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The Nairobi Protocol on Small Arms and Light Weapons at 20

A regional implementation scorecard

RUBEN NICOLIN • LILLIAN WAMUYU • BENJAMIN AGAGE • PAUL HOLTOM



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About the project

This report was prepared as a key element of a joint UNIDIR–RECSA project "Reviewing and Strengthening the Implementation of the Nairobi Protocol on Small Arms and Light Weapons", which is funded by the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. This report supports the delivery of the project's first objective: to provide the first comprehensive regionwide review of the Nairobi Protocol's implementation, highlighting effective implementation measures and progress made, common challenges, and new and emerging threats. The project also seeks to strengthen normative frameworks at the national and regional levels for controlling small arms, light weapons and ammunition, and for countering their illicit proliferation, by making proposals to amend the Nairobi Protocol, revise its Best Practice Guidelines and develop a 5-year action plan to support implementation.

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About RECSA

The Regional Centre on Small Arms and Light Weapons (RECSA) is an intergovernmental regional organization established in June 2005. RECSA's mandate is to coordinate its member states in the efficient and effective implementation of the Nairobi Protocol for the Prevention, Control and Reduction of Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Great Lakes Region, the Horn of Africa and Bordering States.

Note

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Acronyms and abbreviations

AFRIPOL	African Union Mechanism for Police Cooperation
BMS	Border Management Secretariat – Kenya
CECORE	Center for Conflict Resolution
CNAP	Permanent National Commission for Combatting the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (Commission nationale pemanente de lutte contre la prolifération des armes légères et de petits calibres) – Burundi
CNC-ALPC	National Commission on Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons and Reduction of Armed Violence (Commission nationale de contrôle des armes légères et de petit calibre et de réduction de la violence armée) – Democratic Republic of the Congo
COMNAT-ALPC	National Commission for Combatting the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (Commission nationale de lutte contre la prolifération des armes légères et de petit calibre) – Central African Republic
DDR	Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
GFA	Global Framework for Through-life Conventional Ammunition Management
IED	Improvised explosive device
INTERPOL	International Criminal Police Organization
POA	United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects
SALW	Small arms and light weapons
UAS	Uncrewed aerial system

Executive summary

Twenty years after its entry into force, the Nairobi Protocol for the Prevention, Control and Reduction of Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Great Lakes Region, the Horn of Africa and Bordering States remains a central framework guiding its states parties in preventing, combating and eradicating the illicit proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons (SALW). While states in this region have made significant progress in implementing the Protocol and enhancing their national SALW control systems, the widespread circulation of illicit SALW continues to contribute to insecurity, armed conflict and violence, and to impede sustainable development.

This study constitutes the first comprehensive review of the Nairobi Protocol's implementation. The study's findings are intended to provide evidence to support RECSA member states in their review of the Protocol. Drawing on information provided by states participating in the review process and complemented by open-source information, the study highlights significant progress in strengthening national SALW control systems (see Table 1). It highlights the advances in legal, institutional and technical capacities but also illustrates gaps in implementation, coordination and the long-term sustainability of effective SALW control.



Obsolete weapons to be destroyed, CAR, 2025. Credit: MINUSCA / Leonel Grothe.

TABLE 1.

Key findings on SALW control in the RECSA region in 2005 and 2025

2005	2025
Legislative and regulatory framework	
▸ Outdated or incomplete national frameworks	▸ Updated legislation to control most stages of the SALW life cycle, but gaps regarding brokering, re-export and craft manufacture
Inter-agency coordination mechanisms	
▸ Inter-agency coordination mechanisms or national focal points in some states	▸ Inter-agency coordination mechanisms in most states ▸ National focal points in all states
Operational capacity	
▸ Limited capacity and resources for SALW control, training and equipment	▸ Expanded national training programmes and equipment, often donor-supported ▸ Key role of RECSA in training, equipping and capacity-building for marking and record-keeping
Law enforcement cooperation	
▸ Nascent regional cooperation mechanism in the form of RECSA	▸ Key role of RECSA in facilitating information exchange, but regional law-enforcement cooperation is ad hoc and uneven
Transparency and regional information exchange	
▸ Aspiration for regional information exchange	▸ Regional information exchanges are ad hoc and limited in scope
Civilian licensing regime	
▸ Inadequate and outdated civilian licensing regimes ▸ Large quantities of SALW in civilian possession outside state control	▸ All states have measures to regulate civilian possession, with licensing regimes present in most ▸ Large quantities of SALW in civilian possession remain outside state control
Regulating international transfers	
▸ Inadequate and outdated transfer controls	▸ Import/export licensing systems established in most states
Border controls	
▸ Limited cross-border cooperation to counter SALW trafficking ▸ Porous borders contributed to SALW trafficking	▸ Cross-border cooperation remains ad hoc and limited ▸ New technologies facilitate SALW trafficking across porous borders
Stockpile management	
▸ No standards for stockpile management	▸ Stockpile management procedures in place in all states
Marking	
▸ SALW marking rare	▸ Marking of state-owned SALW well advanced in most states and in progress in all states ▸ Marking of civilian-owned SALW nascent

2005	2025
Record-keeping of civilian SALW	
▸ Centralized inventories uncommon	▸ Centralized inventories in a majority of states, but not computerized/digitalized
Tracing of illicit SALW	
▸ No systems or processes for tracing	▸ Continued lack of tracing systems and processes
Collection of SALW	
▸ Few legal frameworks for amnesties or voluntary surrender	▸ Amnesties and voluntary surrender programmes implemented by states, often linked to the Africa Amnesty Month

The study took place against a backdrop of geopolitical flux and regional instability. In online consultations, at the national focal point meeting that took place on 18–19 November 2025 and the stakeholder conference on 20–21 November 2025, both in Nairobi, national experts underlined that a review of the Nairobi Protocol should not just take into account challenges in implementing the existing provisions. They highlighted the equally long-standing factors that drive demand for arms and ammunition, new and emerging security threats, as well as new commitments and approaches at the international level to address these challenges. Based on the key outcomes of these discussions, it is recommended that RECSA member states:

- Review and expand existing yet underdeveloped provisions under the Nairobi Protocol
- Align the Nairobi Protocol with global and African arms control frameworks
- Address emerging weapon technologies and acquisition methods
- Enhance national strategic planning and ensure sustainable operational capacity
- Ensure that national control systems are gender-responsive
- Strengthen partnerships with civil society to address demand for arms and ammunition
- Improve cross-border cooperation and integrated border management
- Strengthen regional information-sharing and coordination mechanisms
- Improve monitoring, evaluation and evidence-based reporting for regular reviews of implementation

The Nairobi Protocol has played a key role in strengthening SALW control in its region. Contemporary armed conflict and violence dynamics – including the impact of climate change and developments in the production, acquisition and use of SALW and improvised weapons in the region – underscore the need to update the Nairobi Protocol and its implementation support. This will equip RECSA member states with appropriate guidance to ensure effective local, national and regional approaches to controlling conventional arms and ammunition and countering their illicit proliferation and misuse.

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A man passes by a destroyed tank, Ethiopia, 2021. Credit: Yan Boechat / VOA.

1. Introduction

On 21 April 2004, 10 states signed the Nairobi Protocol for the Prevention, Control and Reduction of Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Great Lakes Region, the Horn of Africa and Bordering States (see Box 1.1).[1] It constituted a landmark, legally binding agreement on controlling small arms and light weapons (SALW) and combating their illicit proliferation and misuse in the region, but its significance extended further. The Nairobi Protocol transformed the 2000 Nairobi Declaration into a legally binding regional agreement and, to support its implementation, established the Regional Centre on Small Arms (RECSA; see Box 1.2) to replace the earlier Nairobi Secretariat.[2] It incorporated key political commitments contained in the United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms (PoA) and legally binding provisions of the 2001 United Nations Firearms Protocol.[3] The new agreement also contained region-specific

1 These 10 states were Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Seychelles, Sudan, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania. *Nairobi Protocol for the Prevention, Control and Reduction of Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Great Lakes Region, the Horn of Africa and Bordering States*, signed 21 April 2004, entered into force 5 May 2006, https://www.recsasec.org/nairobi-protocol/.

2 Nairobi Declaration on the Problem of the Proliferation of Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa, 15 March 2000, https://www.recsasec.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Nairobi-Protocol-.pdf.

3 United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects. United Nations, Report of the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, New York, A/CONF.192/15(SUPP), 9–20 July 2001, https://docs.un.org/A/CONF.192/15(SUPP); Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, adopted by General Assembly resolution 55/255, 31 May 2001, *United Nations Treaty Series*, vol. 2326, p. 208.

requirements, such as requiring states parties to regulate civilian possession of SALW, as well as more detailed, prescriptive provisions than those in international SALW control instruments.

Twenty years later, the Nairobi Protocol continues to guide SALW control in the RECSA region. However, its member states have recognized that the Protocol had not kept pace with new developments at the international, regional and national levels. Internationally, new instruments such as the 2005 International Tracing Instrument (ITI), the 2013 Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) and the 2023 Global Framework for Through-life Conventional Ammunition Management (GFA) have since been adopted.[4] These new instruments, together with the further elaboration of provisions in the PoA and the Firearms Protocol, seek to address long-standing and new threats, challenges and opportunities. In Africa, new initiatives such as the African Union's Silencing the Guns initiative, the Africa Amnesty Month and the Djibouti Code of Conduct on repression of piracy have introduced new resources and political commitments for addressing the scourge of illicit SALW on the continent.[5] At the same time, states and communities face not only persistent challenges to peace and security, but also new and emerging SALW-related threats, including from terrorism and violent extremism, the diversion of weapons and ammunition, and the proliferation and misuse of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and uncrewed aerial systems (UASs).[6]

4 United Nations, Report of the Open-ended Working Group to Negotiate an International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons, A/60/88, 2005, Annex, https://docs.un.org/A/60/88; Arms Trade Treaty, adopted by General Assembly resolution 67/234B, 2 April 2013, *United Nations Treaty Series*, vol. 3013, p. 269; United Nations, Final report of the open-ended working group to elaborate a set of political commitments as a new global framework that will address existing gaps in through-life ammunition management, A/78/111, 2023, https://docs.un.org/A/78/111.

5 African Union Master Roadmap of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns in Africa by Year 2020, African Union Assembly, Assembly/AU/6(XXVIII) Annex, February 2017, https://au.int/en/documents/20200331/au-master-road-map-practical-steps-silencing-guns-africa; Africa Amnesty Month for the Surrender and Collection of Illegally Owned Weapons, African Union Assembly Decision 645(XXIX), 29th Ordinary Session, 3–4 July 2017, https://au.int/sites/default/files/decisions/37294-assembly_au_dec_642_-_664_xxix_e_1.pdf; International Maritime Organization, Code of Conduct concerning the Repression of Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in the Western Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden (Djibouti Code of Conduct), as amended in 2017 (Jeddah Amendment), annex to C/ES.29/D, adopted at Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, 12 January 2017.

6 See, e.g., Manasseh Wepundi and Roba D. Sharamo, *The State of Peace and Security in East Africa*, Monograph 205 (Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies (ISS), 2021), https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/Mono-205.pdf; Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, "Event Report on Addressing Key Security Challenges in the Horn of Africa and Great Lakes Region", 8 December 2025, https://www.kas.de/en/web/sipodi-east/event-reports/detail/-/content/horn-of-africa-and-great-lakes-security-symposium-1; United Nations, "Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa", Report of the Secretary-General, A/79/128, 9 July 2024, https://docs.un.org/A/79/128.

BOX 1.1.

The Nairobi Protocol on SALW

Timeline on the development of the Nairobi Protocol

2000
Nairobi Declaration adopted

2004
Nairobi Protocol signed, ratification by Ethiopia

2005
RECSA established; start of Nairobi Protocol implementation; ratification by DRC, Djibouti, Eritrea, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda

2006
Nairobi Protocol enters into force; ratification by Burundi

2007
Ratification by Republic of the Congo and Sudan

2025
Council of Ministers mandates Protocol review

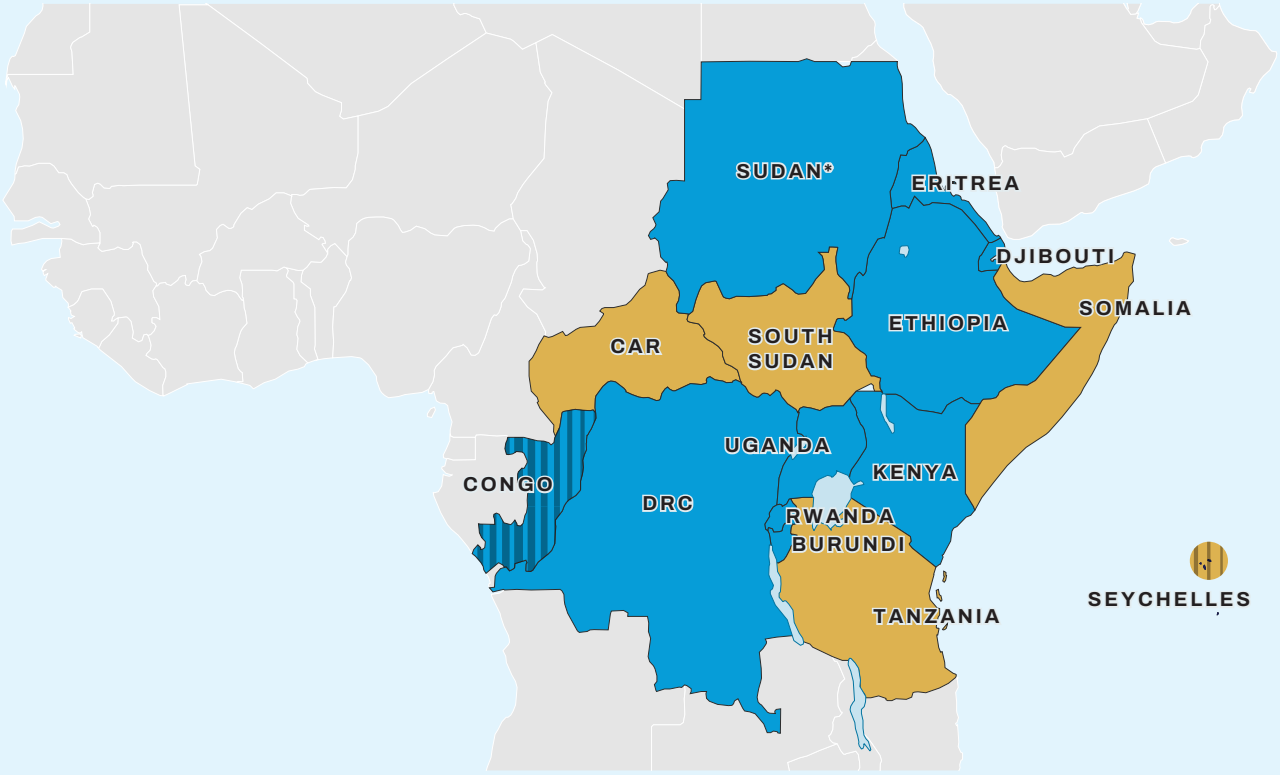
Article 2 of the Nairobi Protocol lists the following objectives:

- Preventing, combating and eradicating the illicit manufacturing, trafficking, possession and use of SALW in the RECSA region
- Preventing the excessive and destabilizing accumulation of SALW in the region
- Promoting and facilitating information-sharing and cooperation between governments in the region, and among governments, intergovernmental organizations and civil society in all matters relating to the trafficking and proliferation of SALW
- Promoting cooperation at the regional level as well as in international forums to effectively combat the SALW problem, in collaboration with the relevant partners
- Encouraging accountability, law enforcement, and the efficient control and management of SALW held by states parties and civilians

Articles 3–17 of the Nairobi Protocol contain operative provisions for establishing and maintaining an effective national system for controlling SALW and enhancing regional information-sharing and cooperation to address the transnational dimensions of the illicit small arms trade. At the national level, states parties are required to have legislative measures in place to clearly identify criminal offences relating to SALW; to control civilian possession and state-held weapons; to regulate international transfers and brokering; to ensure the responsible disposal of surplus, confiscated or unlicensed SALW; and to curb corruption associated with the illicit small arms trade. They are also required to initiate programmes to encourage voluntary surrender and for public and community education to tackle illicit proliferation. At the regional level, the Nairobi Protocol seeks to ensure that states parties can cooperate in investigations and prosecutions through mutual legal assistance and law enforcement cooperation, and can share information via national focal points to harmonize transfer controls and counter-trafficking efforts.

As of December 2025, 10 of the 15 member states of RECSA were formal states parties to the Nairobi Protocol.

Overview of RECSA member states, Nairobi Protocol states parties and states participating in this study



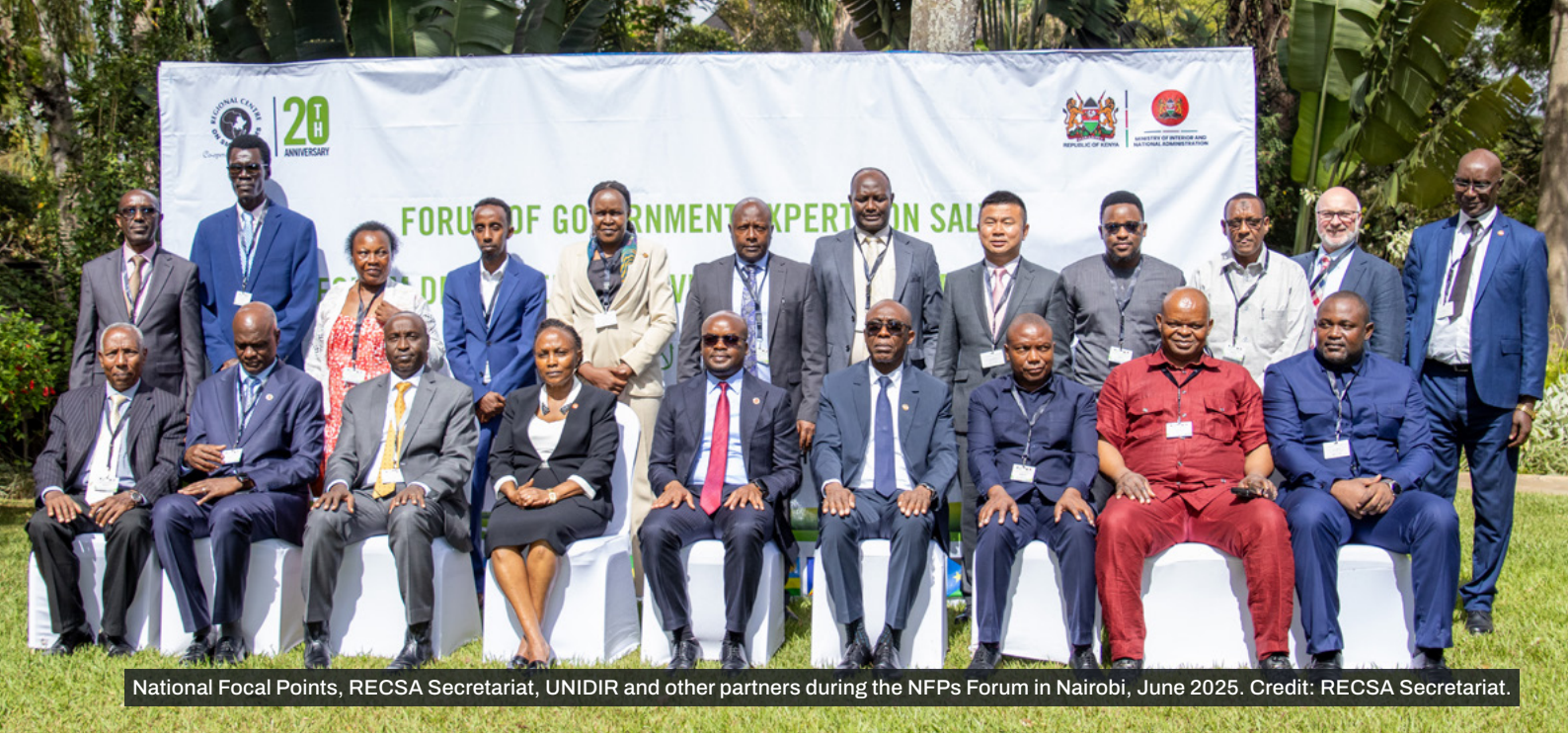
NAIROBI PROTOCOL STATE PARTY

- PARTICIPATED IN THIS STUDY
- DIDN'T PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

NOT NAIROBI PROTOCOL STATE PARTY

- PARTICIPATED IN THIS STUDY
- DIDN'T PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

* While Sudan participated in this study, given the ongoing conflict and the resulting methodological difficulties in reliably interpreting any data on the state of SALW control in the country, it was decided to not to include it in the findings.



National Focal Points, RECSA Secretariat, UNIDIR and other partners during the NFPs Forum in Nairobi, June 2025. Credit: RECSA Secretariat.

Against this background, on 13 June 2025, the 11th ordinary meeting of the RECSA Council of Ministers was convened in Nairobi, Kenya. It mandated the RECSA Secretariat to review the Nairobi Protocol, focusing not just on its current scope but also on emerging threats.[7] To support the review process, the RECSA Secretariat, in partnership with the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) and with funding from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office of the United Kingdom, launched the project, "Reviewing and Strengthening the Implementation of the Nairobi Protocol". This initiative marks the first systematic and comprehensive review of the implementation of the Nairobi Protocol, underscoring its political and strategic significance.

The present report contributes an analytical foundation to the review process. It provides the first comprehensive assessment of the implementation of the Nairobi Protocol over the 20-year period 2005–2025. The study identifies regional strengths and effective practices in SALW control that can be built upon and highlights common challenges. Further, it recognizes new threats to and opportunities for the control of conventional weapons, including SALW, and the through-life management of conventional ammunition.

The findings of the study are intended to support RECSA member states in reviewing the Nairobi Protocol and in informing potential amendments to the Protocol, its related Best Practice Guidelines, and other institutional policy documents and activities.[8] Further, the RECSA Secretariat, member states and partners may use the knowledge and resources delivered by the project to strengthen normative and technical frameworks at the national and regional levels for controlling SALW and ammunition, countering illicit proliferation, contributing to efforts to reduce human suffering, and enhancing peace, security and development in the RECSA region.

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7 RECSA, 11th RECSA Ordinary Council of Ministers Meeting, Resolution no. 8, 13 June 2025.

8 RECSA, Best Practice Guidelines for the Implementation of the Nairobi Declaration and the Nairobi Protocol on Smal Arms and Light Weapons, adopted at Nairobi, Kenya, 20 June 2005, https://www.recsasec.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/recsa-best-practice-guidelines-for-the-implementation-of-the-nairobi-declaration-and-the-nairobi-protocol-on-small-arms-and-light-weapons.pdf.



National Focal Points and Stakeholders Conference on the Review of the Nairobi Protocol, November 2025. Credit: RECSA Secretariat.

BOX 1.2.

RECSA

The Regional Centre on Small Arms and Light Weapons (RECSA) was established on 21 June 2005 as an intergovernmental institution with the principal objective of ensuring the efficient and effective implementation of the Nairobi Declaration and the Nairobi Protocol. The Centre consists of the Council of Ministers, the Technical Advisory Committee and the Secretariat. The Secretariat is RECSA's executive body, supporting member states in implementing the Nairobi Protocol and complementary SALW control initiatives.[9] As of March 2026, RECSA has 15 member states. This includes states that are party to or have signed (but not yet ratified) the Nairobi Protocol and states that have joined through written request and unanimous decision of the Council of Ministers (see Box 1.1).

RECSA's collaborations with development partners, regional organizations, research institutions, think tanks and civil society organizations have played a key role in delivering international cooperation and assistance to member states to strengthen their SALW control efforts. RECSA's work also includes cooperation with regional organizations with overlapping mandates on peace and security, including the African Union (AU), the East African Community (EAC), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR).

9 Agreement Establishing the Regional Centre on Small Arms in the Great Lakes Region, and the Horn of Africa, 21 June 2005, **https://www.recsasec.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/SIGNED-RECSA-AGREEMENT-1.pdf**.

1.1. Research methodology

This study presents the results of the first comprehensive review of the status of implementation of the Nairobi Protocol by RECSA member states. The regional assessment faced several methodological constraints, which are described in this subsection and should be considered when interpreting the findings presented in Sections 3–4.

The UNIDIR–RECSA research team established more than 500 criteria for the assessment derived from the provisions and commitments contained in the Nairobi Protocol's 15 "operational" articles. These have been used to create the following 16 thematic issue areas for the assessment:

1. Legislative and regulatory framework
2. Inter-agency coordination mechanisms
3. Operational capacity
4. Law enforcement cooperation
5. Transparency and regional information exchange
6. Civilian licensing regime
7. Awareness-raising
8. Regulating commercial entities
9. Regulating international transfers
10. Border controls
11. Stockpile management
12. Marking
13. Record-keeping of civilian SALW
14. Tracing of illicit SALW
15. Collection of SALW
16. Identification of surplus, obsolete and redundant SALW

The research team sought to establish a 2005 baseline for SALW control in the RECSA region. Since only two states used a questionnaire developed by the research team to provide information on national SALW controls in 2005, the baseline was instead prepared using publicly available information, primarily national reports on implementation of the PoA and a review of legislation conducted by a non-governmental organization in 2004.[10] As shown in Section 3, there is limited reliable data to establish a robust baseline for 2005 for all RECSA member states. This data gap limited the ability to undertake a full longitudinal assessment of progress over the 20 years.

To assess implementation in 2025, the research team used information contained in the 2024 national reports on PoA implementation.[11] However, the primary data source was dedicated, direct engagements with the national focal points on SALW of RECSA member state via two approaches.

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10 The sources of data for 2005 included national reports on implementation of the PoA submitted by Burundi (2005), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (2005), Kenya (2005), Rwanda (2005), Uganda (2005), and the United Republic of Tanzania (2006); Catherine Flew and Angus Urquhart, *Strengthening Small Arms Controls: An Audit of Small Arms Control Legislation in the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa* (Pretoria and London: SaferAfrica and Saferworld, 2004), and accompanying reports on *Burundi, Djibouti, Eritrea, Kenya, Rwanda* and *Tanzania*, https://www.saferworld-global.org/resources/publications/41-strengthening-small-arms-controls.

11 The sources of data for 2025 included the 2024 PoA reports submitted by Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Uganda and Tanzania, https://smallarms.un-arm.org/national-reports.

First, UNIDIR and RECSA developed a comprehensive questionnaire to collect information from member states on implementation measures for the 15 operational articles of the Nairobi Protocol. The questionnaire included both closed-answer questions (yes, partially and no) to enable a comparative analysis of implementation and open-ended questions to gather information on effective national practices. The questionnaire was circulated between September and November 2025 to the national focal points, the national commissions or their equivalents of all RECSA member states (in both English and French). A total of 13 member states submitted data on national implementation as of 2025 (see Annex I). Eight member states submitted completed questionnaires, while five provided partial responses across key thematic areas. The frequent "blank" answers made it difficult to draw conclusions from the data. Response limitations therefore affected the comprehensiveness of the 2025 data set.

The second primary source of data for this study was online and in-person meetings of the research team with the RECSA member states' national focal point or their representatives. RECSA and UNIDIR organized a series of online consultations for national focal points during October–November 2025, followed by an in-person meeting in Nairobi in November 2025 and then an in-person stakeholder conference. The conference, with input from national focal points and stakeholders, provided an opportunity to discuss common challenges and effective implementation measures, as well as to identify new and emerging threats and opportunities for an updated Protocol and Best Practice Guidelines.

Overall, 13 RECSA states, of which nine are states parties to the Nairobi Protocol, contributed to the regional assessment and the review process. The assessment of the situations in 2005 and 2025 relied primarily on self-reported data submitted by RECSA member states. While this approach promoted national ownership, it may carry a risk of over-reporting implementation achievements. Where feasible within the constraints of this project, the research team supplemented findings from other reliable sources, including relevant RECSA documentation, UNIDIR and United Nations reports, and other credible open-source materials.

These limitations notwithstanding, the assessment provides a substantive overview of regional progress and key challenges, while also highlighting areas where strengthened reporting mechanisms and data systems would further enhance monitoring and evaluation efforts.

1.2. Overview of the report

Section 2 of this report provides a brief overview of SALW proliferation and trends in armed conflicts and violence in the RECSA region during 2005–2025. Section 3 provides the 2005 baseline for SALW control in the RECSA region at the time the Nairobi Protocol came into force. Section 4 provides the 2025 baseline, highlighting progress made and persistent challenges in implementing the Nairobi Protocol, based on the data collected. Finally, Section 5 summarizes the drivers of demand and sources of supply for illicit proliferation in the region and the challenges of SALW control, and provides recommendations for an updated Nairobi Protocol.

2. Illicit proliferation and misuse of SALW in the RECSA region: Undermining peace, stability and development

The Great Lakes and Horn of Africa region has grappled for decades with the intertwined challenges of armed conflict, socioeconomic underdevelopment and illicit proliferation of SALW. Since the signing of the Nairobi Protocol in 2004, the demand for arms and ammunition in the region has not abated due to:

- Inter- and intra-state armed conflicts and historical tensions between states and communities
- Violent extremism and terrorism
- Political instability
- Economic drivers, including extreme poverty and struggles to control access to valuable mineral resources

This section provides a brief overview of trends in armed conflict, human development and illicit arms circulation in the RECSA region between 2005 and 2025, with a focus on developments over the past few years.

The RECSA region has suffered from numerous armed conflicts over the past two decades. In 2005, government forces of Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan and Uganda were engaged in armed conflicts with non-state armed groups.[12] The Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) and Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) classified these as "minor" armed conflicts in 2005 because fewer than 1,000 battle-related deaths occurred per year. Unfortunately, the situation worsened rather than improved. By 2025, the DRC, Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan had experienced levels of violence and fatalities that were classified as "war" at some point in the period 2005–2025.[13] Parties to armed conflicts in the region tend not to respect national borders, with cross-border operations and spillovers being common. For example, the armed conflict in Somalia against al-Shabaab has spilled over into states that were providing peacekeepers for the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), most notably with high-profile attacks by al-Shabaab on civilian targets.[14]

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12 Ralph Sundberg and Erik Melander, "Introducing the UCDP Georeferenced Event Dataset", *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 50, no. 4 (2013), https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343313484347; Nils Gleditsch et al., "Armed Conflict 1946–2001", *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 39, no. 5 (2002), https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343302039005007. Data from filtered UCDP/PRIO v25.1.

13 Sundberg and Melander, "Introducing the UCDP Georeferenced Event Dataset"; Gleditsch et al., "Armed Conflict 1946–2001".

14 Notable incidents in Kenya included the attacks on the Westgate Mall in September 2013, on Garissa University in April 2025 and on the Dusit D2 hotel in January 2019. See, e.g., National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), Global Terrorism Database (GTD), https://www.start.umd.edu/research-projects/global-terrorism-database; Erin Miller, Al-Shabaab Attack on Westgate Mall in Kenya (College Park, MD: START, University of Maryland, September 2013), https://www.start.umd.edu/sites/default/files/publications/local_attachments/STARTBackgroundReport_alShabaabKenya_Sept2013.pdf; Amy Pate, Michael Jensen and Erin Miller, *Al-Shabaab Attack on Garissa University in Kenya*, Background Report (College Park, MD: START, University of Maryland, April 2015), https://www.start.umd.edu/pubs/STARTBackgroundReport_alShabaabGarissaU_April2015.pdf.

This escalation of violence across the region has strained SALW control efforts as heightened violence often leads to increased diversion from state stockpiles and trafficking of arms and ammunition across porous borders.

It has been estimated that organized violence claimed more than half a million lives between 2005 and 2024 in the RECSA region (see Figure 2.1).[15] As with levels of armed conflicts, the impact of organized violence differs across the region. Available data indicates that the Seychelles was immune to organized violence, while very low levels were recorded in the Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Eritrea, Rwanda and Tanzania during 2005–2024. In contrast, Ethiopia suffered more than 330,000 fatalities from organized violence over this period, with more than 53,000 deaths in the DRC, at least 42,000 in Sudan and 41,000 in Somalia.[16] These figures omit other forms of armed violence committed without the involvement of the state or armed groups, such as community-level disputes between herders and pastoralists in Kenya's North Eastern province or Uganda's Karamoja region, death and destruction caused by criminal organizations and bandits across the region, and intimate partner violence committed with SALW.

Beyond direct fatalities, armed conflicts in the RECSA region have broader effects on civilians. The United Nations has reported large numbers of grave violations against children in several conflicts in the RECSA region, particularly in the DRC and in Somalia, including recruitment and use of children by armed groups, killing and maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence, abductions, and attacks on schools and hospitals.[17] Conflict-related sexual violence and gender-based violence remain widespread in the DRC and Somalia, often exacerbated by illicit arms proliferation.[18]

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15 "Organized violence" covers intrastate conflicts, non-state conflicts and one-sided violence against civilians. Calculated from UCDP Organized Violence Dataset v25.1, filtered for RECSA countries. See Shawn Davies et al., "Organized Violence 1989–2024, and the Challenges of Identifying Civilian Victims", *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 62, no. 4 (2025), https://doi.org/10.1177/00223433251345636.

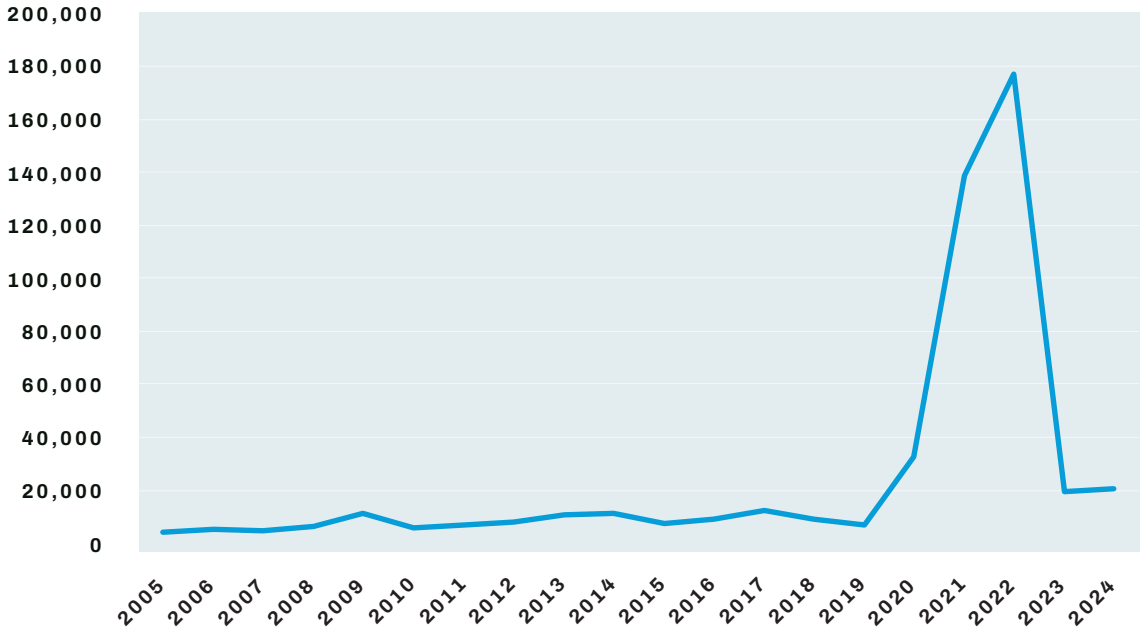
16 The figure for Sudan does not adequately reflect fatalities caused by the ongoing conflict. While no reliable numbers exist, estimates for 2023–2025 range from 20,000 to 120,000 fatalities. Leslie Roberts, "Tracking the Toll of Sudan's Forgotten War from Afar", *Science*, vol. 387, no. 6737 (2025): 914–15, https://doi.org/10.1126/science.adx0328.

17 United Nations, General Assembly and Security Council, "Children and Armed Conflict", Report of the Secretary-General, A/79/878–S/2025/247, 17 June 2025, https://docs.un.org/A/79/878.

18 United Nations, Security Council, "Conflict-Related Sexual Violence", Report of the Secretary-General, S/2025/389, 14 August 2025, https://docs.un.org/S/2025/389.

FIGURE 2.1.

The trend in organized violence fatalities in the RECSA region, 2005–2024



Source: Ralph Sundberg and Erik Melander, "Introducing the UCDP Georeferenced Event Dataset", *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 50, no. 4 (2013), https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343313484347; Shawn Davies et al., "Organized Violence 1989–2024, and the Challenges of Identifying Civilian Victims", *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 62, no. 4 (2025), https://doi.org/10.1177/00223433251345636.

The correlation between high levels of armed violence and low levels of socioeconomic development has been well documented in the RECSA region.[19] Even countries that appear to have undergone a relatively successful transition from conflict to a stable post-conflict situation score poorly on human development indicators. The United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Index provides a useful barometer in this regard, scoring and ranking overall levels of development using a range of indicators. While the Human Development Index scores for most RECSA member states increased between 2000 and 2023, 11 of RECSA's 15 member states ranked among the world's 30 least developed countries in 2023. The Central African Republic, Somalia and South Sudan were the bottom three countries globally, with South Sudan's score being lower in 2023 than in 2010 and 2020. It can be inferred that the high levels of armed violence in the region disrupt education, health and income through direct destruction of infrastructure, displacement of populations and diversion of resources, thereby perpetuating poverty and inequality. Prolonged and high-intensity conflicts further undermine SALW control by compromising stockpile security (leading

19 See, e.g., Regional Centre on Small Arms (RECSA), *Strategic Plan (2016–2020)* (Nairobi: RECSA Secretariat, 2016), https://www.recsasec.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Strategy-2016-2020-Final-2.doc.pdf; Robert Muggah, "Obstructing Development: The Effects of Small Arms on Human Development", in *Small Arms Survey 2003: Development Denied*, ed. Peter Batchelor and Keith Krause (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

to diversions), weakening border controls (allowing cross-border trafficking) and reducing enforcement capacity due to the diversion of resources to military efforts.[20]

This creates a vicious cycle as insecurity from conflicts and low development spurs demand for arms for self-protection from civilians and non-state armed groups, while arms availability enables further violence. Reliable data on both authorized and illegal SALW located in the RECSA region remains elusive. The estimated number of small arms in the hands of civilians, criminals, armed groups and terrorist groups in the RECSA region increased from 6 million in 2007 to 9.27 million in 2017 (see Figure 2.2).[21] Yet the distribution of these weapons is uneven across the region. An estimated 40 per cent of these 9 million small arms were located in Somalia and Sudan in 2017, while only 4,000 "civilian-held" small arms were estimated to be in the Seychelles at the time.[22] The problem is further compounded by risks of diversion from state armouries and the seizure of arms and ammunition from state security forces and law enforcement officers.[23] Furthermore, armed conflicts influence both illicit and licit arms flows into, across and out of the region, driven by heightened demand and supply dynamics. Arms and ammunition circulate between conflicts in the DRC, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan, while armed groups operate across borders or maintain transnational networks. In addition, weapons originating from conflicts in Chad, Libya and Yemen flow into and transit through RECSA member states that are not themselves affected by armed conflict.[24]

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20 Muggah, "Obstructing Development".

21 Aaron Karp, "Completing the Count: Civilian Firearms", in *Small Arms Survey 2007: Guns and the City*, ed. Eric G. Berman et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/resources/Small-Arms-Survey-2007-Chapter-02-annexe-3-EN.pdf; Aaron Karp, "Annex: Civilian Firearms Holdings, 2017", *Estimating Global Civilian-Held Firearms Numbers*, Briefing Paper (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, June 2018), https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/resources/SAS-BP-Civilian-held-firearms-annexe.pdf. The Small Arms Survey uses the term "firearms" rather than small arms. This report uses the term "small arms" for consistency in terminology.

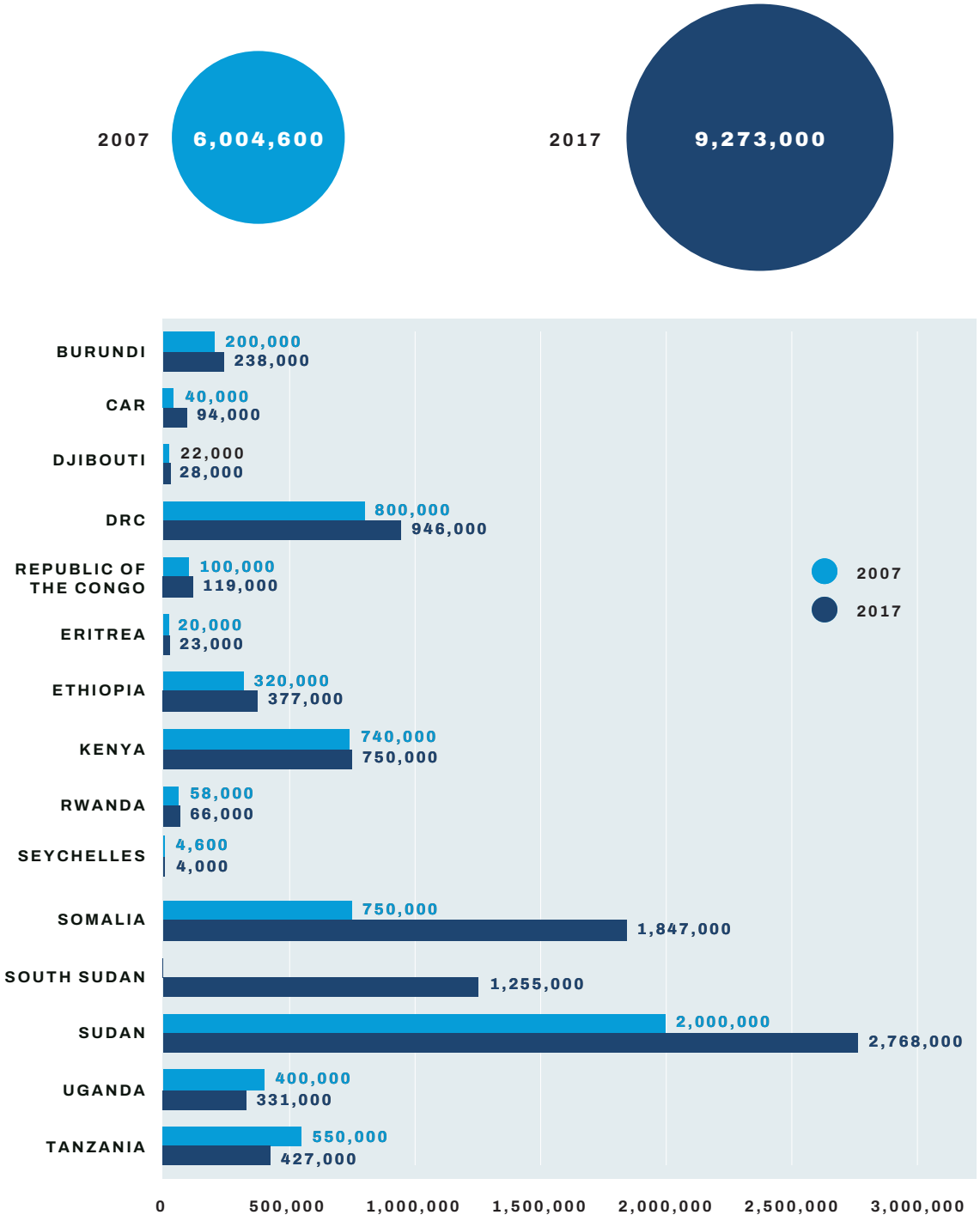
22 Calculated as the number of estimated civilian small arms per 100 persons, this corresponds to a score of 12.4 (Somalia), 12.3 (Puntland), 11.9 (Somaliland), 6.6 (Sudan) and 4.1 (Seychelles). Karp, "Annex: Civilian Firearms Holdings, 2017."

23 Khristopher Carlson, *Firearms and Ammunition Trafficking in Eastern Africa*, Issue Paper 1/2022 (Nairobi: UNODC, 2022), https://eapcco-ctcoe.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/UNODC-ROEA-Issue-Paper-1_2022-_Firearms-and-Ammunition-Trafficking-in-Eastern-Africa.pdf.

24 See, e.g., United Nations, Security Council, Final Report of the Panel of Experts Pursuant to Resolution 2745 (2024), S/2025/385, 15 June 2025, https://docs.un.org/S/2025/385, paragraphs 21–38; United Nations, Security Council, Final Report of the Panel of Experts on South Sudan Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2731 (2024), S/2025/442, 2 July 2025, https://docs.un.org/S/2025/442, paragraphs 82–87; United Nations, Security Council, Final Report of the Panel of Experts on Yemen Established Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2140 (2014), S/2025/650, 17 October 2025, https://docs.un.org/S/2025/650, paragraphs 74–78.

FIGURE 2.2.

Estimated “civilian” small arms holdings in the RECSA region, 2007 and 2017



Note: The two graphs show the estimated number of small arms held by civilians in 2007 and 2017.

Sources: Aaron Karp, “Completing the Count: Civilian Firearms”, in *Small Arms Survey 2007: Guns and the City*, ed. Eric G. Berman et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/resources/Small-Arms-Survey-2007-Chapter-02-annexe-3-EN.pdf; Aaron Karp, *Estimating Global Civilian-Held Firearms Numbers*, Briefing Paper (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, June 2018), https://www.smallarms-survey.org/sites/default/files/resources/SAS-BP-Civilian-held-firearms-annexe.pdf.

SALW are not the only weapons used in these armed conflicts and to commit terrorist attacks in the RECSA region. The United Nations has identified the Central African Republic, the DRC and Somalia as RECSA member states that have experienced significant civilian casualties due to the use of improvised explosive devices in recent years.[25] According to United Nations data, Somalia recorded 1,943 casualties caused by IEDs in 2020–23, the highest number of a single state.[26] Al-Shabaab continues to use IEDs to target Somali security forces and the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM), with civilian casualties continuing to be recorded.[27]

Uncrewed aerial systems have been increasingly used in the region. Among RECSA member states, the Central African Republic, the DRC, Kenya and Somalia have experienced the use of UASs by non-state armed groups.[28] While non-state armed groups' use of UASs in these countries has been primarily for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) and propaganda purposes, al-Shabaab has used them in Somalia to facilitate attacks on Somali and Kenyan military personnel. In early 2025, it was reported that an Islamic State-affiliated group used a first-person view UAS to attack security forces in Puntland, Somalia, killing at least one soldier and injuring three more.[29] There are concerns that the arms trafficking relationship between the Houthis in Yemen and Al-Shabaab is expanding to include transfers of knowledge and technology to enable Al-Shabaab to produce and use armed UASs.[30]

Thus, not only does the widespread availability in the RECSA region of SALW and ammunition – alongside know-how and components for assembling and using IEDs, UASs and craft-manufactured small arms (or combinations thereof) – prolong conflicts, it also undermines efforts to foster sustainable development. Control of conventional weapons and ammunition and regulation of components that can be used to produce such weapons therefore remain critical challenges for the RECSA region, where conflicts, violent deaths and development gaps interlink with arms proliferation. Available data indicates that more than half of the region's states have experienced increases in both the availability of SALW and the intensity of armed conflicts and violence, alongside limited human development over the past two decades.

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25 United Nations, General Assembly, "Countering the Threat Posed by Improvised Explosive Devices" Report of the Secretary-General, A/79/211, 22 July 2024, paragraph 6, **https://docs.un.org/en/A/79/211**.

26 United Nations, "Interactive Dashboard of the UN Mine Action Strategy", **https://www.mineaction.org/en/interactive-dashboard-of-un-mine-action-strategy**, last accessed 30 January 2026.

27 United Nations, Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on Somalia, S/2025/613, 30 September 2025, **https://docs.un.org/S/2025/613**, paragraphs 14–15.

28 Bárbara Morais Figueiredo, *The Use of Uncrewed Aerial Systems by Non-State Armed Groups: Exploring Trends in Africa* (Geneva: UNIDIR, 2024), **https://doi.org/10.37559/CAAP/24/PACAV/01**.

29 "At Least One Solider Killed in ISIS Drone Attack in Northeastern Somalia's Puntland State", *Somali Guardian*, 23 January 2025, **https://www.somaliguardian.com/news/somalia-news/at-least-one-soldier-killed-in-isis-drone-attack-in-northeastern-somalias-puntland-state/**.

30 United Nations, S/2025/650, paragraphs 78–79; Karen Allen, "Houthis in Somalia: Friends with Technological Benefits", ISS Today, 10 June 2025, **https://issafrica.org/iss-today/houthis-in-somalia-friends-with-technological-benefits**.

3. SALW control in the RECSA region in 2005

This section provides a snapshot of national SALW control systems in 2005, the year after the Nairobi Protocol was signed, in eight RECSA member states: Burundi, the DRC, Djibouti, Eritrea, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda and Tanzania.[31] The available data is limited and does not enable a comprehensive assessment of these states' national SALW controls at the time. This section therefore only covers the following issue areas (the numbers refer to the corresponding sub-sections in Section 4):

1. Legislative and regulatory framework
5. Transparency and regional information exchange
11. Stockpile management
12. Marking
13. Record-keeping of civilian SALW
14. Tracing of illicit SALW
15. Collection of SALW

A summary of key data points for the above seven issues for the eight RECSA member states is presented in Table 3.1 and Table 3.2.

TABLE 3.1.

Snapshot of legislative and regulatory frameworks in 2005

	YES	PARTIAL	NO	NO INFO
LEGISLATIVE AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK				
Life-cycle stages covered				
Manufacture	5	3	0	0
Civilian possession	4	4	0	0
Dealing within national territory	4	4	0	0
Brokering	0	0	7	1
Export	4	4	0	0
Import	4	4	0	0
Transit	4	4	0	0
Criminal offences include				
Unauthorized manufacture	6	0	0	2
Unauthorized civilian possession	6	0	0	2
Unauthorized international transfers	4	0	1	3
Violations of United Nations arms embargoes	0	0	7	1

31 Data collection for this section draws heavily up findings from Flew and Urquhart, *Burundi*; *Djibouti*; *Eritrea*; *Kenya*; *Rwanda* and *Tanzania*. Conclusions for this section have a high degree of uncertainty.

In the eight RECSA member states covered by this analysis, legislative and regulatory frameworks implemented Nairobi Protocol provisions either fully or partially in 2005, controlling different life-cycle stages of SALW control: manufacture, civilian possession and use, dealing in small arms within national territories, and international transfers. Many of the laws and regulations for controlling SALW in force in 2005 dated from before independence or from the early post-independence period. In six of these RECSA member states, unauthorized manufacture and civilian possession were criminal offences. None of these states regulated brokering or criminalized violations of United Nations arms embargoes in 2005. Gaps in marking, record-keeping and stockpile management directly contributed to illicit SALW flows by increasing risks of diversion and hindering tracing efforts. National reports on implementation of the PoA from 2005 and 2006 indicate that at least four of these RECSA member states had an inter-agency coordination mechanism for SALW control, while at least five had established a SALW national focal point for exchanging information.

At the start of the 21st century, stockpile management in many countries in the RECSA region was considered to be weak and an actual or potential source of diverted SALW.[32] In 2005, national standards and procedures for stockpile management were lacking in all but one of the eight states. Only one had a centralized inventory of state-owned SALW, and none of these states indicated that they had national procedures for initiating or responding to a tracing request. In contrast, at least five of these RECSA member states appeared to have some provisions at the time for the seizure, confiscation and forfeiture of SALW manufactured or transferred without authorization. Yet only two of the eight had a legal basis for the voluntary surrender of SALW or for amnesties.

The limited available data indicates that, while RECSA member states had legislative and regulatory frameworks for SALW control in 2005, national SALW control systems did not comply with most of the Nairobi Protocol's requirements. The very limited amount of reliable information available also indicates a lack of national resources and measures to effectively control SALW and counter illicit manufacture, trafficking, possession and use.

32 See, e.g., Matt Schroeder and Guy Lamb, 'The Illicit Arms Trade in Africa', *African Analyst*, vol. 1, no. 4 (2006): 69–78; Owen J. Greene, "Stockpile Security and Reducing Surplus Weapons", BASIC, International Alert and Saferworld, 2001, https://www.saferworld-global.org/downloads/pubdocs/btb_brf3.pdf.

TABLE 3.2.

Snapshot of SALW controls in 2005

	YES	PARTIAL	NO	NO INFO
TRANSPARENCY AND REGIONAL INFORMATION EXCHANGE				
Inter-agency cooperation mechanism for policy coordination, information sharing and analysis	4	0	0	4
National focal point	5	0	0	3
STOCKPILE MANAGEMENT				
National standards and procedures contain provisions for				
Appropriate locations for state-owned SALW storage sites	1	0	5	2
Physical security measures for storage sites	1	1	4	2
Control of access to stocks	1	0	5	2
Inventory management and accounting control	1	0	5	2
Procedures and sanctions in the event of theft or loss	1	0	5	2
Security, accounting and control of SALW held by or transported by operational units or authorized personnel	1	0	3	4
MARKING				
Does your country ensure that each SALW is marked at the time of manufacture?	0	1	6	1
Does your country ensure that each imported SALW is marked at the time of import?	0	0	6	2
Are all state-owned SALW marked in accordance with the requirements of Article 7 of the Nairobi Protocol?	0	0	3	5
RECORDKEEPING				
There is a centralized inventory of state-owned SALW	1	2	2	3
There is a centralized inventory of SALW held by civilians	0	1	4	3
TRACING				
There are procedures for initiating a tracing request or responding to one	0	0	1	7
COLLECTION AND DESTRUCTION				
There are provisions for the seizure, confiscation, and forfeiture of SALW manufactured without authorization	4	1	1	2
There are provisions for the seizure, confiscation, and forfeiture of SALW transferred without authorization	5	1	1	1
There are provisions for the voluntary surrender of SALW and according amnesties	1	1	1	5

Sources for Tables 3.1 and 3.2: Questionnaires completed by two RECSA member states; national reports on implementation of the PoA submitted in 2005 and 2006 by five RECSA member states; Saferworld and SaferAfrica reports on SALW control legislation in six RECSA member states.

4. SALW control in the RECSA region in 2025

The previous section suggests that, in 2005, the Nairobi Protocol's provisions on SALW control were a distant aspiration for many RECSA member states. This section – based on national self-assessments by 12 RECSA member states – shows that during the first 20 years of the Nairobi Protocol's existence, RECSA member states have strengthened key elements of their national SALW control frameworks and practices:

- Their laws and regulations are more robust.
- They have closed key gaps in stockpile management, marking and record-keeping.
- They have strengthened state control over civilian possession and the regulation of commercial entities.
- They have put in place transfer controls.

Moreover, the states have built their capacity to control and regulate SALW, strengthened their law enforcement agencies, established inter-agency cooperation mechanisms, and conducted programmes to raise public awareness, collect illicit SALW, and destroy collected and surplus SALW.

This section also highlights challenges for SALW control in RECSA member states that persist after two decades. Legislative and regulatory frameworks continue to have gaps; many remain outdated. Regional law enforcement cooperation and information exchange are largely ad hoc. Several states continue to struggle to maintain effective civilian licensing regimes. Border controls have been ineffective in preventing trafficking and the illicit movement of SALW across borders. Record-keeping remains a challenge and tracing mechanisms are not yet operational in many RECSA member states. Finally, the number of SALW collected and destroyed remains low compared to estimates of illicit SALW in the region.

The remainder of this section provides the aggregated results of the 12 national self-assessments of the implementation of the Nairobi Protocol. The UNIDIR–RECSA research team analysed information from the 12 questionnaires in accordance with the 16 thematic issue areas that relate to stages in the life-cycle control of SALW and correspond to the Nairobi Protocol's articles. There are sub-thematic clusters for three thematic issue areas: legislative and regulatory framework, operational capacity, and law enforcement cooperation. Since reliable data on the implementation of all the Nairobi Protocol's operational provisions was not available, the study's findings do not cover all thematic issue areas comprehensively. The figures in this section present the number of RECSA member states out of a total of 12 that report having implemented ("yes"), partially implemented ("partially") or not implemented ("no") a provision. In several cases, no information was made available for analysis ("no info").

4.1. Legislative and regulatory framework

ARTICLE 3[33]

Overall requirement

Article 3 requires states parties to regulate all stages of the SALW life cycle and criminalize prohibited conduct through harmonized and up-to-date laws, decrees, regulations and administrative documents.

Progress

One state reported having fully implemented all of the Nairobi Protocol's legislative and regulatory provisions; the 11 other states have made significant progress in updating and reviewing laws and regulations to the extent that they now implement most provisions (see Table 4.1). The Central African Republic's experience in updating its legislation is presented in Box 4.1.

Challenges

Eleven RECSA member states indicated that they still need to fully update their legal and regulatory frameworks to comply with the requirements of the Nairobi Protocol. Anecdotal evidence suggests that a lack of political will and the lengthy processes to pass laws or regulations constitute key barriers to addressing these gaps.[34]

Recommendations

Reviewing, updating and harmonizing laws and regulations should be a renewed focus for national implementation of the Nairobi Protocol, particularly regarding controls on brokering, international transfers and manufacture.

4.1.1. SALW life-cycle stages covered in legislation

Progress

All RECSA member states that contributed to this study have put in place controls and regulations covering most of the SALW life cycle, including manufacture, dealing, brokering, export, import, transit, marking and tracing of SALW (see Table 4.1).[35] At least nine states reported that 10 life-cycle stages are covered by their national legislation.

Challenges

Long-standing regulatory gaps remain in at least 10 states regarding controls across one or more life-cycle stages. Gaps are especially significant for re-export, artisanal or craft manufacturing, and voluntary-surrender amnesty programmes.

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33 Some provisions of Articles 5, 6, 7 and 12 also touch upon the legislative and regulatory framework.

34 UNIDIR and RECSA, "Reviewing and Strengthening the Implementation of the Nairobi Protocol", Stakeholder Conference, Nairobi, Kenya, 20–21 November 2025.

35 While the Nairobi Protocol does not contain a definition of "dealing", it appears to refer to the commercial sale of SALW on the domestic market.

4.1.2. Regulated civilian conduct

Progress

All 12 states regulate and restrict civilian possession and civilian use of SALW; this is the only life-cycle control stage for which all assessed states reported full implementation. Five states indicated that laws and regulations fully cover the requirements of the Nairobi Protocol's Article 3 for civilian possession of SALW, while four states cover all provisions at least partially. Legislation in one state prohibits civilians from owning any SALW, although unofficial estimates indicate that there is civilian possession of unregulated SALW in this country.

Challenges

Three states reported major gaps in their legal and regulatory framework for civilian possession.

4.1.3. Criminalization of prohibited conduct

Progress

All 12 states reported having established criminal offences relating to unauthorized manufacture, transfer, possession and use of SALW, while 9 criminalize unauthorized tampering with markings.

Challenges

One area in which there appears to have been limited progress since 2005 is the criminalization of violations of United Nations arms embargoes.



Weapons marking using portable marking machines in Wajir, Kenya, 2025. Credit: RECSA Secretariat.

TABLE 4.1.

Legislative and regulatory framework

	YES	PARTIAL	NO	NO INFO
LEGISLATIVE AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK				
Life-cycle stages covered				
Manufacture	10	1	1	0
Civilian possession	12	0	0	0
Dealing within national territory	10	1	0	1
Brokering	9	2	1	0
Export	10	2	0	0
Re-export	7	1	4	0
Import	10	2	0	0
Transit	10	2	0	0
Standardised marking	10	0	1	1
Initiate tracing requests	10	0	1	1
Respond to tracing requests	9	1	0	2
Voluntary surrender and amnesties	6	2	3	1
Criminal offences include				
Unauthorized manufacture	12	0	0	0
Unauthorized civilian possession	12	0	0	0
Unauthorized international transfers	12	0	0	0
Falsification and unlawful obliteraton, removing or altering markings	9	0	2	1
Violations of United Nations arms embargoes	6	2	3	1

BOX 4.1.

Revising legislation on SALW control in the Central African Republic

The management of SALW is central to national stability in the Central African Republic.[36] In 2017, a national baseline assessment of weapons and ammunition management highlighted the inadequacy of the existing legal framework in the light of contemporary security challenges. This underscored the urgent need to harmonize national legislation with relevant regional and international instruments.

In response to this assessment, the Government of the Central African Republic established a national committee tasked with reviewing and drafting a new bill, with technical support from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), complemented by support from RECSA.[37] Thanks to strong political will, the bill was approved by the Council of Ministers in February 2020, adopted by the National Assembly in July 2020 and promulgated by the Presidency in August 2020.

The resulting Law on the General Regime of Conventional Weapons, their Parts and Components and Ammunition establishes, among other things, a comprehensive regulatory framework applicable to state- and civilian-held SALW. It clearly assigns mandates, roles and responsibilities among national authorities and regulates the full life cycle of SALW and ammunition. The law is aligned not only with the Nairobi Protocol, but also with the Firearms Protocol, the Arms Trade Treaty and the 2010 Central African Convention for the Control of SALW (Kinshasa Convention).[38]

The Government of the Central African Republic, through the National Commission for Combatting the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (COMNAT-ALPC), has demonstrated its political will to strengthen conventional arms control and the through-life management of conventional ammunition, as recognized by the United Nations Security Council.[39]

The revision of SALW legislation undertaken by the Central African Republic is an example of a structured reform, carried out with clear political commitment and coordinated international support. However, realizing the law's intended benefits rests on effective operationalization. The COMNAT-ALPC and other relevant institutions will need targeted technical and financial assistance, as well as resources from the national budget, to fully implement and enforce the national law.

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36 This case study summarizes findings from Hardy Giezendanner and Himayu Shiotani, *Central African Republic: Weapons and Ammunition Management*, Country Insights Series (Geneva: UNIDIR, 2023), **https://doi.org/10.37559/CAAP/23/WAM/01**; Anna Edna Esi Mensah et al., *Weapons and Ammunition Management in Africa Insight: 2022 Update* (Geneva: UNIDIR, 2022), **https://doi.org/10.37559/CAAP/22/WAM/07**.

37 RECSA, *Project Completion Report on Strengthening Regional and National Institutions for Reduction of Proliferation of Small Arms in the Horn of Africa and Great Lakes Region* (Nairobi: RECSA, April 2022).

38 Central African Convention for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and All Parts and Components That Can Be Used for Their Manufacture, Repair and Assembly (Kinshasa Convention), 30 April 2010, **https://treaties.unoda.org/t/kinshasa**.

39 United Nations, Security Council, Statement by the President of the Security Council, S/PRST/2019/3, 9 April 2019, **https://docs.un.org/S/PRST/2019/3**; United Nations, Security Council, resolution 2745 (2024), S/RES/2745 (2024), 30 July 2024, **https://docs.un.org/S/RES/2745** (2024).

4.2. Inter-agency coordination mechanisms

ARTICLE 4

Overall requirement

Article 4(d) of the Nairobi Protocol requires states parties to establish inter-agency coordination mechanisms to enable cooperation and coordination among all relevant government agencies.

Progress

All 12 states have established inter-agency coordination mechanisms. Eleven states identified the government ministries, departments and agencies involved in these mechanisms; the police are part of these mechanisms, with the Ministries of Defence, Interior/Home Affairs and Finance also commonly represented. Box 4.2 provides an overview of Burundi's experience in this regard.

Challenges

National coordination mechanisms remain focused on supply-side controls, being composed almost exclusively of security agencies. International instruments and processes on small arms control call for SALW control to be integrated into both national security and development strategies.[40]

Recommendations

To further strengthen analysis and decision-making to tackle the multidimensional challenges posed by illicit proliferation and misuse, these mechanisms should be expanded to include government ministries, departments and agencies that address demand-side factors and the impact of illicit arms proliferation on human development.

40 United Nations, General Assembly, Report of the fourth United Nations Conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, A/CONF.192/2024/RC/3, 5 July 2024, https://docs.un.org/A/CONF.192/2024/RC/3, annex, paragraph 122; United Nations, General Assembly, resolution 79/1, "The Pact for the Future", A/RES/79/1, 22 September 2024, https://docs.un.org/A/RES/79/1, paragraph 39(f).

BOX 4.2.

Burundi's Permanent National Commission on SALW

Like many countries in the RECSA region, Burundi's efforts to control its SALW and tackle the illicit trade in small arms have been complicated by conflict legacies, porous borders, the presence of armed groups and spillover effects from conflicts in its neighbourhood.[41] Nevertheless, over the past two decades, the Government of Burundi has strengthened its SALW control frameworks and enhanced its operational capacity.

Even before the adoption of the Nairobi Protocol, Burundi established a focal point (*point focal*) for SALW control in 2003.[42] In 2010, Burundi reformed its inter-agency cooperation mechanism by creating the Permanent National Commission for Combatting the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (CNAP) with a clear mandate.[43] The mandate includes oversight of the implementation of the Nairobi Protocol and Burundi's SALW legislation, coordination of national through-life control of SALW, and facilitation of regional and international cooperation.[44] CNAP has an annual operational budget drawn from the budget of the Ministry of Interior, Community Development and Public Security, which provides it with a measure of operational independence to implement that mandate.

To ensure that it takes a comprehensive approach to SALW control, CNAP includes representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and Development Cooperation, the Ministry for Justice, Human Rights and Gender, and the Ministry for Youth, Sport and Culture, as well as representatives from civil society.[45] It has made progress in ensuring the meaningful inclusion of women and youth in SALW control. For example, it nominates women participants for SALW control capacity-building training. Until recently, the CNAP president was a woman, assisted by two vice-presidents who were men, resulting in a ratio of one woman to three men at the coordination level.[46] Thanks to CNAP's coordination, Burundi has been able to:

- Harmonize its national legislation with regional and international SALW frameworks
- Develop, revise and implement its National Action Plan to combat the illicit proliferation of SALW
- Strengthen the capacity of law enforcement agencies
- Make progress in SALW marking in accordance with the Nairobi Protocol
- Enhance physical security and stockpile management in line with international best practice
- Establish and manage a national SALW database

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41 ENACT Africa, *Africa Organised Crime Index 2023: Burundi* (Pretoria: ENACT Africa, 2023), **https://africa.ocindex.net/assets/downloads/2023/english/ocindex_summary_burundi.pdf**.

42 Republic of Burundi, Ministry of Interior, Community Development and Public Security, "Lutte contre les armes légères" [Combating small arms], **https://mininterinfos.gov.bi/lutte-contre-les-armes-legeres/**, accessed 13 February 2026.

43 Décret no. 100/19 du 7 octobre 2010 portant création, organisation et fonctionnement de la Commission nationale permanente de lutte contre la prolifération des armes légères et de petits calibres [Decree no. 100/19 of 7 October 2010 on the establishment, organization and functioning of the Permanent National Commission for Combating the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons], *Bulletin Officiel du Burundi*, no. 10/2010, 1 October 2010, **https://amategeko.gov.bi/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/BOB_No10-2010.pdf**, p. 3100.

44 Décret no. 100/19.

45 Décret no. 100/19.

46 Correspondence of the authors with national experts.



AMISOM Combat engineers search for IEDs in Kismayo, Somalia, 2012. Credit: AU-UN IST PHOTO / Stuart Price.

4.3. Operational capacity

ARTICLE 4

Overall requirement

Article 4 commits states parties to strengthen their operational capacity for SALW control, including through law enforcement, security agencies, customs and border control, and by procuring equipment and conducting training programmes. Operational capacity for SALW control refers to the capacity of responsible institutions to implement SALW control measures.

Progress

As noted in Section 3, limited reliable information is available on operational capacity in RECSA member states in 2005. As of 2025, all 12 states had developed national training programmes on aspects of SALW control, 11 had sought to include women in decision-making in these mechanisms, and 8 had included SALW control in national budgets.

Challenges

Available information from the questionnaires suggests that RECSA member states rely on international assistance to build national capacity to implement the Nairobi Protocol and ensure robust SALW control systems.[47] To be effective in the long term, externally supported equipment and training programmes need to be integrated into national SALW control frameworks and sustained with national or regional means.[48]

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47 The questionnaire only inquired about training programmes and procurement of equipment, in line with relevant Nairobi Protocol provisions. Extrapolating from the available data suggests that reliance on international assistance seems to be a challenge beyond these two areas of capacity-building.

48 See also, e.g., James Bevan and Benjamin King, *Making a Mark: Reporting on Firearms Marking in the RECSA Region* (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, April 2013), https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/resources/SAS-SR19-Making-a-Mark-RECSA.pdf.

Recommendations

Further efforts should be undertaken to build sustainable regional and national capacity to deliver training (e.g., training of trainers) and to identify opportunities to procure and maintain relevant equipment. RECSA members states should be encouraged to evaluate where SALW control efforts can be sustained through dedicated national budget lines.

4.3.1. Representation of women in SALW control decision-making

Progress

Eleven states reported having taken measures to ensure the meaningful participation of women in national SALW control decision-making. Seven states reported on measures to ensure that women have a role in the national coordination mechanism. **Challenges**

One state indicated that it has not taken any measures to ensure the meaningful participation of women in SALW control decision-making. RECSA research indicates that there remain structural barriers to the meaningful representation of women in SALW control due to prevailing gender norms.[49]

4.3.2. National budget for SALW control

Progress

Eight states have dedicated national budget lines for SALW control (see Table 4.2).

Challenges

Two states do not have such a budget line.

4.3.3. Equipment for SALW control

Progress

At least 11 states have acquired equipment to support implementation of the Nairobi Protocol since 2004. Responses indicate that, in the majority of cases, international assistance was required and only in a minority of cases did states procure equipment fully or partially with national resources. Almost all states have acquired equipment for marking SALW since 2004 (see Table 4.2), with no states indicating that the national budget was used for such equipment and eight indicating that it was provided via international assistance (i.e., via RECSA's provision of marking machines).[50] Eight states have acquired equipment for physical security and stockpile management, seven for record-keeping, and six for disposal of state-owned surplus, redundant or obsolete SALW.[51] In these cases, states reported a mix of national finances and international assistance.

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49 RECSA, *Assessment Report on the Gender Transformative Approaches for the Implementation of Arms Regulation Instruments* (Nairobi: RECSA Secretariat, 2023), https://www.recsasec.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/GTA-BOOK-MERGED_230928_172507.pdf.

50 See, e.g., RECSA, *Firearms Evaluation Report 2023* (Nairobi: RECSA Secretariat, 2023), https://www.recsasec.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/FIREARMS-EVALUATION-REPORT-2023-.pdf.

51 The equipment for physical security and stockpile management includes permanent armouries, containerized modular armouries, strong steel arms boxes, gun racks, marking machines and hydraulic shear cutting machines.



Police first aid training, Tanzania, 2008. Credit: AFRICOM / Tyler J. Wilson.

Challenges

Most states have required international assistance to acquire equipment for national SALW controls (see Table 4.2). Given the importance of record-keeping equipment for ensuring accurate records for national inventories of marked weapons and for effective responses to tracing requests, the fact that only seven states have acquired such equipment is a concern.

4.3.4. Training programmes

Progress

All 12 states have developed or received capacity-building programmes to strengthen aspects of their operational capacity to control SALW since 2004 (see Table 4.3). At least two states have either developed or received training on all aspects of the Nairobi Protocol's operational provisions for national SALW control. Furthermore, all states have developed or received training on physical security and stockpile management for state-owned SALW, with all states participating in regional training organized by Austria, the Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies (BICC) and RECSA in this regard.[52] With RECSA's assistance, 11 RECSA member states have also received training on marking and 9 on record-keeping.[53]

Challenges

Only six states reported having developed or received training on investigating trafficking and the tracing of illicit arms and only two states reported training for transfer controls, including brokering.[54] Further, available information indicates that most training is dependent on ad hoc international assistance; few RECSA member states reported having established institutionalized national training programmes for SALW control.

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52 See, e.g., SIPRI, "RECSA–BICC–IPSTC Regional Training of Trainers on Physical Security and Stockpile Management", ATT Assistance Database, https://att-assistance.org/activity/recsa-bicc-ipstc-regional-training-trainers-physical-security-and-stockpile-management-0, accessed 13 February 2026.

53 RECSA, *Firearms Evaluation Report 2023*.

54 Given the concerns regarding porous borders and illicit arms flows in the region, these are areas in which training programmes could support the implementation of the Nairobi Protocol and the achievement of its objectives. However, the questionnaire results are not conclusive on the number of states that have not developed or received such training.

TABLE 4.2.

SALW control equipment procured by RESCA member states since 2004

	TOTAL NUMBER OF STATES THAT ACQUIRED EQUIPMENT		ACQUIRED THROUGH NATIONAL BUDGET		ACQUIRED THROUGH INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE	
	YES	PARTIAL	YES	PARTIAL	YES	PARTIAL
For investigating trafficking and related criminal activities	3	2	1	0	2	2
For border controls to counter trafficking	3	1	3	0	1	3
For regulating civilian possession	4	1	1	1	3	1
For physical security and stockpile management for state-owned SALW	8	1	3	1	5	2
For marking SALW	11	0	0	1	8	0
For tracing	4	1	0	1	4	0
For record-keeping	7	1	2	0	3	1
For disposal of state-owned surplus, reundant or obsolete SALW	6	2	1	2	5	0
For disposal of confiscated or seized SALW	5	0	2	0	3	0
For transfer controls, including brokering	0	0	0	0	0	0
For voluntary surrender programmes	3	1	1	1	1	1
For public and community awareness raising and education	3	3	2	2	1	1

Notes: The figure does not differentiate between the general national budget and dedicated budget lines. Not all states gave information on how equipment was acquired; some have used both national finances and international assistance to acquire equipment. Therefore, the totals for the number of states that reported acquiring equipment do not all match the combined totals for the national budget and international assistance.

TABLE 4.3.

Training programmes for SALW control since 2004

	YES	PARTIAL	NO INFO
For investigating trafficking and related criminal activities	6	0	2
For border controls to counter trafficking	5	0	2
For regulating civilian possession	5	1	4
For physical security and stockpile management for state-owned SALW	12	0	0
For marking SALW	11	0	0
For tracing	6	0	2
For record-keeping	9	0	3
For disposal of state-owned surplus, reundant or obsolete SALW	7	0	4
For disposal of confiscated or seized SALW	6	0	5
For transfer controls, including brokering	2	0	7
For voluntary surrender programmes	3	1	5
For public and community awareness raising and education	6	1	3

4.4. Law enforcement cooperation

ARTICLES 4(A), 9 & 14

Overall requirement

Law enforcement cooperation generally refers to collaboration among law enforcement entities across countries to control SALW and prevent their illicit circulation. Several articles address strengthening regional cooperation among police, intelligence, customs and border control officials. Article 9 provides for cooperation with communities, but it is focused solely on identifying SALW caches. Article 14 provides a comprehensive overview of mutual legal assistance.

Progress

Ten states reported that their national legislation provides, in full or partially, for mutual legal assistance for all or some cases relating to the illicit manufacturing, trafficking, possession and use of SALW. Approximately half indicated that their law enforcement agencies cooperate at the regional level regarding training or information exchange.

Challenges

Only one state reported having successfully requested, received or offered mutual legal assistance in line with the areas specified by the Nairobi Protocol. Anecdotal evidence suggests that mutual legal assistance is a broader challenge for the region.[55] Overall, law enforcement cooperation at the communal, bilateral and regional levels appears to be limited and ad hoc.

55 UNIDIR and RECSA, "Reviewing and Strengthening the Implementation of the Nairobi Protocol", National Focal Point Meeting, Nairobi, Kenya, 18–19 November 2025.



Training on taking inventory of small arms, 2019. Credit: UNREC.

Recommendations

During consultations with national focal points on SALW, enhancing law enforcement cooperation in the RECSA region was highlighted as a priority for future action.[56] There are several options for carrying this recommendation forward. States could regularize their law enforcement cooperation at the regional levels via existing mechanisms within the African Union Mechanism for Police Cooperation (Afripol) or the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol). A revised Nairobi Protocol could expand the scope of regional law enforcement-community cooperation via RECSA.

4.4.1. Regional law enforcement cooperation mechanism

Progress

Around half of the 12 states reported participating in law enforcement training or exchanging information at the regional level (see Table 4.4). RECSA organized or facilitated most of the training and some of the information exchanges.

Challenges

Law enforcement cooperation appears to be ad hoc and uneven across the RECSA region.

4.4.2. Law enforcement–community cooperation

Progress

Six states indicated that their law enforcement agencies had worked with communities to identify SALW caches between 2005 and 2025.

56 UNIDIR and RECSA, National Focal Point Meeting.

TABLE 4.4.

Participation in law enforcement mechanisms

	YES	PARTIAL	NO	NO INFO
Regional training to address the illicit proliferation, circulation and trafficking of SALW	7	0	1	4
Information exchanges to support common action to reduce arms trafficking	6	0	2	4
Free and fast flow of information to address the illicit proliferation, circulation and trafficking of SALW	5	1	2	4

4.5. Transparency and regional information exchange

ARTICLE 16

Overall requirement

Article 16 of the Nairobi Protocol sets out comprehensive requirements for states parties to collect and share a range of information, including through national focal points, and to consider establishing regular regional information-sharing mechanisms. It encourages the sharing of information on SALW imports and exports and civilian possession, as well as criminal groups, sources of illicit supply, and the routes, destinations and methods for transportation and financing.

Progress

All 12 states have established a National Focal Point Coordination Office. It is commonly integrated in the national coordination mechanism to ensure that information that needs to be exchanged is sourced from and provided to the relevant government offices. Six states reported having exchanged information on illicit SALW since 2004. They reported using various information-sharing mechanisms, including Interpol, RECSA and bilateral border-cooperation mechanisms.

Challenges

At least two states appear not to exchange any information related to SALW. Furthermore, given that no two states reported using the same information-exchange mechanisms, regional information-sharing appears to remain largely fragmented and ad hoc.

Recommendations

National focal points on SALW are supportive of a proposal for states to routinely exchange information using the existing National Focal Point Coordination Offices.[57] While states can use existing Afripol or Interpol platforms for information-sharing, it is recommended that a regional information-sharing mechanism be established under RECSA to operationalize several aspects of Article 16, particularly relating to maintaining a regional intelligence picture for illicit arms and ammunition flows in the RECSA region.

57 UNIDIR and RECSA, National Focal Point Meeting.



Small arms ammunition, DRC, 2015. Credit: MONUSCO / Abel Kavanagh.

4.6. Civilian licensing regime

ARTICLE 5

Overall requirement

Article 5 commits the states parties to conduct a review of national licensing procedures to regulate civilian possession of SALW and establish and maintain prohibitions and criminal offences in accordance with the Nairobi Protocol.

Progress

All 12 states reported that their national legislative and regulatory framework covers civilian possession of SALW (see Table 4.1 above). Progress has been made since 2005 in providing clear legislative bases for controlling civilian possession and use of small arms (see Table 4.5). At least nine states prohibit civilian possession of light weapons and automatic and semi-automatic rifles and have criteria and procedures in national legislation for issuing, withdrawing, revoking and suspending licences for civilian possession.

Challenges

There are gaps in the regulatory frameworks of several RECSA member states and national legislation is thus not harmonized across the region. Further, publicly available estimates of civilian possession in RECSA member states suggest that unlicensed civilian possession vastly outnumbers licensed civilian small arms possession in most RECSA member states.[58]

Recommendations

Article 5 should be revised to focus on establishing and maintaining licensing regimes and ensuring that they are harmonized, as much as possible, across the RECSA region. States should close legislative gaps regarding civilian possession and with RECSA support seek to harmonize controls across the region.

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58 Karp, *Estimating Global Civilian-Held Firearms Numbers*.

TABLE 4.5.

Civilian licensing regimes

	YES	PARTIAL	NO	NO INFO
NATIONAL LEGISLATION AND REGULATIONS CONTAIN THE FOLLOWING				
Explanation of the procedure and criteria for civilian possession of small arms	10	1	1	0
Explanation of the procedure and criteria for withdrawing, revoking and suspending licences for civilian possession	9	2	1	0
Prohibition on unrestricted civilian possesion of small arms	11	0	1	0
Prohibition on civilian possession of semi-automatic and automatic rifles, machine guns, and light weapons	9	2	1	0
Establishment of the centralized registration of civilian-owned small arms	8	2	1	1
Competency testing for prospective civilian small arms owners	5	2	3	2
Requirements for civilian storage and use of authorized small arms	8	1	3	0
Monitor and audit licensed civilian small arms owners	8	1	2	1
Control SALW owned by private security companies	9	1	1	1

4.7. Awareness-raising

ARTICLE 13

Overall requirement

Article 13 requires states parties to put in place programmes to raise the awareness of the population regarding the dangers of illicit SALW and their misuse.

Progress

Eleven states have implemented public or community education and awareness programmes on the dangers of illicit SALW, on responsible SALW ownership or to promote a culture of peace. Information provided in questionnaires indicates that RECSA member states that have established regular awareness programmes have seen positive results in addressing illicit SALW and armed violence at the community level (however, this information does not appear to have been independently verified).

Challenges

Awareness-raising and education programmes in most states appear to be ad hoc and a recent development. National focal points recognize the benefits of regular, consistent and targeted programming, but face resource constraints in implementing regular programmes using national resources.

Recommendations

States should endeavour not only to regularly conduct general awareness-raising programmes, but also to target particular "at risk" or "high risk" communities in cooperation with local leaders and civil society.

4.8. Regulating commercial entities

ARTICLES 5(A) & 11

Overall requirement

Articles 5(a) and 11 require states parties to regulate commercial entities through licensing regimes. "Commercial entities" refers to the manufacturers, dealers, brokers and transporters of SALW, and the financiers of SALW transfers.

Progress

At least seven states reported having comprehensive licensing regimes for manufacturers, dealers and brokers involved in the authorized SALW trade (see Table 4.6). At least five states keep records of registered dealers and brokers and have a legal mandate to regularly audit commercial entities in accordance with the Nairobi Protocol. Overall, at least five states indicate having implemented most, if not all, provisions of the Nairobi Protocol concerning commercial entities.

Challenges

The regulation of commercial entities is one of the areas where the implementation of Nairobi Protocol provisions is particularly uneven across the RECSA region. Four states do not appear to have any controls over commercial entities involved in the arms trade, while only three regulate financiers and five regulate transportation entities. The lack of definitions in the Nairobi Protocol of what constitutes a dealer, financier or transporter could lead to different national understanding on this issue.

Recommendations

The Nairobi Protocol should be revised to include relevant definitions for commercial entities covered by Articles 5(a) and 11. As well as closing other legislative and regulatory gaps, states should establish and subsequently operationalize licensing regimes, strengthen record-keeping and ensure regular audits of commercial entities.

TABLE 4.6.

Regulation of commercial entities involved in the arms trade

	YES	PARTIAL	NO	NO INFO
NATIONAL LEGISLATION AND REGULATIONS CONTAIN THE FOLLOWING				
There is a licensing regime for				
1. Manufacturers	7	1	3	1
2. Dealers	7	1	3	1
3. Brokers	7	1	4	0
4. Financiers	3	2	6	1
5. Transportation	5	3	3	1
The national system provides for audits of licensed manufactuerers, dealers, traders, and brokers	**5**	**4**	**2**	**1**
There is a register of authorized brokers and their authorized transactions	6	1	5	0
There is a register of authorized dealers and their authorized transactions	5	3	3	1

4.9. Regulating international transfers

ARTICLES 4(C), 7(D) & 10

Overall requirement

Several articles commit states parties to putting in place licensing systems and control measures to regulate the import, export, transfer and transit of SALW.

Progress

Ten states reported having effective measures for licensing the export and import of SALW and regulating their transit; the other two states have some measures in place (see Table 4.7). At least six states take steps to ensure that information is shared between competent government authorities in the importing, exporting and transit states. Further, the contents of export licences are harmonized across seven states, and the content of import licences across six.

Challenges

While all 12 states have a legislative and regulatory framework in place to control international SALW transfers, at least 2 states appear not to implement Nairobi Protocol requirements and recommended best practices concerning the licensing process. Only around half of the states provided information on their record-keeping for international SALW transfers.

Recommendations

Future implementation efforts could strengthen record-keeping for international transfers to ensure accountability and notification and verification processes among the states involved in a transfer.

TABLE 4.7.

Control of international SALW transfers

	YES	PARTIAL	NO	NO INFO
Exports need to be licensed	10	2	0	0
Imports need to be licensed	10	2	0	0
There are measures to regulate transit	10	2	0	0
Import licences are required before export licenses are issued	7	1	3	1
Import licences are provided to transit states in advance of the shipment	6	0	2	4
Importing states confirm delivery to the exporting state	7	0	1	4
The authenticity of licences and other documents are checked	7	0	1	4
Information contained in licences and other documents are verified	7	0	1	4
There is a national centralized database of international SALW transfers	5	1	2	4

4.10. Border controls

ARTICLES 4 AND 9(B)

Overall requirement

Article 4 requires the strengthening of cooperation between customs and border-control services and Article 9(b) contains a specific provision for cross-border operations to destroy SALW caches.

Progress

Seven of the participating states reported conducting cross-border operations to locate, seize and destroy post-conflict SALW, with Interpol and RECSA having played a coordinating role in some cases. Kenya has sought to strengthen inter-agency cooperation for strengthening border controls to counter SALW trafficking, as shown in Box 4.3.

Challenges

Four states reported that they have never conducted such cross-border operations. Cooperation with neighbouring states appears to be strongly influenced by bilateral relations. Limited information is available on joint cross-border operations to destroy post-conflict SALW caches in accordance with the Nairobi Protocol.

Recommendations

The current provisions in the Nairobi Protocol on border controls appear underdeveloped, given the challenge that the region faces to control its porous borders. These provisions should be revised to strengthen border controls and cross-border cooperation. Bilateral co-operation and information-sharing on border controls should be strengthened across the region.

BOX 4.3.

Kenya's multi-agency approach in advancing effective border controls: The Border Management Secretariat

As noted in Section 2, RECSA member states have highlighted porous borders and limited operational capacity as key enablers for SALW trafficking.[59] Nairobi Protocol Articles 4 and 15 require states parties to establish appropriate mechanisms for cooperation among police, intelligence, customs and border-control officials in combatting illicit circulation and the trafficking of SALW. Kenya's experience in this area could provide a useful model for other RECSA member states.

In 2014, Kenya established the Border Management Secretariat (BMS) under the Security Laws (Amendment) Act to coordinate the national agencies responsible for border controls. The BMS is composed of officers drawn from various ministries, departments and agencies, including the Department for Internal Security and National Administration (in the Ministry of Interior), the National Intelligence Service, the National Police, the Directorate of Immigration Services and the Kenya Revenue Authority, among others. It also closely works with the Kenyan National Focal Point on SALW. This multi-agency structure has improved coordination and information-sharing within Kenya to secure borders and mitigate security threats, including those relating to arms trafficking. It has also focused on providing appropriate training in investigative procedures, border control and law enforcement techniques, on upgrading equipment and on improving operational resources.

Through the BMS and its National Focal Point, Kenya has strengthened cross-border cooperation with its neighbouring countries. Some of the activities that have been undertaken include:

- Joint border patrols and resource-management conferences between Kenya and Uganda to tackle SALW-linked conflicts in pastoral areas
- Joint initiatives with Ethiopia to curb SALW-fuelled cross-border conflicts
- Supporting information exchange via national databases and partnerships with Interpol for tracing illicit arms routes

59 This case study summarizes information from Border Management Secretariat, "Border Control and Operations Coordination Committee (BCOCC)", 2014, **https://bordersecretariat.go.ke/bcocc/**; Kenya National Focal Point, Discussion points presented at UNIDIR and RECSA, National Focal Point Meeting and Stakeholder Conference.

4.11. Stockpile management

ARTICLE 6

Overall requirement

Article 6 requires states parties to maintain inventories and ensure national accountability of state-owned SALW. Under international instruments, such measures are considered part of physical security and stockpile management, which refers to the physical infrastructure, policies, procedures and accountability measures used to safely and securely store weapons and ammunition to prevent theft, loss, diversion and accidental harm.

Progress

All 12 states reported having standards and procedures in place to ensure the physical security and management of state-owned SALW stockpiles that fulfil the requirements of the Nairobi Protocol and other international commitments (see Table 4.8). At least eight states have a centralized national inventory or database of state-owned SALW. One state's record-keeping is entirely electronic, while others reported a mixture of paper and electronic systems. Somalia's experience in using technology to strengthen record-keeping of state-owned SALW is described in Box 4.4.

Challenges

Research into the illicit arms trade in Africa indicates that diversion of SALW from government stockpiles remains an important source of weapons for armed groups, terrorists and other unauthorized end users.[60] While there are centralized databases for police-owned SALW in nine states, it appears that only six states have such a database for their armed forces.

Recommendations

Nairobi Protocol provisions concerning physical security and stockpile management are underdeveloped and should be revised and expanded. Across the region, centralized, electronic databases should be established, then rolled out in all provinces, federal states or units of the respective government agency. They should then be maintained across all government agencies that possess SALW, especially the armed forces. The Nairobi Protocol could be updated to better reflect the ongoing efforts of the RECSA Secretariat and member states to strengthen national control, oversight and accountability of state-owned SALW.

60 See, e.g., Nicolas Florquin et al., *Weapons Compass: Mapping Illicit Small Arms Flows in Africa* (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, African Union, 2019); Andrea Edoardo Varisco et al., *Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons in Sub-Saharan Africa: Using UN Reports on Arms Embargoes to Identify Sources, Challenges and Policy Measures* (Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2022), https://doi.org/10.55163/SZJA6535.

TABLE 4.8.

Physical security and stockpile management

	YES	PARTIAL	NO	NO INFO
There are national standards and procedures for physical security and stockpile management	12	0	0	0
There is a centralized national inventory or database of state-owned SALW	8	2	1	1
The centralized national inventory or database of state-owned SALW contains information on armed forces holdings	6	2	3	1
The centralized national inventory or database of state-owned SALW contains information on police holdings	9	2	0	1
The centralized national inventory or database of state-owned SALW contains information on other state security force holdings	6	2	2	2



Containerized Armoury in RECSA Member States supported by the US Government, June 2020. Credit: RECSA Secretariat.

BOX 4.4.

Digitalized record-keeping of Somalia's state-owned SALW

When Somalia joined RECSA in 2005, it was in a protracted civil war and under a United Nations arms embargo.[61] In 2014, the diversion of SALW from government stockpiles was highlighted as a serious concern and source of weapons for non-state armed entities.[62] The same year, Somalia conducted a national weapons and ammunition management baseline assessment, which recommended enhancing record-keeping practices and establishing a record-keeping system to strengthen SALW control and to counter diversion.[63] A decade later, through continuous efforts and international assistance, Somalia has a digitalized, comprehensive national central SALW database to help prevent diversion. Given that Somalia continues to face widespread security challenges and is marked by weak institutions, this constitutes a significant achievement.

Since 2020, the Office of National Security, in consultation with relevant ministries and supported by a non-governmental expert organization, has developed and implemented a comprehensive national database on weapons and ammunition, which covers SALW.[64] The database is part of a record-keeping system that centralizes accounting to support accountability along the transfer chain – from pre-transfer and import phases, through central registration, during stockpiling and then distribution down to unit and individual levels. It operates alongside an electronic application that serves as a user interface through which designated officers can register, verify and monitor SALW.

The system was rolled out by relevant ministries and the Somali Security Forces in 2023. By 2024, more than 20,000 Somali National Army weapons and 8,000 Somali Police Force weapons had been digitally recorded and entered into the centralized system.

In recognition of the progress made by Somalia, including in the area of weapons accounting, in December 2023 the United Nations Security Council unanimously voted to lift the arms embargo.[65]

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61 This case study summarizes findings shared in: Anna Edna Esi Mensah et al., *Weapons and Ammunition Management in Africa Insight: 2023 Update* (Geneva: UNIDIR, 2023), **https://doi.org/10.37559/CAAP/23/WAM/09**; Theò Bajon, *Weapons and Ammunition Management in Africa Insight: 2024 Update* (Geneva: UNIDIR, 2024), **https://doi.org/10.37559/CAAP/24/WAM/07**.

62 Louis Charbonneau, "Exclusive: U.N. Monitors Warn of 'systematic' Somali Arms Diversion", Reuters, 13 February 2014, **https://www.reuters.com/article/world/exclusive-un-monitors-warn-of-systematic-somali-arms-diversion-idUSBREA1C1QU/**.

63 The baseline assessment was conducted by the Office of National Security and facilitated by UNIDIR. See Himayu Shiotani and Jonah Leff, *Towards a National Framework for Arms and Ammunition Management in the Federal Republic of Somalia – A Narrative Report: 2014–2017* (Geneva: UNIDIR, 2017), pp. 36–37, **https://doi.org/10.37559/CAAP/17/WAM/05**.

64 Records were already kept before 2020, but it marks the shift to a digital database.

65 United Nations, Security Council, resolution 2714 (2023), S/RES/2714 (2023), 1 December 2023, **https://docs.un.org/S/RES/2714** (2023).

4.12. Marking

ARTICLE 7

Overall requirement

Article 7 requires states parties to mark SALW at the time of manufacture or import and to mark all SALW in the possession of the state. The marking should be unique and should provide the name of the manufacturer, the country or place of manufacture, and the serial number.

Progress

In 2005, only one out of eight states required, at least partially, any SALW markings (see Table 3.1 and Table 3.2 above). In 2025, eight states require marking at the time of import and seven at the time of manufacture (see Table 4.9). Further, five states reported that all state-owned SALW are marked, with marking operations ongoing in the other seven states. As noted above, the Nairobi Protocol and RECSA have played a key role in the progress made by RECSA member states in marking their state-owned SALW. The DRC's experience in marking its state-owned SALW is presented in Box 4.5. Although marking ammunition is not a requirement of the Nairobi Protocol, four states reported doing so.

Challenges

While there has been notable progress regarding the marking of state-owned SALW, the majority of participating states have not fulfilled their obligations to require marking at the time of manufacture or import and to mark state-owned SALW. Only two states reported with confidence that the marking of civilian-owned small arms is required and occurs; the marking process is ongoing in two other states. One other state reported that marking is required but gave no details on the degree of implementation.

Recommendations

States should continue their progress towards marking all state-owned SALW. An updated Nairobi Protocol could expand the marking requirement to cover SALW in civilian possession.

TABLE 4.9.

SALW marking

	YES	PARTIAL	NO	NO INFO
SALW are marked at the time of manufacture, in accordance with Nairobi Protocol requirements	7	1	3	1
SALW are marked at the time of import, in accordance with Nairobi Protocol requirements	8	1	2	1
Ammunition is marked	4	0	7	1
	YES	**ONGOING**	**NO**	**NO INFO**
All State-owned SALW are marked in accordance with Nairobi Protocol requirements	5	7	0	0
Legal civilian small arms are marked	2	2	0	8

BOX 4.5.

Advancing weapons marking in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

During the 2016 national baseline assessment of its weapons and ammunition management, the DRC noted that its national efforts to mark state-owned SALW had made limited progress, mainly in Kinshasa.[66] Marking equipment and trained personnel were scarce, and the institutional framework was still evolving. These constraints were compounded by the DRC's vast territory, the large number of SALW held by government forces, limited resources and a complex security environment in parts of the country. The assessment identified two key factors to enable marking all state-owned SALW:

- Strong national leadership, particularly by the National Commission on Control of SALW and Reduction of Armed Violence (CNC-ALPC)
- Sustained international assistance

Over the past decade, the DRC has made steady progress in establishing a national marking programme. The CNC-ALPC established and coordinated a national Working Group on Marking that developed and adopted standardized marking procedures aligned with the Nairobi Protocol and the Best Practice Guidelines. In parallel, national record-keeping systems were strengthened to ensure effective registration of marked weapons.

With support from international partners, marking equipment was procured and permanent and mobile marking teams were established.[67] By 2023, more than 300,000 SALW held by the armed forces and the police had been marked in Kinshasa and 6 of the 25 provinces. This has improved accountability, inventory management and tracing capacity.

The DRC's 2024–2028 National Action Plan foresees the continuation and geographic expansion of marking activities for state-owned SALW, as well as a start to marking of civilian SALW. To complete this work, the DRC and international partners will need to address security and logistical challenges, particularly in the eastern provinces.

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66 This case study summarizes findings published in National Commission on Control of SALW (CNC-ALPC), "Plan d'Action National 2024–2028" [National action plan 2024–2028], 2023; Mensah et al., *Weapons and Ammunition Management in Africa Insight: 2023 Update*; Bajon, *Weapons and Ammunition Management in Africa Insight: 2024 Update*; Claudio Gramizzi et al., *Weapons and Ammunition Management Country Insight: The Democratic Republic of the Congo* (Geneva: UNIDIR, 2020), **https://doi.org/10.37559/CAAP/20/WAM/17**.

67 The partners include RECSA, the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), Mines Advisory Group and the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the United States State Department's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs.

4.13. Record-keeping of civilian SALW

ARTICLES 5 & 7(D)

Overall requirement

Articles 5 and 7(d) require states parties to establish national databases of licensed SALW and their owners and to maintain relevant information for at least 10 years.

Progress

All 12 states have made progress in establishing and maintaining a centralized national database on civilian SALW, with 8 states recording information on authorized civilian owners and 7 recording information on civilian-owned SALW (see Table 4.10). Ten states keep their records for at least 10 years, including four that keep them indefinitely.

Challenges

At least four states have yet to successfully operationalize a national centralized database in accordance with Nairobi Protocol requirements and recommended best practices. For those states with a centralized database for civilian-owned SALW, it is unclear if it has been rolled out across all provinces or federal states. The limited detail in the data reported by states on seized and collected SALW suggests that systematic record-keeping remains a challenge, which will also negatively affect analysis and evidence-based detection and investigations (see also Subsection 4.15).

Recommendation

States that have not yet done so should establish centralized databases. A focus for Nairobi Protocol implementation should be the full, nationwide roll-out and maintenance of such national databases. This will also help to enable information-sharing envisaged under the Nairobi Protocol.

TABLE 4.10.

Record-keeping for civilian-owned SALW

	YES	PARTIAL	NO	NO INFO
The centralized database contains information on				
1. Civilians authorized to own SALW	8	2	0	2
2. Civilian-owned SALW	7	3	1	1
3. SALW in the possession of dealers/traders	6	2	2	2
4. SALW in the possession of private security companies	6	0	3	3
5. Seized, confiscated or recovered SALW	6	3	0	3
6. Surrendered or collected SALW	5	3	1	3
7. SALW destined to be destroyed	8	2	0	2
Records are held for at least 10 years	**10**	**0**	**1**	**1**

4.14. Tracing of illicit SALW

ARTICLES 6(B) & 7(D)

Overall requirement

Articles 6(b) and 7(d) establish vague commitments to enable tracing of illicit SALW.[68] Tracing is the process of tracking an illicit weapon back to its point of manufacture, most recent import and last legal owner to determine where and when it entered illicit circulation.[69]

Progress

Ten states have procedures to trace state-owned SALW that have been reported as lost or missing, with the other two states also reporting progress in this regard. Eight of these states have designated a national focal point for tracing.

Challenges

Only five states reported issuing any tracing requests since 2004. Therefore, in most – if not almost all – cases, national tracing systems have yet to be operationalized.

Recommendation

The Nairobi Protocol provisions on tracing are underdeveloped and should be revised and expanded. Putting in place effective national tracing mechanisms that draw on national centralized record-keeping systems will enable domestic and international tracing operations.

4.15. Collection of SALW

ARTICLE 12

Overall requirement

Article 12 commits states to establishing SALW-collection programmes.[70] Collection of SALW refers to the voluntary surrender of both legal and illicit SALW in civilian possession.

Progress

Since 2005, seven participating states have implemented a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programme or introduced at least one programme for the voluntary surrender of SALW. Eight have held at least one amnesty programme for the surrender of illicit SALW, with the more recent programmes implemented as part of the Africa Amnesty Month. As shown in Box 4.6, collection programmes in RECSA member states have also utilized innovative methods, as well as ensuring strong engagement with women in communities affected by high levels of illicit arms and armed violence.

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68 This study interprets these commitments in the light of the International Tracing Instrument and its Articles 14–23. See International Tracing Instrument, A/60/88, Annex.

69 United Nations, Modular Small-arms-control Implementation Compendium (MOSAIC), "Tracing Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons", 05.31:2012(E)V1.0, 2012, https://front.un-arm.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/MOSAIC-05.31-2012EV1.0.pdf.

70 The questionnaire requested information on weapon collection in the context of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programmes. While not strictly covered by the Nairobi Protocol, DDR programmes have been used by RECSA member states to collect illicit SALW and are therefore included in this study.

Challenges

Voluntary surrender programmes in the RECSA region appear to be ad hoc. There is limited information on whether all collected SALW, whether legally held or illicit, are recorded and securely stored before being responsibly disposed of to prevent their diversion.

Recommendations

The Nairobi Protocol should be revised to include provisions on SALW collection in the context of DDR programmes. Given the large numbers of illicit SALW estimated to circulate in the RECSA region, states should continue to offer collection programmes while simultaneously addressing the factors driving demand for illicit SALW.



Awareness raising among high school students, CAR, 2026. Credit: MINUSCA / Herve Cyriaque Serefio.

BOX 4.6.

Community women at the forefront of collecting illicit small arms in Karamoja, Uganda

Uganda's Karamoja region has a long history of being affected by illicit arms possession and armed violence, dating back to the colonial era.[71] Post-independence, the region remained economically important because of its role in the ivory trade. However, as elephant populations declined, traders shifted to cattle rustling and the sale of weapons, leading to widespread circulation of SALW, particularly along the border with Kenya. At the turn of the 21st century, the region suffered from insecurity, economic decline, intensified cattle rustling and armed violence targeting both government security personnel and civilians.

While men have been the primary perpetrators of cattle rustling and gun violence, women in Karamoja have historically played influential roles linked to supporting armed violence – for example, by encouraging raids to enhance family status, preparing food for raiders, performing rituals to bless them, praising successful raids through songs and often safeguarding illicit SALW. Recognizing this link, the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, in collaboration with civil society organizations and the United Nations Programme for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), deliberately engaged women in DDR initiatives in the region. They, in turn, convinced their husbands and sons to surrender weapons, refused to conduct traditional blessing rituals and formed discussion groups on the impacts of cattle rustling. In the 2021 DDR exercise, women provided intelligence to security forces and discreetly handed over hidden firearms, contributing to successful weapon recovery.

Since 2019, the Center for Conflict Resolution (CECORE), a Ugandan civil society organization, has implemented peacebuilding programmes across Karamoja and other conflict-affected regions in Uganda. In these programmes, women act as early-warning agents who report signs of impending conflict – such as increased circulation of SALW – via SMS or community networks. Once threats are identified, women mobilize leaders, youth and other community members to prevent escalation. This has resulted in a notable transformation, with women, formerly supporters and custodians of raiders' weapons, now serving as peace champions. The efforts of CECORE complement those of the government and other partners in positioning women and girls as agents of change and promoters of non-violent livelihoods in Karamoja.

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71 This case study summarizes findings from RECSA, *Assessment Report on the Gender Transformative Approaches*.

4.16. Identification of surplus, obsolete and redundant SALW

ARTICLE 8

Overall requirement

Article 8 requires states parties to identify and dispose of surplus, obsolete and redundant state-held SALW. Identifying surplus, obsolete and redundant SALW is the process by which authorities assess existing stockpiles against legitimate security needs to determine which weapons are no longer required or functional and should be disposed of.

Progress

Seven states have a national programme for identifying surplus, obsolete or redundant SALW in the state's possession, while two have elements of such a programme. Ten states reported that SALW identified as surplus, obsolete or redundant are securely stored, while 11 reported that such material is destroyed. Only one state reported having identified and destroyed a significant number of surplus SALW between 2005 and 2025.

Challenges

Two states appear to have not yet identified surplus SALW. For nine states, it is difficult to determine whether national programmes for identifying and disposing of surplus SALW are operational.

Recommendations

States that do not already do so should regularly determine the SALW needed for national security needs. They should subsequently review national stockpiles to identify surplus, obsolete and redundant SALW and then destroy them.



SALW Collection, Kenya, June 2025. Credit: RECSA Secretariat.

5. The path ahead: Ensuring the effectiveness and relevance of the Nairobi Protocol

The 20th anniversary of the Nairobi Protocol was marked in a context of geopolitical flux and regional instability. In the research for this study, during consultations and meetings with national focal points on small arms, experts highlighted long-standing insecurity factors – such as political instability, armed conflict, terrorism and extreme poverty – that drive demand for arms and ammunition in the RECSA region. They also identified new and emerging security threats that hamper efforts to reduce illicit proliferation and misuse of arms and ammunition – primarily climate change impacts, violent struggles to control natural resources and their exploitation, and the spread of organized crime groups in the region. Overall, the review process showed that focusing solely on supply-side control measures will not address the region's challenges with illicit SALW and their impact on insecurity, armed conflict and violence and on sustainable development challenges.

As in many regions of the world, porous borders have long enabled the illicit movement of arms and ammunition, as well as cross-border operation and movements of armed groups. Participants in the Nairobi Protocol review process indicated that producers and exporters of small arms and ammunition located in the Global North continue to contribute to the illicit arms trade – whether through inadequate risk assessments or through inadequate measures to prevent or mitigate illicit brokering and diversion. At the same time, experts were concerned that transfers into the RECSA region of parts and components and of knowledge – for example, on how to assemble and produce SALW and IEDs or convert commercially available UASs into loitering munitions and airborne IEDs – will pose a greater threat to regional security in the near future. Several states in the region have already seized craft-produced SALW as well as non-lethal items that have been converted to fire live rounds or deliver lethal payloads.[72] A 2024 study shows that the lethality of craft-produced weapons is increasing in Africa.[73] Experts raised concerns about the potential for terrorists or criminals to use 3D printing (also called additive manufacturing) to produce small arms. These developments pose a risk not only to national security forces and peacekeepers but also to civilians.

The assessment of 20 years of implementation of the Nairobi Protocol confirms that **meaningful progress has been achieved across the region regarding key elements of national systems for control of SALW**, notably:

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72 See, e.g., "Police Recover Four Homemade Guns in Laikipia", NTV Kenya, 5 February 2026, https://ntvkenya.co.ke/news/police-recover-four-homemade-guns-in-laikipia/; "Police Arrest Four for Illegal Firearms Possession", *Daily News* (Tanzania), 23 May 2025, https://dailynews.co.tz/police-arrest-four-for-illegal-firearms-possession/.

73 Matilde Vecchioni, *Unregulated Production: Examining Craft-Produced Weapons from a Global Perspective* (Geneva: UNIDIR, 2024), https://doi.org/10.37559/CAAP/24/PACAV/08. See also Carlson, *Firearms and Ammunition Trafficking in Eastern Africa.*

- The development of legislative and regulatory frameworks governing the SALW life cycle
- Improvements in stockpile management and physical security
- The introduction of marking and record-keeping systems
- The establishment of inter-agency coordination mechanisms

At the same time, **a key impediment to greater progress in implementing all aspects of the Nairobi Protocol has been securing adequate resources**. These resources are necessary to ensure sufficient capacity to regulate authorized small arms throughout their life cycle in order to prevent their diversion and misuse, as well as to detect and appropriately respond to the illicit arms trade and unauthorized use. This report has clearly identified **persistent and cross-cutting challenges in four areas**:

- Operationalization of tracing mechanisms
- Effectiveness of border controls
- Consistency of law enforcement cooperation
- In-depth regional information exchange

The 20th anniversary celebrations for the Nairobi Protocol and the review process activities conducted in 2025 have given a new impetus to national and regional efforts to address the scourge of illicit arms and their misuse in the RECSA region.



National Focal Points and Stakeholders Conference on the Review of the Nairobi Protocol held in November 2025. Credit: RECSA Secretariat.

5.1. Key considerations for reviewing and updating the Nairobi Protocol

One of the key outcomes of the November 2025 meeting of national focal points and the multi-stakeholder conference was a call for a renewed regional political commitment to conventional arms control.[74] These consultative meetings helped deliver broad consensus on the strategic direction for strengthening the implementation of the Nairobi Protocol in the coming years, including the need for a structured, inclusive process to review and update the Nairobi Protocol and its Best Practice Guidelines. Experts emphasized the importance of enhancing regional cooperation and strengthening national capacities to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit manufacturing, trafficking, possession and use of not just small arms but also ammunition, IEDs and armed UASs in the RECSA region. The review process activities conducted in 2025, supported by the findings of this study, revealed the following key considerations for updating the Nairobi Protocol to ensure that it can fulfil its objectives – supporting regional, national and community-level efforts to counter the illicit proliferation and misuse of conventional arms and ammunition.

1. Review and expand existing yet underdeveloped provisions under the Nairobi Protocol

1.1. RECSA member states should review all operational articles of the Nairobi Protocol.

1.2. RECSA member states should revise and expand, among others, Articles 5–7 concerning provisions on civilian possession, physical security and stockpile management, record-keeping, and tracing.

2. Align the Nairobi Protocol with global and African arms control frameworks

2.1. RECSA member states should align the Nairobi Protocol's provisions on tracing with the International Tracing Instrument, which was adopted around the same time.

2.2. RECSA member states should examine the correspondence between the Nairobi Protocol and the Arms Trade Treaty's provisions for regulating international arms transfers and countering diversion.

2.3. RECSA member states should expand the scope of the Nairobi Protocol to incorporate the GFA's objectives and measures for safe, secure and sustainable through-life management of conventional ammunition.

2.4. RECSA member states should take into account African and other regional arms control frameworks, including the African Union's Silencing the Guns flagship initiative, the Africa Amnesty Month and the Djibouti Code of Conduct.

2.5. RECSA member states should revise and expand Nairobi Protocol Article 1 (Definitions) to include key terms such as IEDs, UASs, craft-produced and improvised weapons, amnesty programmes, commercial entities, dealer and dealing, among others, in order to ensure alignment with international instruments (e.g., the PoA, the International Tracing Instrument, the GFA and the Arms Trade Treaty).

74 UNIDIR and RECSA, National Focal Point Meeting and Stakeholder Conference.

3. Address emerging weapon technologies and acquisition methods

3.1. RECSA member states should expand the scope of the Nairobi Protocol to regulate transfers of parts and components that could be used to assemble or produce IEDs, SALW and UASs.

3.2. RECSA member states should add provisions to the Nairobi Protocol requiring them to enact national legislation that prohibits the unauthorized production and use of improvised weapons (i.e., IEDs, SALW and UASs). This could include explicit references to 3D-printed and craft-produced weapons and the conversion of replicas, blank-firing and acoustic weapons into lethal weapons.

4. Enhance national strategic planning and ensure sustainable operational capacity

4.1. RECSA member states should consider integrating SALW control into broader strategic planning on security and development with strategies, action plans and targets.

4.2. RECSA member states should include in their national coordination mechanisms for SALW control all relevant government ministries and agencies for addressing not only the diversion and illicit supply of weapons, but also demand and impacts from their misuse.

4.3. RECSA member states should prioritize sustained investments in national operational capacities, including training, equipment maintenance and institutional strengthening of coordination mechanisms. This should also include measures to retain trained personnel and to ensure the continuity of institutional knowledge.

5. Ensure national control systems are gender-responsive

5.1. RECSA member states should ensure the full, equal, meaningful and effective participation of women in through-life management of conventional arms control and ammunition.

5.2. RECSA member states should take into account the differential impact of the illicit trade in SALW on women, men, girls and boys. Where feasible and safe to do so, they should collect data disaggregated by sex, age and disability and analyse it to inform evidence-based gender-responsive policymaking and programming.

5.3. RECSA member states should take measures to prevent the use of SALW for committing or facilitating gender-based violence.

6. Strengthen partnerships with civil society to address the demand for arms and ammunition

6.1. RECSA member states should introduce SALW control and the importance of countering illicit proliferation and misuse into school education curricula.

6.2. RECSA member states should enhance partnerships with civil society to raise awareness on illicit proliferation and misuse of arms and ammunition, addressing in particular youth disengagement, the meaningful participation of youth in small arms control and preventing violent extremism.

7. Invest in cross-border cooperation and integrated border management

7.1. RECSA member states should consider adopting best practice models for integrated border management approaches – covering land, maritime and lake borders – to address geographic vulnerabilities and disrupt trafficking networks more effectively. These approaches should include increasing opportunities for training and capacity-building in effective methods for detecting illicit SALW.

7.2. RECSA member states should strengthen cross-border cooperation through joint operations, harmonized procedures and confidence-building measures among border, customs, police and intelligence authorities, among others.

7.3. The Nairobi Protocol should encourage RECSA member states to explore the use of new technology for monitoring border spaces and enhancing detection.

8. Strengthen regional information-sharing and coordination mechanisms

8.1. The RECSA Secretariat should establish secure, institutionalized platforms that facilitate the timely exchange of data on trafficking trends, diversion risks, tracing requests and operational outcomes. RECSA member states should actively contribute to and use these platforms.

8.2. The RECSA Secretariat should support the national focal points of RECSA member states to establish and maintain predictable and trusted channels for regional early warning, joint analysis and coordinated responses.

9. Improve monitoring, evaluation and evidence-based reporting for regular reviews of implementation

9.1. The RECSA Secretariat and partners should support RECSA member states to strengthen data collection, analysis and reporting capacities on key implementation areas, including tracing outcomes, border operations, training, awareness-raising activities and voluntary surrender programmes.

9.2. The RECSA Secretariat should establish a mechanism to regularly review implementation of the Nairobi Protocol and to identify effective measures for controlling SALW and ammunition and countering trafficking and diversion.

If the Nairobi Protocol and its Best Practice Guidance are updated to take into account persistent and emerging challenges and the considerations listed above, they can provide a robust regional approach to preventing diversion and combating trafficking, thereby making a significant contribution to sustainable peace and security across the RECSA region.

Annex I. Institutions that submitted data for this study on behalf of the member states

MEMBER STATE	INSTITUTION INVOLVED IN THE ASSESSMENT	DATA FORMAT
Burundi	Permanent National Commission for Combatting the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (CNAP)	Questionnaire
Central African Republic	National Commission for Combatting the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (COMNAT-ALPC)	
Democratic Republic of the Congo	National Commission on Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons Control and Reduction of Armed Violence (CNC-ALPC)	
Djibouti	National Focal Point on SALW	Questionnaire
Eritrea	National Focal Point on SALW	
Ethiopia	National Focal Point on SALW	
Kenya	National Focal Point Coordinator on SALW	Questionnaire
Rwanda	National Focal Point Coordinator on SALW	Questionnaire
Somalia	National Focal Point Coordination Office on SALW–Central Monitoring Department	Questionnaire
South Sudan	Bureau for Community Security and Small Arms Control	Questionnaire
Sudan	National Focal Point on SALW	
Uganda	National Focal Point on SALW	Questionnaire
United Republic of Tanzania	National Focal Point on SALW	Questionnaire

Cover image: Assault rifles, CAR, 2025. Credit: MINUSCA.

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