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Addressing Weapons in Conflict-related Sexual Violence: The Arms Control and Disarmament Toolbox

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Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	6
INTRODUCTION	9
1. UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE	11
1.1 Survivors and Victims	13
1.2 Perpetrators	15
1.3 Root Causes and Enabling Factors	16
1.4 Challenges to Data Collection	17
2. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WEAPONS AND CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE	21
2.1 Direct Links	21
2.2 Indirect Links	24
2.3 In Focus: The Case of Weapons and Conflict-related Sexual Violence in Sudan	28
3. THE ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT TOOLBOX FOR PREVENTING CONFLICT RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE	32
3.1 Arms Control Treaties and Instruments Applicable to Small Arms and Light Weapons	33
United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects	35
The Arms Trade Treaty	35
The Firearms Protocol	36
3.2 Additional Arms Control and Disarmament Tools for Preventing Conflict-related Sexual Violence	37
Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Programmes	38
Civilian Disarmament and Weapon Collection Programmes	39
Weapon and Ammunition Management	39
Community Violence Reduction	40
Security Sector Reform	41
4. LOOKING AHEAD: FURTHER RECOMMENDATIONS TO SUPPORT CRSV PREVENTION	43
5. CONCLUSION	47

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Notes

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The Gender and Disarmament Programme seeks to contribute to the strategic goals of achieving gender equality in disarmament forums and effectively applying gender perspectives in disarmament processes. It encompasses original research, outreach activities and resource tools to support disarmament stakeholders in translating gender awareness into practical action.

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Acronyms & Abbreviations

ACLED	Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project
ATT	Arms Trade Treaty
CRSV	conflict-related sexual violence
CVR	community violence reduction
DDR	disarmament, demobilization and reintegration
GBV	gender-based violence
GBVIMS	Gender-Based Violence Information Management System
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
SALW	small arms and light weapons
SSR	security sector reform
UNITAMS	United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan
UNPOA	United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects
WAM	weapon and ammunition management

Executive Summary

The United Nations Secretary-General and many United Nations Member States have recognized that increased militarization and the proliferation of weapons are two related factors that fuel the systematic and widespread occurrence sexual violence in conflict. Beyond this recognition, however, little has actually been done to address weapon proliferation as part of efforts to prevent conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV).

This research seeks to fill this gap by exploring the links between the proliferation of weapons, particularly small arms and light weapons (SALW), and CRSV. Specifically, this research seeks to identify entry points where arms control and disarmament treaties, instruments, tools and measures can be leveraged to prevent CRSV.

Based on publicly available incident data and in-depth interviews with experts on both CRSV and the arms control and disarmament field, the report offers an overview of how different arms control and disarmament treaties, tools, instruments and measures can be leveraged throughout the conflict cycle to strengthen prevention of this form of violence.

This research considers that gender-responsive arms control and disarmament can play a role in both short-term operational prevention and long-term structural prevention of CRSV, not only by reducing the proliferation of the weapons that facilitate CRSV and create the conditions for this type of violence to escalate, but also by changing harmful gender norms and attitudes, thereby addressing the root cause of CRSV.

Key findings

- The proliferation of SALW in conflicts can be linked to CRSV in two ways. First, directly, as weapons and ammunition are used by perpetrators to commit rape, to threaten or coerce individuals into sexual acts against their will, and to injure and kill survivors and victims of sexual violence. Second, indirectly, as weapon proliferation is one of the factors that fuel armed conflict, which in turn propagates the conditions that lead to CRSV.
- Publicly available data on CRSV incidents, collected by the UN and civil society actors mainly refers to “armed actors” as perpetrators, and there is a lack of specific data on weapons in relation to CRSV. However, in six countries where disaggregated data on weapons was available, approximately 70% to 90% of CRSV incidents are reported to involve weapons, particularly firearms.

- Despite the linkages between CRSV and weapons, to date, no arms control or disarmament treaty or instrument mentions CRSV; however, some have recognized the gendered impacts of weapons, including their role in facilitating gender-based violence. This recognition provides an entry point from which CRSV may be addressed.
- As part of CRSV prevention efforts, this paper proposes an arms control and disarmament toolbox, which includes multiple treaties, such as the Arms Trade Treaty, the United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms and the Firearms Protocol. By addressing the legal and policy frameworks for SALW control, these treaties and instruments can contribute to the long-term structural prevention of CRSV.
- The toolbox also includes tools and measures that can be relevant during different phases of a conflict to limit access to weapons to perpetrators of CRSV, thus contributing to short-term operational prevention of CRSV. These tools and measures include disarmament, demobilization and reintegration; civilian disarmament programmes; weapons and ammunition management; community violence reduction; and security sector reform.
- A gender-responsive implementation of the arms control and disarmament toolbox can contribute to changing gender norms and attitudes by promoting women's participation in decision-making about security issues, including arms control and disarmament, which has traditionally been a male-dominated field. Thereby addressing structural gender inequality, a root cause of CRSV.

Key recommendations

- **All arms control and disarmament stakeholders, including States, civil society organizations, and international and regional organizations, should contribute to improving understanding of the links between SALW proliferation and CRSV by:**
 - Supporting 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.
 - Pursuing and funding further context-specific research on the links between the proliferation of SALW and CRSV, for example the link between organized crime, the illicit trade of SALW and other types of illicit trade in conflict, and CRSV.
- **All stakeholders should raise awareness in SALW-related forums of the role of arms control and disarmament in CRSV prevention.**
- **States should consider sharing and building on:**
 - Existing national practices in the development of gender-responsive SALW legislation and policies, which can contribute to the prevention of gender-based violence, including CRSV, and;

- Export risk assessment practices which could assess and mitigate the risk that exported weapons can be used to commit or facilitate CRSV, in the context of Arms Trade Treaty obligations.

- **States should leverage synergies among complementary global and regional arms control and disarmament instruments and treaties – as well as other frameworks such as the Women, Peace and Security Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals – to address the proliferation of SALW and its gendered impacts, which include CRSV.**
- **As critical stakeholders in efforts to prevent CRSV, survivors and their representative associations should be included in decision-making on arms control and disarmament at multilateral and national levels.**

Introduction

In 2000, United Nations resolution 1325 on women, peace and security made sexual violence a matter of international peace and security, calling for “all parties to armed conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, and all other forms of violence in situations of armed conflict”.¹ Since then, the United Nations Security Council has prioritized preventing and responding to conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) in a number of ways. These include mandating United Nations field presences to work towards its prevention by regularly reporting on CRSV incidents, supporting justice accountability measures for perpetrators, and providing services for survivors. The Security Council has also established a Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, whose role is to bring attention to this issue through high-level engagements with governments, militaries and other stakeholders as well as to coordinate the monitoring and reporting on CRSV where the United Nations has a presence.

Yet, over 20 years since the adoption of Security Council resolution 1325 and over 10 years since the establishment of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, widespread and systematic use of sexual and gender-based violence is persistent in many conflicts, including in countries where there are United Nations-led peace operations. In 2022, the Secretary-General's report on CRSV highlighted that “sexual violence continued to be employed as a tactic of war, torture and terrorism”² and that sexual violence has been used against men and boys, to target LGBTQI+ persons, and to silence women political activists. Deeply rooted in gender inequality, CRSV is a complex phenomenon with multiple overlapping causes. Tackling it will therefore require a multiprong approach that works on both long-term structural prevention to address the root causes of CRSV and more operational short-term prevention to address and mitigate immediate enabling factors.

Although certainly not the only factor, in many contexts, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) plays a direct role in facilitating CRSV or in the act of CRSV itself. Weapons also indirectly enable escalation of sexual violence by fuelling the conflict in which CRSV occurs. In his annual reports on CRSV, the Secretary-General has recognized that illicit SALW proliferation is among the factors fuelling systematic and widespread CRSV.³ Recently, arms control and disarmament treaties, instruments and measures have been recognized in the new United Nations Framework for the Prevention of Conflict-related Sexual Violence. However, beyond this recognition, not much attention has been given to practical ways arms control and disarmament can address CRSV or how

1 Security Council, [S/RES/1325](#), 2000, para. 10.

2 Security Council, Conflict-related Sexual Violence, Report of the United Nations Secretary-General, S/2022/272, 2022, <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/auto-draft/SG-Report2021for-web.pdf>, para. 10.

3 Ibid., paras 2, 3, 21, 35.

arms control can contribute to both long-term and short-term CRSV prevention. Consequently, there has been little quantitative or qualitative research on the ways in which SALW proliferation plays a role in exacerbating sexual violence in conflict.

This research project seeks to fill this gap by exploring the various ways in which SALW proliferation and CRSV are linked and identifying opportunities for arms control and disarmament to be integrated into the prevention of and response to CRSV. The research aims to support the implementation of the United Nations Framework for the Prevention of Conflict-related Sexual Violence and complement it by identifying additional opportunities for arms control and disarmament measures to contribute to both long term structural prevention and short-term operational prevention.

This first report,⁴ ***The Arms Control and Disarmament Toolbox***, seeks to understand how the proliferation of SALW contributes to CRSV based on a review of literature and an examination of publicly available incident data. Building on the available evidence base and UNIDIR's work on leveraging arms control for conflict prevention,⁵ the report provides a conceptual framework for understanding how different arms control and disarmament treaties, instruments, tools and measures can be leveraged to strengthen CRSV prevention, before and during conflict and when transitioning out of conflict into post-conflict settings.

Evidence for this report is drawn from a literature review, a review of all publicly available incident data on CRSV and a desk review of all United Nations frameworks, policies and operational guidance related to addressing and preventing CRSV, spanning a period of 20 years. In addition, recommendations are drawn from in-depth interviews with experts on sexual and gender-based violence, CRSV, and arms control and disarmament from the United Nations, civil society organizations, academia and government who are working in conflicts in Africa, Asia and Europe.

This research considers that gender-responsive arms control and disarmament can play a role in both short-term operational prevention and long-term structural prevention of CRSV, not only by reducing the proliferation of the weapons that facilitate CRSV and create the conditions for this type of violence to escalate but also by changing harmful gender norms and attitudes, thereby addressing the root cause of CRSV.

4 Subsequent reports will look at specific opportunities for the United Nations, including UN actors on the ground to integrate arms control and disarmament measures to address and prevent CRSV.

5 See UNIDIR's research stream on preventing armed conflict and armed violence: <https://unidir.org/projects/preventing-armed-conflict-and-armed-violence>.

1. Understanding Conflict-related Sexual Violence

Over the past two decades, increasing attention has been paid to CRSV. The United Nations defines CRSV⁶ as:

“ Rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilization, forced marriage, and any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity perpetrated against women, men, girls or boys that is directly or indirectly linked to a conflict. That link may be evident in the profile of the perpetrator, who is often affiliated with a State or non-State armed group, including those designated as terrorist groups by the United Nations; the profile of the victim, who is frequently an actual or perceived member of a political, ethnic or religious minority group, or targeted on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity; a climate of impunity, which is generally associated with State collapse; cross-border consequences, such as displacement or trafficking; and/or violations of a ceasefire agreement. The term also encompasses trafficking in persons for the purpose of sexual violence and/or exploitation, when committed in situations of conflict.”⁷

CRSV is rooted in structural gender inequalities derived from cultural and societal conceptions of gender roles, which exist prior to a conflict and may continue after hostilities have ceased. It is often used as a “tactic of war” by armed groups to deliberately target civilians and terrorize and humiliate victims in an effort to exert power and control.⁸ Sexual violence can vary in form, motivation and purpose⁹ but ultimately contributes to and is fed by the destruction of the social fabric of a community and has devastating immediate and long-term impacts on survivors, including physical, physiological and socioeconomic harms.¹⁰

Some of the major steps in ensuring accountability for CRSV and its recognition as international crimes, of particular importance are the rulings of the International Criminal Tribunals for the Former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. The former having determined that rape can be a war crime and the latter

6 This paper will use the current United Nations definition when referring to CRSV for the purpose of clarity. There is no universally agreed definition of CRSV or sexual violence in conflict, and the definition and scope of CRSV varies among organizations.

7 Security Council, Conflict-related Sexual Violence, Report of the United Nations Secretary-General, S/2022/272, 2022, <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/auto-draft/SG-Report2021for-web.pdf>, para 4.

8 As recognized in Security Council resolutions 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013), 2331 (2016) and 2467 (2019).

9 E.J. Wood, “Variation in Sexual Violence during War”, *Politics & Society*, vol. 34, no. 32006, pp. 307–342, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032329206290426>.

10 Dr Denis Mukwege Foundation, “Consequences of Wartime Sexual Violence”, www.mukwegefoundation.org/the-problem/consequences-sexual-violence-conflict.

that, if committed with the genocidal intent to destroy a protected group, it can constitute genocide.¹¹ The International Criminal Court has followed in the footsteps of the UN tribunals, by also ensuring accountability for these crimes, including for girl survivors.¹²



Credit: © The Mukwege Foundation

11 Patricia Viseur Sellers, *The Prosecution of Sexual Violence in conflict: The Importance of Human Rights as Means of Interpretation* https://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/women/docs/Paper_Prosecution_of_Sexual_Violence.pdf

12 Cecile Aptel, *Atrocity Crimes, Children and International Criminal Courts: Killing Childhood*, Routledge, 2023.

1.1 Survivors and Victims

The survivors and victims¹³ of CRSV are often targeted based on being actual or perceived members of a political, ethnic or religious group or targeted on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.¹⁴ The majority of survivors and victims of CRSV are women and girls. In 2021, 97% of the 3,293 cases of CRSV verified by the United Nations affected women and girls, and 1% of recorded cases involved men and boys as survivors or victims. These figures on victimization are likely to be an underestimate due to the multiple challenges in reporting CRSV discussed in section 1.4 of this report.¹⁵

Intersecting identity markers and circumstances may put some women and girls at higher risk of certain forms of sexual violence. For example, women and girls of childbearing age are primary targets for reproductive harms such as forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization and forced marriage.¹⁶

Children are also affected by CRSV and may be more vulnerable to forced recruitment as sexual slaves or wives of combatants because of their age.¹⁷ In the case of CRSV against children, the United Nations reported that in 98% of the cases reported, survivors were girls.¹⁸ Additionally, sexual violence within armed groups commonly targets girl child soldiers, who are often specifically recruited for those purposes, such as the “bush wives” who were abducted and raped by armed groups throughout the conflict in Sierra Leone.¹⁹

While women and girls are not inherently vulnerable, they are made more exposed to this type of violence because of the structural gender inequality that exists in almost every society, where the gender-based power differentials place women and girls at more risk of certain types of violence.

13 “Survivor” is the preferred and most commonly used term when referring to those who have suffered CRSV. “Victims” refers to those who were killed in an incident of CRSV.

14 M. Murphy et al. “Socioecological Framework for Drivers of Conflict and Postconflict Violence against Women and Girls”, *Violence Against Women*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2022, pp. 406–427, <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778012221094065>; L. Stark, I. Seff and C. Reis, “Gender-based Violence against Adolescent Girls in Humanitarian Settings: A Review of the Evidence”, *Lancet Child & Adolescent Health*, vol. 5, no. 3, 2021, pp. 210–222, [https://doi.org/10.1016/s2352-4642\(20\)30245-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/s2352-4642(20)30245-5).

15 Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, “13th Report of the United Nations Secretary-General on Conflict-related Sexual Violence”, 2021, <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/factsheet-2021-report-of-the-secretary-general-on-crsv/202204-SG-annual-report-factsheet-2021.pdf>.

16 UN Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict, *Framework for the Prevention of Conflict-related Sexual Violence*, 2022, <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/auto-draft/202209-CRSV-Prevention-Framework.pdf>, p. 14.

17 M. Murad, “The Phenomenon of Child Soldiers: Their Recruitment and Rehabilitation”, DLP Forum, 17 October 2022, <https://www.dlpforum.org/2022/10/17/the-phenomenon-of-child-soldiers-their-recruitment-and-rehabilitation>.

18 Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, “13th Report of the United Nations Secretary-General on Conflict-related Sexual Violence”, 2021, <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/factsheet-2021-report-of-the-secretary-general-on-crsv/202204-SG-annual-report-factsheet-2021.pdf>.

19 R. Grey, “Sexual Violence against Child Soldiers”, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, vol. 16, no. 4, 2014, p. 613, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2014.955964>.

Although women and girls form the vast majority of survivors and victims, men and boys are also affected by CRSV. There are limited data on men and boys as survivors or victims as this particular form of sexual violence is highly stigmatized and challenges prevalent notions of masculinities in conflict.²⁰ Nevertheless, there are several documented cases of sexual violence targeting men and boys in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Colombia, Iraq, Libya, Myanmar, South Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic.²¹ People who identify as LGBTQI+ or outside the gender binary can also be the target of sexual violence, especially in places where traditional gender norms are strong and/or homosexuality is illegal or seen as “undesirable” by a segment of the population.²² The limited data on sexual violence against men and boys and LGBTQI+ communities (which, even when reported, is often reported as torture rather than as CRSV) have resulted in a gap in responding to male or gender-diverse survivors of CRSV, and they are often overlooked or even neglected by humanitarian responders and service providers.²³



Ukraine. Mobile humanitarian teams are reaching thousands of conflict-affected women in Ukraine, with a special focus on survivors of gender-based violence. Credit: © UNFPA/ Maks Levin

20 I. Bahati, “Masculinities, Conflict-related Sexual Violence, and the WPS Agenda”, IPI Global Observatory, 19 October 2020, <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2020/10/masculinities-conflict-related-sexual-violence-wps-agenda>.

21 Security Council, Conflict-related Sexual Violence, Report of the United Nations Secretary-General, S/2022/272, 2022, <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/auto-draft/SG-Report2021for-web.pdf>.

22 International Committee of the Red Cross, “‘That Never Happens Here’: Sexual and Gender-Based Violence against Men, Boys, LGBTQI+ People”, 3 February 2022, p. 28, www.icrc.org/en/document/sexual-gender-violence-against-men-boys-lgbtqi.

23 Ibid., pp. 19–21.

1.2 Perpetrators

Perpetrators of CRSV are often affiliated with a State or non-State armed group. Sexual violence may be authorized or ordered by command, or simply tolerated in the armed group, where individual perpetrators may take advantage of collapsed protection infrastructure or a general context of impunity. CRSV can be part of the repertoire of violence to control and coerce civilian populations. Sexual violence is not a tactic of warfare in all conflicts; it may be simply tolerated or be a non-military policy, such as to control the sexual and reproductive lives of combatants.²⁴

Civilians also commit CRSV. In a survey of human rights abuses in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo mining towns, women reported that “the most common perpetrators of rape and forced marriage were civilians, including mining bosses, neighbors, and family members”.²⁵ Furthermore, although perpetration is mostly associated with men, in some cases women, including women combatants, are perpetrators, such as when sexual violence is used as a form of torture in detention spaces.²⁶



²⁴ UN Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict, Framework for the Prevention of Conflict-related Sexual Violence, 2022, <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/auto-draft/202209-CRSV-Prevention-Framework.pdf>.

²⁵ A.H. Blair, N. Gerring and S. Karim, Ending Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in War and Peace, United States Institute of Peace, PeaceBrief 215, September 2016, www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PB215-Ending-Sexual-and-Gender-Based-Violence-in-War-and-Peace.pdf.

²⁶ For example, during the conflict in Sierra Leone in the 1990s, women combatants were participants in widespread CRSV, including gang rape: see D.K. Cohen, “Female Combatants and the Perpetration of Violence: Wartime Rape in the Sierra Leone Civil War”, *World Politics*, vol. 65, no. 3, 2013, pp. 383–415, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42002215>. In addition, this has been explored in a book in the context of Nazi Germany, Serbia and the Islamic State: L. Sjoberg, *Women as Wartime Rapists: Beyond Sensation and Stereotyping*, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1bj4r7q>. Examples of female US army soldiers who were prosecuted for sexual and physical abuse of prisoners in Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq can be found in D.S. Cloud, “Private Found Guilty in Abu Ghraib Abuse”, *New York Times*, 27 September 2005, www.nytimes.com/2005/09/27/us/private-found-guilty-in-abu-ghraib-abuse.html; J. McChesney, “Harman Convicted for Role in Abu Ghraib Abuse”, *NPR*, 17 May 2005, www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4654626.

1.3 Root Causes and Enabling Factors

CRSV is a specific form of gender-based violence (GBV); both are rooted in patriarchal gender norms. These norms, which exist in most societies, set out an expectation that men should be aggressive and dominant and that women should be passive and, in some cases, submissive. This can lead to the use of sexual violence as a tactic of war and as a means of asserting power and dominance over women.²⁷ The same norms also shape gendered participation in armed conflict, where men are expected to take up weapons and participate in hostilities and women are often excluded from combat roles and instead assigned to support roles such as nursing and caregiving.²⁸ While these gender norms are prevalent, there are many exceptions – as discussed in section 1.2 – where women as part of armed groups have been perpetrators of CRSV.

GBV is wider than sexual violence and is an umbrella term that encompasses “harmful acts directed at an individual or a group of individuals based on their gender.”²⁹ GBV, and sexual violence as a form of GBV, is present in most societies, whether in war or peacetime. However, there is evidence that during a conflict, sexual violence in all its forms tends to escalate. For example, research on sexual violence in civil wars has found that the likelihood of gang rape during conflict is higher than in peacetime and that sexual violence in conflict is associated with more brutal acts of rape, including in public spaces and using objects and torture.³⁰ This indicates that the conflict itself creates conditions that may intensify or increase the frequency of sexual violence.

Sexual violence can vary in form, frequency, motivation and aims between conflicts and even within the same conflict. Scholars have noted that armed groups within the same country and conflict can perpetrate sexual violence to different degrees or at different times and that in some conflicts sexual violence may be absent, meaning that it is not a ubiquitous or inevitable part of every conflict.³¹ As such, it is important to recognize that CRSV is a complex phenomenon with many intersecting and overlapping causes. For example, depending on the conflict, different characteristics or circumstances – such as detention, age, membership in an armed group – may increase individual or community risk of CRSV. A breakdown in the rule of law due to State collapse, displacement, trafficking, and/or violations of a ceasefire agreement, as well as access to weapons and socioeconomic factors, can all increase the risk of CRSV.³²

27 C. Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, University of California Press, 2014.

28 E. Bjarnegård et al., “Gender, Peace, and Armed Conflict”, in *SIPRI Yearbook 2015*, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2015, pp. 101–109.

29 UN Women, “Frequently Asked Questions: Types of Violence against Women and Girls”, www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/faqs/types-of-violence.

30 C. Koos, “Sexual Violence in Armed Conflicts: Research Progress and Remaining Gaps”, *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 38, no. 9, 2017, pp. 1935–1951, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2017.1322461>.

31 E.J. Wood, “Armed Groups and Sexual Violence: When Is Wartime Rape Rare?” *Politics & Society*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2009, pp. 131–161, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032329208329755>.

32 As discussed in UN Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict, *Framework for the Prevention of Conflict-related Sexual Violence*, 2022, <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/auto-draft/202209-CRSV-Prevention-Framework.pdf>, pp. 14–15.

Ultimately, CRSV is linked to both the conditions of the conflict and to the structural inequalities and unequal gender norms that lead to GBV. Preventing CRSV requires a holistic understanding of gender dynamics, of enabling factors that often overlap with conflict drivers and of risk factors arising from the intersecting identities of survivors and perpetrators.

1.4 Challenges to Data Collection

The global scale of CRSV is difficult to know, as figures vary widely. Data are collected by different organizations, and those data collection efforts vary in scope, purpose and methodology, including incident reporting, media monitoring, and surveys and estimation methods.³³ What is counted as perpetrator, victim, survivor, incident or individual act also varies between data collectors, which means that often data from different organizations, even those collecting data in the same conflict, cannot be combined or compared.³⁴

Data collection efforts are hindered by several factors. CRSV is often referred to as a “hidden” crime, as many survivors are unable or unwilling to report to law enforcement authorities or service providers because of a general breakdown in the rule of law or the collapse of health, law enforcement and justice sectors as a consequence of the conflict or because of fear of stigmatization or reprisal.³⁵

Systematic data collection about the types of weapon used in CRSV remains a major challenge. In addition to the difficulties already mentioned, many of experts interviewed mentioned that due to post-traumatic stress disorder and/or the passage of time between when the event occurred and when it was reported, survivors may not remember or have only vague recollection of such details. Some incident reporting and media monitoring efforts have collected information on weapons in CRSV incidents, albeit often making general references to “armed men or armed groups”, but sometimes referring explicitly to “firearms” or “automatic weapons.”

Table 1 presents recent publicly available figures on CRSV incident reporting.³⁶ The figures vary significantly as organizations have varying definitions of sexual violence, geographic scope, access to sources of information, and levels of verification.

33 For an overview of the different types of methodology and associated challenges, see R. Nordås and D.K. Cohen, “Wartime Sexual Violence: Challenges and Opportunities for Data Collection and Analysis”, Centre for the Study of Civil War, Peace Research Institute Oslo, 2011, www.prio.org/publications/9009; “Sexual Violence in Conflict: Data and Data Collection Methodologies”, Meeting Report, Geneva 18–19 December 2008, www.stoprapenow.org/uploads/advocacyresources/1282164411.pdf.

34 “Sexual Violence in Conflict: Data and Data Collection Methodologies”, Meeting Report, Geneva 18–19 December 2008, www.stoprapenow.org/uploads/advocacyresources/1282164411.pdf

35 Independent Commission for Aid Impact, “Literature Review: Conflict-related Sexual Violence and Sexual Exploitation and Abuse”, 30 September 2020, <https://icai.independent.gov.uk/html-version/psvi-2/#section-1>.

36 In addition to this there are historical data sets, such as the PRIO Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict database, which compiles reports of CRSV by armed actors from 1989 to 2019.

United Nations monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements use a variety of sources when collecting information about CRSV incidents, including receiving testimonies directly from survivors and conducting human rights investigations where there is a United Nations presence. Generally, the United Nations has a high threshold for what is considered a verified incident, as incidents need to be corroborated by three independent sources.³⁷ The figure of 3,293 incidents of CRSV from the United Nations monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements is based on incidents verified by the United Nations in the following countries: Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Iraq, Libya, Mali, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, South Sudan, Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, and Yemen. This figure refers to incidents recorded in 2021, and about half these incidents were reported in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.³⁸

Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) collects information on political violence events, demonstrations and select politically relevant non-violent events. According to its website, ACLED derives its information from a wide range of local, regional and national sources, including news sources. ACLED defines sexual violence as any action that inflicts harm of a sexual nature and does not exclude any types of perpetrator or make a distinction between conflict and non-conflict settings. The project claims it has near-global coverage.³⁹

Insecurity Insight is a non-governmental organization that collects different types of publicly sourced data on violent events, such as incidents of attacks on aid workers and health care workers, the use of explosive weapons, and incidents of sexual violence and sexual exploitation and abuse. Incidents of sexual violence are included in the database when the perpetrator is a member of a State or private security force or is an actor in a conflict or when the survivor is a member of a social group affected by conflict, recognizable by having sought protection in an internally displaced person or refugee system. The data from 2021 and 2022 covers almost all conflicts with detailed datasets available for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Nigeria, South Sudan, Sudan and Ukraine.⁴⁰

37 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Manual on Human Rights Monitoring, 2011, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/training7Introen.pdf>, p. 10.

38 Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, “13th Report of the United Nations Secretary-General on Conflict-related Sexual Violence”, 2021, <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/factsheet-2021-report-of-the-secretary-general-on-crsv/202204-SG-annual-report-factsheet-2021.pdf>.

39 ACLED, Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) Codebook, ACLED, https://acleddata.com/acleddatanew/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/ACLED_Codebook_v1_January-2021.pdf.

40 Insecurity Insight, “Definitions and Methodologies”, https://insecurityinsight.org/methodology-and-definitions#section_sexual_violence_and_abuse.

Table 1. Multi-country Data (2021–2022)

	UNITED NATIONS MONITORING, ANALYSIS AND REPORTING ARRANGEMENTS	ACLED	INSECURITY INSIGHT
Time period	January to December 2021	January 2021 to October 2022	January 2021 to October 2022
Countries	Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Iraq, Libya, Mali, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, South Sudan, Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Yemen	Near-global coverage	Near-global coverage
Total incidents	3,293	767	611
Available data on perpetrators			
State actors	16	261	270
Non-State actors	53	500	294
Available data on survivors			
Women and girls	3,198 (97%)	677 (88%)	564 (92%)
Men and boys	83 (1%)	64 (8%)	80 (13%)
Children	1,565 (48%)	Not recorded	188 (30%)
LGBTQI+ adults	12 (0.3%)	24 (3%)	Not recorded
Incidents involving weapons			
Firearms	Not recorded	Not recorded	514 (84%)
Other (knives, machetes, blunt objects)	Not recorded	Not recorded	59 (1%)

Table 2. Country-level Data on Firearms from Insecurity Insight

COUNTRY	TIME PERIOD	TOTAL INCIDENTS	INCIDENTS INVOLVING FIREARMS	PROPORTION OF INCIDENTS INVOLVING FIREARMS (%)
DRC	January 2020–October 2022	155	135	87%
Ethiopia	February 2020–October 2022	96	87	90%
Nigeria	February 2020–January 2022	40	28	70%
South Sudan	February 2020–September 2022	69	57	82%
Sudan	February 2020–September 2022	79	66	83%
Ukraine	March 2022–August 2022	64	58	90%



Monrovia, Liberia, 2008. UNMIL Launches “16 days of Activism” Campaign. Credit: © UN Photo/Christopher Herwig

2. The Relationship between Weapons and Conflict-related Sexual Violence

CRSV is a complex phenomenon with multiple enabling factors that overlap with drivers of the conflict itself. One of these factors, which is often acknowledged but rarely addressed in the context of prevention and response to CRSV, is the proliferation of weapons and ammunition.

Weapons and ammunition proliferation, including the illicit proliferation of SALW, along with other factors, has been identified by the United Nations Secretary-General as an enabler of CRSV.⁴¹

Weapons and ammunition are interlinked with CRSV in two main ways. First, there are direct links: weapons and ammunition are used by perpetrators to facilitate the commission of rape, to threaten or coerce individuals into sexual acts against their will, and to injure and/or kill survivors and victims of sexual violence. Second, there are indirect links: weapon and ammunition proliferation contributes to the escalation of conflict violence, which, in turn, propagates the conditions that lead to CRSV.

2.1 Direct Links

In terms of publicly available data, Insecurity Insight is the only organization that has collected information on weapons, and specifically firearms, as part of its monitoring of CRSV incidents. According to its data covering incidents from 2021 to 2022, 514 of the 611 incidents (84%) recorded in their global dataset, while only 59 out of 611 (1%) of incidents involve other types of weapons (knives, machetes, and blunt objects) and for the remaining 38 incidents, the information on weapons was not available (see Table 1). When looking at Insecurity Insight's disaggregated data available by country (see Table 2), it is noted that between 70% and 90% of CRSV cases in countries where data are reported involved a firearms. In general, it can be assumed that figures derived from the monitoring of publicly available sources, such as the data from Insecurity Insight, are underestimates of CRSV events in a conflict, given the general challenges of reporting in an armed conflict and the additional challenges of reporting CRSV crimes, as discussed in section 1.4. Therefore, the proportion of firearms reported in these incidents may not be representative of the frequency with which weapons are involved in CRSV incidents.

⁴¹ For example, in the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Libya, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan illicit proliferation of SALW was recognized as a factor contributing to sexual violence, as mentioned in the United Nations Secretary-General's annual reports on sexual violence between 2012 and 2022.

In 2020,⁴² Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) reported that out of 10,810 survivors of sexual violence treated by MSF facilities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, more than 60% “were attacked by aggressors bearing weapons”.⁴³ The report stated that:

“ During the year, our teams also observed that in areas where the security situation had deteriorated, the proportion of patients attacked by people with weapons was higher than elsewhere. This was the case in the territories of Masisi and Rutshuru (North-Kivu), but also in Salamabila (Maniema), where respectively 75%, 84% and 70% of survivors declared that their attackers were armed.”⁴⁴ ”

The data are based on 10,810 survivors who were treated in 2020 by MSF facilities located in the provinces of Kasai-Central, North-Kivu, South-Kivu, Ituri, Maniema and Haut Katanga.

UNIDIR also received case data from the Panzi Hospital, established by Dr Denis Mukwege, which has treated survivors of CRSV in Bukavu, Democratic Republic of the Congo, since 1999.⁴⁵ The hospital’s data reveal that in 2021 and 2022 about 42% of cases recorded by the hospital involved a weapon (1,045 out 2,488 cases).

For both MSF and the Panzi Hospital, the data on weapons were not disaggregated by type of weapon and therefore might also include traditional weapons such as machetes, knives or household objects. This underscores the need to be more specific when collecting data on weapons, in particular asking survivors, if possible, to differentiate between traditional weapons and automatic weapons.

Some annual reports on CRSV by the Secretary-General and United Nations human rights organizations include details about incidents involving weapons. For example, in 2012 the Secretary-General’s report included details from testimonies from male survivors of CRSV in detention in Libya, who reported “being subjected to torture and ill-treatment, as well as to...rape, including anal rape with an automatic weapon”.⁴⁶ In 2015, the Secretary-General’s report stated that in Darfur, South Sudan, “in 60 per cent of all reported cases, involving 119 victims, the alleged perpetrator(s) were armed”.⁴⁷

42 Security Council, Conflict-related Sexual Violence, Report of the Secretary-General, A/66/657-S/2012/33, 13 January 2012, <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/report/conflict-related-sexual-violence-report-of-the-secretary-general/SG-Report-2012.pdf>.

43 An interview with an MSF representative in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

44 Médecins Sans Frontières, Sexual Violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo, 2021, www.msf.org/sexual-violence-democratic-republic-congo, p. 16.

45 The Hospital”, Panzi Foundation, <https://panzifoundation.org/the-hospital/>

46 Security Council, Conflict-related Sexual Violence, Report of the Secretary-General, A/66/657-S/2012/33, 2012, <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/report/s2015203-23-march-2015/SG-Report-2015.pdf>, para. 37.

47 Security Council, Conflict-related Sexual Violence, Report of the Secretary-General, S/2015/203, 2015, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/790993?ln=en>, para. 55.

Box 1.

Views from Practitioners

Given the sparseness of data available, this study sought to complement the desk research with key informant interviews. Twelve experts working on conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) were interviewed. These experts worked in different capacities, such as United Nations women's protection advisers and United Nations police sexual and gender-based violence advisers, working in both United Nations special political missions and United Nations-led peace operations, as well as staff from humanitarian agencies providing services to survivors. These experts were working in a range of contexts, including the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, Sudan and Ukraine. When asked about the links between small arms and light weapons (SALW) proliferation and sexual violence, all acknowledged that proliferation of SALW plays a crucial role in facilitating CRSV but highlighted that it is not the only factor that exacerbates CRSV, as discussed in section 1.3.

In terms of direct links, some experts affirmed that firearms may be used in the sexual violence act itself. Although some of the data on CRSV incidents indicate “armed actor” or “armed aggressor” as the perpetrator, how weapons are used is rarely reported, unless the victim is killed by a firearm subsequent to or during the incident. One expert noted that “we know the presence of firearms, but we don't actually know exactly how they are employed in the different forms of sexual violence”.

Most of the experts noted that the mere presence of a firearm is enough to intimidate, threaten and control individuals and/or groups of survivors and victims. Several experts referred to weapons giving perpetrators more power, especially in the case of child soldiers as perpetrators, where “carrying weapons gives them the illusion of power”. Although child soldiers are more often survivors or victims of sexual violence, particularly girl child soldiers, they can also be perpetrators.⁴⁸

The interviews also highlighted that the link between SALW proliferation and CRSV is highly contextual, as in some places CRSV can be perpetrated with traditional weapons (e.g., knives, machetes, blunt objects). Experts working in Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali noted that weapon circulation in their respective contexts seemed to be very high and had contributed to CRSV in those countries; they had little knowledge, however, about the level and dynamics of illicit weapons and weapon circulation in the country where they worked, which they said might be useful contextual information for CRSV prevention and response.

Several experts working in Democratic Republic of the Congo also highlighted additional links between the proliferation of weapons and CRSV, one of those links being the high levels of sexual violence reported in the mining areas controlled by armed groups and organized criminal groups. For example, many studies have reported that organized criminal groups are involved in the production

and supply chain of precious minerals, that they have ties with armed groups in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and that the exploitation of children, rape and other forms of GBV are common at these mining sites.⁴⁹ Another link was the possible use and threat of sexual violence in the trafficking of illicit weapons in conflict. The experts observed that in some cases women and girls may be forced to participate in the trade as carriers or brokers and that sexual violence is used to coerce them into compliance. However, there are minimal data or research on this aspect of illicit arms trafficking due to challenges gaining access to those who may be involved in the illicit arms trade, especially women and girls.⁵⁰

2.2 Indirect Links

Not only are weapons instruments to commit rape, to threaten or coerce survivors into sexual acts against their will and to injure and kill survivors and victims of CRSV, but the proliferation of these weapons also fuels the conflict itself. In fact, several studies have correlated the availability of SALW to the escalation of armed violence in conflict, particularly internal armed conflict.⁵¹ In particular, SALW are seen to have many advantages in these contexts because they are relatively low cost, durable, easy to transport and widely available, making them the “weapon of choice” for most armed groups.⁵² In fact, the relationship between the deterioration of a security situation and the increase in CRSV perpetrated by weapons, observed in MSF’s data for the Democratic Republic of the Congo (see section 2.1), is noteworthy and points to the mutually reinforcing dynamics that contribute to CRSV in conflict. Contributing to this deterioration is the indirect way weapons, and SALW in particular, create the conditions for CRSV and other forms of GBV, including intimate partner violence, domestic violence, gendered hate crimes, and femicides.

48 I. Derluyn et al. “Victims and/or Perpetrators? Towards an Interdisciplinary Dialogue on Child Soldiers”, *BMC International Health and Human Rights*, vol. 15, no. 28, 2015, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12914-015-0068-5>.

49 S. Aas Rustad, G. Østby and R. Nordås, “Artisanal Mining, Conflict, and Sexual Violence in Eastern DRC”, *The Extractive Industries and Society*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2016, pp. 475–484, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.exis.2016.01.010>.

50 For more about the challenges on researching women’s role in illicit weapons trafficking, see E. Dungal and A. Severin Fabre, *Missing or Unseen? Exploring Women’s Roles in Arms Trafficking*, Small Arms Survey, 2022, <https://smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/resources/SAS-Report-Women-Arms-Trafficking.pdf>.

51 See, for example, International Committee of the Red Cross, *Arms Availability and the Situation of Civilians in Armed Conflict*, 1999, https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/other/icrc_002_0734_arms_availability.pdf; UNIDIR, *The Arms-related Risk Analysis Toolkit*, 2021, <https://unidir.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/Arms-Related%20Risk%20Analysis%20Toolkit.pdf>; P. Lock, “Armed Conflicts and Small Arms Proliferation: Refocusing the Research Agenda”, *Policy Sciences*, vol. 30, no. 3, 1997, pp. 117–132, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4532406>.

52 N. Duquet, “Arms Acquisition Patterns and the Dynamics of Armed Conflict: Lessons from the Niger Delta”, *International Studies Perspectives*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2009, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44218591>.

Studies in contemporary conflicts also attest to indirect links between weapon proliferation and CRSV. Since the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2021, there have been multiple reports of systematic CRSV committed against women, men and LGBTQI+ persons.⁵³ It has also been reported that during this same period, the number of domestic violence calls to the police in Ukraine rose by 40% between January and April 2022 compared with the same time period in 2021.⁵⁴ A Save the Children report about the previous conflicts in Ukraine also indicated an increase in domestic violence (mainly directed at women and girls) in families living along the contact line from the start of the 2014 conflict. Survivors noted that “the violence was seen to be taking on more violent and severe forms, due to the ease of access to weapons.”⁵⁵ In South Sudan, a study evaluating CRSV prevention interventions found that conflict conditions affecting non-intimate partner violence were similarly affecting intimate partner violence. Survivors of sexual violence in South Sudan noted an increase in the brutality of intimate partner violence since the start of the 2013 conflict.⁵⁶ Similar findings were also reported in studies in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which emphasized the normalization of sexual violence during conflict.⁵⁷

53 UN News, “Reports of Sexual Violence in Ukraine Rising Fast, Security Council Hears”, 6 June 2022, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/06/1119832>.

54 J. Williams, “This War Made Him a Monster: Ukrainian Women Fear The Return of Their Partners”, The Fuller Project, 13 March 2023, <https://fullerproject.org/story/ukrainian-women-fear-the-return-of-their-partners>.

55 Save the Children, Listen to Us: Girls’ and Boys’ Gendered Experiences of the Conflict in Eastern Ukraine, 2019, https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/listen_to_us_ukraine_full_report_eng.pdf, p. 30.

56 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Global Study on Homicide: Gender-related Killing of Women and Girls, 2019, www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/gsh/Booklet_5.pdf, pp. 39, 59.

57 S.A. Bartels et al., “Patterns of Sexual Violence in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo: Reports from Survivors Presenting to Panzi Hospital in 2006”, *Conflict and Health*, vol. 4, no. 9, 2010, <https://doi.org/10.1186/1752-1505-4-9>; S.A. Bartels et al., *Now, The World is Without Me: An Investigation of Sexual Violence in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo*, Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, 2010, pp. 2, 39, <https://hhi.harvard.edu/publications/now-world-without-me-investigation-sexual-violence-eastern>.

Box 2.

Beyond Conflict-related Sexual Violence: Understanding Gender-based Violence and Weapons

To further understand the relationship between small arms and light weapons (SALW) and conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), it is helpful to look at the role of SALW along the gender-based violence (GBV) continuum. That is, even though CRSV occurs in a unique environment, namely in conflict, it is part of a wider spectrum of GBV that exists prior to and during conflict and in post-conflict situations, forming a continuum of violence.⁵⁸ GBV includes different kinds of violence, such as intimate partner violence, domestic violence⁵⁹ and family-related violence.⁶⁰ Due to patriarchal gender norms and gender inequality, women and girls form the majority of victims of these types of violence. Although gender-disaggregated data on victimization from SALW are also limited, there have been increased efforts by some countries, United Nations entities and civil society organizations to collect these kinds of data.⁶¹

The Global Violent Deaths Database, which compiles global statistics on violent deaths in conflict and non-conflict settings, in 2020 found that men constituted the majority of victims of homicide by firearms (83%).⁶² However, when it comes to specific types of violence, such as intimate partner or family member homicides (IPFM homicides) women and girls constitute the majority of victims (64%).⁶³ Although data enabling a cross-disaggregation of IPFM homicides by type of mechanism and gender are very limited, the 2020 UNODC Global Study on Firearms Trafficking notes that:

“Country-specific data suggest that, in a context where women make up the great majority of victims of IPFM homicide, the proportion of women tends to be consistently higher among victims of firearm-related IPFM homicides, in comparison with those IPFM homicides perpetrated by means of sharp object.”⁶⁴ ”

58 Independent Commission for Aid Impact, “Conflict-related Sexual Violence and Sexual Exploitation and Abuse”, 30 September 2020, <https://icai.independent.gov.uk/html-version/psvi-2/#section-1>.

59 Defined by UN Women as any pattern of behavior used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner. It encompasses all physical, sexual, emotional, economic and psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This is one of the most common forms of violence experienced by women globally.

60 This includes violence perpetrated by a family member, including so-called “honour killings”.

61 See A. Alvazzi del Frate, G. Hideg and E. LeBrun, “Gender Counts: Assessing Global Armed Violence Datasets for Gender Relevance”, Small Arms Survey, March 2022, <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/resource/gender-counts-assessing-global-armed-violence-datasets-gender-relevance>.

62 Small Arms Survey, “Global Violent Deaths in 2020”, infographic, 2022, <https://smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/resources/SAS-GVD-July-2022-update.pdf>.

Argentina is one of the few countries that publishes official statistics on femicides, and between 2017 and 2021 the country recorded an average of 273 feminicides annually, which includes intimate partner violence but also other intentional killing of women and girls. Firearms were used in almost a quarter of the cases.⁶⁵

Social constructs around masculinity and femininity, among other factors such as cultural norms and personal or collective safety and security perceptions, mediate the use, misuse and possession of SALW. This is in part reflected in the rates of civilian firearm possession. Although there is no single source of gender-disaggregated data on civilian gun owners, in countries where gun licensing is mandatory, licensing data are often the most reliable available indicator of civilian firearm ownership. A 2014 study on women and gun ownership noted that in nine European countries for which disaggregated gun licensing data were available, men accounted for an average of 96% of licence holders, while women represented the remaining 4%.^{66,67} However, there are some exceptions to this, such as the United States of America, which has a relatively high percentage of women (21%) owning firearms,⁶⁸ demonstrating that factors other than gender influence firearm possession. Nevertheless, gender norms that link masculinity with weapon possession may be further polarized in a conflict, with men expected to take part in hostilities while women are left with caring duties, and this increased polarization could lead to widespread CRSV.

63 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Global Study on Homicide: Gender-related Killing of Women and Girls, 2019, www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/gsh/Booklet_5.pdf, p. 11.

64 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Global Study on Firearms Trafficking, 2020, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/firearms-protocol/firearms-study.html>, p. 83.

65 M. Iazzetta, "Gender-based Violence in Numbers: Data from Argentina's National Agency of Controlled Materials (ANMaC)", Small Arms Survey, 13 February 2023, <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/resource/gender-based-violence-numbers-data-argentinass-national-agency-controlled-materials-anmac>.

66 H. Dönges and A. Karp, "Women and Gun Ownership", Small Arms Survey, Research Notes 45, 2014, <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/resources/SAS-Research-Note-45.pdf>, p. 1.

67 The countries are Andorra, Austria, Czechia, Estonia, Lithuania, Malta, Montenegro, Serbia and Spain.

68 According to survey data from 2022. Statista, "Gun Ownership in the U.S. by Gender", 7 December 2022, www.statista.com/statistics/623453/gun-ownership-in-the-us-by-gender.

2.3 In Focus: The Case of Weapons and Conflict-related Sexual Violence in Sudan

To better understand the complex relationships between weapons and CRSV, it is useful to look at a concrete case. Sudan is an appropriate context for this discussion as a country that has a high level of weapons in circulation and for which a United Nations Framework of Cooperation on CRSV was established in 2020. The Framework prioritizes a number of actions that aim to prevent and respond to CRSV in the country, including supporting legislation to strengthen protection from CRSV, ensuring comprehensive services to survivors, engaging with Sudanese justice and security actors, and enhancing capacity for the investigation and prosecution of crimes of sexual violence.⁶⁹ However, due to the military coup and ensuing political crisis, little has been implemented.

Sudan has a long legacy of armed conflict dating back to its 25-year civil war with the South, which eventually gained independence in 2011. In 2017, it was estimated that there were some 3.5 million SALW in Sudan, more than two-thirds (or approximately 2.75 million) of which were circulating outside of State-controlled stockpiles.⁷⁰ Sudan also has undergone several disarmament initiatives. Since 2005, some 11,000 former combatants have been disarmed and demobilized, with only a limited number having received reintegration support.⁷¹ In certain regions, such as Darfur, Blue Nile state and South Kordofan, arms have proliferated rapidly among civilians because of the legacy of armed conflict and the lack of State security provisions. Illicit arms flows have been identified as a critical factor leading to the outbreak and escalation of armed conflict in Sudan.⁷²

The Juba Peace Agreement was signed on 31 August 2020 between the Transitional Government of Sudan and the Sudan Revolutionary Front (a coalition of armed groups from the regions of Darfur, Blue Nile and South Kordofan), however armed conflict has continued to pose significant challenges in West Darfur state and in the Blue Nile region, where some armed groups have not signed the agreement.⁷³ Although CRSV is addressed in the Juba Peace Agreement, and this is largely seen as

69 Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, “The Government of Sudan and the United Nations Sign a Framework of Cooperation to Prevent and Respond to Conflict-related Sexual Violence”, 11 March 2020, www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/press-release/the-government-of-sudan-and-the-united-nations-sign-a-framework-of-cooperation-to-prevent-and-respond-to-conflict-related-sexual-violence.

70 Small Arms Survey, “Global Firearms Holdings”, 29 March 2020, www.smallarmssurvey.org/weapons-andmarkets/tools/global-firearms-holdings.html.

71 R. Nichols, DDR in Sudan: Too Little, Too Late? Small Arms Survey, 2011, www.files.ethz.ch/isn/127353/HSBA-SWP-24-DDR-in-Sudan.pdf, pp. 6–7.

72 Security Council, Small Arms and Light Weapons, Report of the Secretary General, S/2021/839, 30 September 2021, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2021_839.pdf, para. 2.

73 Security Council, Situation in the Sudan and the Activities of the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan, Report of the Secretary-General, S/2022/172, 2 March 2022, https://unitams.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/sg_report_on_unitams_s-2022-172.pdf, para. 14.

positive, little progress or attention has been paid to addressing or preventing CRSV in the context of this peace agreement. This has been attributed to the lack of official representation by women in the process,⁷⁴ and as previous studies have shown, CRSV is a topic that is rarely addressed without women represented around the negotiation table.⁷⁵

In his 2022 report on the security situation of Sudan, the UN Secretary-General outlined many cases of violence against women, including the shooting of women protesters with live ammunition. The report also documents many instances of CRSV by non-State actors, militias and government security forces.⁷⁶

As part of this research, UNIDIR conducted a focus group in Khartoum in January 2023. Experts on sexual and gender-based violence and CRSV from local civil society organizations, the national government, the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan (UNITAMS) and United Nations agencies based in the country, discussed the problem of sexual violence, its links with weapons, and how arms control and disarmament measures could support CRSV prevention efforts.

According to the participants in the focus group discussion, gender norms in Sudan are very rigid and have shaped who owns weapons and how they are used. Tribal and pastoralist communities have a long tradition of carrying weapons for the protection of their cattle. However, these weapons are almost exclusively owned by men.

In cities such as the capital city Khartoum, participants noted that firearms, traditionally, have been less commonly held by civilians and that cases of domestic violence, including against children, have involved traditional weapons such as knives. However, they noted that recently there has been an increase in civilians carrying weapons in Khartoum. Many associated this increase with the deteriorating security situation and increase in criminality and the need for civilians to protect themselves.

The following were identified as particularly worrying trends that would increase the risk of CRSV:

- The migration of individuals belonging to armed groups or militia into the city, who are bringing weapons with them
- Increased trafficking and use of illicit drugs by members of armed groups

74 R. Abbas and L. Tønnessen, “Tokens of Peace? Women’s Representation in the Juba Peace Process”, *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2022, pp. 89–105, <https://muse.jhu.edu/issue/48959>.

75 R.S. Klein, “The Role of Women in Mediation and Conflict Resolution: Lessons for UN Security Council Resolution 1325”, *Washington and Lee Journal of Civil Rights and Social Justice*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2012, pp. 277–313, <https://scholarlycommons.law.wlu.edu/crsj/vol18/iss2/7>.

76 Security Council, *Situation in the Sudan and the Activities of the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan*, Report of the Secretary-General, S/2022/172, 2 March 2022, https://unitams.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/sg_report_on_unitams_s-2022-172.pdf, para. 14.

- People who are unaffiliated with armed groups wearing uniforms of State and non-State armed groups and security forces to abuse perceived authority and perpetrate crimes, including CRSV
- Taxi drivers carrying weapons in their vehicles
- Many refugees from conflicts in neighbouring countries (e.g. the Central African Republic, Chad, Ethiopia) bringing their weapons to resettlement camps

Focus group participants revealed that there is a lack of reporting of CRSV and GBV incidents in general, although some particularly brutal cases of gang rape have been reported by the local media. As in many other countries, negative gender norms also play a role in the lack of reporting in Sudan. There is a high level of shame associated with reporting this type of crime and fear of being stigmatized.

In addition, participants pointed out a specific challenge relating to the current context in Sudan. First, there is no clear legislative framework for GBV, although efforts are being made to propose gender-sensitive and survivor-centred legislation that would consider certain forms of GBV as crimes and offer more protection for women. Because of the lack of legal framework, police are not appropriately equipped or trained in investigating allegations of sexual violence, although United Nations experts have been deployed to advise law enforcement authorities on this as part of UNITAMS.

Even if a stronger legislative framework existed on GBV, participants noted that in the current context there is a high level of distrust of the police among the local population, meaning that women are highly unlikely to report incidents of sexual violence to the police.

Currently, UNITAMS is one of the few organizations that collect data on CRSV in Sudan in the context of the United Nations monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements, and it does not collect information on weapons. The team is relatively small and therefore cannot cover all incidents in the country. Participants noted that even in the context of the United Nations data collection, survivors may not know how to identify weapons used as they may be in a traumatized state, or they may not identify the presence of a weapon if it was used to threaten but not to injure them. In addition, medical services do not usually include information on weapons.

To deploy effective arms control and disarmament measures to address sexual violence, participants highlighted the importance of contextual understanding, especially in a complex context like Sudan. This will include improving 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 type of weapon involved in the incident.

From the perspective of some of the United Nations women's protection advisers working at UNITAMS, collecting basic data about weapons could be integrated into the questions to survivors. Another opportunity is to add a weapons category to the Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS), which will be established by the GBV subcluster in Sudan. The GBVIMS will collect data on rape, forced marriage and other incidents of GBV. However, it does not

necessarily distinguish between incidents of conflict-related sexual violence or other types of GBV.⁷⁷ From a State perspective (e.g. law enforcement, medical services), collecting data about weapons in sexual violence may be more challenging as participants noted that addressing weapons is very politically sensitive in the current context.

The participants noted, however, that these kinds of data, including on weapons, can be used for early warning tools, such as the United Nations Development Programme Crisis Risk Dashboard in Sudan, which currently integrates some issues on weapons but does not yet report on GBV.⁷⁸ On early warning of CRSV risks, participants noted the importance of involving the community in these mechanisms. Community leaders, including women, are often an important source of information on sexual violence incidents and weapon possession in their communities.

The participants recommended that, in Sudan, a community accountability mechanism should be supported as the State and State institutions rarely acknowledge the existence of CRSV. A State accountability mechanism, as one participant noted, may be “too little too late” when it comes to seeking justice and deterring perpetrators, because recognition from the State takes time. However, the two mechanisms are not mutually exclusive: while community accountability mechanisms may be the most viable options in many contexts, including in Sudan, opportunities for reinforcing State accountability mechanisms and improving practices could be pursued in parallel.



Sudan, 2013. UNAMID Organizes Campaign against Gender Violence. Credit: © UN Photo/ Albert Gonzalez Farran

77 See [GBVIMS Classification Tool](#) and [Where Is the GBVIMS?](#) for a list of countries where this system is operational.
78 See the United Nations Development Programme’s [Crisis Risk Dashboard](#).

3. The Arms Control and Disarmament Toolbox for Preventing Conflict-related Sexual Violence

Stemming the proliferation of SALW, which contributes to CRSV both directly and indirectly, along with tackling the drivers of conflict and gender inequality, are important measures for preventing CRSV. Addressing both the demand for weapons and their channels of acquisition is key. The arms control and disarmament toolbox for preventing CRSV includes multiple SALW-related treaties, instruments, tools and measures aimed at reducing the proliferation of SALW. These include international treaties and instruments, as well as regional and subregional agreements and initiatives aimed at enhancing legal and policy frameworks for the control of SALW, thereby contributing to the long-term structural prevention of CRSV. Specific tools and measures can also be relevant at different stages of a conflict to limit access to weapons to perpetrators of CRSV, thus contributing to more short-term operational prevention of CRSV. To effectively take into account the risk of CRSV, the arms control and disarmament toolbox needs to be implemented in a gender-responsive way, meaning that the implementation must identify and analyse the gendered impacts of weapons, including the proliferation of SALW, and address these impacts in a way that promotes gender equality.

Figure 1 shows the arms control and disarmament instruments and measures relevant to SALW that are applicable at different stages of a conflict.

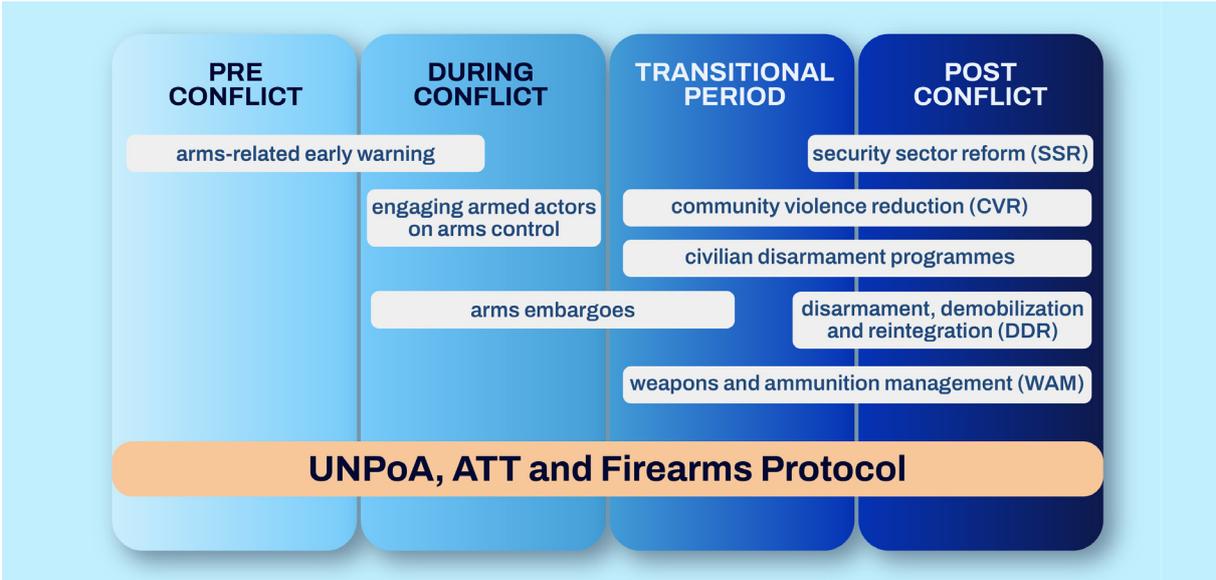


Figure 1 The Arms Control and Disarmament Toolbox for Preventing Conflict-related Sexual Violence

Before a conflict starts, considering arms-related risks⁷⁹ can enhance early warning on CRSV and inform more holistic prevention strategies in the early phases of a conflict.

During the conflict, engaging with armed actors on arms control and using targeted arms embargoes against known perpetrators could mitigate the escalation of such violence.⁸⁰

In transitional conflict settings, which are sometimes characterized by high levels of criminality and intercommunal violence and the proliferation of illicit economic activities including illicit trade in SALW, community violence reduction (CVR), weapon and ammunition management (WAM) and civilian disarmament programmes can be implemented in a gender-responsive way to stem the flow of weapons to potential perpetrators of sexual violence and begin to address some of the root causes that lead to this type of violence.

In post-conflict settings, measures such as WAM and security sector reform (SSR) can address the normative frameworks regulating the supply, transfer, stockpiling and use of SALW, which by preventing diversion and creating gender-responsive national policies on the ownership, use and storage of firearms by civilians and the security sector can contribute to preventing the reoccurrence of CRSV. Additionally, gender-responsive implementation of these measures means that they can contribute to changing gender norms and attitudes by promoting women's participation in decision-making about security issues, including arms control and disarmament, which has traditionally been a male-dominated field. Thus, along with other measures, gender-responsive implementation of arms control and disarmament measures can begin to address structural gender inequality, a root cause of CRSV.

3.1 Arms Control Treaties and Instruments Applicable to Small Arms and Light Weapons

A number of international arms control agreements are applicable to SALW, including the United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms (UNPoA), the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) and the United Nations Firearms Protocol. In some regions, these international agreements are complemented by regional agreements, such as the Economic Community of West African States Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and Other Related Materials and the Roadmap for a

79 UNIDIR, *The Arms-related Risk Analysis Toolkit: Practical Guidance for Integrating Conventional Arms-related Risks into Conflict Analysis and Prevention*, 2021, <https://unidir.org/publication/arms-related-risk-analysis-toolkit>.

80 These measures will be discussed in greater details subsequent reports.

sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of SALW and their ammunition in the Western Balkans. These various agreements aim to ensure that States have effective national regulations, systems and practices in place to prevent the misuse and illicit trade of SALW and to combat their diversion. Although these norms and obligations have been established, their effective implementation is a challenge, particularly by States who experience systemic institutional weaknesses due to armed conflict.⁸¹ Several actors are involved in SALW control; however, the primary responsibility rests with the State to implement commitments made on SALW control at the multilateral level, regional or subregional level, and national level as well as at the local or community level.

To date, no multilateral or regional arms control or disarmament treaties or instruments explicitly refer to CRSV; however, some have recognized the gendered impacts of weapons, including their role in facilitating GBV. As CRSV is a form of GBV, many of these treaties and instruments are relevant to addressing and preventing CRSV. The following presents an overview of the main multilateral arms control instruments and treaties applicable to SALW and how they are relevant to long-term structural prevention of CRSV.



Mali. Inspecting stored (temporary) weapons in DDR process. Credit: © Afifa Habbasi/ UNMAS

81 UNIDIR, *The Changing Role of Conventional Arms Control in Preventing and Managing Violent Conflicts*, 2018, www.unidir.org/sites/default/files/publication/pdfs/-en-725.pdf, p. 8.

3.1.1. United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects

The UNPoA is a political commitment made by all United Nations Member States to improve national small arms regulations, to strengthen stockpile management, to ensure that weapons are properly and reliably marked, to improve cooperation in weapons tracing, and to engage in regional and international cooperation and assistance.⁸² In 2018, the outcome document of the Third Review Conference of the UNPoA explicitly recognized that “eradicating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons is a key part of combating gender-based violence”.⁸³ It also made a series of important recommendations to States, including that States should account for the differing impacts of the illicit trade of SALW on women, men, boys and girls through the collection of gender-disaggregated data and ensure that their policies and programmes designed to combat the illicit trade in SALW take into account such data.⁸⁴ As these commitments have been made by all United Nations Member States, the UNPoA represents a potentially significant tool in the prevention of CRSV. It can support CRSV prevention efforts by encouraging States to consider the risk of CRSV when designing policies and programmes to combat illicit trade and proliferation of weapons and ammunition.

3.1.2 The Arms Trade Treaty

The ATT covers eight categories of conventional weapons,⁸⁵ including SALW, and is the first legally binding arms control instrument to contain a specific provision aimed at preventing GBV.⁸⁶ Under the ATT, States Parties have two key duties with respect to GBV. First, article 6 prohibits States from authorizing a arms transfer which be used to commit war crimes or grave breaches of International Humanitarian Law. Second, article 7 requires States to carry out a comprehensive assessment of the risk that exported arms or related items could be used to commit or facilitate serious acts of GBV, which would include CRSV.⁸⁷ CRSV – including rape and other forms of sexual violence such as sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy and enforced sterilization – has been established as both a serious violation of international humanitarian law and a war crime in both international and

82 General Assembly, Report of the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, [A/CONF.192/L.5/Rev.1](#), 2001.

83 General Assembly, Report of the Third United Nations Conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, [A/CONF.192/2018/RC/3](#), 2018, para. 14.

84 *Ibid.*, para. 73–78.

85 United Nations, The Arms Trade Treaty, https://thearmstradetreaty.org/hyper-images/file/ATT_English/ATT_English.pdf?templateId=137253, article 2.

86 *Ibid.*, article 7.

non-international armed conflict.⁸⁸ Therefore CRSV risks can be considered under both Article 6 & 7 of the treaty. These articles address the direct ways in which weapons can enable CRSV, making the ATT potentially one of the most important arms control treaties for preventing CRSV.

In addition to CRSV, article 7.4 is relevant to other forms of GBV facilitated by weapons either directly or indirectly, whether in a conflict or not, that are not necessarily sexual in nature, such as femicides, intimate partner violence, family-related violence and other types of violence according to national legal interpretation of the term GBV.

However, there are challenges with implementing these obligations. A recent study by the Small Arms Survey noted that no State has publicly denied an arms export based on the potential that these weapons could be used to commit or facilitate serious acts of GBV, including CRSV. There are several reasons for this, including a lack of common understanding of what constitutes GBV or serious acts of GBV and the lack of data on GBV that contain specific information on the types of weapon used in these acts.⁸⁹

3.1.3. The Firearms Protocol

The Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition, known as the Firearms Protocol, is the only legally binding instrument to counter the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components, and ammunition at the global level.⁹⁰ The Firearms Protocol is a supplement to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. Although the protocol does not explicitly mention CRSV or GBV, it is relevant to the prevention of CRSV in several ways. First, as the limited data show (see Table 2), firearms are involved in the majority of CRSV incidents. In requiring States to criminalize their illicit manufacturing and trade and adopt effective control and security measures, including their disposal,⁹¹ the Firearms Protocol can reduce the number of firearms in illicit circulation, including in conflict, contributing to the long-term structural prevention of CRSV. Second, as per the gender mainstreaming resolution of the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, Member States are called to:

87 According to guidance provided by the International Committee of the Red Cross, sexual violence should be considered as “serious acts of gender-based violence” under article 7.4 of the ATT: International Committee of the Red Cross, “International Humanitarian Law and Gender-based Violence in the Context of the Arms Trade Treaty”, April 2019, <https://www.thearmstradetreaty.org/hyper-images/file/CSP5%20-%20working%20paper%20-%20GBV%20and%20IHL/CSP5%20-%20working%20paper%20-%20GBV%20and%20IHL.pdf>.

88 Ibid.

89 A.-S. Fabre et al., “At Whose Risk? Understanding States Parties’ Implementation of Arms Trade Treaty Gender-based Violence Provisions”, Briefing Paper, Small Arms Survey, March 2022, <https://smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/resources/SAS-ATT-GBV-BP.pdf>, p. 3.

90 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, The Firearms Protocol, www.unodc.org/unodc/en/firearms-protocol/the-firearms-protocol.html.

“ Take a gender perspective into account in the implementation of the Organized Crime Convention and the Protocols thereto by considering how crime, including transnational organized crime, has different impacts on men and women, in order to ensure that policies, programmes and actions to address crime are effective.”⁹² ”

The Firearms Protocol and the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime are also relevant because they address organized criminal groups, which often operate in and across conflict zones. Organized criminal groups may provide armed groups in a conflict with illicit arms, ammunition, explosives and other equipment and commodities to be used in conflict,⁹³ and these same weapons may directly or indirectly be facilitating CRSV. In addition, a 2018 report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime about trafficking in conflict found that organized criminal groups are frequently involved in the trafficking of persons for the purpose of sexual exploitation, often taking advantage of the breakdown in governance and border security in a conflict setting.⁹⁴ While several Security Council resolutions have highlighted the challenging security implications posed by organized crime in conflict-affected and fragile settings, noting the imperative to integrate crime prevention mandates into United Nations responses at all phases of conflict,⁹⁵ further attention should be paid to the role of organized criminal groups as perpetrators and enablers of CRSV as part of prevention efforts.

3.2 Additional Arms Control and Disarmament Tools for Preventing Conflict-related Sexual Violence

The implementation of SALW-related treaties and instruments can support the prevention of sexual violence directly by reducing the number of weapons, especially illicit weapons, in fragile and conflict-affected settings. In addition, there are arms control and disarmament measures that can be leveraged to mitigate the immediate risk of CRSV before and during conflict and when countries

91 Ibid., “Key Provisions”.

92 Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, Resolution 26/3, www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CCPCJ/CCPCJ_Sessions/CCPCJ_26/CCCPJ_Res_Dec/CCPCJ-RES-26-3.pdf.

93 UNIDIR, Addressing the Linkages between Illicit Arms, Organized Crime and Armed Conflict, 2022, <https://unidir.org/publication/addressing-linkages-between-illicit-arms-organized-crime-and-armed-conflict>, p. 3.

94 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Global Report on Trafficking in Persons – In the Context of Armed Conflict, 2018, www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/2018/GloTIP2018_BOOKLET_2_Conflict.pdf, pp. 20–21.

95 Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime, Organized Crime and Its Role in Contemporary Conflict: An Analysis of UN Security Council Resolutions, 2018, <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/TGIATOC-UNSC-Policy-Note-1962-web.pdf>.

are transitioning out of conflict. These measures include integration of arms-related risks into CRSV early warning mechanisms; engagement with armed groups; arms embargoes; disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR); civilian disarmament programmes; WAM; CVR programmes; and specific measures as part of SSR. Some of these measures are discussed below.

3.2.1 Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Programmes

Traditional DDR is described as the “process of removing weapons from the hands of combatants, taking the combatants out of military structures and helping them to integrate socially and economically into society”.⁹⁶ Today, DDR is an integrated process that includes tools such as WAM and CVR programmes and reintegration support that can be used piecemeal and in contexts where the preconditions for a DDR programme are not present, such as during a conflict.⁹⁷

The disarmament component of DDR provides an opportunity to address CRSV. Some DDR processes have resulted in the collection and destruction of large amounts of arms and ammunition and thus effectively eliminated the risk of weapons being recirculated and used to commit or facilitate CRSV. The Integrated DDR Standards acknowledge that involving non-governmental organizations and women community leaders in weapon collection and destruction as part of DDR programmes could help raise awareness of weapon spread and misuse, and the implications of this in facilitating CRSV.⁹⁸ In addition, gender-responsive WAM carried out in the context of DDR can contribute to prevention, as discussed in section 3.2.3.

The demobilization and reintegration components of DDR already address CRSV in several ways. First, from the initial stages of screening and identification of combatants to their long-term reintegration, DDR programmes are encouraged to establish effective mechanisms for receiving and transmitting information on CRSV incidents throughout the process.⁹⁹ This is important, as DDR should not be misperceived as condoning amnesty for combatants responsible for CRSV crimes.

According to the revised Integrated DDR Standards, DDR programmes should offer health-care services and psychological health support to combatants, dependents and members associated with armed groups who might have suffered sexual violence during or after the conflict. Cantonment sites should be adequately lit and provide separate latrines for women and men to prevent sexual violence.

96 Inter-Agency Working Group on DDR, “Introduction to the IDDRS”, www.unddr.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/IDDRS-1.10-Introduction-To-The-IDDRS.pdf, p. 2.

97 Ibid.

98 Ibid., p. 17.

99 United Nations, Handbook for United Nations Field Missions on Preventing and Responding to Conflict-related Sexual Violence”, 2020, www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2020.08-UN-CRSV-Handbook.pdf, p. 61.

In addition, opportunities should be provided during cantonment to educate women and girls about their rights (e.g. to take legal action against those who have committed crimes against them).¹⁰⁰

3.2.2 Civilian Disarmament and Weapon Collection Programmes

Civilian disarmament and weapon collection activities, sometimes called “microdisarmament”, have often been used to help collect weapons and ammunition in circulation among the civilian population in a post-conflict environment or in locations of pervasive violent crime. One example is Africa Amnesty Month for the surrender and collection of illicit arms and light weapons as part of the African Union’s Silence the Guns by 2020 initiative.¹⁰¹

Civilian weapon collection programmes can directly prevent the reoccurrence of CRSV in the transitional and post-conflict period by removing guns from civilians, who can also perpetrate CRSV. In addition, if accompanied by disposal programmes, the weapon collection can remove firearms from circulation that may otherwise contribute to the reoccurrence of the conflict and the conditions that may lead to CRSV. The inclusion of diverse stakeholders, including women’s groups, in civilian disarmament has been long advocated for, and their inclusion can raise awareness about CRSV prevention. However, it is important to go beyond women’s tokenistic participation and to ensure that women and different demographic groups, including survivors of CRSV and their representative associations, can meaningfully take part in the decision-making and design of programmes such as “weapons for development”, where weapons are surrendered in exchange for a community development project.¹⁰² These programmes can also be an opportunity to address civilian firearm licensing legislation, as discussed in section 3.2.3.

3.2.3 Weapon and Ammunition Management

WAM, which can be part of DDR and CVR or implemented independently, can be described as the oversight of, accountability for and governance of arms and ammunition throughout their life cycle, from the point of manufacture to disposal, including destruction. WAM refers to frameworks governing

100 Inter-Agency Working Group on DDR, “Women, Gender and DDR”, www.unddr.org/modules/IDDRS-5.10-Women-Gender-and-DDR.pdf, pp. 15–16.

101 United Nations Development Programme, Silencing the Guns: A Developmental Approach, 2021, www.undp.org/africa/publications/silencing-guns-developmental-approach.

the acquisition, stockpiling, transfer controls (including end user controls), tracing, and disposal of arms and ammunition.¹⁰³ A gender-responsive approach to WAM considers the different impacts of diversion, theft and proliferation of weapons on women, men, girls and boys at every phase of the management life cycle of weapons and ammunition. This approach requires gender expertise and the collection of gender- and age-disaggregated data, including improved data on weapons in CRSV incidents, to be shared with WAM practitioners in an aggregate format to better inform their work.

The Integrated DDR Standards module on transitional WAM explicitly recognizes that “inadequately secured weapons and ammunition can facilitate inter-personal armed violence, including sexual and gender-based violence”.¹⁰⁴ By preventing diversion and loss of weapons allocated to military forces due to poor stockpile and security measures, WAM can reduce the risk that these weapons are used to fuel CRSV directly but also indirectly. While WAM can be implemented as a part of formal DDR processes, it is also an important measure to support security transitions. For example, in contexts where there is no peace agreement and where disarmament as part of a formal DDR programme may not be possible, transitional WAM can be implemented to support better arms control by preventing the diversion of weapons, ammunition and explosives to unauthorized end users,¹⁰⁵ thereby contributing to prevention of the reoccurrence of CRSV in these contexts. For WAM to be an effective part of CRSV prevention, understanding of WAM must go beyond the “train and equip” type of work, which primarily focuses on physical security and stockpile management, and include a more holistic assessment of legal national frameworks.¹⁰⁶ For example, as part of a WAM assessment, existing legal and policy frameworks on civilian ownership of firearms can be reviewed and a gender-sensitive approach to firearm legislation and licensing could be encouraged¹⁰⁷ with the aim of preventing GBV including CRSV in transitional and post-conflict settings.

3.2.4 Community Violence Reduction

Originally introduced in Haiti in 2006, CVR programmes are becoming more popular, especially in contexts where the preconditions for DDR (e.g. a formal peace agreement or ceasefire agreement)

102 V. Farr, “The Importance of a Gender Perspective to Successful Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Processes”, Disarmament Forum, vol. 4, 2003, pp. 25–35, https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/unidir_importancegenderperspective_2006_0.pdf.

103 Definition based on H. Giezendanner and H. Shiotani, A Reference Methodology for National Weapons and Ammunition Management Baseline Assessments, UNIDIR, 2021, <https://unidir.org/publication/reference-methodology-national-weapons-and-ammunition-management-baseline-assessments>, p. 7.

104 Inter-Agency Working Group on DDR, “Transnational Weapons and Ammunition Management”, <https://www.unddr.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/IDDRS-4.11-Transitional-Weapons-and-Ammunition-Management.pdf>, p. 3.

105 UNIDIR, The Role of Weapon and Ammunition Management in Preventing Conflict and Supporting Security Transitions: Preliminary Findings and Key Policy Considerations, 2019, <https://unidir.org/publication/role-weapon-and-ammunition-management-preventing-conflict-and-supporting-security>.

106 For example, see H. Giezendanner and H. Shiotani, A Reference Methodology for National Weapons and Ammunition Management Baseline Assessments, UNIDIR, 2021, <https://unidir.org/publication/reference-methodology-national-weapons-and-ammunition-management-baseline-assessments>.

107 For example, see SEESAC, “Western Balkan Authorities to Make Firearms Licensing Gender Sensitive”, 1 December 2022, www.seesac.org/News-SALW/western-balkan-authorities-to-make-firearms-licensing-gender-sensitive.

are not in place, yet where armed violence and criminal violence is pervasive. CVR differs from DDR in that it works directly with target communities to find solutions to causes of armed violence from within, and it explicitly targets youth at risk of recruitment by armed groups in addition to ex-combatants.¹⁰⁸

There are several entry points into CVR to develop integrated practices that can support the prevention of CRSV. One example is using such programmes to better understand the nexus between GBV and the factors that influence firearm ownership within a given community (including through perception surveys). These surveys can serve to identify potential arms control options that could support the prevention of GBV, including CRSV, for example including awareness-raising activities about the use and misuse of weapons and the risks involved in the unsafe storage and handling of arms and ammunition. Another example entry point is the introduction of weapon-free zones in locations such as schools, businesses, religious centres, parks, sports areas and plazas, or entire villages, in areas that suffer from pervasive armed violence and GBV and where there is a lack of law enforcement. Weapon-free zones may help people feel safer regardless of gender (although this may be especially true for women and people of diverse gender identity) and promote a change of attitude towards the need to own firearms for safety and security. In fact, weapon-free zones in conflict settings like the ones established around protection camps in South Sudan have resulted in a decrease in CRSV cases.¹⁰⁹

CVR can also provide entry points to engage the community and ex-combatants to carry out sensitization on CRSV, including by condemning CRSV and encouraging communities to protect CRSV survivors.¹¹⁰

3.2.5 Security Sector Reform

SSR refers to the process of transforming the security sector – those institutions that safeguard a country and its citizens from security threats – to ensure the provision of effective security to both the State and its people within a framework of accountability and democratic governance. SSR involves a systematic review of the policies, programmes and activities of a country's security sector. It addresses both the core State providers of security (e.g. military, police, intelligence community, border guard, judiciary, penal system) and non-State providers (e.g. private security and military companies, non-State armed groups).¹¹¹

108 Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions, Community Violence Reduction: Creating Space for Peace, Department of Peace Operations, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/ddr-and-cvr-creating-space-for-peace.pdf>, p. 1.

109 See United Nations Secretary-General reports on CRSV: [S/2017/249](https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/sgsmr17012017.docstoc.htm) (15 April 2017) and [S/2016/361/Rev.1](https://www.un.org/press/en/2016/sgsmr16012016.docstoc.htm) (22 June 2016).

110 United Nations, Handbook for United Nations Field Missions on Preventing and Responding to Conflict-related Sexual Violence, 2020, www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2020.08-UN-CRSV-Handbook.pdf, p. 61.

111 Based on the definitions provided in Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, SSR in a Nutshell: Manual for Introductory Training on Security Sector Reform, 2012, <https://issat.dcaf.ch/content/download/2970/25352/file/ISSAT%20LEVEL%201%20TRAINING%20MANUAL%20-%20SSR%20IN%20A%20NUTSHELL%20-%2005.2.pdf>.

Gender-responsive SSR is particularly relevant to preventing CRSV as one of its objectives is improving the security sector’s prevention of and response to sexual and gender-based violence, including CRSV, in post-conflict settings.¹¹² Mainstreaming gender considerations into SSR could lead to the development of more gender-responsive policies and guidelines on the conduct of security personnel to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse, as well as regulations and procedures for arms transfers to private security companies or regulations that determine whether security personnel are allowed to take service weapons home,¹¹³ a measure that could reduce the risk of domestic violence and help prevent reoccurrence of CRSV in post-conflict settings.



Sudan. Disarmament launches in Ed Damazin, Sudan. © UN Photo

112 H. Myrntinen, Security Sector Governance, Security Sector Reform and Gender, Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, www.dcaf.ch/tool-1-security-sector-governance-security-sector-reform-and-gender, pp. 2–3.

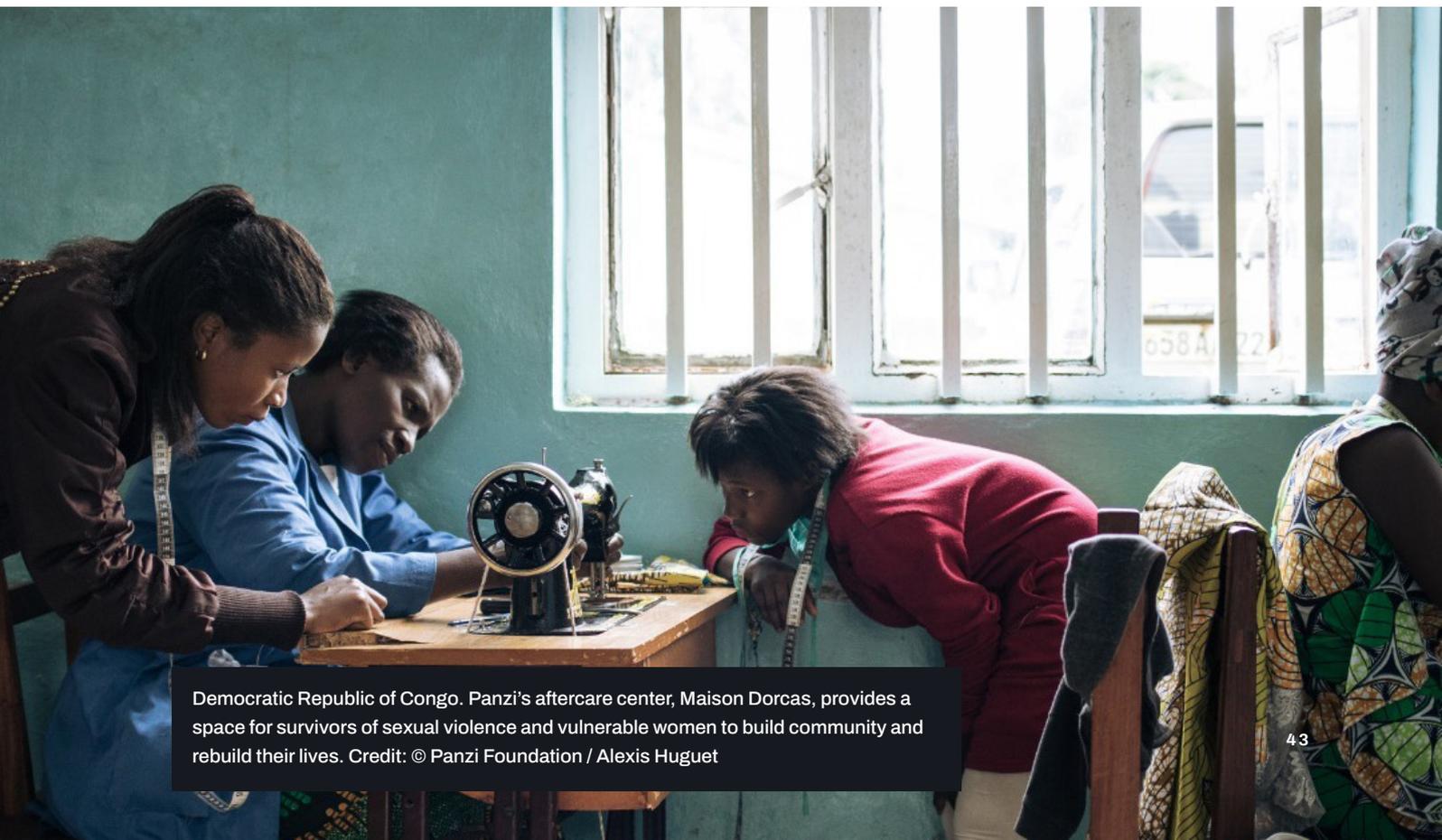
113 H. Salama and E. Bjerten-Gunter, “How Weapons and Ammunition Management Can Enhance Women, Peace and Security”, IPI Global Observatory, 17 March 2022, <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2022/03/how-weapons-and-ammunition-management-can-enhance-women-peace-and-security>.

4. Looking Ahead: Further recommendations to support CRSV prevention

As the primary duty bearers, States have a key role in contributing to preventing CRSV through better and more transparent implementation of SALW-related treaties and instruments. Although many challenges for implementation exist, especially in conflict-affected States, there are some steps that all stakeholders, including States, the United Nations, regional organizations and civil society organizations, can take to bring greater attention to this issue and improve implementation of the treaties, instruments, tools and measures outlined, with the aim of effectively contributing to both short-term and long-term prevention of CRSV.

→ Improving understanding of the links between SALW proliferation and CRSV

All arms control and disarmament stakeholders can contribute to improving understanding of the links between the proliferation of SALW in conflict and CRSV. First, by contributing to improving data collection on CRSV through supporting **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.** States in particular could also encourage and fund initiatives to safely make anonymized



Democratic Republic of Congo. Panzi's aftercare center, Maison Dorcas, provides a space for survivors of sexual violence and vulnerable women to build community and rebuild their lives. Credit: © Panzi Foundation / Alexis Huguet

country-level data and trends on CRSV incidents more accessible to their national export authorities to support the export risk assessments in the context of article 7.4 of the ATT. In addition, these data can be used to inform SALW control policies at a national level in the context of commitments made by States under the UNPoA.

Second, States in collaboration with civil society organizations, the United Nations and other relevant stakeholders could **pursue and fund further context-specific research on the links between CRSV and the proliferation of SALW**, in particular, the links between organized crime, including the illicit trade in weapons and other types of illicit trade in conflict and CRSV. This would build on recommendations from both the Fifth Conference of States Parties to the ATT and the Third Review Conference on the UNPoA to increase understanding of the gender impacts of armed violence and understanding of the gender-specific impacts of the illicit trade in SALW.^{114,115}

Raising awareness of the role of arms control and disarmament in CRSV prevention

Although the United Nations and others have acknowledged SALW proliferation as an enabling factor of CRSV, there is little awareness of the role that arms control and disarmament plays in the prevention of CRSV. Again, all arms control and disarmament stakeholders can contribute to raising awareness of this issue.

States can do this by **including data or research on the links between SALW proliferation and CRSV in their national statements during SALW-related forums, such as the ATT, the UNPoA and the Firearms Protocol**, and consider **including survivors or survivors' associations in their delegations to these meetings to deliver statements**.

International and national civil society organizations, as well as international and regional organizations, have played an important role in the negotiation, adoption and ratification of all arms control and disarmament treaties and instruments. They continue to play a crucial role in developments related to these instruments and treaties, such as encouraging States to adopt stronger gender language and recommendations in the development of additional resolutions and protocols or in outcome documents of meetings.¹¹⁶ Therefore, **civil society organizations as well**

114 General Assembly, "Report of the Third United Nations Conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects", [A/CONF.192/2018/RC/3](#), 2 July 2018, para. 79.

115 ATT Secretariat, "Final Report of the Fifth Conference of States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty", [ATT/CSP5/2019/SEC/536/Conf.FinRep.Rev1](#), 30 August 2019, para. 22(b)(ii).

116 See, for example, United Nations Office Disarmament Affairs, The Importance of Civil Society in United Nations and Intergovernmental Processes: Views from Four Delegates to the United Nations, 2014, <https://disarmament.unoda.org/update/the-importance-of-civil-society-in-united-nations-and-intergovernmental-processes-views-from-four-delegates-to-the-united-nations/>; United Nations Office Disarmament Affairs, Advocacy by Non-governmental Organizations to Strengthen the United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons, 2018, www.un.org/disarmament/publications/civilsociety/civil-society-and-disarmament-2018; B. Rappert et al., "The Roles of Civil Society in the Development of Standards around New Weapons and Other Technologies of Warfare", *International Review of the Red Cross*, vol. 94, no. 886, 2012, pp. 756–785, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1816383112000744>.

as international and regional organizations can raise awareness on this issue by making statements outlining the links between SALW proliferation and CRSV and by holding side events and informational sessions during meetings of state parties or review conferences.

→ Sharing and building on existing good practices that aim to prevent GBV

To improve the implementation of SALW-related treaties and instruments aimed at supporting long-term or structural prevention of CRSV, **States can consider sharing existing national practices on the development of gender-responsive SALW-related legislation and policies, which can contribute to the prevention of GBV, including CRSV. States can share and build on existing export risk assessment practices which would assess and mitigate the risk that exported weapons can be used to commit or facilitate CRSV in the context of Arms Trade Treaty obligations.**¹¹⁷ States could also consider establishing a sub-working group on the implementation of article 7.4 as part of the existing working group on treaty implementation. Through this group, States could elaborate on export risk assessment practices that consider the full spectrum of GBV, including CRSV.

→ Leveraging synergies between complementary frameworks

The proliferation of SALW is a complex issue, involving a wide range of actors and potential factors. As such, **States should take advantage of synergies among relevant global and regional instruments and treaties – as well as other frameworks such as the Women, Peace and Security Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals –to address the proliferation of SALW and its gendered impacts.** Leveraging the synergies of these instruments can increase their collective effectiveness to help curb proliferation of SALW to perpetrators, which could make a significant impact on CRSV prevention.



New York, United States, 2019.
Commemoration of 10-Year
Anniversary of Establishment of
Mandate on Sexual Violence in
Conflict. Credit: © UN Photo/Mark
Garten

117 ATT Secretariat, “Final Report of the Fifth Conference of States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty”, ATT/CSP5/2019/SEC/536/Conf.FinRep.Rev1, 30 August 2019, para. 22(c).

Box 3.

The role of survivors and survivors' groups

Security Council resolution 2468 recognized “the need for a survivor-centered approach in preventing and responding to sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations”.¹¹⁸ In fact, survivors have a crucial role in addressing conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) by helping bring perpetrators to account through formal and informal justice processes and ensuring that responses to CRSV are effective by voicing their concerns and needs to inform specific forms of support, protection and redress.

Survivors such as Nadia Murad, a Yazidi survivor of sexual violence by ISIL, and survivors' groups such as SEMA (Global Network of Victims and Survivors to End Wartime Sexual Violence) have also played a fundamental role in prevention by bringing much needed global attention to CRSV, which has resulted in increased financial resources and political will towards preventing and ending CRSV.

In this same way, survivors and survivors' groups have a key role to play in leveraging arms control and disarmament measures for CRSV prevention, if they so wish. **As critical stakeholders in efforts to prevent CRSV, they should be included in decision-making on arms control and disarmament.** At national and multilateral levels, they can further underscore the importance of arms control and disarmament measures by sharing their stories and their concerns about the proliferation of weapons in their communities. Their engagement with national small arms and light weapons authorities could offer key insights, contributing to the formulation of laws and policies that could prevent the reoccurrence of CRSV and GBV. Encouraging their participation in decision-making on processes of arms control and disarmament is also in line with calls from the United Nations Secretary-General and several Member States to improve women and youth participation in decision-making related to arms control and international security.¹¹⁹

118 Security Council, [S/RES/2467](#), 2019, preamble.

119 United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, *Securing Our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament*, 2018, <https://s3.amazonaws.com/unoda-web/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/sg-disarmament-agenda-pubs-page.pdf>.



Credit: © The Mukwege Foundation

5. Conclusion

CRSV has traditionally been seen as a tactic of warfare, with perpetration often affiliated with a State or non-State armed group and victimhood associated with women and girls. Recent research on its occurrence has promoted a more nuanced understanding of this complex phenomenon. It is now understood that sexual violence is part of a continuum of GBV that exists prior to the conflict and may continue after the conflict and affects women and girls as well as men, boys and people of diverse gender identities. Effective prevention will require a holistic understanding of prevailing gender norms that can drive both GBV and participation in armed violence; the enabling factors of CRSV, which often overlap with the conflict drivers; and the risk factors arising from the intersecting identities of survivors and perpetrators.

Arms control and disarmament can play an important role in preventing CRSV and can contribute to both long-term structural prevention and short-term operational prevention in several ways. First, enhanced implementation of arms control and disarmament treaties, instruments, tools and measures will likely reduce the availability of SALW in a conflict, making it harder for perpetrators to commit CRSV. Second, reducing the overall number of SALW in a conflict may help decrease its intensity and decrease the conditions that lead to the normalization of sexual violence in conflict. Third, in post-conflict settings, arms control and disarmament measures such as WAM and weapon collection programmes including as part of DDR and CVR can help reduce the availability of weapons, and a gender-responsive framework for regulating weapons, in particular firearms, can prevent

the reoccurrence of sexual violence in post-conflict settings. In addition, these measures enhance security and stability, creating a more conducive environment to focus on the underlying causes of sexual violence.

However, no disarmament or weapon reduction programme will be successful in the absence of adequate security guarantees for those persons who voluntarily surrender their weapons. Therefore, DDR, weapon collection programmes, WAM, SSR and other SALW control initiatives, need to be integrated to reduce the risks of relapse into conflict and effectively prevent CRSV.¹²⁰

The arms control and disarmament community have a greater role to play in preventing CRSV. States, civil society organizations can bring more awareness to this issue by including survivors and survivor associations to ensure that arms control and disarmament treaties are implemented with a view to preventing CRSV. For this, the arms control community could support better reporting of CRSV incidents, to include information on weapons, and could explore additional links between SALW proliferation and CRSV, for example the link between organized crime, armed groups, and CRSV.

Arms control and disarmament measures alone cannot prevent CRSV. To do that, the root causes of conflict and its gendered dynamics, and other exacerbating factors, need to be addressed. However, when implemented in a gender-responsive way, arms control and disarmament can create space for women's participation in peace negotiations and post-conflict decision-making processes and in the security sector, where the root causes of CRSV can be addressed. Taken together with other measures, such as promoting gender equality, addressing the root causes of conflict, and holding perpetrators accountable, arms control and disarmament can help change gender norms and address the structural inequalities in society that lead to this type of violence.

¹²⁰ UNIDIR, *The Role of Weapon and Ammunition Management in Preventing Conflict and Supporting Security Transitions: Preliminary Findings and Key Policy Considerations*, 2019, <https://unidir.org/publication/role-weapon-and-ammunition-management-preventing-conflict-and-supporting-security>.

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