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Gender Equality Network for Small Arms Control

FROM PROGRESS TO **PARADIGM SHIFT**

Mapping Global Policy Drivers and Gaps in Gender-Responsive Small Arms Control (2021–2026)

AUGUST 2026

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report was prepared by Lea Lepik, Elan Nelson, Florencia Rebolledo, and Natalie Briggs on behalf of the Gender Equality Network for Small Arms Control (GENSAC). A portion of the research included in this publication was undertaken as part of a project with students in the NYU Wagner Capstone Program for International Development. The authors thank Marta Bautista Forcada, Frida Thomassen, Laurie Mincieli, Emma Bjerten, Briza Silva, and Candelaria Lopez for their inputs and support of this paper. The authors further appreciate the editorial support provided by Thibault Chareton and Symphony Chau.

About the Gender Equality Network for Small Arms Control (GENSAC)

The Gender Equality Network for Small Arms Control (GENSAC) is a network that aims to save lives by making small arms control policies and practices more gender-responsive. The Network endeavors to identify the best international, regional, national, and local practices from a variety of sectors, including representatives of civil society organizations, government, security forces, international organizations, women's groups, conflict prevention, and development communities. In addition, it aims to foster cross-regional learning through the exchange of knowledge and experiences among its regionally diverse members, as well as direct support and accompaniment to their efforts. The Network is supported by the NYU Center on International Cooperation (CIC). More information: www.gensac.network.

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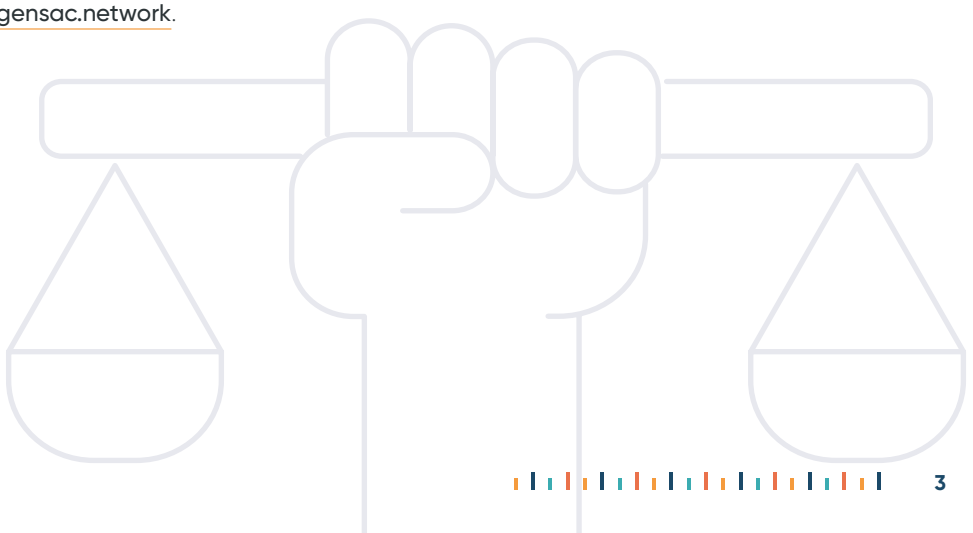
GENSAC, "From Progress to Paradigm Shift," NYU Center on International Cooperation, August 2026, available at www.gensac.network.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Gender-responsive small arms and light weapons (SALW) control has evolved considerably over the past five years. Since the Gender Equality Network for Small Arms Control (GENSAC)'s 2021 issue brief, *From Promises to Progress: Opportunities for Action on Gender-Responsive Small Arms Control in Existing International Commitments*, important advances have been made across international, regional, and national policy frameworks. Gender considerations are now more firmly embedded within arms control discussions, implementation mechanisms have expanded, and the links between firearms proliferation, gender-based violence (GBV), violence prevention, and inclusive security governance are increasingly recognized.

At the same time, the broader political context has become more challenging. Growing contestation around gender equality initiatives, shifting donor priorities, and increasing geopolitical tensions have complicated efforts to advance gender-responsive approaches. As a result, while policy commitments have expanded, implementation remains uneven and significant gaps persist.

This report examines developments in gender-responsive SALW control between 2021 and 2026 through a review of multilateral, regional, and national frameworks. It assesses how these frameworks have evolved, identifies key trends shaping the field, examines persistent barriers to implementation, and highlights emerging opportunities for future action.

Key Findings

1. Gender-responsive SALW control has become increasingly institutionalized

One of the most significant developments since 2021 has been the growing institutionalization of gender-responsive approaches within arms control frameworks. While earlier efforts often focused on recognizing the differentiated impacts of armed violence or increasing women's participation in arms control discussions, recent developments demonstrate a shift towards implementation and operationalization.

Across the United Nations (UN) Programme of Action (PoA), the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), the Global Framework for Through-life Conventional Ammunition Management (GFA), and other international frameworks, gender considerations are increasingly reflected in implementation guidance, institutional coordination mechanisms, reporting practices, and national action plans. While recent multilateral negotiations have focused more on preserving existing commitments than adopting new ones, gender-responsive approaches have become increasingly embedded within arms control governance.

2. Gender-responsive SALW control is progressively understood as part of broader violence prevention and security governance

The relationship between firearms proliferation and GBV is now recognized across a growing number of international, regional, and national policy processes. While the ATT remains the most explicit international instrument linking arms transfers and GBV, similar approaches are increasingly reflected in the PoA, regional firearms roadmaps, the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, and the Global Framework on Ammunition.

The report also identifies emerging opportunities to integrate SALW control within broader violence prevention efforts, including through National Prevention Strategies. These developments reflect a growing understanding that effective arms control contributes not only to security and law enforcement, but also to violence prevention, sustainable development, and gender equality.

3. Regional and national implementation is driving practical progress

Regional organizations and national governments are increasingly translating international commitments into practical implementation. Frameworks such as the Western Balkans Roadmap and the Caribbean Firearms Roadmap demonstrate how gender-responsive approaches can be integrated into monitoring systems, violence-prevention initiatives, data collection, and institutional practices. Emerging regional initiatives in Africa and Central America also suggest growing momentum.

At the national level, national action plans on SALW, WPS national action plans, and National Prevention Strategies are creating new opportunities to operationalize gender-responsive arms control through improved coordination, evidence-based policymaking, and stronger links between arms control and violence prevention.

4. The scope of gender-responsive arms control continues to expand

Gender-responsive approaches are increasingly extending beyond traditional SALW control into broader areas of conventional arms governance. The adoption of the GFA marked an important milestone by incorporating gender considerations from the outset, while ongoing discussions on emerging technologies under the PoA demonstrate growing recognition that technological developments are not gender-neutral.

These developments suggest that gender is increasingly viewed as an integral component of effective arms governance rather than an issue confined solely to firearms policy.

Persistent Gaps and Challenges

Despite these advances, significant barriers continue to impede implementation.

One of the most persistent challenges remains the limited availability and use of gender- and sex-disaggregated data, which constrains evidence-based policymaking and limits governments' ability to understand differentiated patterns of armed violence and evaluate interventions.

Institutional fragmentation also continues to hinder implementation. Arms control, gender equality, violence prevention, and security sector institutions frequently operate independently, limiting coordination and reducing opportunities to integrate gender expertise into arms control processes. While women's participation has increased across many policy spaces, meaningful representation in technical, operational, and decision-making roles remains uneven.

The broader political environment has also become increasingly contested. Growing resistance to gender-related language within some multilateral negotiations has shifted attention from advancing new commitments towards protecting existing ones. At the same time, reductions in development assistance, declining investment in gender equality and WPS initiatives, and increasing global defense spending have created a more challenging environment for financing implementation.

Looking Ahead

Despite these challenges, important opportunities remain. The implementation of ATT Gender Focal Points, ongoing regional roadmap reviews, preparations for the first Meeting of States under the GFA, and continued discussions on technological developments under the PoA all provide opportunities to further strengthen gender-responsive approaches.

Continued investment in evidence generation, gender-disaggregated data, sustainable financing, and stronger integration between arms control, violence prevention, and broader security governance frameworks will be essential to sustaining recent progress.

Overall, the period since 2021 demonstrates that gender-responsive SALW control has matured from an emerging policy agenda into an increasingly institutionalized field of practice. Whether this progress ultimately represents a broader paradigm shift will depend less on the adoption of new commitments than on the ability of states, international organizations, and civil society to translate existing commitments into effective, well-resourced, and sustainable implementation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Gender-responsive small arms control has become an increasingly important area of policy and practice within international peace and security efforts. Recognizing that the proliferation and misuse of small arms affect people differently depending on gender, policymakers and practitioners have increasingly called for approaches that take these differences into account in the design, implementation, and evaluation of arms control measures.[1] Such approaches are closely linked to broader efforts to prevent armed violence, strengthen security sector governance, and promote inclusive peacebuilding.

In 2021, the Gender Equality Network for Small Arms Control (GENSAC) contributed to this discussion through its issue brief titled "**From Promises to Progress: Opportunities for action on gender responsive small arms control in existing international commitments.**"[2] Produced as part of the Issue Brief Series, the publication offered a concise and practical overview of the international policy instruments and tools available to support gender-responsive small arms and light weapons (SALW) control and aimed to encourage action at local, national, regional, and international levels.[3]

Five years later, it is possible to ask a broader question: has gender-responsive small arms control progressed from a set of emerging commitments to a more fundamental shift in the design and implementation of arms control policies? In the intervening years, the global political landscape has changed significantly, with both advances and setbacks reshaping the environment for gender equality and arms control policy. As many governments across the world shift to the right, gender equality initiatives have faced growing political contestation in a number of multilateral and national contexts, creating new challenges for sustaining and advancing gender-responsive approaches to arms control.

Against this backdrop, the present report seeks to map developments in gender-responsive small arms control over the past five years and assess their implications. Drawing on a desk-based literature review of key international, regional, and national policy instruments and frameworks relevant to gender-responsive small arms control, it examines how these policy frameworks have evolved, identifies emerging trends and persistent gaps, and highlights areas for future action. The analysis finds that significant progress has been made in expanding gender-responsive language, institutional mechanisms, and policy frameworks across multiple levels of governance. Despite this, important questions remain regarding the extent to which these commitments have been translated into institutional practice and measurable change.

This report is therefore guided by a central question: to what extent have advances in policy commitments truly translated into practical implementation of gender-responsive small arms control? Implementation remains uneven and increasingly constrained by political contestation, funding pressures, limited data, and institutional fragmentation. Examining both advances and persistent barriers is therefore essential to understanding the current state of the field and identifying priorities for future action.

2. CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

Small Arms, Armed Violence, and Sustainable Development

The illicit proliferation, circulation, and misuse of SALW continue to pose a significant threat to peace, security, and sustainable development. In 2021, nearly 45 percent of global violent deaths were committed with firearms, reflecting the widespread impact of these weapons.[4] Over the past few decades, the international community has taken a range of measures to address the global epidemic of firearm violence through the control of SALW at the multilateral, regional, and national level. These efforts are closely linked to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly with Goals 16.1 and 16.4, which aim to "significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere" and "significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organized crime."[5]

Although SALW control is often discussed within the broader disarmament agenda, it is more accurately understood as a form of practical arms control focused on regulating weapons, preventing their illicit proliferation and misuse, and reducing armed violence. Effective SALW control contributes not only to public safety and security, but also to broader goals related to development, governance, conflict prevention, and peacebuilding.

The Gendered Nature of Armed Violence

The impacts of small arms proliferation and misuse are not experienced equally. Men and boys account for the majority of direct firearm deaths and injuries worldwide and represent the majority of both perpetrators and victims of armed violence.[6] Women and girls, meanwhile, are often disproportionately affected by firearm-enabled intimate partner violence (IPV), sexual and gender-based violence (GBV), coercive control, displacement, and other indirect consequences of armed violence.[7] These differences reflect broader social, economic, and political inequalities that shape exposure to violence, access to security, and participation in decision-making processes.

A gender perspective is therefore essential to understanding and responding to SALW proliferation and misuse. Gender influences patterns of weapon ownership and use, shapes social expectations around violence and security, and affects how individuals and communities experience the consequences of armed violence.[8] As a socially constructed category, gender helps explain not only who is most affected by armed violence, but also the underlying norms and power dynamics that contribute to it. Although formal recognition of these differential impacts raises awareness and legitimizes them institutionally, they can only be addressed through policy that embeds a gendered perspective in its design.

Research demonstrates that the availability of weapons, such as firearms, is a significant risk factor for GBV.[9] While not all countries collect data disaggregated by sex or by method of killing, evidence indicates that firearms are frequently used to perpetrate, facilitate, or intensify violence against women and girls.[10] As a result, strengthening small arms control can contribute directly to the prevention of GBV and violence against women and girls (VAWG), both in conflict-affected and non-conflict settings.[11]

What Is Gender-Responsive SALW Control?

Over time, the language and practice of integrating gender perspectives into arms control have evolved. Early efforts focused primarily on increasing awareness of the differentiated impacts of armed violence on women. Subsequent approaches sought to ensure that policies were gender-sensitive by acknowledging these differences and avoiding unintended harms. More recently, attention has shifted towards gender-responsive approaches, which seek not only to recognize gender inequalities but also to address them through policy design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.[12]

Gender-responsive small arms control can be understood as an approach in which all policies, programs, and activities related to arms control are designed and implemented in ways that are non-discriminatory, equally benefit women and men, and seek to correct existing gender imbalances and inequalities.[13] In practice, this may include collecting sex- and age-disaggregated data, integrating gender analysis into policy development, addressing the links between firearms and GBV, promoting the meaningful participation of women in decision-making processes, and ensuring that arms control interventions respond to the needs and experiences of different population groups.

Importantly, the evolution of gender-responsive SALW control reflects a broader shift in how policymakers understand the relationship between gender and security. Earlier approaches often focused primarily on women as victims of armed violence and on increasing women's participation in security processes. More recent approaches increasingly examine the role of gender norms, masculinities, power relations, and social expectations in shaping patterns of firearm ownership, use, and violence. This shift has expanded the analytical scope of gender-responsive SALW control beyond participation alone and towards a more comprehensive understanding of the social drivers of armed violence.

Gender-Responsive SALW Control in the Broader Peace and Security Agenda

Gender-responsive SALW control is closely linked to broader international efforts to promote gender equality, prevent violence, and strengthen inclusive security governance. A key foundation for this work lies in the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. The WPS agenda promotes women's participation in peace and security processes, protection from violence, conflict prevention, and gender-responsive recovery. The WPS agenda provides a critical framework for integrating gender perspectives into arms control, armed violence prevention, and security sector reform.[14]

Over time, growing recognition of the relationship between firearms proliferation, armed violence, and gender inequality has led to increased attention to gender considerations across a range of international and regional policy processes. These developments have helped establish a broader normative foundation for understanding that arms control is not gender-blind and that effective responses must account for the differentiated ways in which women, men, girls, and boys experience insecurity and violence.

3. EVOLUTION OF MULTILATERAL POLICY FRAMEWORKS

The international policy landscape on SALW is shaped by a set of interconnected multilateral frameworks that collectively aim to prevent, combat, and eradicate the illicit trade and misuse of these weapons. Over the past five years, key global instruments and processes, including the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons (UNPoA), as well as complementary frameworks such as the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) and the WPS agenda, have continued to evolve in response to emerging challenges. These include the diversification of illicit trafficking patterns, technological developments, and growing recognition of the differentiated and gendered impacts of armed violence. Additionally, the adoption of the GFA in 2023 represented a fundamental shift in the perception of ammunition's role in SALW control, and the need for diversity in administering policy. Together, these frameworks provide normative guidance, foster international cooperation, and increasingly emphasize inclusive, evidence-based, and gender-responsive approaches to SALW control. The following section outlines key developments across these processes over the past five years.

UN Programme of Action on SALW (PoA)

Adopted in 2001, the United Nations (UN) Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (PoA) remains the principal global framework guiding international efforts to address the illicit proliferation and misuse of SALW. Through the PoA, States have committed to strengthening national legislation, improving stockpile management and tracing systems, enhancing international cooperation and assistance, and addressing the illicit trade in SALW.15 In 2005, the UN also adopted the International Tracing Instrument (ITI), which requires States to ensure that weapons are properly marked and that records are kept in a timely and reliable manner. The ITI provides a framework for cooperation in weapons tracing which fulfills one of the commitments governments made in the PoA. While implementation is reviewed periodically through Biennial Meetings of States (BMS) and Review Conferences, the integration of gender considerations into the PoA process has accelerated considerably over the past decade.

As background to the developments examined in this report, the Third Review Conference (RevCon3) in 2018 marked an important turning point, with States recognizing for the first time the links between the illicit trade in SALW, GBV, and broader human rights concerns.[16] This development helped align the PoA more closely with other international frameworks, including the WPS agenda and the ATT, which had already begun incorporating gender considerations into their implementation frameworks.

Since 2018, progress on integrating gender considerations into the PoA has been consolidated through Biennial Meeting of states processes,[17] and expanded and deepened significantly at RevCon4 (2024). At BMS meetings in 2021 (BMS7) and 2022 (BMS8), additional language was included in the Outcome Documents. Notably, BMS7 highlighted the connection between illicit small arms and gender-based and sexual violence, framing arms control as essential to preventing such harms. States also encouraged the collection of sex-, age-, and disability-disaggregated data to support evidence-based policymaking.[18] BMS7 encouraged States to harmonize national small arms policies with the WPS agenda. The 2022 meeting (BMS8) built on earlier commitments but introduced stronger, more action-oriented language. States again affirmed the importance of women's participation, but BMS8 went further by describing women as "agents of change" and emphasizing their presence in leadership roles, not just participation. BMS8 advanced institutional coordination by recommending that national focal points for the PoA coordinate directly with focal points for the WPS agenda, strengthening cross-agenda alignment. It also referenced the implementation of gender- and youth-based action plans, and again called for sex-, age-, and disability-disaggregated data to support gender-sensitive policymaking.[19]

The Fourth Review Conference, which took place in 2024, represents the most significant advancement of gender-related language under the PoA process to date. Twenty-three of the 228 paragraphs in the final outcome document of RevCon4 contain gender-related language. The document recognizes gender roles, norms, and expectations for women and men to acquire illicit arms. It includes new language on violence associated with SALW, new references to encouraging the engagement and participation of men and boys in mainstreaming a gender perspective as well as new language on public and mental health concerns. It also refers to updated language such as gender-responsive policies instead of gender-sensitive policies as in BMS8.[20]

Reporting trends during this period suggest growing attention to gender-responsive implementation. The number of States integrating gender considerations in national arms control has consistently and substantially increased over time (74 percent of reporting states in 2024).[21] Despite increasing references to gender in policy frameworks, relatively few States reported collecting sex-disaggregated data on armed violence, limiting the ability of governments to design, implement, and evaluate evidence-based interventions. In the 2026 PoA reporting cycle, thirty-one Member States reported that they collected sex-disaggregated data,[22] a crucial piece of information that can help states better design strategies to combat the illicit proliferation of small arms.

The Ninth Biennial Meeting of States (BMS9), held in June 2026 under the theme of technological developments for diversion prevention and detection,[23] took place in a more politically contested environment than RevCon4. Negotiations were marked by efforts from some States to reopen discussion on previously agreed gender-related language. While the meeting did not significantly expand gender-related commitments, the outcome document retained references to mainstreaming gender perspectives and evidence-based gender-responsive policymaking and programming.[24] In doing so, BMS9 preserved many of the gains achieved at RevCon4, despite broader efforts by some States to limit the expansion of gender-related language in multilateral processes.

Beyond the outcome document itself, discussions surrounding BMS9 highlighted growing interest in ensuring that gender considerations remain integrated into emerging areas of SALW control. Throughout both the BMS9 process and consultations related to the Open-Ended Technical Expert Group (OETEG), established at RevCon4 in 2024 to examine technological developments relevant to the implementation of the PoA and ITI, Member States, international organizations, and civil society actors emphasized the importance of considering the differentiated impacts of technological developments and ensuring that future technical discussions mainstream a gender perspective.[25] These discussions reflected a growing recognition that emerging technologies, diversion prevention measures, and tracing systems are not gender-blind and may have different implications for women, men, girls, and boys.

Taken together, developments between 2021 and 2026 demonstrate a continued expansion of gender considerations within the PoA process. While progress has not been linear and important implementation challenges remain, gender-responsive approaches have become increasingly embedded in discussions on SALW control, contributing to a broader understanding of the relationship between arms control, violence prevention, and inclusive security governance.

Arms Trade Treaty

The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), adopted in 2013, established common international standards for the international trade in conventional arms and sought to prevent and eradicate illicit arms transfers. A distinctive feature of the Treaty is its explicit recognition of GBV. Article 7(4) requires States Parties, when conducting export assessments, to consider the risk that conventional arms could be used to commit or facilitate serious acts of GBV or violence against women and children.[26] As one of the few legally binding provisions linking arms transfers and GBV, Article 7(4) represented an important milestone in integrating gender considerations into international arms control frameworks.

Despite the inclusion of Article 7(4) in the Treaty text, implementation remained limited during the ATT's early years. While States Parties periodically discussed Treaty implementation through annual Conferences of States Parties (CSPs), gender issues received relatively little attention, and there was limited guidance on how States should operationalize GBV risk assessments in practice.

Assessing implementation of Article 7(4) has also proven difficult due to limited transparency in national export licensing decisions. Although the provision entered into force with the Treaty in 2014, publicly available evidence of its application remains scarce. A 2024 analysis by Control Arms found that only one surveyed State Party reported denying transfers, in whole or in part, on the basis of gender considerations under Articles 7.1 or 7.4.[27] However, because export licensing decisions are often confidential, and States are generally not required to disclose detailed justifications for transfer denials, it remains difficult to determine how frequently Article 7(4) has been applied in practice.

Before examining developments since 2021, it is important to note that a significant shift occurred at CSP5 in 2019, when gender and GBV were elevated as a priority theme within ATT discussions.[28] States Parties encouraged greater gender balance in delegations and panels, supported efforts to improve understanding of the gendered impacts of armed violence through research and data collection, and called for increased information exchange on national implementation practices.[29] These discussions marked an important step in moving gender from a relatively narrow legal obligation under Article 7(4) towards a more visible and structured area of engagement within the ATT framework.

Between 2021 and 2025, subsequent CSPs continued to build upon this foundation. Discussions increasingly focused on strengthening implementation of Article 7(4), improving information sharing among States Parties, and developing a more systematic understanding of how arms transfers can contribute to GBV and violence against women and children. States were encouraged to exchange information on national measures to assess and mitigate GBV risks, including in relation to stockpile security and transfer controls. During this period, ATT discussions also increasingly emphasized the importance of collecting and utilizing sex-disaggregated data, supporting research, and promoting the meaningful participation of women in ATT processes.

An important development occurred at CSP10 in 2024. States Parties requested continued discussions on the implementation of Articles 6 and 7, including risks related to GBV and violence against women and children, with the objective of deepening understanding and assessing the feasibility of voluntary guidance.[30] The Conference also welcomed proposals aimed at strengthening the integration of gender considerations throughout ATT processes, including recommendations to establish gender focal points, strengthen information exchange on good practices related to GBV risk assessments, and improve coordination across ATT working groups. In addition, States Parties reaffirmed commitments to gender-balanced participation in ATT meetings and supported the continued collection of gender-disaggregated participation data.

The most significant institutional development during the period under review occurred at CSP11 in 2025 with the formal establishment of gender focal points within the ATT framework.[31] Created as voluntary positions with two-year mandates, the gender focal points were tasked with encouraging the application

of a human rights-based approach, supporting the consideration of GBV risks in implementation practices, and facilitating continuity and coordination of gender-related discussions across working groups and CSPs.[32] Their creation reflected growing recognition that gender considerations required greater coordination and sustained attention across ATT discussions and implementation mechanisms. The first gender focal points appointed under the mechanism were Mexico, Spain, and Togo.

Additional developments at CSP11 included requests for further discussion on integrating guidance related to Article 7(4) into the Voluntary Guide on Implementing Articles 6 and 7, as well as support for making relevant guidance available as a standalone resource for States Parties.[33] CSP11 also reaffirmed commitments to improving participation and representation within ATT processes. These discussions reflected an increasing emphasis on translating existing commitments into practical implementation measures rather than solely reaffirming normative principles.

The establishment of gender focal points represents a potentially important mechanism for strengthening continuity and coordination across ATT processes. It will also provide an opportunity in August 2026 to assess how institutional mechanisms can support the integration of gender considerations into implementation, reporting, information exchange, and policy development. For the first time, at CSP12 there will be an agenda item during the plenary meeting on "gender-related commitments."

Developments between 2021 and 2026 demonstrate a gradual but significant expansion of gender considerations within the ATT framework. While implementation remains largely dependent on voluntary measures and national practice, discussions increasingly moved beyond the existence of Article 7(4) itself towards broader questions of implementation, participation, information exchange, and institutional coordination. Reports by ATT Monitor and ongoing civil society analyses continue to identify transparency and reporting challenges limiting the ability of States Parties and observers to fully assess how gender-related commitments are being implemented in practice.[34] As a result, gender has become a more visible and structured component of ATT governance than in previous periods, while important questions remain regarding implementation and accountability.

UN Global Framework on Through-Life Conventional Ammunition Management (GFA)

The adoption of the UN Global Framework for Through-Life Conventional Ammunition Management (GFA) in 2023 marked one of the most significant developments in conventional arms control in recent years. For the first time, States agreed to a dedicated global framework addressing ammunition management across its entire lifecycle, filling a longstanding gap in international arms control efforts. The framework seeks to reduce the risks associated with unsafe, insecure, and unsustainable ammunition management practices, including diversion, illicit trafficking, unplanned explosions at munitions sites, and the broader humanitarian and security consequences of ammunition misuse.[35]

Historically, ammunition management received considerably less attention than weapons control within international arms control processes. While SALW have long been the subject of dedicated international instruments and political commitments, ammunition remained largely absent from multilateral frameworks due to political sensitivities, technical complexity, and concerns relating to national sovereignty and military readiness.[36] As a result, approaches to ammunition management often developed through regional initiatives, technical guidance, and national practices rather than through a comprehensive global framework.[37]

The adoption of the GFA therefore represented an important milestone in addressing this gap. In addition to establishing a common set of objectives and commitments for ammunition management, the framework recognizes the broader social, humanitarian, and development impacts associated with ammunition diversion and misuse.

Notably, unlike many earlier arms control frameworks, gender considerations were incorporated into the GFA from the outset rather than introduced through subsequent review processes. Gender is explicitly integrated throughout the framework, most prominently through Objective 14, which calls on States to "mainstream gender perspectives in through-life conventional ammunition management efforts."[38] The GFA recognizes that women, men, girls, and boys may experience the impacts of ammunition diversion, armed violence, and insecurity differently and encourages States to incorporate gender perspectives into policy development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. It also calls for the promotion of women's participation in ammunition management processes and recognizes the value of inclusive and representative decision-making. Unlike many high-level commitments, Objective 14 offers specific enabling measures, such as promoting women's participation in national institutions, sharing best practices on gender mainstreaming, and providing implementation measures.[39] By institutionalizing gender responsiveness in a technically complex and politically sensitive domain, it transforms gender from a peripheral concern into a core pillar of effective ammunition governance. In this sense, the GFA represents one of the clearest efforts to move gender from the margins of ammunition governance to a more central place within it.

The framework further encourages States to collect and utilize relevant data, cooperate with civil society and international organizations, and strengthen capacities for gender-responsive implementation where appropriate.[40] In doing so, the GFA reflects growing recognition that effective ammunition management requires consideration not only of technical and security dimensions but also of broader social and human security impacts.

Since the adoption of the GFA, a range of actors, including the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), the UN Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), regional organizations, and civil society, have begun developing guidance and implementation support tools to assist States in operationalizing the framework. These efforts have included work on reporting practices, multi-stakeholder cooperation, and the integration of gender perspectives into ammunition management. One notable example is the Women Managing Ammunition (WoMA) initiative, which seeks to strengthen women's participation and leadership in ammunition management and to promote gender-responsive approaches across the ammunition lifecycle.[41]

Implementation efforts remain in their early stages. However, the development of voluntary reporting mechanisms and implementation guidance suggests increasing attention to accountability and practical application. As States prepare for the first Meeting of States in 2027, discussions are beginning to focus on implementation priorities, reporting practices, international cooperation, and capacity-building needs.

The adoption of the GFA represents an important expansion of the international arms control architecture. By establishing a dedicated global framework for ammunition management and integrating gender considerations from the outset, it has created new opportunities for advancing more comprehensive and inclusive approaches to conventional arms control.

Firearms Protocol

The Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition (Firearms Protocol), adopted in 2001 as a supplement to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC), is the principal legally binding international instrument addressing the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms.[42] The Protocol seeks to strengthen international cooperation in preventing and combating firearms trafficking through measures relating to marking, record-keeping, tracing, licensing, and information exchange.

Unlike more recent arms control frameworks, the Firearms Protocol does not contain explicit references to gender, gender equality, or GBV. At the time of its adoption, the Protocol was primarily conceived as a technical and law-enforcement instrument aimed at combating organized crime and illicit trafficking. As a result, discussions of gendered impacts, participation, or gender-responsive implementation were largely absent from both the treaty text and early implementation efforts.

A notable development came at the eleventh session of the Conference of the Parties to UNTOC in 2022, when States recognized the negative impact of illicit firearms trafficking on the lives of women, men, girls, and boys, acknowledged that preventing and combating such trafficking is important for addressing GBV, and encouraged States and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to advance the gender and age dimensions of firearms policies and programs.[43] The resolution also encouraged the collection of gender- and age-disaggregated data and greater attention to gender-specific impacts. This direction was reinforced again at the twelfth session of the Conference of Parties in 2024, when the Conference reaffirmed the need to address the human dimension of firearms-related crime, including the needs of victims, and to consider its gender and age dimensions more systematically.[44]

In 2024, UNODC reported that it had reviewed its Global Firearms Program with the aim of strengthening gender-responsiveness across all pillars of intervention, including through the possible development of a dedicated training module on the gender dimensions of the criminal justice response to firearms trafficking and gender-mainstreaming training for staff. UNODC's 2023–2030 strategy on illicit firearms and interconnected threats similarly places greater emphasis on the human impact of firearms trafficking and highlights the importance of attention to women and youth.[45] More recently, UNODC has also produced a dedicated 2025 conference room paper on preventing and addressing firearms-related GBV against women, suggesting a growing institutional willingness to connect firearms control more directly to broader gender equality and protection agendas.[46]

Developments since 2021 demonstrate an increasing effort to integrate gender considerations into the implementation and interpretation of the Firearms Protocol. Although the Protocol itself has remained largely unchanged, gender-responsive approaches have become more visible within firearms-related research, technical assistance, and policy discussions.

The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda

The WPS Agenda, established through UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 (2000) and subsequent resolutions, provides one of the most important normative foundations for gender-responsive small arms control. The Agenda recognizes that women's meaningful participation in peace and security processes, the prevention of violence, and the promotion of gender equality are essential to achieving sustainable peace and security. Although the WPS Agenda is not an arms control framework, it has increasingly informed discussions on the gendered impacts of armed violence and the role of arms control in violence prevention.

Over the past two decades, successive Security Council resolutions have strengthened recognition of the relationship between the proliferation of SALW, GBV, and women's security. Resolutions such as UNSCR 2122 (2013), UNSCR 2242 (2015), and UNSCR 2467 (2019) highlight the importance of addressing the illicit transfer, destabilizing accumulation, and misuse of SALW, particularly in relation to conflict-related sexual violence and violence against women and girls. These developments helped establish stronger conceptual and policy linkages between the WPS Agenda and arms control processes.

Since 2021, the UN Secretary-General's annual reports on WPS have continued to highlight the role of SALW in driving conflict-related and domestic violence.[47] These reports have repeatedly emphasized that the widespread availability and misuse of firearms undermine both the participation and prevention pillars of the WPS Agenda. The presence of firearms can limit women's ability to safely engage in political, community, and peacebuilding processes, while also contributing to insecurity, GBV, and heightened risks of harm in both conflict and non-conflict settings.

Growing attention has also been paid to the role of firearms in facilitating violence against women and girls, including IPV, femicide, and other forms of GBV. As a result, discussions of gender-responsive SALW control have increasingly drawn upon WPS commitments and objectives, reinforcing the idea that arms control can contribute to violence prevention, gender equality, and more inclusive security governance.

The relationship between the WPS Agenda and SALW control has also become increasingly visible at the national level. A growing number of national action plans on WPS now include references to SALW, armed violence prevention, or weapons-related GBV.[48] At the same time, SALW-specific policies and programs have increasingly drawn upon WPS frameworks to support women's participation, strengthen prevention efforts, and address the differentiated impacts of armed violence. These developments have contributed to greater policy coherence between arms control, violence prevention, and gender equality initiatives.

Developments since 2021 demonstrate the continued relevance of the WPS Agenda as a normative and policy framework supporting gender-responsive SALW control. While the Agenda does not establish specific arms control obligations, it has helped strengthen recognition of the links between firearms proliferation, GBV, women's participation, and violence prevention, providing an important foundation for gender-responsive approaches across a range of arms control and security processes.

4. EVOLUTION OF REGIONAL POLICY FRAMEWORKS AND ROADMAPS

Regional policy frameworks and roadmaps play a critical role in translating global commitments on SALW into context-specific action. While multilateral instruments establish overarching norms and standards, regional processes are often better positioned to respond to localized dynamics of armed violence, trafficking patterns, and governance challenges. Over the past decade, regional organizations and initiatives have increasingly developed coordinated strategies, roadmaps, and action plans that promote practical implementation, peer learning, and accountability among states.

These frameworks frequently emphasize cross-border cooperation, capacity-building, and data-sharing, while also providing entry points for integrating gender-responsive and inclusive approaches tailored to regional realities. In many contexts, regional roadmaps have also served as important platforms for aligning national policies with international commitments, mobilizing donor support, and fostering collaboration between governments, civil society, and international partners. The following section highlights key developments and trends across regional SALW control frameworks and roadmaps.

The degree to which gender considerations have been integrated into regional SALW control frameworks varies considerably. Some frameworks have emerged as leading examples of gender-responsive arms control, incorporating gender perspectives into their objectives, monitoring systems, and implementation mechanisms. Others have begun to recognize the relevance of gender but remain at earlier stages of integration, while newer initiatives present opportunities to strengthen gender-responsive approaches as they continue to develop. The following section highlights key developments across regional frameworks and initiatives since 2021.

Regional Frameworks with Advanced Gender Integration

WESTERN BALKANS FIREARMS ROADMAP

The Roadmap for a Sustainable Solution to the Illegal Possession, Misuse and Trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons and their Ammunition in the Western Balkans,[49] adopted in 2018 by the six Western Balkan jurisdictions (WB6) with the support of the European Union and technical assistance from the South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC), is widely regarded as one of the most advanced examples of gender-responsive SALW control at the regional level.

From its inception, the Roadmap integrated gender considerations into both its analytical framework and implementation approach. The original framework (2018–2024) was grounded in a dedicated gender analysis of SALW dynamics in the Western Balkans, which identified gender inequality and GBV as central factors shaping patterns of arms misuse.[50] This early integration positioned the Roadmap ahead of many global policy frameworks, where gender considerations were often incorporated only after initial adoption.

A key strength of the Roadmap is how robustly it is grounded in evidence. Several key performance indicators (KPIs) require the collection and reporting of sex- and age-disaggregated data relating to firearms incidents, victimization, and perceptions of security.[51] These measures have helped institutionalize data collection practices across participating jurisdictions and have supported a more nuanced understanding of how armed violence affects different population groups.[52]

The Roadmap also explicitly recognizes the relationship between firearms and GBV. It sets targets to reduce the misuse of weapons in domestic violence and other forms of violence against women, and it seeks to strengthen institutional awareness and response capacities.[53] In addition, the framework promotes the meaningful participation of women across all aspects of SALW control, including policymaking, implementation, and technical and operational roles traditionally dominated by men.[54]

A comparison with the first phase (2018–2024) suggests that the second phase of the Roadmap (2025–2030) builds upon these foundations and reflects a more sophisticated understanding of gender and armed violence. The revised framework places greater emphasis on the role of gender norms, particularly harmful constructions of masculinity that may contribute to weapons demand, misuse, and risk-taking behaviors.[55] It also seeks to move beyond gender mainstreaming as a policy objective and towards the operationalization of gender-responsive approaches within routine institutional practice, including law enforcement, investigations, and violence prevention initiatives.[56]

The Western Balkans Roadmap demonstrates how gender considerations can be integrated throughout the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of regional SALW control efforts. Its evolution over time reflects broader shifts within the field towards more comprehensive and operationalized approaches to gender-responsive arms control.

CARIBBEAN FIREARMS ROADMAP

Adopted in October 2020 by CARICOM Member States and the Dominican Republic, the Caribbean Firearms Roadmap marked an important milestone in the region addressing the illicit proliferation of firearms and ammunition, with a shared framework of goals, targets, and priority actions through 2030.[57] While its central purpose is to strengthen regional responses to trafficking, diversion, and misuse, the roadmap is also significant for introducing a broader prevention vision into the Caribbean policy space.

From its adoption, the roadmap integrated gender-responsive elements across both its priorities and implementation framework. It explicitly encourages the inclusion of women and youth in efforts to reduce armed violence, promoting prevention-based approaches and community-level interventions where gender is treated as a core pillar.[58] This is reflected in specific commitments, including Goal 1, Action 1.2.3, which links firearms legislation with domestic violence prevention frameworks, recognizing the intersection between arms control and GBV.[59] The roadmap also established gender-sensitive indicators to track progress, including women's and men's participation in arms control processes, the integration of gender and youth considerations in legislation, and risk assessments accounting for differentiated impacts of trafficking and armed violence.[60] These provisions align with broader international commitments, including the ATT and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16.4.

These features positioned the Caribbean Roadmap as an early regional framework linking arms control objectives with prevention, participation, and gender-responsive governance. However, developments between 2021 and 2026 suggest uneven implementation with respect to its gender-responsiveness. While annual Meetings of States advanced implementation overall, annual reports showed limited substantive discussion of gender as a standalone issue until 2025, when states committed to more inclusive implementation by engaging civil society, women, and youth in national and regional processes. That same year, the Midterm Review introduced a more critical reflection, explicitly recognizing that "cross-cutting issues of gender equality, women's empowerment and youth inclusion have not been prioritized under the Roadmap."[61] This acknowledgment is significant because it shifts attention from the existence of gender commitments to persistent gaps in operationalization.

These developments suggest both progress and tension: while gender has been embedded in the framework since adoption, implementation has not consistently matched those commitments. In this sense, the Caribbean Firearms Roadmap remains one of the more advanced regional frameworks for integrating gender into SALW control, particularly in terms of formal commitments and monitoring structures, but challenges remain in prioritization, consistency, and follow-through across participating states.

CONCLUSION: Together, the Western Balkans and Caribbean roadmaps demonstrate how regional frameworks can serve as laboratories for gender-responsive SALW control. While they differ in their approaches and levels of implementation, both illustrate a growing trend towards integrating gender considerations into regional arms control governance, data collection, violence prevention, and institutional practice.

Regional Frameworks with Emerging Gender Integration

CENTRAL AMERICAN FIREARMS ROADMAP

Published in 2025 under the Central American Integration System (*Sistema de la Integración Centroamericana*, SICA), the Central American Firearms Roadmap represents an important effort to strengthen regional cooperation in preventing and combating the illicit trafficking and misuse of firearms, ammunition, and explosives.[62] As one of the newest regional roadmaps, it signals growing recognition in Central America of the need for coordinated responses that combine control measures with prevention-oriented approaches.

While the roadmap does not include extensive discussion of GBV or establish a comprehensive gender-responsive approach across its framework, it does recognize the role of firearms in facilitating different forms of violence, including sexual and domestic violence.[63] This acknowledgment, even if limited, is significant, as it opens space for the future development of stronger gender-responsive provisions.

Compared to more established regional frameworks, gender is not yet treated as a cross-cutting pillar of implementation, nor is it systematically integrated throughout the roadmap's objectives, indicators, or reporting structures. Nevertheless, the inclusion of references to domestic and sexual violence provides an important foundation for future efforts to strengthen gender-responsive implementation. As review and implementation mechanisms develop, the roadmap may offer opportunities to deepen discussions on gender, strengthen recognition of the links between firearms and GBV, and integrate gender considerations more systematically into regional cooperation efforts.

NAIROBI PROTOCOL

The Nairobi Protocol for the Prevention, Control and Reduction of Small Arms and Light Weapons, adopted in 2004 under the Regional Centre on Small Arms (RECSA), remains one of Africa's most significant legally binding regional instruments addressing illicit SALW proliferation.[64] While gender considerations were not incorporated into the original text, the importance of gender-responsive implementation has since received increasing attention over time.

A particularly important development occurred through the twenty-year review of the Protocol conducted by RECSA and UNIDIR. The review identified gender-responsive SALW control as a critical but underdeveloped area of implementation and highlighted the need to integrate gender considerations more systematically across SALW policies and programs.[65]

The review emphasized the importance of collecting sex-disaggregated data, strengthening women's participation in SALW decision-making processes, and addressing the links between firearms proliferation and GBV.[66] It also highlighted the broader contribution that gender-responsive SALW control can make to violence prevention, sustainable development, and the WPS agenda.[67] While further efforts are needed to translate these recommendations into national implementation, the review represents an important step in strengthening regional recognition of gender-responsive approaches within the

Nairobi Protocol framework.

ECOWAS CONVENTION ON SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons provides a legally binding framework governing the transfer, manufacture, and possession of SALW across West Africa. Through measures relating to transfer controls, stockpile management, marking and tracing, and the establishment of National Commissions, the Convention seeks to reduce illicit proliferation and strengthen regional security cooperation.[68]

Although the Convention reflects broader commitments associated with the WPS agenda, gender is not systematically integrated throughout its provisions. Recent developments nevertheless suggest growing awareness of the importance of gender-responsive implementation. In 2025, ECOWAS and the UN Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa (UNREC) convened a regional workshop that specifically explored gender-responsive approaches to arms control implementation.[69] While subsequent coordination meetings focused primarily on technical and operational priorities, these discussions indicate increasing regional interest in strengthening gender integration within SALW control efforts.

At present, gender-responsive approaches remain more visible within associated implementation activities and capacity-building initiatives than within the Convention's core implementation framework itself. However, engagements such as the ECOWAS and UNREC workshop suggests opportunities for further development in this area.

AFRICAN UNION SILENCING THE GUNS INITIATIVE

The African Union Silencing the Guns Initiative aims to end armed conflict, curb the proliferation of illicit weapons, and promote sustainable peace across Africa. Originally launched in 2013 with a target date of 2020, its mandate was extended to 2030, aligning with the UN's SDGs target date.[70] Since its launch, the initiative has emphasized conflict prevention, disarmament, governance reform, and post-conflict reconstruction as central components of its approach.[71]

The initiative calls for the meaningful participation of women in peace processes, while also highlighting the need to prevent and respond to GBV.[72] However, gender considerations have not been systematically integrated across all aspects of implementation, and progress has varied significantly across participating states and regions.

Recent discussions linked to the initiative have highlighted growing recognition of the role that women and youth can play in community-based disarmament and violence prevention efforts. For example, a 2025 side event examining progress under Africa Amnesty Month emphasized the importance of engaging women and youth in awareness-raising, voluntary weapons surrender programs, and grassroots peacebuilding initiatives.[73] These discussions suggest increasing attention to inclusive approaches to arms control and violence prevention, even as broader implementation challenges remain.

CONCLUSION: Taken together, these frameworks illustrate a broader pattern of emerging gender integration across regional SALW processes. While gender considerations are increasingly recognized as relevant to arms control, violence prevention, and security governance, implementation remains uneven and often dependent on supplementary reviews, workshops, and capacity-building initiatives rather than fully institutionalized mechanisms. Nevertheless,

these developments suggest growing momentum towards more gender-responsive approaches across diverse regional contexts.

Emerging Regional Initiatives

ANDEAN ROADMAP

The Andean Firearms Roadmap, currently under development, represents an emerging effort to establish a coordinated regional framework to address firearms-related violence and trafficking in the Andean region, and has been acknowledged at the international level alongside other regional roadmaps.[74] Building on lessons from the Caribbean and Central American roadmaps, it is expected to define shared priorities across areas such as regulatory strengthening, enforcement capacity, and prevention strategies, while fostering greater cross-border cooperation.
As of 2026, however, the roadmap remains in the formulation stage and has not yet entered into effect or started implementation. Current draft versions contain limited references to gender and do not yet establish gender-responsive objectives, indicators, or implementation mechanisms. At the same time, the ongoing development process presents an important opportunity to incorporate gender considerations before the framework is finalized. Drawing on experiences from other regions could help ensure that gender perspectives are integrated into both the design and implementation of the roadmap from the outset.

FORTALEZA ACTION PLAN

The Fortaleza Action Plan emerged from a regional seminar held in Fortaleza, Brazil, organized by the *Asociación para el Análisis de Políticas Públicas* (APP, "Association for Public Policy Analysis"), in 2025 that brought together government representatives, parliamentarians, academics, and civil society organizations from across Latin America to discuss priorities for strengthening arms control implementation.[75] While the resulting proposal has not been formally adopted by states and remains a non-binding discussion document, it provides useful insights into emerging regional conversations on gender-responsive arms control.

Several proposed actions create entry points for the integration of gender perspectives. These include commitments to strengthen the collection of disaggregated data on armed violence, improve understanding of risk factors associated with firearms misuse, and strengthen linkages between firearms control, violence prevention, and responses to domestic and GBV.[76] The proposal also encourages regional cooperation and information exchange on these issues, reflecting growing recognition of the value of gender-responsive approaches across multiple areas of arms control implementation.[77]

Although the Fortaleza Action Plan remains at an early stage of development, it demonstrates increasing regional interest in integrating gender considerations into discussions that have traditionally focused on technical and operational aspects of arms control. Whether these provisions are retained and strengthened during future negotiations will help determine the initiative's contribution to advancing gender-responsive SALW control in the region.

CONCLUSION: Together, the Andean Firearms Roadmap and the Fortaleza Action Plan illustrate the continued expansion of regional efforts to address firearms-related violence through more comprehensive and inclusive approaches. While neither initiative has yet reached the level of institutionalization seen in more established regional frameworks, both demonstrate growing awareness of the importance of integrating gender considerations into future arms control and violence prevention efforts. As these initiatives continue to develop, they also offer an opportunity to draw on lessons from more established regional roadmaps, while providing useful models for other regions that have yet to develop dedicated regional SALW roadmaps or implementation frameworks.

5. NATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION AND EMERGING PRACTICES

National policies and implementation practices are the primary means through which global and regional commitments on SALW are translated into tangible outcomes. While international and regional frameworks provide normative guidance and strategic direction, their effectiveness ultimately depends on the extent to which States adopt, adapt, and operationalize these commitments within domestic legal, policy, and institutional frameworks.

From 2021 to 2026, States have made varying levels of progress in strengthening legislative controls, improving stockpile management and tracing systems, enhancing inter-agency coordination, and developing more evidence-based approaches to SALW control. At the same time, persistent challenges—including capacity constraints, gaps in data and monitoring systems, limited resources, and uneven integration of gender-responsive and human security approaches—continue to affect implementation. Rather than providing a comprehensive survey of national practice, this section highlights key instruments and illustrative examples that demonstrate how gender-responsive SALW control is being advanced at the national level.

National Action Plans on SALW

National action plans on SALW are key policy instruments through which States translate international and regional commitments into coordinated, time-bound national strategies. Typically developed as whole-of-government frameworks, national action plans outline a country's priorities, objectives, and concrete actions to prevent, combat, and eradicate the illicit proliferation and misuse of SALW, in line with instruments such as the UN Programme of Action and relevant regional roadmaps.

In practice, national action plans serve several core functions. They provide a structured approach to implementation by translating broad commitments into specific national priorities, timelines, and activities. They also establish defined institutional roles, often designating a national coordinating body and assigning responsibilities across ministries such as defense, interior, customs, justice, and foreign affairs. This whole-of-government structure can reduce duplication, strengthen accountability, and support coordination across relevant institutions.

National action plans can also provide a mechanism for integrating gender-responsive approaches into national SALW control. This may include commitments to collect gender- and age-disaggregated data, address the links between firearms and GBV, promote women's participation in decision-making processes, and ensure that prevention strategies reflect the differentiated ways in which women and girls, men and boys, and people of diverse genders experience armed violence. However, gender integration remains uneven across national frameworks, and many national action plans continue to lack clear indicators, dedicated resources, or monitoring mechanisms to assess implementation.

Box 1: Sierra Leone's National Action Plan on SALW[78]

Sierra Leone's national action plan on SALW serves as an example of good practice in gender-responsiveness as it explicitly recognizes that armed violence affects men, women, boys, and girls differently, and integrates this understanding into policy design and implementation. A key strength is its alignment with UNSCR 1325, ensuring that gender perspectives are embedded in disarmament and arms control efforts. The national action plan empowers women as active agents in prevention, peacebuilding, and community security by promoting women's participation in decision-making processes such as national commissions, local security committees, and civil society initiatives. This inclusion helps ensure that policies reflect lived experiences across communities.

The plan is also noteworthy for addressing GBV, recognizing the role of illicit SALW in exacerbating domestic and sexual violence. It supports awareness campaigns, survivor-centered services, and collaboration between security institutions and women's organizations. Additionally, it calls for sex-disaggregated data collection to better understand patterns of armed violence and inform targeted interventions. And it features gender-responsive capacity-building, with training for law enforcement and border officials on gender-sensitive approaches to SALW control. Sierra Leone's national action plan demonstrates a holistic and inclusive model, linking arms control with gender equality, community safety, and sustainable peace.

WPS National Action Plans

National action plans on WPS are another important entry point for advancing gender-responsive SALW control. WPS national action plans operationalize commitments under UNSCR 1325 and subsequent resolutions, typically focusing on women's participation in peace and security processes, protection from GBV, conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and security governance.

In recent years, there has been growing recognition of the intersections between the WPS agenda and arms control. A UNIDIR review of 197 WPS national action plans adopted by 106 States and territories between 2005 and 2024 found increasing integration of weapons-related issues—including SALW, landmines, weapons of mass destruction, emerging technologies and the Arms Trade Treaty—into national implementation of the WPS agenda.[79] UNIDIR's analysis concludes that strengthening these linkages can reinforce all four pillars of the WPS agenda by contributing to violence prevention, enhancing protection from weapons-related harm, promoting women's meaningful participation in security governance, and supporting more sustainable peacebuilding and recovery efforts.

While the extent of integration varies considerably across countries, an increasing number of WPS national action plans explicitly recognize the role of SALW as a driver of insecurity and GBV, particularly in relation to domestic violence, conflict-related sexual violence, and community-level armed violence. As a result, some States have begun incorporating measures related to firearms legislation, stockpile management, border security, arms control, and violence prevention within their WPS frameworks.[80]

These measures may include strengthening national firearms legislation, improving oversight of arms transfers, enhancing coordination between security institutions and gender ministries, and integrating gender analysis into the work of national small arms commissions or SALW focal points. Some WPS national action plans also emphasize capacity-building for police, military, border officials, and other security sector actors to better identify, prevent, and respond to armed GBV. This reflects a broader effort to align national SALW strategies with gender-responsive security and development objectives while strengthening implementation of both the WPS agenda and international arms control commitments.

Box 2: Chad's National Action Plans on WPS[81]

Chad's national action plan on WPS (2023–2027) situates the proliferation of SALW as a core driver of insecurity and gendered violence, integrating arms-related concerns primarily through its prevention and protection pillars. The national action plan highlights that recurrent conflicts, including farmer–herder clashes, intercommunal disputes, and the activities of armed groups, are exacerbated by the widespread circulation of weapons across porous borders with Libya, Sudan, and the Central African Republic.

While the plan does not establish a standalone SALW control strategy, it embeds arms-related risks into its analysis of conflict drivers and commits to strengthening early warning, community mediation, and local conflict-management mechanisms. These are spaces where gender-responsive arms control can be operationalized. By emphasizing women's participation in these mechanisms and recognizing their roles as mediators, paralegals, and peace actors, the national action plan implicitly links women's leadership to improved oversight of local security dynamics, including harms associated with small arms proliferation.

National Prevention Strategies and SALW Control

National prevention strategies (NPS)[82] are an increasingly important policy tool for addressing the underlying drivers of violence before they escalate into conflict. Rather than responding only after violence has occurred, NPS seek to identify and address the risk and protective factors that contribute to violence through coordinated, evidence-based action across government and society.[83] Recent UN policy processes have also highlighted the importance of linking arms control with prevention efforts. In his 2023 policy brief, *A New Agenda for Peace*, the UN Secretary-General recommended pursuing "whole-of-government approaches that integrate SALW control into development and violence reduction initiatives at the national and community levels, as well as in national prevention strategies." Similarly, in the 2024 *Pact for the Future*, Member States committed to addressing the risks associated with the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, including "through national prevention strategies and approaches." These developments suggest growing momentum within the UN system to connect SALW control with broader prevention agendas.

As countries develop and implement these strategies, there are growing opportunities to integrate relevant SALW control measures where firearms proliferation and armed violence are identified as contributing risk factors through national prevention diagnostics. Papua New Guinea's 2025–2030 NPS provides a recent example of this approach. Under Strategic Objective 2 ("Increasing investment in early warning and violence prevention systems and capacity"), the Strategy includes a dedicated objective on improving control of the illicit circulation of SALW through nationwide survey data, the development of a national action plan on SALW Control, and the operationalization of that plan.[84]

Effective prevention strategies require an understanding of how risk and protective factors vary across different populations. Women and girls, men and boys, and people of diverse genders may experience insecurity differently, face distinct forms of violence, and encounter different barriers to safety and resilience. Incorporating gender analysis into prevention processes can therefore strengthen evidence-based decision-making by ensuring that interventions—including, where relevant, SALW control measures—are tailored to local contexts and differentiated experiences of violence.[85] This approach reflects growing recognition that while gender equality is an important objective in its own right, understanding how gender shapes pathways to violence is essential for designing more effective prevention and peacebuilding policies.

NPS also emphasize the importance of a whole-of-society approach to prevention. Where firearms proliferation is identified as a relevant driver of violence, involving SALW practitioners alongside government institutions, civil society, women's organizations, and peacebuilding actors throughout the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of prevention strategies can help strengthen coordination across sectors. This offers an opportunity to better connect arms control, violence prevention, gender-responsive policymaking, and sustainable peace in ways that are tailored to national contexts.

The diversity of national approaches highlights both the flexibility and complexity of implementing gender-responsive SALW control. While there is no single model for effective coordination, growing experience suggests that sustained cooperation across security, development, gender, and prevention actors can help strengthen the implementation of national commitments and support more comprehensive responses to armed violence.

6. KEY TRENDS IN GENDER-RESPONSIVE SALW CONTROL (2021-2026)

The period between 2021 and 2026 has been marked by significant developments in gender-responsive SALW control across multilateral, regional, and national frameworks. While progress has not been uniform across all contexts, several common trends emerge from the evolution of policy instruments, implementation mechanisms, and national practice. These developments suggest that gender-responsive SALW control has continued to mature as a policy field, moving beyond questions of recognition towards greater attention to implementation, accountability, and institutionalization. At the same time, persistent challenges and growing political contestation continue to shape the environment in which these efforts take place.

From Participation to Operationalization

Historically, efforts to integrate gender perspectives into SALW control often focused on increasing women's participation in arms control, disarmament, and security processes. Participation remains an important objective and continues to feature prominently across international frameworks. However, developments since 2021 suggest a broader shift towards operationalizing gender-responsive approaches through concrete policies, procedures, and institutional practices.

This trend is evident across multiple frameworks. Within the PoA process, discussions have increasingly moved beyond recognition of the differentiated impacts of armed violence to include references to gender-responsive national action plans, disaggregated data collection, coordination between PoA and WPS focal points, and the incorporation of gender considerations into implementation activities. Similarly, within the ATT, discussions have evolved from focusing primarily on Article 7(4) and the risks of GBV to broader questions of implementation, reporting, information exchange, and institutional coordination.

At the national level, this shift can be seen in the growing number of SALW and WPS national action plans that incorporate specific measures related to gender-responsive implementation. Rather than simply acknowledging gendered impacts, these plans increasingly identify institutional responsibilities, establish monitoring mechanisms, and promote coordination between security actors, gender institutions, and civil society organizations.

These developments suggest that gender-responsive SALW control is increasingly being understood not only as a question of representation, but also as a practical approach to designing, implementing, and evaluating arms control policies.

Growing Recognition of the Relationship Between SALW and GBV

A second notable trend is the growing recognition of the relationship between SALW proliferation and GBV. While this linkage has been discussed for many years by civil society and some Member States, it has become increasingly visible across international, regional, and national policy frameworks.

The ATT (2014) remains the most explicit example, with Article 7(4) requiring States Parties to consider the risk that conventional arms could be used to commit or facilitate serious acts of GBV. However, since 2021, references to GBV have expanded considerably across other frameworks. The PoA process has increasingly highlighted the role of firearms in facilitating violence against women and girls, including domestic violence, conflict-related sexual violence, and other forms of gender-based harm. RevCon4 represented a particularly important milestone in this regard, with multiple references linking SALW control to the prevention of GBV.

Similar developments can be observed at the regional and national levels. Regional roadmaps and action plans increasingly recognize the role of firearms in exacerbating violence against women and girls, while a growing number of WPS national action plans explicitly identify weapons proliferation as a driver of insecurity and gendered violence. These developments reflect a broader shift in understanding: SALW control is increasingly viewed not only as a security issue, but also as an important component of violence prevention and gender equality efforts.

Growth of Implementation Mechanisms and Institutional Structures

A third trend is the emergence of more formal implementation mechanisms intended to support gender-responsive arms control. While many early commitments focused on normative recognition, recent years have seen increasing efforts to create structures capable of supporting implementation and accountability.

One example is the establishment of gender focal points within the ATT framework at CSP11 in 2025. Similarly, the PoA process has increasingly encouraged coordination between SALW focal points and WPS focal points, reflecting growing recognition that implementation requires sustained institutional engagement. National action plans, interministerial coordination bodies, national small arms commissions, and multi-stakeholder platforms have also become more prominent as mechanisms for translating commitments into practice.

The emergence of these structures reflects a growing understanding that gender-responsive SALW control cannot rely solely on political commitments. Effective implementation requires institutions, coordination mechanisms, dedicated expertise, and sustained resources. While the effectiveness of these mechanisms varies considerably across contexts, their increasing presence suggests that gender considerations are becoming more deeply embedded within arms control governance.

Expansion Beyond SALW to Ammunition Management

Another significant development has been the more explicit integration of gender considerations into through-life conventional ammunition management. Ammunition has long formed part of international discussions on SALW control, even where particular UN instruments or processes have treated weapons and ammunition differently. Gender considerations have also been recognized in other areas of conventional arms control and disarmament, including mine action and efforts to address the humanitarian impacts of explosive weapons. Therefore, the adoption of GFA in 2023 is significant not because it extended gender-responsive arms control to ammunition for the first time, but because it embedded gender considerations from the outset within a dedicated global framework addressing ammunition management across its full life cycle.

Through Objective 14 and related provisions, the framework recognizes the importance of mainstreaming gender perspectives throughout ammunition management efforts and promoting women's participation in decision-making processes. This brings gender-responsive approaches more explicitly into areas that can be highly technical and operational, including ammunition safety and security, stockpile management, diversion prevention, and disposal.

The GFA provides an important opportunity to examine how established gender-responsive principles can be operationalized within the technical dimensions of ammunition management. As implementation progresses, experience under the framework may generate practical lessons on integrating gender analysis and participation into capacity-building, national implementation, data collection, and other aspects of ammunition governance, with potential relevance for SALW control more broadly.

This development suggests a broadening understanding of the relationship between gender and arms control. Rather than treating gender-responsive approaches as relevant only to SALW, policymakers increasingly recognize that gender considerations are applicable across a wider range of conventional arms governance issues. As implementation of the GFA progresses, it may provide important lessons for integrating gender perspectives into other technical areas of arms control and weapons management.

CONCLUSION: Taken together, these trends suggest that gender-responsive SALW control has entered a new phase of development. Since 2021, the field has moved beyond establishing the relevance of gender considerations towards greater attention to implementation, institutionalization, and accountability. Gender-responsive approaches are increasingly reflected in implementation mechanisms, national policies, violence prevention efforts, and more technical areas of weapons and ammunition governance. At the same time, persistent implementation challenges and growing political contestation continue to constrain progress. The next phase of gender-responsive SALW control will likely depend not only on the adoption of new commitments, but also on the ability of States, international organizations, and civil society to sustain and operationalize existing gains.

7. GAPS AND BARRIERS

Despite significant progress in the development of gender-responsive policies, frameworks, and implementation mechanisms, important gaps remain between normative commitments and practical implementation. Across multilateral, regional, and national levels, states and institutions increasingly recognize the relevance of gender perspectives to SALW control. However, these commitments are often applied unevenly, inadequately resourced, or insufficiently integrated into day-to-day policy and practice.

The challenges identified throughout this report are interconnected. Weak data collection limits evidence-based policymaking; political contestation constrains ambition and implementation; institutional fragmentation hinders coordination; funding shortages undermine sustainability; and persistent participation barriers limit the diversity of perspectives shaping arms control decisions. Together, these factors continue to impede efforts to translate gender-responsive principles into meaningful and measurable change.

Data Deficits Continue to Limit Evidence-Based Policymaking

One of the most persistent challenges facing gender-responsive SALW control is the limited availability and use of gender- and sex-disaggregated data. While many international, regional, and national frameworks now recognize the importance of evidence-based policymaking, implementation remains uneven. As highlighted throughout this report, shortcomings in data collection continue to constrain understanding of how different groups experience armed violence, limit the design and evaluation of targeted interventions, and weaken accountability. Examples from the Nairobi Protocol review, the Caribbean Firearms Roadmap, and national action plans demonstrate that improving evidence remains a prerequisite for translating gender commitments into effective policy.

Institutional Fragmentation and Participation Gaps Continue to Undermine Implementation

Gender-responsive SALW control requires coordination across arms control, security, development, and gender equality institutions, yet these actors often continue to operate in separate policy silos. Although mechanisms such as ATT Gender Focal Points, stronger links with the WPS agenda, and regional initiatives have begun to bridge these divides, coordination remains uneven. Women and civil society actors also remain underrepresented in many technical and decision-making processes, limiting the diversity of expertise informing policy and implementation.

Political Contestation Is Making Further Normative Progress More Difficult

The political environment surrounding gender equality has become increasingly polarized, shifting negotiations from advancing new commitments towards preserving existing ones. As discussed in relation to BMS9 and broader developments affecting the WPS agenda, changing political priorities, geopolitical tensions, and resistance to gender-related language have narrowed the space for consensus. While implementation continues through technical cooperation and regional initiatives, sustaining existing gains may become as important as securing new commitments.

Funding Constraints Continue to Impede Implementation

Many of the commitments described throughout this report remain insufficiently resourced. Reductions in development assistance, changing donor priorities, declining emphasis on feminist foreign policy and WPS, and increasing global military expenditure have created a more challenging financing environment. In his 2025 report on WPS, the UN Secretary-General expressed concern that global military expenditure had surpassed US$2.7 trillion, representing the steepest annual increase since the end of the Cold War.[86] Against this backdrop, funding for disarmament, violence prevention, and gender-responsive programming often struggles to compete with other security priorities. These trends particularly affect civil society organizations and local women's groups, highlighting the need for sustained investment if gender-responsive SALW commitments are to translate into measurable outcomes.

8. FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The developments examined throughout this report demonstrate that gender-responsive SALW control has become increasingly embedded within international, regional, and national policy frameworks. At the same time, important gaps remain in implementation, data collection, institutional capacity, and political support. Looking ahead, several ongoing processes and emerging areas of work present opportunities to further strengthen the integration of gender perspectives into arms control, violence prevention, and security governance efforts.

Six of these emerge as key priorities and opportunities and include:

Priority Area	Opportunity
BMS9 Follow-Up and Technological Developments	The Open-Ended Technical Expert Group (OETEG) provides an opportunity to ensure that discussions on emerging technologies—including digital tracing, artificial intelligence (AI), and data management—consider how technological developments may have a gender differentiated impact. Integrating gender perspectives early can help ensure that technological innovation strengthens, rather than overlooks, inclusive approaches to SALW control.
Strengthening the Role of ATT Gender Focal Points	The establishment of Gender Focal Points under the ATT creates a new mechanism to strengthen implementation of Article 7(4), facilitate the exchange of good practices, and promote greater consistency in assessing GBV risks during arms transfer decisions. Their long-term impact will depend on sustained political support, coordination, and adequate resources.
Advancing Implementation of the Global Framework for Through-Life Conventional Ammunition Management	As implementation of the GFA progresses and preparations begin for the first Meeting of States in 2027, there is an opportunity to translate the framework's gender commitments into practical guidance, capacity-building, reporting, and monitoring. The implementation process will also demonstrate how gender considerations can be integrated into technical areas of conventional arms governance from the outset.
Regional Roadmap Reviews and Emerging Regional Processes	Ongoing implementation of the Caribbean Firearms Roadmap, the second phase of the Western Balkans Roadmap, and the development of emerging regional initiatives provide opportunities to strengthen accountability, peer learning, and context-specific approaches to gender-responsive SALW control.
Strengthening Evidence and Data Collection	Continued investment in sex- and age-disaggregated data, research on the relationship between SALW and GBV, and improved monitoring methodologies will strengthen evidence-based policymaking and help evaluate the effectiveness of gender-responsive interventions.
Financing Gender-Responsive SALW Control	Sustaining recent progress will require dedicated financial support for national implementation, research, civil society participation, capacity-building, and monitoring. At a time when many traditional donors are reducing funding for gender equality, feminist foreign policy, and WPS initiatives, identifying sustainable financing mechanisms will be critical to ensuring that policy commitments translate into practice.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, advancing gender-responsive SALW control is not only a matter of equity, but also of effectiveness. Policies that account for the differentiated impacts of armed violence and include diverse perspectives are better equipped to prevent harm, strengthen governance, and contribute to more sustainable peace and security outcomes.

The period from 2021–2026 has demonstrated both the progress made and the work that remains to be done in advancing gender-responsive SALW control. Looking ahead, opportunities exist to strengthen implementation, deepen institutionalization, improve evidence, and expand gender-responsive approaches into emerging areas such as ammunition management and technological innovation. Realizing these opportunities will require sustained political commitment, meaningful partnerships, adequate resources, and continued engagement from states, international organizations, and civil society alike.

Moving forward, the immediate challenge is less about generating new commitments and more about ensuring that existing ones are meaningfully operationalized. However, this does not mean that efforts to strengthen the normative framework have reached their endpoint. Civil society organizations, women's rights groups, affected communities, and other advocates will continue to press for greater ambition, identify gaps in existing commitments, and bring emerging issues onto national, regional, and international agendas even where the political environment makes consensus on new commitments more difficult. At the same time, stronger institutional integration, improved data systems, and more consistent inclusion of women and gender perspectives will be essential to translating existing commitments into practice. Upcoming policy spaces, including international meetings, regional roadmap reviews, and evolving national frameworks, offer important opportunities to consolidate recent gains and address persistent barriers.

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