"From Research to Policy: Prospects for Gender-Transformative Small Arms Control"

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What do gender perspectives bring to small arms control policy-making?

1. Violence committed with or facilitated by small arms and light weapons (SALW) impacts people of different ages and genders differently, including women, men, boys and girls. Understanding the gender differentiated impacts of violence committed with SALW, and thus ensuring the effective implementation of the Programme of Action (PoA) requires data on violent crime disaggregated by gender and/or sex, and by whether a firearm was used. It also requires the full, equal, meaningful, safe and effective participation of women in technical and policy-related roles.

2. Conceptualizing gender-responsive small arms control within the peace, security and development nexus can lead to more holistic and comprehensive programming that includes actors that have not traditionally been part of small arms control efforts, especially from civil society, such as organizations working on women’s rights, gender equality, youth, marginalized communities and sustainable development, as well as parliamentarians.

3. Incorporating gender perspectives into policy discussions can prompt conversations on how small arms control can contribute to armed violence prevention efforts that address the gender-differentiated impacts of violence as well as the gender-motivated demands for illicit weapons, or motivations to engage in illicit trafficking.¹

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

5. Integrating gender perspectives can also help identify synergies and opportunities for collaboration with other national frameworks that share commitments to reduce armed violence and maintain peace and security, such as those found in National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS).² Small arms control converges with the WPS agenda on all its four interconnected pillars, namely participation, prevention, protection, and relief and recovery.

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

7. Gender mainstreaming small arms control can thus promote greater coherence in policies to prevent SGBV in conflict and non-conflict settings. For example, collecting and sharing data disaggregated by presence/use of weapons in conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) incidents can inform preventative action and policy.

The importance of data

8. UN General Assembly Resolution 77/55 on 'Women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control' encourages member states to disaggregate data on firearms-related deaths where feasible by 'income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, marital status, migration status, disability, geographical location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts'.

9. Research institutions and international organisations have played a key role in filling data gaps. Existing sex- and age-disaggregated data indicates that, globally, 91% of victims of firearms-related deaths are men and boys, and 8% are women and girls. Men are more at risk of being injured or killed by a firearm in both conflict and non-conflict settings, including through suicide.

10. Women and girls constitute 66% of victims of intimate partner violence and 55% of victims in family-related violence. In some countries with high femicide rates, more than half of these killings are perpetrated with small arms.

11. In 2023, the UN reported that 95% of victims of CRSV were women and girls. While data on CRSV and weapons is limited, a recent UNIDIR report found that in 6 countries where disaggregated data was available, between 70% and 90% of CRSV incidents reported involved a firearm.

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

13. Women and girls are more likely to be internally displaced, pushed out of school, and to care for those injured by firearms, or for the family members of those who are killed. This can undermine their full enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights.
Women’s meaningful participation in small arms control

14. Women and men have the right to participate meaningfully in negotiations and shape the decisions that affect them. The outcome documents adopted at the Third Review Conference (RevCon 3) of the PoA, as well as at 7th Biennial Meeting of States (BMS 7) and the 8th Biennial Meeting of States (BMS 8), affirmed this by calling on States to ensure the full, equal, meaningful, safe and effective participation of women, including in leadership roles and as agents of change, in all policy, planning and implementation processes, mechanisms and forums at all levels related to the implementation of the PoA.

15. Despite these calls, women remain underrepresented in negotiations, comprising, on average, only 34% of diplomats in arms control and disarmament fora. For example, during BMS 7 the proportion of women who delivered statements was 30% and during BMS8 this grew only slightly to 34%.

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

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

18. Civil society also plays an important role in ensuring the effectiveness of national SALW control efforts both as experts, and as organizations that engage regularly with and advocate for survivors and affected communities. It is therefore important to ensure that civil society organizations (CSOs) working on women’s rights, gender equality, youth, and with marginalized communities have the opportunities, knowledge, skills and resources to engage in national SALW-related action. This allows for the integration of needs and perspectives of victims and survivors of armed violence while identifying synergies between national SALW control measures and the work of CSOs.
Moving Forward: Recommendations for the Fourth Review Conference

19. Member States should consolidate and build on the discussions and conclusions on gender-transformative arms control in the UN Programme of Action through the following recommendations for consideration at RevCon 4:

I. Reiterate previous commitments on gender mainstreaming from RevCon 3 and BMS 8 in the outcome document for RevCon 4 and further expand dialogue and action on gender-transformative SALW control by including new topics, such as the link between gender roles (especially masculinities) and demand for illicit SALW, while placing a greater emphasis on the role of the PoA in addressing GBV and, in particular, CRSV. These analyses should consider the connections between illicit SALW trafficking, gender, and other forms of organized crime.

II. Improve data collection efforts on homicide, and other forms of violence such as CRSV, intimate partner violence, and family-related violence, disaggregated by gender and/or sex. This data should specify whether a small arm was used and whether or not it was acquired illicitly. Where feasible, data should be further disaggregated by income, age, race, ethnicity, marital status, migration status, disability, geographical location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts, where targeted responses are needed to protect specific groups in vulnerable situations.

III. Identify and act upon synergies and opportunities for collaboration with the Women, Peace and Security agenda, CEDAW, and the Sustainable Development Goals. Similarly, regional and national action plans related to the implementation of the PoA should integrate gender perspectives in line with regional and national policy frameworks. This work should be supported by gender advisors or gender focal points17 where necessary.

IV. Work with gender and diversity experts to identify barriers to women’s meaningful participation in decision-making and implementation related to the PoA, including in technical areas related to weapons and ammunition management. Collect gender/sex disaggregated data on participation in the field of SALW control both at a policy and implementation level and develop context-specific measures and plans to overcome barriers to participation.

V. Foster an inclusive approach to SALW control policy making, by ensuring that CSOs working on women’s rights, gender equality, youth and marginalized communities have the opportunities, knowledge, skills and sufficient resources to engage in national SALW control at the national, international, and multilateral levels.
While different institutions define this term differently, gender focal points usually comprise of a network of individuals in different units who dedicate a percentage of their time (often around 20%) to support gender mainstreaming by advocating, advising and supporting colleagues, and monitoring and reporting on progress towards gender equality in their respective areas of work.