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**Fourth 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**

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**From research to policy: prospects for gender-transformative  
small arms control**

**Working paper submitted by Canada, Chile, Germany, Ireland,  
Thailand, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern  
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Disarmament Research**

**What do gender perspectives bring to small arms control policymaking?**

1. Violence committed with or facilitated by small arms and light weapons impacts people of different ages and genders differently, including women, men, boys and girls. Understanding the gender-differentiated impacts of violence committed with small arms and light weapons, and thus ensuring the effective implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects requires data on violent crime disaggregated by gender and/or sex, and by whether a firearm was used. It also requires the full, equal, meaningful, safe and effective participation of women in technical and policy-related roles.
2. Conceptualizing gender-responsive small arms control within the peace, security and development nexus can lead to more holistic and comprehensive programming that includes actors that have not traditionally been part of small arms control efforts, especially from civil society, such as organizations working on women's rights, gender equality, youth, marginalized communities and sustainable development, as well as parliamentarians.
3. Incorporating gender perspectives into policy discussions can prompt conversations on how small arms control can contribute to armed violence prevention efforts that address the gender-differentiated impacts of violence as well as the



gender-motivated demands for illicit weapons or motivations to engage in illicit trafficking.<sup>1</sup>

4. Implementing the Programme of Action can be more comprehensive and sustainable in the long term if stakeholders build a deeper understanding of the links between rigid gender norms (especially masculinities) underpinning the motivations and societal pressures that drive the acquisition of weapons, engagement in the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, as well as the commission of armed violence, including sexual and gender-based violence.

5. Integrating gender perspectives can also help identify synergies and opportunities for collaboration with other national frameworks that share commitments to reduce armed violence and maintain peace and security, such as those found in national action plans on women and peace and security and on youth and peace and security.<sup>2</sup> Small arms control converges with the women and peace and security agenda on all its four interconnected pillars, namely participation, prevention, protection, and relief and recovery.

6. In addition, gender-transformative small arms control can help identify practical convergences within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals, such as between Goal 5 on gender equality (in particular, target 5.2 on the elimination of violence against women, target 5.5 on women's full and effective participation), Goal 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions (especially target 16.4 on significantly reducing arms flows and 16.1 on reducing of all forms of violence and related deaths) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Engaging a wide variety of national institutions, as well as civil society, academia and research institutions, in comprehensive approaches to addressing these issues within the framework of the Programme of Action can maximize its efficiency and impact.

7. Gender mainstreaming small arms control can thus promote greater coherence in policies to prevent sexual and gender-based violence in conflict and non-conflict settings. For example, collecting and sharing data disaggregated by the presence or use of weapons in conflict-related sexual violence incidents can inform preventive action and policy.

### **The importance of data**

8. In General Assembly resolution [77/55](#) on women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control, Member States were encouraged to disaggregate data on firearms-related deaths where feasible by income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, marital status, migration status, disability, geographical location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts.

9. Research institutions and international organizations have played a key role in filling data gaps. Existing sex- and age-disaggregated data indicate that, globally, 91 per cent of victims of firearms-related deaths are men and boys, and 8 per cent are

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<sup>1</sup> Callum Watson and Aline Shaban, "What happened to demand? Getting small arms control back on track", Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Papers, No. 88 (EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium, 2024). Available at [www.sipri.org/publications/2024/eu-non-proliferation-and-disarmament-papers/what-happened-demand-getting-small-arms-control-back-track](http://www.sipri.org/publications/2024/eu-non-proliferation-and-disarmament-papers/what-happened-demand-getting-small-arms-control-back-track).

<sup>2</sup> Callum Watson, "Meaningful partners: opportunities for collaboration between women, peace and security, and small arms control at the national level" (Geneva, Small Arms Survey, 2024). Available at [www.smallarmssurvey.org/resource/meaningful-partners-opportunities-collaboration-between-women-peace-and-security-and-small](http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/resource/meaningful-partners-opportunities-collaboration-between-women-peace-and-security-and-small).

women and girls.<sup>3,4</sup> Men are more at risk of being injured or killed by a firearm in both conflict and non-conflict settings, including through suicide.<sup>5</sup>

10. Women and girls constitute 66 per cent of victims of intimate partner violence and 55 per cent of victims in family-related violence.<sup>6</sup> In some countries with high femicide rates, more than half of these killings are perpetrated with small arms.<sup>7</sup>

11. In 2023, the United Nations reported that 95 per cent of victims of conflict-related sexual violence were women and girls.<sup>8</sup> While data on conflict-related sexual violence and weapons are limited, a recent report of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) found that in six countries where disaggregated data were available, between 70 and 90 per cent of conflict-related sexual violence incidents that were reported involved a firearm.<sup>9</sup>

12. Although most States systematically collect homicide data on an annual basis, less than a third disaggregate data by the use of a firearm. Gender- and/or sex-disaggregated data on firearm-related homicide tend to be generated on an ad hoc basis and are 6 to 10 years old on average.<sup>10</sup>

13. Women and girls are more likely to be internally displaced, pushed out of school and to care for those injured by firearms or for the family members of those who are killed.<sup>11</sup> This can undermine their full enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights.

### **Women's meaningful participation in small arms control**

14. Women and men have the right to participate meaningfully in negotiations and shape the decisions that affect them. The outcome documents adopted at the third Review Conference, as well as at the seventh and eighth Biennial Meetings of States to Consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action on Small Arms, affirmed this by calling upon States to ensure the full, equal, meaningful, safe and effective participation of women, including in leadership roles and as agents of change, in all policy, planning and implementation processes, mechanisms and forums at all levels related to the implementation of the Programme of Action.

<sup>3</sup> Small Arms Survey, "Global violent deaths in 2021", December 2023. Available at [www.smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/SAS-GVD-2023-update-FINAL\\_0.pdf](http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/SAS-GVD-2023-update-FINAL_0.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Percentages do not come to 100 per cent due to rounding calculations.

<sup>5</sup> Irena Ilic and others, "Worldwide suicide mortality trends by firearm (1990–2019): a joinpoint regression analysis", PLoS ONE, 25 May 2022.

<sup>6</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), "Gender-related killings of women and girls (femicide/feminicide): global estimates of female intimate partner/family-related homicides in 2022", 2023. Available at [www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/briefs/Femicide\\_brief\\_2023.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/briefs/Femicide_brief_2023.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> United Nations, Modular Small-Arms-Control Implementation Compendium, MOSAIC Module 06.10, "Women, men and the gendered nature of small arms and light weapons", 2018, available at <https://front.un-arm.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/MOSAIC-06.10-2017EV1.0.pdf>; and Gianluca Boo and Gergely Hideg, "Turning tides: a new surge in global violent deaths", 4 December 2023, available at <https://smallarmssurvey.medium.com/turning-tides-a-new-surge-in-global-violent-deaths-0482547f9470>.

<sup>8</sup> United Nations, factsheet on the 2023 report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence. Available at <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/202404-UN-annual-report-CRSV-factsheet-covering-2023.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Hana Salama, "Addressing weapons in conflict-related sexual violence: the arms control and disarmament toolbox" (Geneva, UNIDIR, 2023). Available at <https://unidir.org/publication/addressing-weapons-in-conflict-related-sexual-violence-the-arms-control-and-disarmament-toolbox/>.

<sup>10</sup> Small Arms Survey, infographic on gender and global violent deaths, 2024.

<sup>11</sup> A/HRC/44/29, pp. 8–9.

15. Despite these calls, women remain underrepresented in negotiations, comprising, on average, only 34 per cent of diplomats in arms control and disarmament forums.<sup>12</sup> For example, during the seventh Biennial Meeting of States, the proportion of women who delivered statements was 30 per cent and, during the eighth Biennial Meeting of States, this grew only slightly to 34 per cent.

16. The gap is even wider in technical roles, as women represent less than 12 per cent of participants in weapons and ammunition management roles.<sup>13</sup> Women continue to face both structural and social barriers to meaningful participation such as gender stereotyping, discriminatory attitudes and policies in the security sector, lack of adequate infrastructure, unequal access to specialized training opportunities and conscious and unconscious bias due to prevailing gender norms. Overcoming these challenges involves drawing on expertise in gender and diversity mainstreaming to analyse and address barriers in each specific context, as well as engaging men and boys in supporting gender equality.

17. Practices such as gender equality directives in public administration, quotas and gender-sensitive communication and outreach can have a positive impact on increasing women's overall participation in this field.<sup>14</sup> Increasing opportunities for civilians to be trained in technical roles and, in particular, providing targeted training and establishing peer networks, such as the Women in Ammunition Network,<sup>15</sup> to raise visibility of women in technical roles have also been identified as key ways of advancing participation in this field.

18. Civil society also plays an important role in ensuring the effectiveness of national small arms and light weapons control efforts, both as experts and as organizations that engage regularly with and advocate for survivors and affected communities. It is therefore important to ensure that civil society organizations working on women's rights, gender equality, youth and with marginalized communities have the opportunities, knowledge, skills and resources to engage in national action related to small arms and light weapons. This allows for the integration of needs and perspectives of victims and survivors of armed violence while identifying synergies between national small arms and light weapons control measures and the work of civil society organizations.

### **Moving forward: recommendations for the fourth Review Conference**

19. Member States should consolidate and build on the discussions and conclusions on gender-transformative arms control in the Programme of Action through the following recommendations for consideration at the fourth Review Conference:

(a) Reiterate previous commitments on gender mainstreaming from the third Review Conference and the eighth Biennial Meeting of States in the outcome document of the fourth Review Conference and further expand dialogue and action on gender-transformative small arms and light weapons control by including new topics, such as the link between gender roles (especially masculinities) and demand

<sup>12</sup> UNIDIR Gender and Disarmament Hub. Available at <https://unidir.org/tools/gender-disarmament-hub/>.

<sup>13</sup> Hana Salama and Emma Bjertén-Günther, "Women managing weapons: perspectives for increasing women's meaningful participation in weapons and ammunition management" (Geneva, UNIDIR, 2021). Available at <https://unidir.org/publication/women-managing-weapons>.

<sup>14</sup> Renata Hessmann Dalaqua, Manaved Nambiar and Hana Salama, "Best practices for gender equality in conventional arms control: survey results" (Geneva, UNIDIR, 2023). Available at <https://unidir.org/publication/best-practices-for-promoting-gender-equality-in-conventional-arms-control-survey-results/>.

<sup>15</sup> Women in Ammunition Network. See <https://disarmament.unoda.org/2023/05/01/information-bulletin-issue-no-9-may-2023/#woma>.

for illicit small arms and light weapons, while placing a greater emphasis on the role of the Programme of Action in addressing gender-based violence and, in particular, conflict-related sexual violence. These analyses should consider the connections between illicit small arms and light weapons trafficking, gender and other forms of organized crime;

(b) Improve data collection efforts on homicide and other forms of violence, such as conflict-related sexual violence, intimate partner violence and family-related violence, disaggregated by gender and/or sex. These data should specify whether a small arm was used and whether it was acquired illicitly. Where feasible, data should be further disaggregated by income, age, race, ethnicity, marital status, migration status, disability, geographical location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts, where targeted responses are needed to protect specific groups in vulnerable situations;

(c) Identify and act upon synergies and opportunities for collaboration with the women and peace and security agenda, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Sustainable Development Goals. Similarly, regional and national action plans related to the implementation of the Programme of Action should integrate gender perspectives in line with regional and national policy frameworks. This work should be supported by gender advisers or gender focal points<sup>16</sup> where necessary;

(d) Work with gender and diversity experts to identify barriers to women's meaningful participation in decision-making and implementation related to the Programme of Action, including in technical areas related to weapons and ammunition management. Collect gender-/sex-disaggregated data on participation in the field of small arms and light weapons control at both the policy and the implementation level and develop context-specific measures and plans to overcome barriers to participation;

(e) Foster an inclusive approach to policymaking on small arms and light weapons control by ensuring that civil society organizations working on women's rights, gender equality, youth and marginalized communities have the opportunities, knowledge, skills and sufficient resources to engage in small arms and light weapons control at the national, international and multilateral levels.

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<sup>16</sup> While different institutions define this term differently, gender focal points usually comprise a network of individuals in different units who dedicate a percentage of their time (often around 20 per cent) to support gender mainstreaming by advocating, advising and supporting colleagues and monitoring and reporting on progress towards gender equality in their respective areas of work.