was a co-sponsor.) ATT: Mexico and the Netherlands et al., ‘Joint Statement: Gender Mainstreaming and Addressing Gender-based Violence under the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)’, 25 Aug. 2023. (22 EU member states co-sponsored.) Working Group: The Philippines et al., ‘Joint Statement on References to Gender in the Draft Global Framework for Through-life Conventional Ammunition Management’, 6 June 2023. (26 EU member states co-sponsored.) See also United Nations, General Assembly, A/CONF.192/BMS/2022/1 (note 1), paras 9, 32, 50–54, 79; ATT, ‘Final Report of the Ninth Conference of States Parties’, ATT/CSP9/2023/SEC/773/Conf.FinRep.Rev2, 25 Aug. 2023, para. 24(g)(h); and United Nations, General Assembly, A/78/111 (note 76), preamble, para. 15 (objectives 8(b)(ii), 13 (a)(vi), 14) and para. 19.

⁸⁴ EU, ‘EU Statement on the consideration on international cooperation and assistance for the full and effective implementation

The broad political support currently enjoyed by the gender equality agenda offers unique opportunities to bring diverse participants and expertise. This, along with the inherent nature of gender as a human-centred perspective, has the potential to provide new entry points to explore demand-side factors in SALW control by leveraging more multidisciplinary approaches.

Multidisciplinary approaches as an integral part of a gender perspective

Growing policy interest in the field of small arms control led to the development of an ‘interdisciplinary “SALW research” epistemic community’ that applies methods and concepts from a wide range of fields such as conflict and development studies, public health, and criminology.⁸⁵ Therefore, on the research side, various studies, such as those with a focus on firearms users (or holders) provide useful insights on the dynamics of SALW demand. Similarly, gender perspectives are multidisciplinary and person-centred by nature because they involve applying analytical tools from feminist theory and gender studies to other domains.

This subsection explores insights from some of the above-mentioned disciplines that have the potential to revive discussions on demand and contribute to more sophisticated approaches to small arms control by analysing both SALW themselves and firearms users and holders. This would result in widening the scope of expertise within the profession of international small arms control beyond technical aspects.

Studies on emotions, culture and crime

The notion of gender as a social construction born from cultural norms that results in expected gendered behaviours can open the door to exploring emotional and cultural aspects related to small arms. This analytical lens has been applied, for example, in the field of criminology.

A 2014 study stresses that emotions such as anger, excitement, pride, fear and hatred are very common in the perpetuation of crime, including illicit arms trafficking.⁸⁶ It highlights the need to consider

emotional factors such as patriotism, conflict mentality, gender roles and gun culture, especially in order to understand protracted crises. According to this study, ‘One way of explaining little progress in SALW reduction is that the dynamics of arms trafficking in certain contexts may not solely depend on formal authority and formal rules but also on cultural attitudes and emotions of those who sell and buy SALW’.⁸⁷

Considering emotions, culture and crime in SALW control efforts could involve measures to address the narratives perpetuated by social influencers, religious and national leaders, and even the advertising of arms companies, taking into account their roles in shaping (often gendered) perceptions of, and demand for, firearms. It could also involve aligning supply-side interventions with SSR activities aimed at addressing people’s perceived security concerns.

The latter is a practice implemented by the UN Development Programme’s (UNDP) South-Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC), which encourages community-based policing in efforts to reduce small arms proliferation among civilians, recognizing ‘that citizens will only be willing to give up firearms if they perceive an improvement in public safety and security and if they have a certain degree of trust in the police and other security agencies’.⁸⁸

In another example, the Living Peace Institute developed a ‘psychological disarmament’ methodology to complement DDR efforts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.⁸⁹ It entails community-based peer support groups run by and for men to help process post-conflict feelings of anger, fear and anxiety. By providing support for men to reflect on their relationships with their wives and children and redefine new social roles for themselves, group members learn to use non-violent means to address their grievances, leading many to surrender their illicitly held weapons.⁹⁰

of the UN PoA and ITI, Eighth biennial meeting of states on the POA, 28 June 2022.

⁸⁵ Florquin, N., ‘Gun violence: Insights from international research’, *Global Crime*, vol. 22, no. 4 (2021), p. 288.

⁸⁶ Arsovska, J., and Zabyelina, Y.G., ‘Irrationality, liminality and the demand for illicit firearms in the Balkans and the North Caucasus’,

European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research, vol. 20 (2014), p. 403.

⁸⁷ Arsovska and Zabyelina (note 86), p. 400.

⁸⁸ South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC), *Philosophy and Principles of Community-based Policing* (SEESAC: Belgrade, 2006).

⁸⁹ UNODA, *Training Manual on Gender-Mainstreaming Small Arms Control* (UN: New York, 2022), p. 70.

⁹⁰ Slegel, H., ‘Masculinities in conflict: Psychosocial disarmament of traumatized men to end violence’, IANSA Members Blog, 12 Jan. 2021.

Studies on individual and group preferences, prices and resources

Whereas conflict analysis traditionally takes a top-down approach, focusing on states and armed groups, other academic discourses (including those with a gender focus) have taken bottom-up approaches, concentrating on individual and group behaviours. Studies on the latter seek to answer the question, ‘can interventions that target “high-risk users” of SALW curb these groups’ access to SALW and influence their capacity, motivations, and incentives to resort to armed violence?’⁹¹

A 2006 study by the Small Arms Survey explored the dynamics between small arms supply and demand through a socio-economic model. It posits that demand is shaped by interrelated variables: individual and group *preferences* for small arms; *prices* (monetary and non-monetary) of small arms; and *resources* available for acquiring small arms.⁹²

Through applying the model in multiple and diverse contexts, the study found, for example, that although weapons buy-back schemes create scarcity, which can drive up the *prices* of firearms thus reducing demand, if such schemes are not accompanied by community-level interventions to address historical, social and structural *preferences* for firearms, they risk providing *resources* to acquire newer weapons.⁹³ This highlights the importance of diagnostic assessments of the (often gendered) motivations to acquire and use firearms as a prerequisite for governments to develop policies and strategies at national and local levels; without them, efforts may be counterproductive.⁹⁴

Examples from the ground

The case studies below explore how national and local-level gender and small arms control initiatives can prompt discussions on multidisciplinary approaches that incorporate supply- and demand-side factors.

⁹¹ Small Arms Survey, *Armed and Aimless: Armed Groups, Guns, and Human Security in the ECOWAS Region* (Small Arms Survey: Geneva, 2005), pp. 47–49; and Florquin (note 85), p. 295.

⁹² The model was tested in Brazil, Colombia, South Africa, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. See Atwood, Glatz and Muggah (note 29), pp. XV, XVI, 15, 45–48.

⁹³ See Atwood, Glatz and Muggah (note 29), pp. XV, XVI.

⁹⁴ Kenyan Government, ‘Kenya National Action Plan for Arms Control and Management’, 2006, p. 38.

South Eastern Europe/Western Balkans

SEESAC’s EU-funded research found that half of all men and a third of all women killed in South Eastern Europe died as a result of firearms use, noting that male firearms victims outnumbered female victims by a factor of seven to one.⁹⁵ While men were most often killed in the context of criminality or a public dispute or argument, the majority of women died in criminal contexts and around a quarter were victims of domestic violence (see figure 3).⁹⁶

Notably, one third of men expressed an interest in owning a firearm, nearly half of whom giving the main reason as protecting themselves in what they saw as an unsafe neighbourhood (see figure 4).⁹⁷

In response, the Western Balkans SALW Control Roadmap (supported by the EU, France and Germany) has a specific target for raising young men’s awareness of the dangers of firearms misuse, and another for reducing the misuse of firearms in violence against women, domestic violence and GBV.⁹⁸ These demand-side approaches are designed to complement supply-side efforts to combat diversion and illicit trafficking.⁹⁹ European-funded NGOs such as Centar E8 in Serbia and Status M in Croatia are conducting complementary efforts through non-violence programmes designed to promote gender equality and positive expressions of masculinity in an attempt to reshape these social norms, including with young perpetrators.¹⁰⁰ Despite these promising efforts, references to men and masculinities remain elusive in international arms control frameworks. However, discussions on youth, which were mentioned in the outcome document of the BMS, may be a diplomatically palatable way to introduce this topic.¹⁰¹

⁹⁵ Božanić, D., *Men and Firearms in South East Europe: Fast Facts* (SEESAC: Belgrade, 2019), pp. 2, 30–32.

⁹⁶ Božanić (note 95), pp. 2, 34–35.

⁹⁷ Božanić (note 95), pp. 2, 42–43.

⁹⁸ SEESAC, *Roadmap for a Successful Solution to the Illegal Possession, Misuse and Trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) and their Ammunition in the Western Balkans by 2024* (SEESAC: Belgrade, 2018), p. 18.

⁹⁹ SEESAC (note 98), p. 15.

¹⁰⁰ Centar E8, ‘Prevenција nasilja’ [Violence prevention], accessed 20 Oct. 2023; and Status M, ‘Inicijativa mladića’ [Young men’s initiative], accessed 20 Oct. 2023.

¹⁰¹ United Nations, General Assembly, A/CONF.192/BMS/2022/1 (note 1), para. 79.

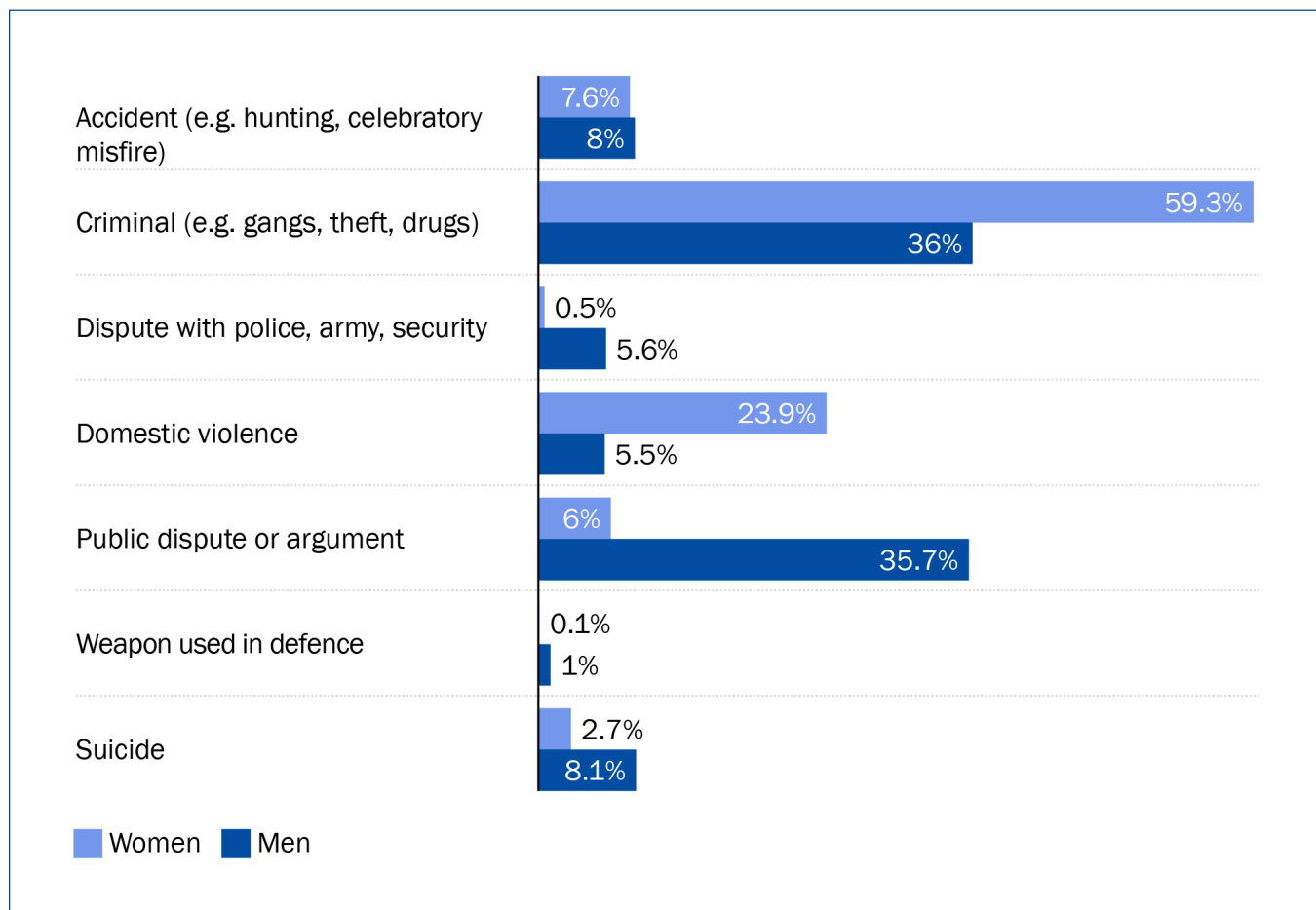


Figure 3. Firearms-related deaths in South Eastern Europe, by gender of the victim and type of incident, 2017

Source: Božanić, D., *Men and Firearms in South East Europe: Fast Facts* (SEESAC: Belgrade, 2019), p. 34.

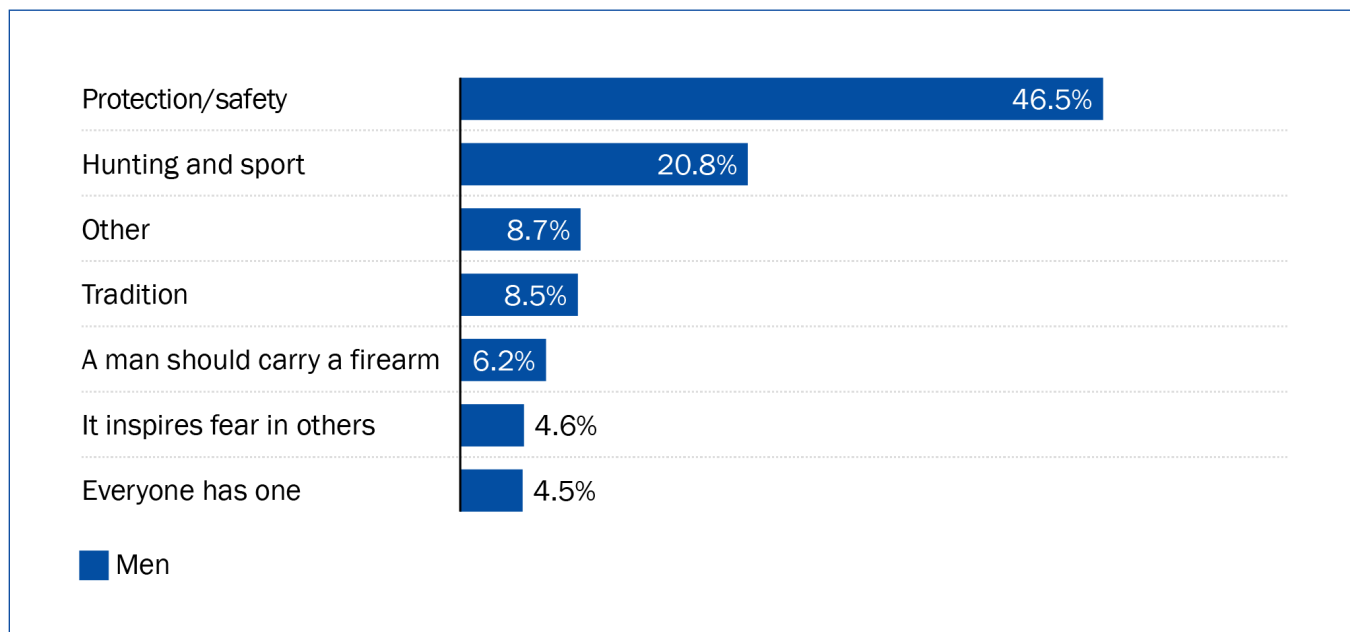


Figure 4. Main reasons for owning a firearm, men in South Eastern Europe, 2017

Source: Božanić, D., *Men and Firearms in South East Europe: Fast Facts* (SEESAC: Belgrade, 2019), p. 42.

Kenya

Cattle rustling is a longstanding issue in the Turkana and Pokot regions of Kenya, near the Ugandan border. It increased with the collapse of the local sugar industry and the reduced availability of arable land due to disputes, climate change and the extractives industry, which left young men with few opportunities to earn the money required to pay dowries and start families.¹⁰² As more men turned to cattle rustling, the greater availability of weapons also made the practice far more deadly than when spears and arrows were used.¹⁰³

Women initially encouraged the practice as marrying rich husbands was their only means to acquire wealth. However, many later lost everything—property, livestock and even their husbands—through revenge attacks.¹⁰⁴ The POTUMA Women’s Forum, established in 2016, sought to address this by boycotting ceremonies that honoured cattle rustlers, seeking dialogue across community lines and negotiating the return of stolen livestock.¹⁰⁵ Local-level organizations like the POTUMA Women’s Forum can also contribute to national efforts to address the illicit diversion and proliferation of SALW by undermining the local market for weapons. Despite this, the forum is chronically short of funding, possibly because this kind of work is under-recognized in international arms control forums and because international cooperation and assistance tends to target national rather than local actors.¹⁰⁶

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Rebalance supply- and demand-side factors through multidisciplinary approaches in EU SALW control policy

The EU could update its 2018 strategy against illicit firearms by reviving some of the demand-side factors that were included in the 2005 strategy. It could also incorporate lessons identified from efforts to harmonize civilian firearms regulations within the EU. In this way, the strategy would contain both technical

¹⁰² UN Women, ‘Kenyan women lead peace efforts in longstanding conflicts’, 24 Oct. 2022.

¹⁰³ Schubiger, E. and Ndunda, E., ‘Mary Kanyaman Ekai: Gender and livestock rustling in northern Kenya’, *The Elephant*, 25 Nov. 2022.

¹⁰⁴ Schubiger and Ndunda (note 103); and UN Women (note 102).

¹⁰⁵ Schubiger and Ndunda (note 103); and UN Women (note 102).

¹⁰⁶ UN Women (note 102).

measures to address illicit SALW and person-centred or cultural measures to address the motivations to illicitly acquire and misuse SALW.

This could be done by engaging EU thematic subject-matter experts from fields such as criminology, sociology, anthropology, public health and gender on the topic of SALW control, even though they may not be considered as SALW specialists. It could also involve documenting and drawing from good practices in complementary efforts to address both supply- and demand-side factors related to the illicit trade and misuse of SALW. There are likely many good examples from within the EU, as well as from EU-funded projects globally.

Collectively, these actions could lead to the EU’s SALW professionals developing a more multidisciplinary skillset. As a result, the EU’s use of diagnostic assessments to simultaneously address supply- and demand-side factors in SALW control activities may increase, and it may identify a broader diversity of national and community-level actors to partner with.

Strengthen the linkages between, and deepen analysis on, gender and SALW in EU policies, particularly related to WPS

A future EU SALW strategy could build on existing gender-related provisions, such as meaningful participation and the prevention of GBV, by outlining the gender dynamics of firearms demand. This would enable the EU to leverage gender as an entry point to discuss demand while further integrating its approaches to small arms control and WPS.

In addition, a future EU action plan on WPS could build on existing actions to understand ‘the gender-specific impacts of the illicit trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons/SALW’, by exploring gender-specific motivations to misuse SALW and unpacking how they shape gender roles, stereotypes, gendered expectations and gender inequality.¹⁰⁷ This approach would easily fit within the prevention pillar. A future document could also analyse the role of men and masculinities, which has not been specifically addressed to date.

In order to maintain credibility when taking this approach in international forums, the EU and its

¹⁰⁷ Council of the EU, EU Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) 2019–2024, EEAS(2019) 747, July 2019, p. 11, Action 5.4.

member states would need to ‘walk the walk’ by ensuring that women from diverse backgrounds are included in their delegations and among experts deployed to support implementation activities.

Promote discussions on gender and the root causes of illicit manufacturing and trafficking of SALW within the Working Group on Firearms and the Firearms Protocol review process

The recent interest of the Working Group on Firearms in discussing the root causes of illicit manufacturing and trafficking of SALW within the Firearms Protocol framework, along with its consideration of gender mainstreaming, presents an opportunity to initiate more discussions on demand-side factors. Prior discussions on how the Firearms Protocol contributes to SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions could be complemented by exploring how activities related to SDG 5 on gender equality could reshape gendered motivations to engage in illicit activities related to firearms.

The Firearms Protocol’s status as a supplement to the UNTOC also provides opportunities to incorporate insights from criminology—and potentially gendered aspects of the protocol on human trafficking. While the narrow scope of the protocol may limit its activities to aligning with, rather than engaging in, efforts to address demand-side factors, the working group could make specific recommendations to other forums. As an active player in Firearms Protocol discussions, the EU would be in a good position to take these suggestions to forums such as the POA, thus promoting an integrated approach.

Leverage the POA as a forum to discuss demand-side factors in SALW control, using gender as an entry point

The POA is the one international mechanism that has an explicit, if currently underused, mandate to discuss demand-side factors.¹⁰⁸ The EU and its member states are well placed to champion this topic and to bring it back into policy discussions and implementation activities. In so doing, it could draw from experts in disciplines such as criminology, sociology,

anthropology, gender equality and public health in order to better incorporate the human dimension of SALW control alongside more technical, supply-side factors.

At the fourth review conference of the POA in June 2024, the EU and other like-minded states could: (a) highlight the importance of addressing motivations to acquire illicit SALW as key to preventing GBV committed with or facilitated by illicit SALW; (b) reframe gender inequality (characterized by rigid gender roles, norms and expectations) and gaps in sustainable development as contributing factors to the illicit trade of SALW, not just as issues that are exacerbated by armed violence; (c) invite experts from diverse academic disciplines and civil society organizations to share good practices and lessons learned in addressing demand-side factors; and (d) consider integrating these experts and their insights into the international cooperation and assistance efforts they fund.

Noting that many good practices in addressing demand-side factors, including from a gender perspective, come from local-level initiatives, the EU could work towards incorporating community-level perspectives in POA policy discussions, while exploring mechanisms to ensure that these actors receive the necessary funding and support.

Use the ATT as a forum to share and exchange good national practices on addressing demand-side factors

The ATT does not have a specific mandate to address demand-side factors or the regulation of civilian firearms. This does not, however, preclude states parties from sharing good practices in preventing the diversion and misuse of SALW from the perspective of effective treaty implementation and post-shipment cooperation. In addition, exporting states can choose to assess the risk of arms exports being used by civilians to commit domestic violence, and whether mitigating measures are adequate if they consider that the scale of the problem in an importing state constitutes serious acts of GBV or violence against women and children. They could also consider supporting importing states parties in implementing mitigation measures, which could address demand-side factors.

While this would be a novel development for the ATT, it aligns with an Argentinian proposal, which

¹⁰⁸ United Nations, General Assembly, A/CONF.192/15 (note 1), para. 7.

many states supported at the ninth conference of states parties in 2023, to develop a good practice guide for the prevention of arms-related GBV through exchanging and discussing national practices.¹⁰⁹ In these discussions, the EU could showcase its integrated approach to addressing supply- and demand-side factors in an effort to reshape the narrative.

V. CONCLUSION

One of the main reasons that international small arms control efforts are yet to realize their full potential is the tendency to restrict the supply of illicit SALW without addressing why demand for these weapons remains strong. This occurs despite the fact that early advocates of arms control efforts specifically highlighted the need to simultaneously address both sides of the issue.

As a consistent gender champion in international forums, the EU, along with its member states and allies, is well positioned to use gender as an entry point and revitalize SALW control. By considering the demand-side factors and advocating for holistic, multidisciplinary and evidence-based approaches, it could get SALW control efforts ‘back on track’. Implementing this at the EU level would involve revisiting the original EU joint action from 1997 that took a more balanced approach to the topic.

While this may entail a fundamental reshaping of recent approaches to international arms control, frameworks such as the POA were initially conceived with the idea that the international community would seek to tackle the root causes of illicit trafficking and misuse in its efforts to reduce armed violence. Moreover, there is a sufficient body of academic research to warrant such a shift, which would be in line with the narratives of the UN Secretary-General reports on small arms, as well as other complementary frameworks such as the New Agenda for Peace.

¹⁰⁹ Permanent Mission of the Argentine Republic to the International Organizations in Geneva, ‘Working Paper of the Argentine Delegation to be Presented at the Ninth Conference of the States Parties of the ATT (Geneva, August 2022)’, 20 Apr. 2023; and ATT, ATT/CSP9/2023/SEC/773/Conf.FinRep.Rev2 (note 83), para. 24(g)(h).

ABBREVIATIONS

ATT	Arms Trade Treaty
BMS	Biennial meeting of states
DDR	Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration
EU	European Union
GBV	Gender-based violence
ITI	International Tracing Instrument
MOSAIC	Modular Small-arms-control Implementation Compendium
POA	UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects
SALW	Small arms and light weapons
SDG	Sustainable development goal
SSR	Security sector reform
UN	United Nations
WPS	Women and peace and security

LIST OF RECENT NON-PROLIFERATION AND DISARMAMENT PAPERS

The Chemical Weapons Convention after its Fifth Review Conference: Key Issues for the European Union

Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Paper no. 87
Alexander Ghionis and Alexander Kelle
February 2024

Feminist Foreign Policy and Nuclear Weapons: Contributions and Implications

Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Paper no. 86
Laura Rose Brown
November 2023

The Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention Confronting False Allegations and Disinformation

Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Paper no. 85
Jean Pascal Zanders
October 2023

Weaponizing Innovation? Mapping Artificial Intelligence-enabled Security and Defence in the EU

Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Paper no. 84
Raluca Csernatoni
July 2023

The EU Space Strategy for Security and Defence: Towards Strategic Autonomy?

Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Paper no. 83
Raúl González Muñoz and Clara Portela
June 2023

Armed Conflict and Nuclear Security: Implications for Europe

Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Paper no. 82
Muhammed Ali Alkiş
April 2023

Opportunities for the European Union to Strengthen Biosecurity in Africa

Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Paper no. 81
Benjamin Wakefield
November 2022



This document has been produced with the financial assistance of the EU. The contents are the sole responsibility of the EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the EU.

A EUROPEAN NETWORK

In July 2010 the Council of the European Union decided to support the creation of a network bringing together foreign policy institutions and research centers from across the EU to encourage political and security-related dialogue and the long-term discussion of measures to combat the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their delivery systems. The Council of the European Union entrusted the technical implementation of this Decision to the EU Non-Proliferation Consortium. In 2018, in line with the recommendations formulated by the European Parliament the names and the mandate of the network and the Consortium have been adjusted to include the word 'disarmament'.

STRUCTURE

The EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium is managed jointly by six institutes: La Fondation pour la recherche stratégique (FRS), the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (HSFK/PRIF), the International Affairs Institute in Rome (IAI), the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS-Europe), the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) and the Vienna Center for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation (VCDNP). The Consortium, originally comprised of four institutes, began its work in January 2011 and forms the core of a wider network of European non-proliferation and disarmament think tanks and research centers which are closely associated with the activities of the Consortium.

MISSION

The main aim of the network of independent non-proliferation and disarmament think tanks is to encourage discussion of measures to combat the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems within civil society, particularly among experts, researchers and academics in the EU and third countries. The scope of activities shall also cover issues related to conventional weapons, including small arms and light weapons (SALW).

www.nonproliferation.eu

EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium

Promoting the European network of independent non-proliferation and disarmament think tanks

FONDATION
pour la RECHERCHE
STRATÉGIQUE

**FOUNDATION FOR
STRATEGIC RESEARCH**

www.frstrategie.org

PRIF  **HSFK**
Peace Research Institute Frankfurt Hessische Stiftung
Friedens- und Konfliktforschung

**PEACE RESEARCH INSTITUTE
FRANKFURT**

www.hsfk.de

 **iai** Istituto Affari
Internazionali

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS INSTITUTE

www.iai.it/en

 **IISS**

**INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE
FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES**

www.iiss.org/en/iiss-europe

 **sipri**

**STOCKHOLM INTERNATIONAL
PEACE RESEARCH INSTITUTE**

www.sipri.org

 **VCDNP**

Vienna Center for Disarmament
and Non-Proliferation

**VIENNA CENTER FOR
DISARMAMENT AND NON-
PROLIFERATION**

www.vcdnp.org