



THE CONTINUUM OF VIOLENCE

HOW SMALL ARMS ARE USED IN
GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AT EACH
STAGE OF THE CONFLICT CYCLE

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ATT	Arms Trade Treaty
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
CRSV	Conflict relation sexual violence
DDR	Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
EWS	Early warning system
GBV	Gender based violence
GREVIO	Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence
IANSA	International action network on small arms
IDP	Internally displaced person
IPV	Intimate partner violence
ITT	International Tracing Instrument
LGBTQI	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex
OECD	Organisation for economic co-operation and development
PTSD	Post-traumatic stress disorder
SALW	Small Arms and light weapons
SDG	Sustainable development goals
SOGIESC	Sexual Orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics
UNODA	UN Office of Disarmament Affairs
UNODC	UN Office of Drugs and Crime
UNPoA	UN Programme of Action to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects
WHRD	Women human rights defenders

The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation has defended women's rights since 1993. For every woman's right to be safe and to be heard. Today we are one of the world's leading women's rights organisations, working directly in areas affected by war and conflict to strengthen women's influence and power. We work closely together with more than 100 local partner organisations across 20 countries to end violence against women, reach lasting peace and close the gender gap once and for all.

Introduction

This brief focuses on one of the effects of increased militarisation – how small arms and light weapons (SALW) contribute to gender-based violence in emerging and active armed conflict, as well as post-conflict contexts. It highlights the continuum of violence across the different phases of conflict, and how destructive masculinity norms, militarisation, psychosocial stress and access to small arms fuels gender-based violence. It shows that a failure to address the interlinkage between small arms and gender-based violence not only has deadly repercussions, but also has a negative impact on the sustainable development of peaceful and democratic societies.

The number of armed conflicts recorded this year is the highest since 1946, and global military spending has reached record highs. At the same time, discussions on disarmament, including non-proliferation, are progressing slowly, if at all. The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation has supported women's rights organisations in conflict-affected regions for more than 30 years and our experience shows that the increase of weapons and the militarisation of societies has a devastating impact on women and girls. It fuels violence and curtails women's possibilities to participate fully in society, something that many organisations have highlighted throughout the years.

There is now a need to remind decision-makers of the consequences of armed conflict, to put the issues of demilitarisation, enforcement of arms embargoes, gender-responsive arms control and strengthened accountability at the heart of the security agenda.

Small arms are used in almost half of all violent deaths globally and in approximately one-third of all killings of women and girls.¹ Whereas the number of male violent deaths varies considerably depending on contextual conditions such as conflict, the data on femicides tends to be quite consistent. Killings by intimate partners or other family members are the only category of homicides where women outnumber men as victims.² Men and boys are instead primarily at risk of being killed by someone outside their family. When a woman is killed in the home, it is her partner or male relative who is most likely to be the perpetrator, often with a prior record of inflicting psychological, sexual and physical abuse.^{3,4}

Conflict situations often exacerbate intimate partner violence (IPV), as the stress of war, the normalisation of violence, economic instability and displacement heighten tensions. The presence of firearms can turn what might otherwise be nonlethal violence into deadly encounters.

While the negative consequences of small arms in relation to gender-based violence (GBV) intensify in violent conflict settings, women also face high levels of such violence outside active conflict. Women are most at risk at home, and therefore under greater threat during all phases of the conflict cycle, i.e. before, during and after conflict, from members of their own family or acquaintances.

Despite some progress with respect to international commitments, and reports highlighting how weapons and gender-based violence are linked, these negative consequences still often remain unaddressed. Gender-based violence is, in practice, frequently still regarded as collateral damage of larger security aims during violent conflict situations. Often it is also hard for women to come forward, especially if the perpetrator is her partner or a soldier who is seen as a hero for protecting the country, area or region.

¹ [IANSAs-Briefing-Paper-Human-Costs-of-SALW-Violence-ENG.pdf](#)

² [UN_BriefFem_251121.pdf](#) (unodc.org)

³ [Microsoft Word - Femicide_report_final_2023.docx](#) (unwomen.org)

⁴ Globally an estimated one in three women globally will experience physical and sexual violence in their lifetime. This statistic does not include other forms of violence that often go unreported: verbal, psychological and economic violence.

Facts

Statistics show that the **risk** of a woman being murdered during a domestic violence situation **increases by 500 percent** when a gun is present.⁵

Research shows that in countries with available data, **approximately 70 to 90 percent of incidents of conflict-related sexual violence involve small arms and light weapons (SALW).**⁶

In societies with high levels of gun ownership, small arms also play a role in homophobic and transphobic violence.⁷

Small arms and light weapons trafficking is often a contributing element in the commission of other serious crimes, with various forms of other illicit activities, in particular drug trafficking and gang criminality but also human trafficking and illegal mining.⁸

⁵ Jacquelyn C. Campbell, et. al., "Risk Factors for Femicide in Abusive Relationships: Results From a Multisite Case Control Study," *American Journal of Public Health* 93, no. 7 (2003): 1089-1097

⁶ (UN Secretary General, *Small arms and light weapons: report of the Secretary General, S/2023/823*, 2023, para. 27)

⁷ [Men-and-Masculinities_final.pdf](#)

⁸ (UN Secretary General, *Small arms and light weapons: report of the Secretary General, S/2023/823*, 2023, para. 40)

International commitments

Women's rights organisations and other civil society actors have long advocated for the inclusion of gender and diversified perspectives in the legislation and policies regulating arms trade. This includes the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) and the UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons (UNPoA).⁹

When the UN Programme of Action (UNPoA) was adopted in 2001, the only reference to gender was the need to consider how the illicit arms trade can have a negative impact on women and the elderly. Much has developed since then.

The seventh Biennial Meeting of States on the UNPoA in 2021 marked a turning point in that the outcome document included eight consecutive paragraphs with gender-related language recalling commitments to previous resolutions on women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control. It also established that eradicating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons (SALW) was a key part of combatting genderbased violence and sexual violence in conflict.^{10 11}

In a 2023 report, International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) stated that *"while gender mainstreaming is one of the policy areas in which States have made the most significant progress in the implementation of the UNPoA, this approach is not fully inclusive."* It continued to highlight that *"The UN Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (IE SOGI) has compiled evidence demonstrating how LGBTIQ+ persons experience specific patterns*

of violence by state and non-state actors during armed conflict and in peace operations, in part due to the intensification of gender roles in these contexts". Further, it recommended that efforts by states to ensure the full, equal, meaningful and effective participation of women in UNPoA and ATT deliberations, decisionmaking and implementation should also include women of diverse SOGIESC¹², especially those representing communities suffering from forms of recurring SALW violence.^{13 14}

At the Fourth Review Conference (Revcon4) in June 2024, the outcome document for the first time included a specific section on gender focusing on gender-responsive small arms control, engaging men and boys, engaging youth, as well as victims and survivors.¹⁵ This is partly thanks to the hard work of many civil society actors.



⁹ Organisations such as WILPF and IANSA have done extensive campaigning around the effects of militarisation on society and women in particular. This has led to an increasing awareness of the impacts on gender-based violence and positive legislative steps forward, such as the Arms Trade Treaty.

¹⁰ [Podcasts | Small Arms Survey, 6 June 2024](#)

¹¹ [BMS7_finalreport.pdf](#)

¹² Acronym for sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics.

¹³ [ENG-factsheet-layout9_final\(1\).pdf](#)

¹⁴ [Microsoft Word - 20230816 Small Arms Survey ATT SOGI Working Paper – Draft for Review by States Parties_V4_Clean.docx \(thearmstradetreaty.org\)](#)

¹⁵ [United Nations Conference to Review Progress on Combating Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons to Be Held at Headquarters, 18-26 June | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases](#)

The **UN Programme of Action (UNPoA)** to Prevent, Combat, and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons In All Its Aspects was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2001, followed by its accompanying **International Tracing Instrument (ITI)** (2005). They are complemented by two global treaties, namely the **UN Firearms Protocol** (entry into force, 2005); and the **Arms Trade Treaty** (entry into force, 2014), in addition to a number of regional and sub-regional instruments.

The **Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)** was the first legally-binding multilateral instrument to recognise the connection between the international arms trade and gender-based violence (GBV) – and this marked a great win at the time. The Treaty came into force on 24 December 2014. Article 7.4 requires that States Parties in their export assessments “take into account the risk of the arms covered by the treaty being used to commit or facilitate serious acts of GBV or serious acts of violence against women and children”.¹⁶



States should adopt a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of all genders, gender perspectives and gender mainstreaming, and reflect this in the Review Conference Outcome Document. Gender mainstreaming must also take into account other factors that intersect with gender, such as race, ethnicity, class, and disability, to fully account for the differential impacts of the SALW trade and misuse on men, women, girls, boys, and genderdiverse individuals.¹⁷



¹⁶ (Factsheet- Gender and the Arms Trade Treaty 1908 International

¹⁷ Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) Statement at the Preparatory Committee for the Fourth Review Conference on the UNPoA, 14 February 2024

Emerging conflicts

In emerging or re-emerging conflicts, the risks posed by the presence of small arms, and their correlation with gender-based violence (GBV), are multifaceted. As conflict tensions rise, the availability of weapons often increases. This is due to both increased imports and exports by states, as well as illicit trade, often with non-state actors.¹⁸

Despite commitments set out in the Arms Trade Treaty, which was a great win at the time, and the European Common Position on Arms Export Controls, defining common rules governing control of exports of military technology and equipment¹⁹, **many states have continued to export weapons to areas with high levels of human rights violations, including gender-based violence.**²⁰ These weapons are usually exported to state and non-state actors, but also often quickly end up in the hands of members of the general population. Research has found that almost every gun traded illicitly, or in the black market, was once traded legally.²¹

Ammunitions control is key in order to address the misuse of small arms. The recently adopted *Global Framework for Through-life Conventional Ammunition Management* (2023) contains practical steps to mainstream a gender perspective into ammunition management activities.

Militarisation of society

As small arms become more widespread during emerging conflicts, there tends to be growing militarisation of societies meaning that military values and patterns of behaviour have a dominating influence on the political, social, cultural and

economic external affairs of the state. This shift normalises and legitimises the use of violence, and women often face increased harassment and violence in both public and private spheres.

The presence of guns contributes to a culture of aggression and power that disproportionately affects women²², further entrenching gender-based violence in conflict settings. As explained in the Kvinna till Kvinna report *Security On Whose Terms*²³, increased weaponisation adds to the growing feeling of insecurity for many people – particularly women.

Although small arms contribute to increasing levels of gender-based violence, the conditions that lead to these forms of violence have existed long before the conflict, rooted in patriarchal norms and power relations.



Now we have much more practice, violence against women is a continuum. In Croatia we had services for women victims of violence before the war, **the war contributed to it but it was not the cause.** While in BiH, where there were no services or attention, some said that the war was the cause. In Ukraine now, there is a lot more awareness about violence against women, war contributes with more power being given to perpetrators, that they are free from legal frameworks and that they can act with impunity. But the structure that allows violence to be perpetrated is already there in our social structures and power relations.²⁴

Nela Pamukovic, Centre for Women War Victims

¹⁸ [background-paper-prohibiting-arms-transfers-to-non-state-actors-and-the-arms-trade-treaty-paul-holtom-eng-0-259-2_0.pdf](#) (unidir.org)

¹⁹ EUR-Lex - 02008E0944-20190917 - EN - EUR-Lex

²⁰ [Full article: Should we sell arms to human rights violators? What the public thinks \(tandfonline.com\)](#)

²¹ [SAS-HB-06-Weapons-ID-ch2.pdf](#)

²² (PDF) Risk Factors for Femicide in Abusive Relationships: Results From a Multisite Case Control Study (researchgate.net)

²³ [Security on whose terms? | Kvinna till Kvinna \(2012\)](#)

²⁴ [The-Kvinna-till-Kvinna-Foundation-they-came-together-not-to-be-silenced-gender-based-violence-in-conflict-the-role-of-womens-rights-organisations.pdf](#) (kvinntillkvinna.org) p. 24

Weaponised sexual violence

The increased availability of firearms in emerging conflicts exacerbates existing patriarchal structures, allowing men, especially those with weapons, to assert control over women through fear and violence. Armed groups often use sexual violence as a tool of war to terrorise and control populations.²⁵ Small arms facilitate these acts, as they allow perpetrators to easily intimidate and overpower their victims. The presence of firearms increases the incidence of rape, sexual slavery, and other forms of GBV, particularly against women and girls. In some cases, women are forced into sexual exploitation in exchange for protection from armed actors.

The widespread presence of small arms leads to a climate of impunity, where armed actors can commit acts of violence, including gender-based violence, without fear of prosecution.



In the east of the DRC, there are currently various groups carrying weapons. Some members of these groups who carry weapons abuse them and use them to exercise their power over women. Various barriers have been erected on the roads that women use to go to the fields or to the market to ensure the survival of their families. Unfortunately, they are forced to give their crops and money to the men in uniform. Young girls are sometimes intercepted and raped by armed men on their way to water sources, fields or forests. Many girls stop going to school for fear of being raped.

Staff at Association des Femmes des Médias du Sud-Kivu (AFEM), 16 October 2024

Increased lethality of intimate partner violence

In conflict-prone regions, the availability of small arms escalates the severity of intimate partner violence (IPV). The increased availability of weapons is often justified by the need to ‘protect vulnerable women’, even though evidence shows that once these weapons end up in the home, they are most likely to be used to harm women and families, instead of protecting them from outside actors.²⁶

In one conflict-affected context, there were 100 approvals a day for firearm permits for private gun bearers before a recent outbreak of violence, which quickly increased to 3,000 just one day later. This does not even include the weapons provided to people as part of the formation of armed community security squads. A women’s rights organisation that has spent many years working on regulating guns in this context, reports that they have already received many calls from social workers and other women’s organisations in this regard, expressing their fears of what the repercussions could be for women at risk of domestic violence.

The data available on intimate partner violence is notoriously underreported, and even more so, the psychological violence of living under the threat of small arms or the presence thereof.



²⁵ [SG-REPORT-2023SPREAD-1.pdf \(un.org\)](#)

²⁶ Progress report by Barbara Frey, UN Special Rapporteur, "Prevention of human rights violations committed with small arms and light weapons", UN Doc. E/CN.4/Sub.2/2004/37, 21 June 2004, para 50.

Femicide

Femicide is the intentional killing of women because of their gender, and is particularly pronounced in conflict contexts, both in public and domestic spaces. **The widespread availability of small arms in war-torn areas intensifies gender-based violence and disproportionately affects women, especially in societies where gender inequality is deeply entrenched.**

Understanding this connection is crucial for developing policies to reduce violence and protect women during and after conflicts.

In 2022, around 48,800 women and girls worldwide were killed by their intimate partners or other family members (including fathers, mothers, uncles and brothers). This means that, on average, more than 133 women or girls are killed every day or more than five women or girls are killed every hour by someone in their own family.

Current and former intimate partners are by far the most likely perpetrators of femicide, accounting for an average of 55 percent of all intimate partner and family related killings, whereas only 12 percent of all male homicides are perpetrated in the private sphere.

Gender-related killings take place in many contexts beyond the private sphere. They can be related to rape or sexual violence by someone unknown to the victim; linked to harmful practices such as female genital mutilation or so-called honour killings; a result of hate crimes linked to sexual orientation or gender identity; or connected with armed conflict, gangs, human trafficking and other forms of organized crime.

UNODC and UN Women have partnered to develop the Statistical framework for measuring the gender-related killing of women and girls (also referred to as “femicide/feminicide”), which was approved by the United Nation’s Statistical Commission in March 2022, with the aim of supporting countries to improve collection and analysis of data on all types of femicide, and to inform advocacy, policies and programmes to end femicide.²⁷

Several research studies find a strong correlation between gender inequality and the emergence of conflict²⁸. Forsberg and Olsson note the following: *“It is postulated that societies with a very high level of male dominance in politics tend to be dominated by hypermasculine political cultures. This norm also prescribes violence as a means to resolve conflict on the highest decision-making levels.”*²⁹ The proliferation of small arms increases the risk of more lethal and severe violence, which in turn can serve as an indicator of rising tensions and potential conflict. Consequently, escalating gender-based violence can serve as an early warning signal of broader societal breakdown, including conflict.

Early warning systems, set up in both pre- and post-conflict situations, which integrate the risks of small arms proliferation and gender-based violence, offer a more comprehensive approach to conflict prevention. This requires disaggregating data by gender and focusing on specific patterns of violence against women, such as rape being used as a weapon of war, or increased intimate partner violence linked to stress, trauma or access to firearms. Women’s organisations play a pivotal role in reporting these risks, and advocating for disarmament and protection measures, helping to prevent both armed conflict and gendered violence.

Shrinking (civic) space and weakened civil society may indicate that women do not feel secure, and that civil society is not strong enough to play a helpful role in conflict management and conflict resolution. On the other hand, strong women’s organisations could present a given society with a variety of coping strategies, including at the microlevel of intra-family and intra-community disputes, which may be overlooked by gender-blind early warning systems³⁰

These systems, set up in both pre- and postconflict situations, which integrate the risks of small arms proliferation and gender-based violence, offer a more comprehensive approach to conflict prevention. This requires disaggregating data by gender and focusing on specific patterns of violence against women, such as rape being used as a weapon of war, or increased intimate partner violence linked to stress, trauma or access to firearms. Women’s organisations play a pivotal role in reporting these risks, and advocating for disarmament and protection measures, helping to prevent both armed conflict and gendered violence.

²⁷ Microsoft Word - Femicide_report_final_2023.docx (unodc.org)

²⁸ Examining Gender Inequality and Armed Conflict at the Subnational Level | Journal of Global Security Studies | Oxford Academic (oup.com)

²⁹ Gender Inequality and Internal Conflict | Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics

³⁰ WPSsourcebook-04E-GenderResponsiveEarlyWarning-en.pdf (unwomen.org)

According to OECDs States of Fragility framework women's political empowerment is an indicator and a coping capacity for political fragility. Women's increased participation and representation in decision-making bodies on all levels of governance structures provide opportunities to mitigate public decisions and political cultures (Beyer, 2021). For example, a higher share of women in parliament

also significantly reduces a state's risk of civil war (Melander, 2005) and the risk of relapse into civil war in post-conflict settings (Demeritt, 2014). Higher shares of women in parliament are associated with decreased government corruption (Markham, 2012) and better standards of living across the whole of society (Perkins, 2017), reducing grievances that may escalate into conflict.³¹

Early warning systems (EWS)

EWS are most effective when they involve local communities, particularly women's organisations, as these groups often have the most up-to-date and accurate information about rising tensions and violence, especially related to gender-based violence. Engaging women's networks and community leaders helps to identify signs of increased gendered violence early on. The presence of small arms in a community is a strong predictor of future violence, including armed conflict and gender-based violence.

In post-conflict Bosnia-Herzegovina, small arms continue to circulate, and the level of GBV remains high. EWS in the region monitor trafficking patterns and arms smuggling networks. Additionally, spikes in femicide or Intimate partner Violence (IPV) are to be tracked as indicators of rising violence, as weapons from the war are often used in such attacks according to The Small Arms and Light Weapons Control Strategy, Bosnia-Herzegovina 2021-2024. The strategy and action plan also recognise linkages between specific gender norms of masculinity, and the demand for and the misuse of firearms. It spells out the need for concrete awareness-raising activities to address them, particularly among young men.

Despite these important provisions to prevent the use of firearms in domestic violence, certain gaps remain that should be addressed. The strategy also recognises the links between dominant masculine norms and firearms, and underlines that men, particularly young men, making up the vast majority of perpetrators of firearm incidents. Monitoring these trends would help authorities pre-empt potential outbreaks of renewed violence. However, the authorities are weak and there is a lack of systematic monitoring, among other things.³²

The project **Femme au Fone** developed by women's rights organisation Association Des Femmes Des Medias (AFEM) and SPR in **South Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo**, allows victims and survivors to report security incidents involving sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) through encrypted text messages, and puts pressure on the authorities to respond. Women are free to decide what they want to report. **The system is used both as an early-warning mechanism, a tool to share information and a political advocacy platform for local women.** Following alerts received by the 'femme au fone' system, AFEM has lobbied traditional and local political and administrative authorities to remove illegal barriers set up by armed actors, as well as organising denunciation press conferences and written statements to call on the authorities at all levels. Femme au Fone led to the creation of a committee of seven people representing the three communes of the city of Bukavu. This structure has the mission to monitor, identify and denounce cases of SGBV in the city of Bukavu. as well as to propose concrete actions such as advocacy missions and other awareness sessions to combat SGBV and other violations.

³¹ Compare your country by OECD

³² (sarajevo-strategy-action-plan-2021-2024.pdf (seesac.org)

Emerging conflicts

Recommendations to the international community, donors & governments

1 Fully implement all existing legislation and policy regarding arms exports – including (but not limited to) the Arms Trade Treaty, the European Common Position on Arms Exports, and the UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. Hold other states, including allied states, accountable for these commitments.

2 Ensure the implementation of Article 7(4) of the Arms Trade Treaty, which states that states exporting arms, when conducting the obligatory arms export assessment, should include an assessment of whether such exports risk being used “to commit or facilitate serious acts of gender-based violence or serious acts of violence against women and children”.

3 When setting up early warning systems, governments must make sure they are gender-responsive, community-focused, and attentive to the interplay between small arms and GBV. **Women’s organisations’ contextual knowledge and community connections should be used to identify signs of emerging conflict and escalating violence**, including the spread of small arms. By engaging in community-based intelligence gathering and reporting, these groups can provide crucial insights that inform proactive, preventive measures.

4 Donors should fund women’s organisations so that they can continue their important work to raise awareness about the links between small arms proliferation and GBV. Women’s organisations can help foster a community-wide commitment to safety and security that extends beyond traditional, militarised responses. Additionally, they can, if properly supported and funded help train community members to identify early warning signs of escalating violence and connect those at risk with protective resources.

During armed conflicts

Militarisation of civilian life and gender norms

The militarisation of society reinforces toxic masculinity and traditional gender roles, often leading to heightened violence against women. The normalisation of gun violence emboldens men with weapons to assert dominance over women, reinforcing patriarchal power dynamics. Small arms become symbols of power and control, as well as manifesting instruments thereof, exacerbating the already unequal gender relations in war-torn societies.



The war has militarized many aspects of civilian life in Ukraine, with civilians being armed and encouraged to defend their communities. While this serves defensive purposes, it also increases the risk of small arms being used to commit acts of gender-based violence, particularly in private spaces. The normalization of firearms in civilian hands raises concerns about women's safety, as power imbalances reinforced by guns could lead to increased violence in homes and communities.³³

Different forms of obstetric and/or reproductive violence are also common in conflict contexts where the patriarchal notion of women's bodies objectified as providers of offspring to 'new' soldiers is reinforced. There are testimonies from women in different contexts, such as in Armenia. After the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, women were told that in order to be good patriots, they should have a child with a disabled war veteran since they were heroes. In exchange, the government even offered monetary compensation.³⁴



In relation to gender-biased sex selection at birth³⁵, Armenia and Azerbaijan share top positions. According to Armenians and Azerbaijanis, the subject of son preference is a challenging concern and a form of discrimination in both nations.³⁶

There have also been examples of sextortion in relation to some contexts where military wives have been forced to have sex with higher ranking officers in order for their husbands not to be sent to the worst areas.³⁷

Guns as symbols of heroism and liberation

The rule of law often collapses in active conflict zones, allowing perpetrators of GBV to act with impunity. Armed actors, whether state or non-state, often commit crimes against women without fear of prosecution. Men may experience psychological trauma or economic stress, which, combined with access to firearms, increases the likelihood of violent behaviour towards women. Survivors are often unable to seek justice due to the breakdown of legal systems or fear of retaliation.

In Ukraine, there are reports of gender-based violence committed with firearms, but law enforcement officers are reluctant to investigate returning soldiers, as they are seen as war heroes. Domestic violence involving veterans, or soldiers home on leave, are often not likely to be considered a high priority by the police and State Bureau of Investigation.

³³ Civilian firearm possession, Small Arms Survey

³⁴ Armenia and Azerbaijan: women peacebuilders on the post-conflict scenario / Armenia / Areas / Homepage – Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso Transeuropa (balcanicaucaso.org)

³⁵ Sex-selective abortion is a form of femicide or female feticide/ infanticide.

³⁶ Gendered dimensions of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, LSE Women, Peace and Security blog

³⁷ Listen to Her – Gendered Effects of the Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh and Women's Priorities for Peace

Women's rights organisation **Center Women's Perspectives in Lviv** collect information from clients and regularly monitor the register of court cases. The latest court update covers information from 1 January 2022 until end of October 2024 and indicate a steady trend of growth in the number of cases of military servicemen being prosecuted for domestic violence under Article 173-2 of the Code of Administrative Offenses. According to the Unified State Register of Court Decisions in 2022 there were 1569 cases involving servicemen, in 2023 there were 3647 cases, and in the first ten months of 2024 there were 4272 number of cases of military servicemen being prosecuted for domestic violence under Article 173-2 of the Code of Administrative Offenses³⁸.

According to the law, criminal offenses committed by military personnel are investigated not by the police, but by the State Bureau of Investigation. From the practice of the Centre Women's Perspectives, in many cases, the State Bureau of Investigation refuses to open criminal proceedings against a military or law enforcement officer who has committed domestic violence. Woman has to challenge this in court while facing significant pressure. Statistics on the number of persons who have committed domestic violence significantly exceed the number of cases investigated by the State Bureau of Investigation, therefore contradictory statistical data raise questions and require clarification.

Linked to a lack of capacity and reluctance by police and officials to investigate GBV during violent conflict, this form of violence is also deprioritised as an issue to deal with 'later'. In the Ukrainian government's report to GREVIO in 2023, the increase in the number of domestic violence perpetrated by the military, and the obstacles in access to justice for the victims, are not mentioned. If the government commented on the problem of violence against women in wartime, it was about crimes committed by servicemen of the Russian Federation³⁹.



The roles of women and men (in Bosnia-Herzegovina) during the war changed, women started to be the breadwinners. When men were returning after the war, they found their communities destroyed and that coupled with PTSD and no psychological support as well as negative coping mechanisms, such as alcoholism, there was a high risk of violence, especially with the presence of weapons. But since women were expected to recognise their heroic acts, they were not at liberty to talk about domestic violence.

Women were also under pressure during the war to provide new offspring because many men and boys had died and there was a need to 'rebuild the nation', it was problematic to access abortion and other reproductive rights.⁴⁰

According to women's rights organisations working with gender-based violence, women are often expected to keep quiet about domestic abuse perpetrated by military members or veterans due to perceptions that domestic violence is a less important issue during a war, and due to reports of abuse coming into conflict with the perception of returning soldiers as war heroes.

Like organisations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ukrainian women's rights organisations are seeing how victims/survivors of domestic violence are turned away by the police and told to support and be understanding of their war-hero husbands. Women themselves sometimes avoid seeking help, as they do not want to burden the strained police or shelters in the middle of a war. Ukrainian society will continue to suffer the consequences for years if today's trauma and mental health issues, society's hypermasculinity, domestic violence, the increase in small arms, and the deprioritisation of domestic violence are not addressed.⁴¹

Conflict-related sexual violence and small arms

Weapons are not only instruments to commit rape, to

³⁸ <https://new.gp.gov.ua/ua/posts/statistika>

³⁹ <https://new.gp.gov.ua/ua/posts/statistika>

⁴⁰ [The-Kvinna-till-Kvinna-Foundation-they-came-together-not-to-be-silenced-gender-based-violence-in-conflict-the-role-of-womens-rights-organisations.pdf \(kvinnaatillkvinna.org\) p. 29](#)

⁴¹ [The-Kvinna-till-Kvinna-Foundation-they-came-together-not-to-be-silenced-gender-based-violence-in-conflict-the-role-of-womens-rights-organisations.pdf \(kvinnaatillkvinna.org\)](#)

threaten or coerce victims/survivors of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) into sexual acts against their will, as well as to injure and kill them – the proliferation of these weapons also fuels the conflict itself.

The relationship between the deterioration of a security situation and the increase in CRSV perpetrated by weapons is highlighted in the UN Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) report *Addressing Weapons in Conflict-related Sexual Violence: The Arms Control and Disarmament Toolbox*⁴², pointing to the mutually reinforcing dynamics that contribute to CRSV in conflict. Weapons, and SALW in particular, indirectly augment this deterioration, since they create the conditions for CRSV and other forms of GBV, including intimate partner violence, domestic violence, gendered hate crimes and femicides. One suggested way of addressing this linkage is to support *“the collection of more disaggregated data on survivors and victims of CRSV by age, gender and other identity markers (e.g. disability) as well as geographic location of the incident, type of location (e.g. displaced persons camps, schools), type of perpetrator, and most importantly the type of weapon involved in the incident.”*⁴³

In Sudan, the armed actors, both the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and Sudan’s Armed Forces (SAF), systematically use sexual violence on a staggering scale to terrorise communities and achieve military or political objectives, where victims and survivors as young as eight and as old as 75 have been documented.⁴⁴ The mere presence of a firearm is enough to intimidate, threaten, coerce and control, but also enhances their capacity to commit these crimes on a larger scale.



Although it has been recognized that the proliferation of weapons fuels the systematic and widespread occurrence of sexual violence in conflict, little has actually been done to address weapon proliferation as part of efforts to prevent conflict-related sexual violence.⁴⁵

⁴² UNIDIR [Addressing Weapons in Conflict related Sexual Violence.pdf](#)

⁴³ UNIDIR [Addressing Weapons in Conflict related Sexual Violence.pdf](#)

⁴⁴ Sudan: UN Fact-Finding Mission documents large-scale sexual violence and other human rights violations in newly issued report | OHCHR

⁴⁵ [Addressing Weapons in Conflict-Related Sexual Violence: The Arms Control and Disarmament Toolbox > UNIDIR](#)

⁴⁶ Remarks of SRSR Pramila Patten at the Security Council Open Debate on “Preventing Conflict-Related Sexual Violence through demilitarization and gender-responsive arms control”, New York, 23 April 2024 – United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict

⁴⁷ [Women in war-torn Sudanese city forced to have sex in exchange for food | Sudan | The Guardian](#)

“We meet today to consider the **15th annual Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence** at a time when gender equality gains are being rolled back, even as militarization is being bankrolled at unprecedented levels; at a time when the world’s resources are being used to feed the flames of conflict, while women and children starve; at a time when military spending has soared to **over 2.2 trillion USD**, while humanitarian aid budgets have been slashed; and at a time when **weapons continue to flow into the hands of perpetrators, while the vast majority of victims remain empty-handed in terms of reparations and redress**. We meet at a time when the pursuit of peace and gender equality has once again become a radical act. The essential, existential task we face is to **silence the guns and amplify the voices of women as a critical constituency for peace.**”⁴⁶

Pramila Patten, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, New York 23 April, 2024.

Exploitation and human trafficking – displacement and heightened vulnerability due to arms

Conflict-driven displacement leaves women and children particularly vulnerable to many forms of GBV. In some conflicts, armed groups use their control of small arms to dominate access to humanitarian aid and resources, coercing women into providing sexual favours in exchange for food, shelter or safety.⁴⁷ This form of violence, also known as **sextortion**, often surges in settings where women have no other means of survival. Women and children fleeing conflict are particularly at risk, since displacement camps and refugee routes are often targeted by traffickers and armed groups.

Sextortion is a form of corruption and gender-based violence. It occurs when a person with entrusted authority abuses this authority to obtain a sexual favour in exchange for a service or benefit which is within their power to grant or withhold. Sextortion is a corrupt conduct in which the currency is sex, and a sexual conduct involving coerced quid pro quo (this for that). The responsibility for sextortion always lies with the actor that abuses their entrusted authority (the perpetrator), and the transactional aspect of sextortion adds to the shame, fear, and invisibility by making the victim appear 'complicit'. Sextortion is a violation of human rights and an abuse of power, and must be understood in the context of gendered power relations and norms.⁴⁸



The large-scale displacement of Ukrainian civilians due to the war has created ripe conditions for human trafficking. Traffickers, often armed, prey on women and girls fleeing conflict zones, coercing them into sexual slavery or forced labour. Reports from border regions and refugee camps have highlighted cases where women and children, desperate for safety, are exploited by armed criminal networks.⁴⁹

Small arms give traffickers the means to exert control and maintain dominance over their victims, making escape difficult. In places like Syria and Iraq, armed groups have trafficked women and girls into sexual slavery, with firearms playing a central role in their capture and control.^{50 51}

Women human rights defenders at risk

In the Eastern DR Congo, women journalists who reported on CRSV received death threats from armed groups, while the government threatened to have their media outlets shut down. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, women's rights organisations that exposed how local organised crime syndicates were engaging in and profiting from human trafficking were subjected to threats of violence, including break-ins at their offices, shelters and homes. In Iraq, WHRDs have had to go underground to run safe-houses as life-saving mechanism after facing extreme security challenges. Many organisations and activists are regularly threatened and attacked, and often have to relocate for security reasons.⁵²

⁴⁸ [Sextortion: Corruption and Gender-Based Violence \(eba.se\)](#)

⁴⁹ UNSCR 2331 on human trafficking from 2016 recognized that the threats and use of sexual violence can be a tactic of the shadow economy of conflict and terrorism as it relates to ISIL (also known as Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities.

⁵⁰ [human trafficking in the ukraine crisis-final2.pdf \(iom.int\)](#)

⁵¹ [Organized Crime Module 16 Key Issues: Trafficking in persons and terrorism \(unodc.org\)](#)

⁵² [The-Kvinna-till-Kvinna-Foundation-they-came-together-not-to-be-silenced-gender-based-violence-in-conflict-the-role-of-womens-rights-organisations.pdf](#)

During armed conflict

Recommendations to the international community, donors & governments

1 Governments should fully implement and enforce all existing arms export legislation, including the Arms Trade Treaty (especially Article 7(4)), the European Common Position on Arms Exports, and the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms, to prevent misuse in gender-based violence. Additionally, states must hold each other accountable to these commitments to ensure arms exports do not facilitate violence against women and children.

2 Fund and support women's rights organisations to be able to continue to provide essential services to GBV survivors, including access to healthcare, legal assistance, psychological support and safe housing, also during conflict. This important work helps to mitigate the lasting impacts of GBV on individuals and communities, and enables survivors to contribute to post-conflict recovery and peacebuilding efforts.

3 Should support and fund women's organisations to play a leading role in designing, establishing and maintaining monitoring and accountability mechanisms that track instances and patterns of GBV during conflict, as well as evaluate the effectiveness of peace and disarmament interventions. By documenting and reporting on GBV trends, women's organisations can hold parties to the conflict accountable, and they can ensure that the peace process includes concrete measures to prevent and address violence against women and girls.

4 Implement UNPoA and other relevant policy instruments. National governments should integrate GBV prevention and response strategies into the implementation of the UNPoA. This includes creating laws and policies that regulate small arms ownership and access, with explicit provisions to prevent firearms from reaching individuals who have a history of domestic violence or GBV.

5 Women's organisations should be recognised as essential partners in implementing the UNPoA, particularly in areas related to community safety, GBV prevention and advocacy. These organisations should be supported to actively participate in policymaking, monitoring and awareness-raising initiatives on small arms control.

Ceasefire and beyond – the long aftermath of armed conflict

Participation in peace negotiation and agreements

The wide availability of weapons often limits women's involvement in peace negotiations, and political processes, as they are used to enforce already existing discriminatory structures (risks of violence/threats/harassment of women). This both limits their participation and their ability to get justice for acts of conflict-related gender-based violence included in agreements and provisions.

In peace negotiations, the dominant invitees are often the armed actors – military officials, militia leaders and government representatives – whose ability to control the violence seemingly legitimises their place at the table. However, this approach disregards the lived realities of women, who frequently bear the brunt of these conflicts, not on the battlefield but within their own homes and communities.

Weapons used to exert power on a large scale are the same ones that are used to threaten and control women on an intimate level, thereby intensifying both personal and societal insecurity. This constant proximity to violence restricts women's freedom, complicates their ability to organise, and constitutes additional barriers to their participation in peace processes. The reliance on armed actors in peace talks perpetuates a narrow vision of security, focused on ending hostilities between those with the greatest capacity for violence rather than addressing the structural insecurities faced by civilians, particularly women.

Small arms exacerbate gender inequalities as men gain increasing social and physical power, while women are deprived of their opportunity to safely participate in the decision-making that affects them and their communities.⁵³

Facts

In 2022, women participated as conflict party negotiators or delegates in four of five active United Nations-led or co-led peace processes.

Women's representation stood only at 16 percent, a further drop compared to 19 percent in 2021 and 23 percent in 2020.

In 2022, 6 out of 18 peace agreements reached (33 percent) included provisions referencing women, girls and gender.⁵⁴

⁵³ Farr, Vanessa, 2006, 'Gender Analysis as a tool for multilateral negotiators in the small arms context.' In *Disarmament as Humanitarian Action: From Perspective to Practice*, edited by John Borrie and Vanessa Martin Randin, Geneva, UNIDIR (United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research Geneva), p. 111 / [Policy-brief-Small-Arms-Control---The-Case-for-Gender-Mainstreaming.pdf](#)

⁵⁴ Facts and figures: Women, peace, and security | UN Women – Headquarters

Challenges to disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR)

Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programmes are key to post-conflict recovery, but they often fail to take into account the gendered dimensions of small arms proliferation. Women are frequently excluded from DDR processes, despite being directly affected by the presence of firearms. When DDR programmes do not address the specific risks of GBV or provide support for women affected by violence, small arms continue to circulate, and GBV remains unchecked. Without the proper disposal of weapons and the reintegration of former combatants into non-violent roles, post-conflict communities remain unsafe for women.

The impact of demobilisation

After ceasefires or a cessation of hostilities, many women's rights organisations report high levels of violence against women as demobilised soldiers return to their homes and communities.

For example in Iraq, decades of war, insurgency and terrorism have contributed to an environment where small arms are easily accessible, exacerbating risks of gender-based violence in homes, communities and conflict zones.

"According to a 2017 report published by GunPolicy.org, the estimated total number of firearms (both legal and illegal) held by civilians in Iraq is 7,588,000, meaning that out of every 100 individuals, 19.6 own a firearm. On the other hand, the defence forces of Iraq are reported to possess 611,000 firearms while police in Iraq are reported to have 56,000 firearms.

Despite the vast underreporting, data from Baghdad shows that out of 994 cases of violence against women 219 included the use of firearms. And data from Erbil showed that over 30% of cases of violence against women involved a weapon".⁵⁵

The role of women's organisations in disarmament

There are numerous examples of women's organisations and activists playing a leading role in disarmament in their contexts, despite little official recognition or involvement in official disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) structures, and that women are rarely invited to take part in or indeed plan DDR processes.

The Kvinna till Kvinna report *Rethink! A Handbook for Sustainable Peace* (2004)⁵⁶ shows examples from Cambodia, where women activists initiated a weapons collection to reduce armed violence against women. In DRC, women declared a general disarmament on International Women's Day in 2001. In Albania, women's organisation joined a UNIFEM Weapons for Development programme and collected a large number of weapons. Despite this, women's rights organisations are still often excluded from internationally-led demobilisation initiatives.

In post-conflict societies, the continued presence and circulation of small arms pose significant risks in perpetuating gender-based violence (GBV), hindering recovery and destabilising peace. Those who used to bear arms during a conflict need to be reintegrated into society, while victims and survivors (e.g. women who have been sexually abused during the conflict) must be given support and help to reintegrate into society.⁵⁷



We [in Liberia in 2012] have not sufficiently rehabilitated ourselves when it comes to change. There is no process going on, no follow-up activities after the DDR process. Everybody thought it was all right. But everything is not all right... At that time, the men also felt that women had taken over their role. And a chain is as weak as its weakest link. So when you talk about security and domestic violence, this is our weakest link right now, we have a long way to go.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ The Correlation Between the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Iraq and Rates of Violence Against Women – WILPF

⁵⁶ *Rethink! A handbook for peace* | The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation

⁵⁷ *Security on whose terms?* | Kvinna till Kvinna

⁵⁸ *13-Equal-power-lasting-peace-Liberia_ENG.pdf* (kvinna.tillkvinna.org) p. 79

Ex-combatants returning to civilian life who struggle with reintegration may seek to reaffirm their masculine identity through violent behaviours. In the absence of formal employment or disarmament programmes, they may use firearms to assert dominance over women and girls, reinforcing a culture of violence and control. This takes place in combination with continued access to firearms, which sustains an atmosphere of fear and intimidation for women, girls as well as other marginalised or discriminated groups, such as LGBTQI+ persons and those with disabilities.

Hence the stress of post-war conditions – such as unemployment, trauma, and instability – combined with easy access to guns, makes gender-based violence more deadly. Further, the coercive force of firearms also creates ample ground for other forms of violence (e.g. sexual or psychological).

Empowering women's organisations to lead GBV monitoring, arms control advocacy and peacebuilding not only increases the effectiveness of conflict response mechanisms, but also builds a more inclusive security framework. Integrating the combined expertise of these organisations into conflict resolution and recovery efforts ultimately supports a lasting peace, grounded in human security and the protection of all, particularly the most vulnerable.

“The exclusion of women can result from barriers that are **conceptual** (beliefs and norms related to the participation of women in negotiations), **technical** (portrayal of women as lacking expertise in issues related to arms) or **political** (the lack of women holding political positions in the specific country).”⁵⁹

Weak law enforcement and impunity

In post-conflict societies, law enforcement institutions are often weakened or overwhelmed. When small arms remain in circulation as a consequence of unsuccessful disarmament programmes or rules concerning soldiers' weapons when they come back home from the front, law enforcement's capacity to manage violence is limited, and women are less likely to report abuse for fear of retaliation or ineffective justice systems. This perpetuates a culture of silence and fear.

Long-term consequences

Almost 30 years after the end of the armed conflict in **Bosnia-Herzegovina** (BiH) just under half (48%) of women report have experienced some form of abuse, including intimate partner violence (IPV), non-partner violence, stalking and sexual harassment, since the age of 15. 84% of women do not report violence to the police.⁶⁰

“As patriarchal gender norms are deeply entrenched in the region, power imbalances between men and women are particularly strong at home and in the public sector. The Western Balkans is unique for its legacy of war, economic insecurity, and history of conflict-related sexual violence against women. These factors have contributed to an environment of poverty, conflict, and intergenerational trauma, where domestic violence is widely accepted as part of the status quo.”⁶¹

“Civil society organizations remain essential, offering life-saving support and assistance to survivors and persistently advocating for necessary policy and legislative changes.”⁶²

Barriers to women's participation in public life

The persistent presence of small arms in post conflict societies can prevent women from fully participating in rebuilding and peace processes. Women may face threats or actual violence for attempting to engage in political or community leadership roles, as armed actors and former combatants maintain control. This suppression reinforces gender inequality and limits women's voices in decision-making, preventing meaningful progress toward peace and stability.

⁵⁹ Gomez Triana et al – Negotiating Disarmament – The Gender Dimension GPS Policy Brief 5-2022.pdf

⁶⁰ (423470_1.pdf)

⁶¹ Women are being murdered in the Western Balkans, and it is time to take action | Euronews

⁶² Statement on the One-Year Anniversary of the Femicide in Gradačac | United Nations in Bosnia and Herzegovina



Women’s rights organisations in Iraq have documented numerous cases where men, many of them former combatants or militia members, use firearms to threaten or harm their wives and daughters. This dynamic was especially apparent during the COVID-19 lockdowns, when domestic violence surged, and many women found themselves trapped in violent homes with armed abusers.⁶³

There is no denying that over the past decade, the increase in women’s political representation has been accompanied by a **rise in violence against women in politics**. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, recent research indicates that 60% of women in politics have experienced a form of violence in politics and over 96% of that violence was verbal or emotional. It affects women at each stage of their political engagement: as activists, candidates and holders of elected office. It threatens democracy at its core – as democracy without the equal and active participation of half of the population is impossible.⁶⁴

Sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment

The aftermath of conflict often leaves societies fragmented, with displaced populations, broken economies and weak governance, creating conditions ripe for human trafficking and exploitation.

Although conflict has officially ended, armed groups can persist in post-conflict settings, maintaining control over certain regions. These groups may continue using small arms to perpetrate sexual violence as a means of asserting power or maintaining control over populations.

Hence the normalisation of violence, weak law enforcement and the failure to disarm former combatants, as well as the lack of efforts to reintegrate combatants and provide support for PTSD, make women especially vulnerable to intimate partner violence, sexual exploitation and

human trafficking. Without targeted interventions, small arms will continue to fuel GBV, undermining long-term peace and security.



In Iraq’s internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, women and girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence and exploitation. Armed actors, including security personnel and militia members, have been reported to exploit their power by coercing women into sexual relationships in exchange for safety or resources. The presence of weapons in these camps often facilitates these abuses, as armed men are able to impose their will on vulnerable women with little resistance. Iraqi women’s organizations have also been involved in disarmament campaigns, recognizing that the reduction of small arms in civilian and militia hands is critical to reducing GBV.⁶⁵

The Saving Lives Entity, or **SALIENT**, jointly managed by UNODA and UNDP **offers governments and the UN system a way to follow through with international commitments and dedicates 30 percent of its funding to gender-responsive actions** in tackling armed violence and illicit small arms and light weapons. Since inception, over 30 percent of SALIENT funds have been committed to tackling gender-based violence, promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment.

The exact magnitude of armed violence against women is not known because statistics are scarce. As part of the 16 Days campaign in 2023, UNODA presented a solution to obtain such data, namely by leveraging synergies between the targets of Sustainable Development Goal 5 on violence against women and Goal 16’s targets on all forms of violence and illicit flows of arms.⁶⁶

⁶³ Iraq: Rise in family-based violence against women linked to conflict - The Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights

⁶⁴ ES289784. PREMS 136819 GBR 2541 Violence against women TXT Web A5.pdf

⁶⁵ The-Kvinna-till-Kvinna-Foundation-they-came-together-not-to-be-silenced-gender-based-violence-in-conflict-the-role-of-womens-rights-organisations.pdf. 59

⁶⁶ <https://disarmament.unoda.org/update/united-to-prevent-gender-based-violence-through-arms-control/>

Ceasefire and beyond

Recommendations to the international community, donors & governments

1 All peace agreements must explicitly include comprehensive support provisions for survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) and the families of victims, ensuring their rights, protection and access to justice. This should encompass measures for physical and psychological support, legal aid and socio-economic reintegration tailored to the specific needs of survivors. Additionally, a dedicated mechanism should be established within the peace process to systematically gather and document evidence and testimonies of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). This mechanism should prioritise survivor safety, confidentiality and trauma-informed practices, facilitating accountability and paving the way for reparations and judicial processes against perpetrators.

2 Comprehensive psychosocial and rehabilitation support should be provided to returning military personnel, particularly those affected by PTSD, to facilitate their successful reintegration into family life and society. These support programmes must also prioritise thorough disarmament efforts to prevent the circulation of small arms within post-conflict communities, thereby fostering a safer and more stable environment for lasting peace.

3 Women's organisations must be included and their work supported, funded and integrated in disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) programmes, as well as peacebuilding processes, to ensure these efforts address the root causes of GBV and the impacts of small arms on women. Their involvement is crucial to developing DDR initiatives that focus not only on disarming combatants, but also on protecting communities from future violence and creating conditions for a sustainable peace that prioritises the safety and agency of all citizens.

4 Governments should enact stringent firearm regulations, including strict licensing criteria that deny gun access to individuals with histories of gender-based violence, domestic violence or gender-motivated hate crimes. Legislation should prioritise victim safety by revoking licenses of offenders, and linking laws to national and international commitments such as CEDAW, the Istanbul Convention, and the WPS agenda. Inclusive, model legislation that centres on preventing gun violence over firearm rights will contribute to safer societies, particularly in potential conflict contexts.

5 National and international bodies should establish joint task forces or working groups, including regular forums, to bring together Women, Peace and Security (WPS), and small arms control actors. These forums should focus on aligning strategies, sharing insights, and updating National Action Plans (NAPs) and arms control policies to reflect the interconnectedness of gender, security and arms proliferation. By integrating WPS priorities into arms control policies and vice versa, these groups can foster inclusive, gender-sensitive data systems, and develop policies that effectively address disarmament and women's protection, especially in conflict-prone areas.

**For all women's rights,
in every corner of the world.**