



UNIDIR

Deploying the Arms Control and Disarmament Toolbox

Strengthening the Role of United Nations Peace Operations to Prevent Sexual Violence

HANA SALAMA



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Notes

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About UNIDIR

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About the Gender and Disarmament Programme

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

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Cover image: 'Apart' art installation by Franziska Greber, International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum (MICR), Geneva, 2022.

Acronyms & Abbreviations

ANRAC	Arms and Natural Resources Advisory Cell
BINUH	United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti
CRSV	conflict-related sexual violence
CSO	civil society organization
CVR	community violence reduction
DDR	disarmament, demobilization and reintegration
IDDRS	Integrated DDR Standards
M23	23 March Movement
MARA	monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements
MINUSCA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic
MINUSMA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MONUSCO	United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
SALW	small arms and light weapons
SGBV	sexual and gender-based violence
UN	United Nations
UNMAS	Mine Action Service of the United Nations
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan
WAM	weapons and ammunition management
WPA	women's protection adviser
WPS	Women, Peace and Security (Agenda)

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Executive summary

In recent years, awareness has grown of the link between the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). The United Nations Framework for the Prevention of Conflict-related Sexual Violence (2022) highlights that implementing arms control instruments, such as the United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms and the Arms Trade Treaty, is key to preventing such crimes in the long term.¹ However, limited attention has been paid to how arms control and disarmament instruments and tools can mitigate the short-term and immediate risks of CRSV, in addition to its long-term prevention.

This report examines how United Nations (UN) peace operations, which are central to UN efforts to combat CRSV, can leverage arms control and disarmament tools such as disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR), weapons and ammunition management (WAM), community violence reduction (CVR) and arms embargoes to support both long-term structural prevention and shorter-term operational prevention on the ground.

Through a review of UN peace operation mandates, operational guidance, official reports and focus group discussions with selected missions, this report identifies the following key findings and actionable recommendations.

Key findings

- ▶ In contexts where UN peace operations are present, the proliferation of SALW continues to be a key factor linked to CRSV and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)
- ▶ Experts working in UN peace operations report that weapons are used to intimidate victims, rape them and threaten them with retaliation if they report these crimes
- ▶ Data from Insecurity Insight on the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti and South Sudan, where UN peace operations are mandated to respond to and prevent CRSV, indicates that firearms were involved in an average of 88% of incidents (across all four countries) between 2022 and 2024²
- ▶ Despite the above, the mandates of UN peace operations do not reflect the links between CRSV and the proliferation of SALW and therefore fail to integrate gender-responsive arms control measures into CRSV prevention efforts

¹ UN Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict, *Framework for the Prevention of Conflict-related Sexual Violence*. (New York: United Nations, 2022), www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/au-to-draft/202209-CRSV-Prevention-Framework.pdf.

² Insecurity Insight is a non-governmental organization that uses a trained algorithm to identify sexual violence incidents globally from publicly available sources such as traditional media and social media on violent incidents in conflict, including CRSV. Its CRSV data cover January 2022 to October 2024. In that period, 129 cases were recorded in the Democratic Republic of Congo, 78 in Haiti, 52 in South Sudan, and 17 in the Central African Republic. Insecurity Insight, “Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV) Data”. Humanitarian Exchange (HDX). <https://data.humdata.org/dataset/conflict-related-sexual-violence>.

- ▶ UN peace operations do not systematically collect information on weapons in mission-level data-collection efforts for CRSV, limiting the potential for enhanced prevention strategies and early warning
- ▶ There is still a lack of capacity and understanding by national authorities supported by UN peace operations on how to mitigate and respond to CRSV in contexts where DDR programmes are being implemented
- ▶ There is increased awareness and recognition among WAM practitioners about how their work can mitigate CRSV and SGBV, as evidenced by the appointment of gender focal points in the Mine Action Service of the United Nations (UNMAS) and the inclusion of UNMAS in the monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements (MARA) meetings in the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic
- ▶ CVR programmes have the potential to prevent CRSV and SGBV and their recurrence in conflict-affected communities. However, due to limited funding, these initiatives remain relatively small scale

Recommendations

UN SECURITY COUNCIL

- ▶ Strengthen the mandates of UN peace operations with clear and explicit references linking arms control and disarmament to CRSV and SGBV prevention

UN SECRETARIAT

- ▶ Maintain a repository for UN Security Council members on CRSV and SGBV-related language for use in mandates
- ▶ Develop trauma-informed interview protocols which include standardized weapon categorization, to prevent the re-traumatization of survivors of CRSV and SGBV when asking them about weapons
- ▶ Review operational guidance on preventing CRSV and SGBV and on DDR and CVR to better address the role of the proliferation of SALW in CRSV and SGBV
- ▶ Review UN guidance related to WAM to mainstream gender considerations and raise awareness about the links between SALW, CRSV and SGBV

UN PEACE OPERATIONS

Improve data collection and sharing

- ▶ Systematically collect information on types of weapons in mission-level data-collection efforts for CRSV
- ▶ Improve data sharing on CRSV trends and patterns facilitated by weapons data with:
 - ▷ UNMAS, to inform gender-responsive weapons and ammunition management policies
 - ▷ Experts on arms embargo monitoring, to inform the UN Security Council sanctions committee about compliance with arms embargoes

Integrate data on weapons flow for early warning

- ▶ Establish mission-wide early warning indicators for arms flow and weapons, which can also be included in CRSV early warning mechanisms
- ▶ Enhance coordination between UNMAS (as well as other relevant mission components) and women's protection advisers (WPAs) to facilitate timely sharing of information on arms flow
- ▶ Create guidance for mission staff and uniformed personnel on the most relevant arms-related data for early warning of CRSV

Increase capacity on weapons-related issues

- ▶ Assign a weapons focal point in the mission, who can be deployed with human rights teams and WPAs during CRSV investigations
- ▶ Institute regular training sessions on weapons categorization and methods for photographing recovered weapons and ammunition during investigations by human rights and WPA teams
- ▶ Allocate of financial and human resources to internal capacity-building activities on weapons issues, data collection and coordination mechanisms such as the MARA

Engage with local actors, including women-led organizations and survivors

- ▶ Deploy a more targeted approach to CVR programmes to specifically address demand for weapons as well as gender norms that shape weapons use and misuse in the community
- ▶ Continue efforts to promote the participation of women – including survivors of SGBV and CRSV – in DDR and CVR programmes and provide opportunities for them to raise awareness about weapons-related risks relating to SGBV and CRSV
- ▶ Develop guidance to support capacity strengthening for national partners to address CRSV in a sustainable manner by integrating arms control and disarmament measures



MINUSCA Peacekeepers provide escort to civilian population in Bangui, Central African Republic, October 2018. Credit: UN Photo / Herve Serefio.

Introduction

In recent years, awareness of the links between the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) has increased among United Nations (UN) Member States, practitioners working on arms control and disarmament and those working to prevent and respond to CRSV. In 2022, the UN Framework for the Prevention of Conflict-related Sexual Violence recognized that state implementation of arms control and disarmament instruments – such as the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and the Arms Trade Treaty – is important to the long-term structural prevention of such crimes.

In 2023, UNIDIR published *Addressing Weapons in Conflict-related Sexual Violence: The Arms Control and Disarmament Toolbox*. Drawing on multiple data sources, the report highlighted direct and indirect links between CRSV and the proliferation of SALW and proposed an arms control and disarmament toolbox for the long- and short-term prevention of CRSV. Given that the widespread availability of firearms in conflict-affected areas not only destabilizes communities but also enables armed actors to perpetrate atrocities such as CRSV with impunity, the UN Secretary-General has recognized that “arms control and disarmament instruments are critical tools of prevention”,³ and that “gender-responsive and inclusive disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, weapons management and community violence reduction programmes hold the potential to address sexual violence.”⁴ In addition, he emphasized the importance of cross-leveraging such measures with UN Security Council tools, such as arms embargoes, to stem weapons proliferation and strengthen CRSV prevention.

³ Security Council, “Conflict-related sexual violence”, Report of the Secretary-General, S/2024/292, 4 April 2024, para. 20.

⁴ Ibid, para. 19.

Referring to UN peace operations, which are often on the front line of UN efforts to prevent and respond to CRSV, the UN Secretary-General has called for Member States to “ensure that mandate authorizations and renewals include gender-responsive and gender-inclusive security and justice sector reform and arms control and disarmament measures in order to prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual violence”.⁵ Building on UNIDIR’s previous research and the UN Secretary-General’s recommendations, this report seeks to enhance understanding of how arms control and disarmament tools, including arms embargoes⁶, can be leveraged by UN peace operations to strengthen CRSV prevention.

According to the UN Framework for the Prevention of Conflict-related Sexual Violence, preventing CRSV from happening, escalating or recurring includes structural and operational approaches:⁷

- ▶ **Structural prevention** focuses on creating a protective environment and addressing the underlying causes of CRSV, including gender inequality
- ▶ **Operational prevention** focuses on more short-term measures and mitigating impacts to the community by preventing the escalation of CRSV

This report explores how gender-responsive and inclusive disarmament, demobilization and re-integration (DDR) processes, weapons and ammunition management (WAM) and community violence reduction (CVR), as well as arms embargoes, can be implemented in an integrated way to support both structural prevention and greater operational prevention on the ground. In doing so, the report outlines key considerations to support the operationalization of gender-responsive arms control and disarmament tools, with the aim of maximizing the impact of CRSV and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) prevention efforts by UN peace operations.

Although this report primarily uses the term CRSV, it also refers to SGBV in cases where the direct or indirect links to conflict are not present or are unclear and to instances where these violations occur in non-conflict settings, such as Haiti.

To better understand how UN peace operations that are mandated to address and prevent CRSV and/or SGBV can operationalize gender-responsive arms control and disarmament tools to enhance prevention, UNIDIR held virtual focus group discussions with four UN peace operations: the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), the UN Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) and the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). The missions were selected to represent both special political missions and peacekeeping missions that had CRSV and/or SGBV and arms control and disarmament measures – namely, DDR, WAM and/or CVR – included in their mandates.

⁵ Ibid, para. 93(d).

⁶ Arms embargoes are also considered a Security Council tool.

⁷ UN Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict, *Framework for the Prevention of Conflict-related Sexual Violence*.

In addition, the contexts where these missions operate are characterized by a high level of illicit proliferation of SALW and a high correlation between CRSV and firearms.⁸

The overall objective of these focus group discussions was to identify entry points and enabling factors for UN missions to apply arms control and disarmament tools in support of CRSV and SGBV prevention.⁹ The content of these discussions is referenced throughout the report. Recommendations from this report are drawn from the focus group discussions and from a thorough review of mission mandates, annual mission reports and relevant literature.

This report adopts the UN definition of CRSV, as follows:

“Rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilization, forced marriage, and any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity perpetrated against women, men, girls or boys that is directly or indirectly linked to a conflict. This link may be evident in the profile of the perpetrator, who is often affiliated with a State or non-State armed group, including those designated as terrorist groups by the United Nations; the profile of the victim, who is frequently an actual or perceived member of a persecuted political, ethnic or religious minority, or targeted on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity; a climate of impunity, which is generally associated with State collapse; cross-border consequences, such as displacement or trafficking; and/or violations of the provisions of a ceasefire agreement. The term also encompasses trafficking in persons for the purpose of sexual violence and/or exploitation, when committed in situations of conflict.”¹⁰

UN Security Council resolutions have used the terms “conflict-related sexual violence”, “sexual violence in conflict” and “sexual and gender-based violence” interchangeably in the mandates of UN peace operations (for further discussion, see Section 4.1).

⁸ According to Insecurity Insight data on the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti and South Sudan, firearms were involved in an average of 88% of incidents across all four countries between January 2022 and October 2024. Insecurity Insight, “Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV) Data”. Humanitarian Exchange (HDX), <https://data.humdata.org/dataset/conflict-related-sexual-violence>

⁹ The focus groups, held virtually between October 2024 and April 2025, brought together women’s protection advisers; gender advisers of police and military mission components (where applicable); human rights officers; protection of children and civilians officers; DDR and CVR officers; professionals from the data and analysis units of the mission, such as joint mission analysis centres and joint operations centres; entities such as the Mine Action Service of the United Nations, which is responsible for WAM; and, in the case of MONUSCO, the Arms And Natural Resources Advisory Cell, which is tasked with supporting the implementation and monitoring of the arms embargo. Also in attendance for some of the focus group discussions were representatives of UN country teams, such as the UN Population Fund and UN Women; national focal points from ministries of gender or women’s affairs and the national police force; other relevant national focal points; and local civil society organizations. Women and men both participated in the virtual discussions, which had the objectives of gaining understanding of priorities, activities, information and data-collection efforts and requirements (both on CRSV and on arms control and disarmament), and data sharing and coordination within each the mission and of identifying key gaps and entry points within UN missions for the application of conventional arms control measures in support of the prevention of CRSV.

¹⁰ Security Council, “Conflict-related sexual violence”, Report of the Secretary-General, S/2022/272, 29 March 2022, <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/auto-draft/SG-Report2021for-web.pdf>, para. 4.



Survivors of sexual violence in South Sudan struggle to access health care, May 2020. Credit: UNMISS / flickr.com.

1. Conflict-related sexual violence and the proliferation of small arms

In 2024, conflicts and humanitarian crises intensified across various regions, leading to severe consequences for civilians. The spread of arms and increasing militarization further fuelled incidents of CRSV. State defence and security forces and non-state armed groups both continued to commit acts of rape, gang rape and abduction, with civilians bearing the brunt of these atrocities. Among those most affected were displaced individuals, refugees, and migrant women and girls, who made up most of the survivors and victims.¹¹

While sexual violence disproportionately impacts women and girls, men and boys also experience such violations, particularly in detention centres, where it is often used as a form of torture.¹² The consequences of CRSV are profound and far-reaching, affecting both individuals and communities. The health, both physical and physiological, of sexual violence survivors is often severely impacted, and they frequently endure intense social stigma, leading to marginalization and exclusion. Sexual violence curtails economic opportunities and access to education for survivors. Additionally, harmful social norms and persistent stigma in many regions create significant barriers to the reintegration of former abductees and their children into society.¹³

¹¹ Security Council, “Conflict-related sexual violence”, Report of the Secretary-General, forthcoming (2025)

¹² Security Council, “Conflict-related sexual violence”, Report of the Secretary-General, A/66/657-S/2012/33, 13 January 2012, para. 37.

¹³ Security Council, “Conflict-related Sexual Violence”, forthcoming (2025)

CRSV arises from multiple intersecting causes, and its prevalence is shaped by conflict dynamics and broader structural factors. Depending on the context, specific characteristics – such as detention status, age or membership in an armed group – may increase vulnerability to CRSV. The collapse of state institutions, the breakdown of the rule of law, forced displacement, human trafficking and ceasefire violations further exacerbate the risk of such violence. Access to weapons and socioeconomic instability are additional contributing factors.¹⁴ However, CRSV is fundamentally rooted in pre-existing structural gender inequalities and social norms that perpetuate gender-based violence.

Rather than being viewed solely as a phenomenon of armed conflict, contemporary scholarship increasingly recognizes CRSV as part of a continuum of gender-based violence that predates conflict and persists in post-conflict settings. Understanding CRSV within this broader continuum is essential for designing effective prevention and response strategies to address this form of violence comprehensively.¹⁵

CRSV is often described as a “hidden crime”, as many survivors are either unable or unwilling to report their experiences due to the breakdown of the rule of law, the collapse of essential health and legal systems, and fear of stigma or reprisal. Law enforcement authorities frequently lack the capacity, resources and institutional frameworks necessary to document such violations adequately.¹⁶ This is particularly true when collecting data about CRSV perpetrated against men and boys, who are often less likely to report such crimes because of stigma. Yet in some contexts, studies have shown that the proportion of survivors who are men or boys can be as large as 40%.¹⁷ Furthermore, the methodologies used to collect data on CRSV vary significantly across different organizations and contexts, resulting in inconsistent definitions of perpetrators, victims, survivors, types of incident and acts of sexual violence. Consequently, even within the same conflict context, data collected by different entities cannot always be compared or aggregated.¹⁸

As of May 2025, the UN had not yet released aggregated statistics on CRSV for 2024. The most recent global data available pertain to 2023, during which the UN verified 3,688 cases of CRSV, reflecting a significant increase in verified cases compared with the previous year.¹⁹ Among these cases, 95% of the victims were women and girls, 4% were men and boys, and

¹⁴ As discussed in UN Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict, *Framework for the Prevention of Conflict-related Sexual Violence*, pp. 14–15.

¹⁵ Independent Commission for Aid Impact, “Literature Review: Conflict-related Sexual Violence and Sexual Exploitation and Abuse”, 30 September 2020, <https://icai.independent.gov.uk/html-version/psvi-2/#section-1>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ J. Miragall Mas and L. Fach, *Report on Sexual Violence against the Male Gender: Democratic Republic of Congo*. (The Hague: Centre for African Justice, Peace and Human Rights, 2021), <https://centreforafricanjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/DRC-report-1.pdf>.

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

¹⁹ In 2022, the UN verified 2455 cases of CRSV.

32% were children, with 98% of these children being girls.²⁰ Given the challenges in collecting CRSV data, this is likely an underrepresentation of the true scale of CRSV.

Most of the data collected by the UN and other organisations refer to armed actors as the perpetrators but do not include specific information on weapons. Some data derived from hospitals do include weapons as a broad category, but these weapons data are not disaggregated by type and may include traditional weapons such as machetes, knives and household objects as well as firearms.

Currently, Insecurity Insight provides the only publicly accessible data disaggregated by weapon type, including firearms. In 2023–2024, of the 829 CRSV cases recorded by Insecurity Insight, 708 (85%) involved a firearm. This proportion had grown from 2020–2022, where out of the 908 CRSV cases recorded, 664 (73%) involved a firearm.²¹ Figure 1 shows global data trends in the proportion of CRSV incidents involving firearms, from 2020 to 2024, as recorded by Insecurity Insight.

Insecurity Insight is a non-governmental organization that collects different types of publicly sourced data on violent events, including sexual violence. It uses a trained algorithm to identify sexual violence incidents globally from publicly available sources such as traditional media and social media. Its methodology varies significantly from that used to collect UN-verified data as Insecurity Insight does not have a physical presence in the countries from which it collects data; Insecurity Insight has a wider inclusion criterion for sexual violence and a lower threshold for verification than those used by the UN.

²⁰ Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Factsheet: “15th Report of the United Nations Secretary-General on Conflict-related Sexual Violence”, 2023, <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/202404-UN-annual-report-CRSV-factsheet-covering-2023.pdf>.

²¹ Insecurity Insight data, as of January 2025, cover CRSV data from January 2020 to December 2024. Data for 2024 cover 57 countries, data for 2023 cover 59 countries, data for 2022 cover 44 countries, data for 2021 cover 51 countries and data for 2020 cover 32 countries. Insecurity Insight, “Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV) Data”, accessed 14 February 2025.

FIGURE 1.

CRSV incidents and proportion of firearms, 2020–2024²²

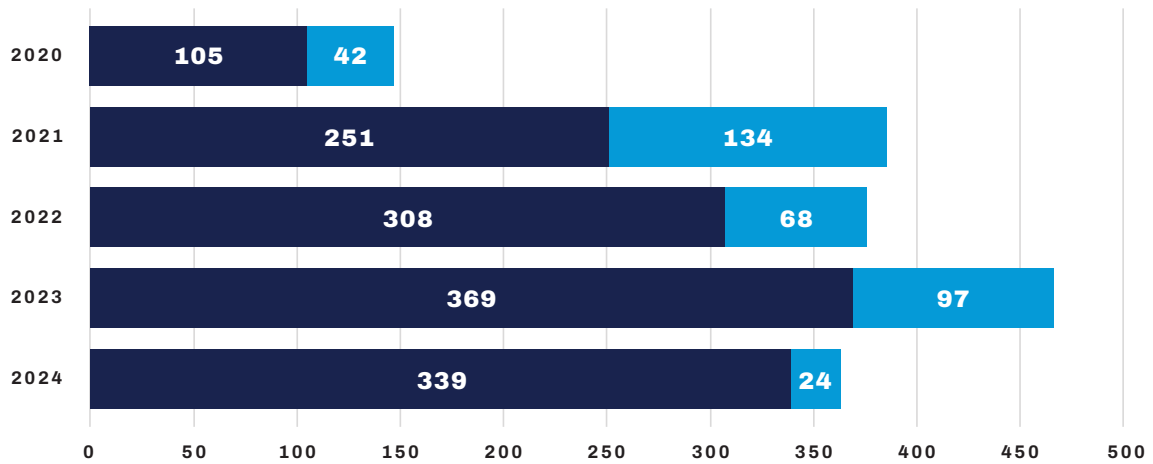
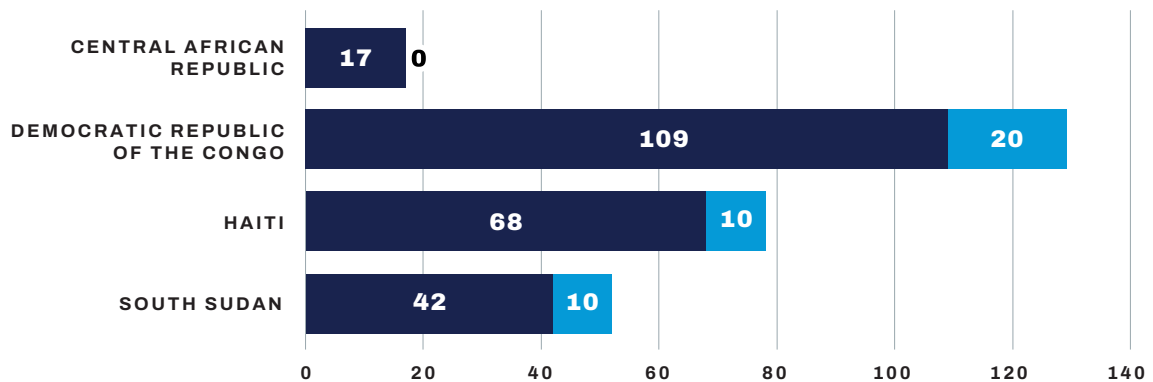


FIGURE 2.

CRSV incidents and proportion of firearms in selected mission settings, 2020–2024²³



²² As per preceding footnote.

²³ Insecurity Insight data covers CRSV data from January 2022 to October 2024. Between 2022 and 2024, 52 cases were recorded, 17 in the Central African Republic, 129 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and 78 in Haiti. Insecurity Insight, "Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV) Data", accessed 14 February 2025.

Between 2022 and 2024, CRSV incidents recorded by Insecurity Insight (1,293) were proportionally more prevalent in specific locations, including on streets, roads or fields (198; 15%), in victims' homes (151; 12%), in captivity (134; 10%) and during arrest (91; 7%), but in over one-third of cases, no location information was recorded (476; 37%). During the same period, when data were available, incidents involving group perpetrators (937; 72%) occurred at significantly higher rates than those involving single perpetrators (289; 22%). The majority of victims were women or girls (1,101 incidents; 85%), adults (835 incidents; 65%) and civilians (1,232 incidents; 95%). After firearms (1,083 incidents; 84%), knives (81 incidents; 6%) were the second most commonly reported weapon.

The widespread availability of firearms in conflict-affected regions not only destabilizes communities but also enables armed actors to perpetrate atrocities against civilians with impunity. The illicit circulation of SALW intensifies insecurity, particularly for internally displaced women and girls, who often face heightened risks of sexual violence in displacement settings. The unregulated flow of these weapons also facilitates the activities of transnational smugglers, traffickers and armed groups, further entrenching patterns of violence and exploitation. Additionally, research highlights the association between gun ownership and constructs of masculinity, power and control, all of which can perpetuate and drive CRSV by reinforcing gendered power imbalances in conflict settings.²⁴

UNIDIR's research has shown that weapons are directly linked to CRSV, as perpetrators use firearms to commit rape, intimidate victims into submission, and inflict injury and/or kill survivors and victims. Weapons and CRSV are also indirectly linked, as the proliferation of weapons and ammunition fuels broader conflict violence, which in turn creates conditions that facilitate CRSV.²⁵ Based on the multiple links between CRSV and the proliferation of SALW, UNIDIR's 2023 report *Addressing Weapons in Conflict-related Sexual Violence* proposed an arms control and disarmament toolbox for CRSV prevention: a conceptual framework to better understand what instruments and tools could be leveraged to prevent CRSV at different phases of a conflict.²⁶

Underpinning this toolbox are the international frameworks aiming to prevent the proliferation of SALW, including the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms (UNPoA), the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), the UN Firearms Protocol and the recently adopted Global Framework for Through-life Conventional Ammunition Management (GFA) (see Figure 2).

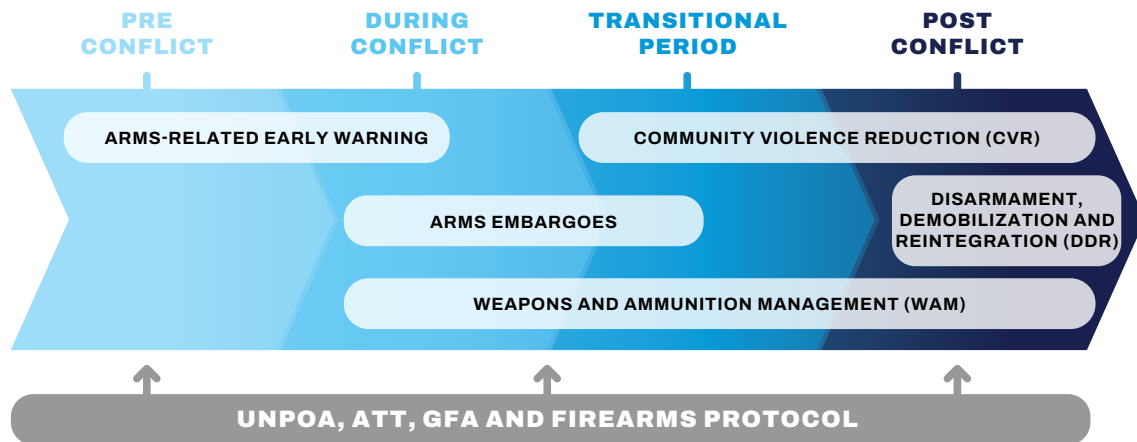
²⁴ General Assembly, "Impact of arms transfers on human rights", Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, A/HRC/44/29, 19 June 2020.

²⁵ H. Salama, *Addressing Weapons in Conflict-related Sexual Violence* (Geneva: UNIDIR, 2023), https://unidir.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/UNIDIR_Addressing_Weapons_in_Conflict_related_Sexual_Violence.pdf.

²⁶ Ibid.

FIGURE 3.

The Arms Control and Disarmament Toolbox



A gender-responsive implementation of SALW-related frameworks – which would include addressing gender dynamics and ensuring that women, girls and survivors of CRSV and SGBV are included in decision-making and the implementation of these frameworks – can support the prevention of sexual violence in two ways:

- ▶ In the **short term** by reducing the number of weapons available to perpetrators, especially illicit weapons, in fragile and conflict-affected settings
- ▶ In the **long term** by helping to address the root causes of armed violence and gender inequality²⁷

In addition to the arms control frameworks mentioned above, a number of other arms control and disarmament tools in the “toolbox” can be leveraged to mitigate both the long-term and immediate risk of CRSV before conflict, during conflict and in post-conflict settings. These measures include DDR, WAM, CVR programmes and arms embargoes.

²⁷ For more details on how the above mentioned treaties and instruments can contribute to CRSV prevention: Salama, *Addressing Weapons in Conflict-Related Sexual Violence*.

BOX 1.

United Nations peace operations in numbers

Established by the UN Security Council to help countries navigate the path from conflict to peace, UN peace operations are often on the front lines of UN efforts to respond to and prevent CRSV.

- ▶ **UN peacekeeping operations** are deployments of military, police and civilian personnel to maintain peace and security, often deployed in conflict and post-conflict areas
- ▶ **UN special political missions** are non-military missions focused on conflict prevention, mediation and peacebuilding

As of February 2025, there are 36 active peace operations mandated by the United Nations (UN) Security Council:

- ▶ 25 special political missions
- ▶ 11 peacekeeping operations

Of these:

- ▶ 14 are mandated to address arms control and disarmament issues
- ▶ 10 are explicitly mandated to address conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) or sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)²⁸

All 10 missions mandated to address CRSV/SGBV also have a mandate related to arms control and disarmament. These are listed in Figure 4. This overlap in relevant mandates provides a solid foundation for leveraging arms control and disarmament to prevent CRSV. However, UN Security Council mandates of UN peace operations have yet to make explicit links between these two mandate areas.

This integration is particularly important within the framework of the Women, Peace and Security agenda and for the work of the women's protection advisers, who are mandated by UN Security Council resolutions 1888 (2009) and 1889 (2009), to advance the implementation of these resolutions in mission contexts. Women's protection advisers, where deployed, support monitoring, analysis and reporting on sexual violence; facilitate dialogue with parties to conflict; coordinate comprehensive strategies to combat sexual violence; and mainstream sexual violence considerations into the policies, operations and advocacy of UN peace operations.

Mainstreaming CRSV concerns into peace operations requires a gender analysis of mission mandates, which would include understanding the gendered impacts of arms proliferation and militarization and ensuring that gender-responsive arms control and disarmament tools are effectively integrated into the CRSV prevention efforts of the mission.

²⁸ Even when the mandates of UN peace operations do not contain specific provisions on CRSV, they are expected to prevent and respond to CRSV based on their mandates on human rights, child protection, and the protection of civilians, women, peace and security, as well as the cross-cutting application of UN Security Council resolutions on CRSV. United Nations, *Handbook for United Nations Field Missions on Preventing and Responding to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence*. (New York: United Nations, 2020), [united-nationscrsv-handbook.pdf](#).



How Can we Avoid
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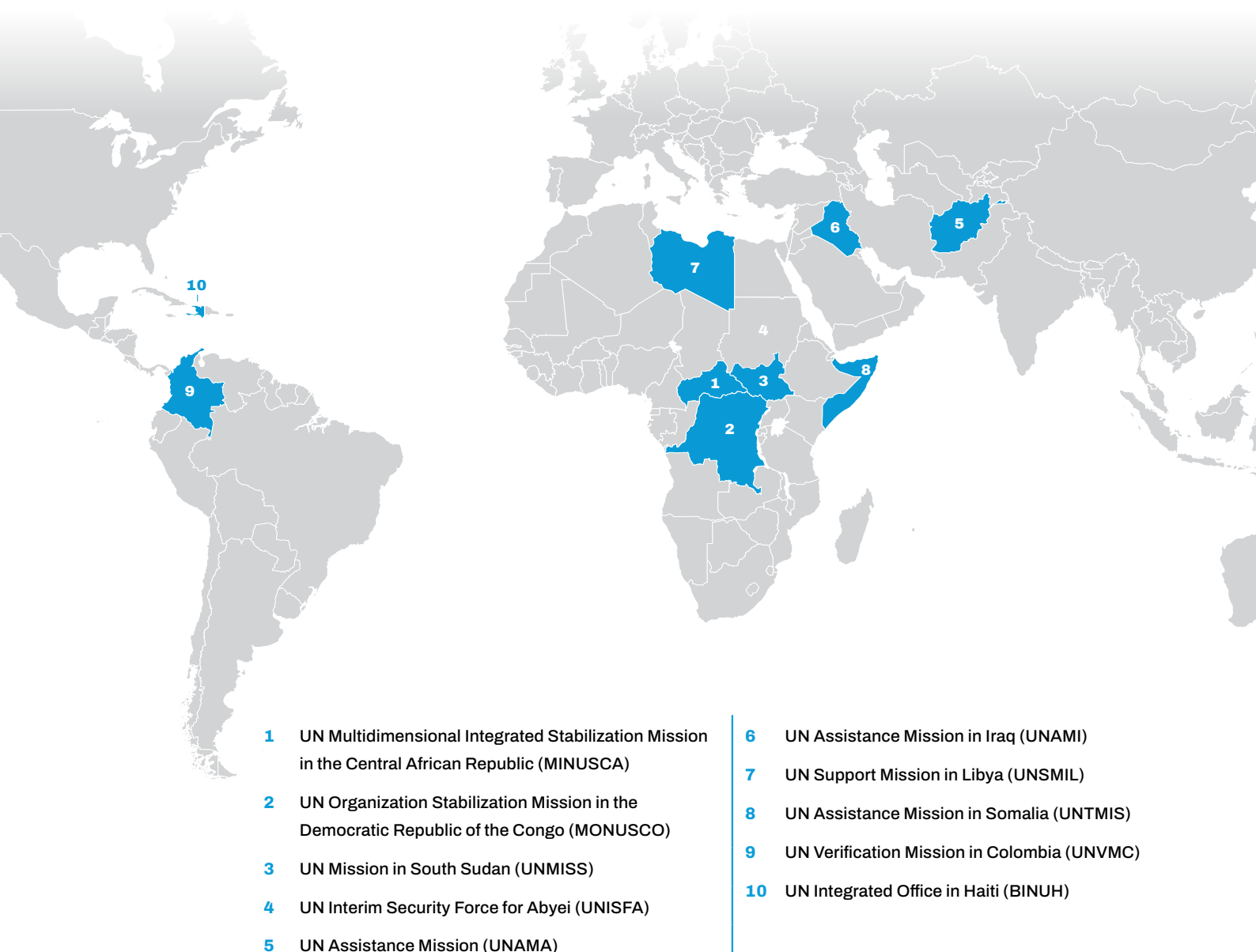
2. The role of UN peace operations in addressing CRSV

2.1. Overview of selected UN peace operations

To ground this research in empirical evidence, this report provides an in-depth analysis of selected UN peace operations. An overview of each of the missions discussed in this report follows, as well as information on the context in which they operate.

FIGURE 4.

UN peace operations with explicit CRSV/SGBV and arms control and disarmament provisions in their mandate



Central African Republic: MINUSCA

MINUSCA snapshot

YEAR OF ESTABLISHMENT
2014
LATEST UN SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION
S/RES/2759 (2024) extended MINUSCA's mandate until 15 November 2025.
MANDATE RELATED TO CRSV
S/RES/2759 (2024) requests MINUSCA to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Provide specific protection for women and children affected by armed conflict, including through the deployment of child protection advisers and WPAs▶ Monitor, help investigate and report specifically on violations and abuses committed against children as well as violations committed against women, including all forms of sexual violence in armed conflict, and to contribute to efforts to identify and prosecute perpetrators, and to prevent such violations and abuses▶ Support the implementation of the UN and the Government of the Central African Republic joint communiqué to prevent and respond to sexual violence in conflict and to take into account these specific concerns throughout the activities of all mission components, and to ensure, in cooperation with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, that risks of sexual violence in conflict are included in the mission's data collection, threat analysis and early warning system
MANDATE RELATED TO ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT
S/RES/2759 (2024) requests MINUSCA to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Continue to provide support to the Government of the Central African Republic in its efforts to safely, securely and effectively manage weapons and ammunition, including through the National Commission to Combat the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons and the implementation of the SALW national action plan, with the support of other regional and international partners▶ Support the Government of the Central African Republic in implementing an inclusive, gender-sensitive and progressive programme for DDR▶ Support the Government of the Central African Republic and relevant civil society organizations in developing and implementing CVR programmes, including gender-sensitive programmes, for members of armed groups, including those not eligible for participation in the national disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration programme
MANDATE RELATED TO SANCTIONS OR ARMS EMBARGO
S/RES/2745 (2024) lifted the arms embargo as of July 2024; however, other provisions were extended until 31 July 2025, as was the mandate of the Panel of Experts on CAR to analyse the illicit transnational supply and trafficking networks funding armed groups.
NUMBER OF CRSV CASES RECORDED BY MINUSCA (JANUARY 2024 TO DECEMBER 2024)
314 cases affecting 417 survivors/victims. ²⁹

²⁹ According to the UN presentation of the data, cases are incidents of CRSV but may involve one or more survivors or victims.

Since 2013, the Central African Republic has been in turmoil caused by a violent takeover of power by Séléka, a coalition of predominantly Muslim rebel groups from the north of the country. In response, anti-balaka coalitions of Christian fighters formed to launch violent attacks on ex-faction fighters and Muslim civilians, provoking a renewed conflict fuelled by a high proliferation of SALW that has killed and displaced thousands.³⁰ The conflict has resulted in thousands of victims and survivors of CRSV and SGBV.³¹ Women, men, girls and boys have all been victims of the sexual violence, which is often used as a deliberate tool of warfare.³² According to Insecurity Insight, all 17 cases of CRSV recorded by the organization between 2022 and 2024 in the Central African Republic involved a firearm.³³

The first report of the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic, published in July 2014, concluded that most of the weapons and ammunition in circulation at the start of the arms embargo came from the arsenals of the Central African Republic Armed Forces or stocks of weapons collected during previous DDR processes. The report also indicated that craft weapons were in widespread use: some groups produced their own handmade firearms and modified hunting ammunition in illegal arms manufacturing facilities.³⁴ Subsequent reports have described armed groups procuring military SALW and hunting weapons from arms traffickers in neighbouring states, as well as recruiting armed foreign fighters.³⁵

In 2013, the UN Security Council responded to the breakdown of law and order in the Central African Republic with an embargo on the supply of arms, military equipment and related assistance to non-state actors. It allowed the supply of arms to the Central African Republic security forces if notified in advance by the sanctions committee established by the resolution, but since July 2024 the notification requirements for the Central African Republic security forces have been lifted.³⁶

Since its establishment in 2014, MINUSCA has undertaken various activities to fulfil its mandate related to addressing and preventing CRSV. MINUSCA was an early adopter of female engagement teams, composed of women peacekeepers from the Zambian battalion; these units placed an emphasis on accessing and engaging with women. Improvements in MINUSCA's ability to engage with women, and potentially learn about experiences of CRSV, have frequently been attributed to these female engagement teams.³⁷ However, there is little concrete data on

³⁰ Center for Preventive Action, "Conflict in the Central African Republic", Global Conflict Tracker, 9 July 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violence-central-african-republic>.

³¹ Médecins Sans Frontières, *Invisible Wounds: MSF Findings on Sexual Violence in CAR*. (MSF, 2023), <https://www.msf.org/invisible-wounds-msf-findings-sexual-violence-car>.

³² Security Council, "Central African Republic", Report of the Secretary-General, S/2023/108, 16 February 2023, https://minusca.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unsg_report_on_car_-_february_2023.pdf.

³³ Insecurity Insight, "Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV) Data".

³⁴ A.E. Varisco, P.D. Wezeman and A. Kuimova, *Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons in Sub-Saharan Africa*. (Stockholm: SIPRI, 2022), https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2022-12/salw_ssa_2.pdf.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Security Council, S/RES/2745, 2024, [https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2745\(2024\)](https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2745(2024)).

³⁷ Center for Civilians in Conflict, *"We Have to Try to Break the Silence Somehow": Preventing Conflict-Related Sexual Violence through UN Peacekeeping*. (Washington, DC: CIVIC, 2023), <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/we-have-try-break-silence-somehow-preventing-conflict-related-sexual-violence-through-un-peacekeeping>.



whether female engagement teams are more or less effective than other troops at community engagement related to CRSV.³⁸

MINUSCA has also organized dialogues with three anti-balaka leaders to exchange views, ideas and practices in relation to women and girls and the notion of sexual violence. Subsequently, a sensitization session for anti-balaka leaders and 120 of their members was organized, with the anti-balaka leaders requesting further engagement for approximately 300 group members at the end of the session.³⁹ Following threats towards women opposed to or critical of the Government on social media, MINUSCA has established a procedure to report those who spread hate speech and incitement to violence on social media platforms.⁴⁰

³⁸ G. Baldwin, *From Female Engagement Teams to Engagement Platoons*. (New York: International Peace Institute, 2021).

³⁹ UN Peacekeeping, *Preventing and Responding to Conflict-related Sexual Violence*. (New York: UNDPO, 2022), https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/2022_crsv_annual_summaries_english-dpo.pdf.

⁴⁰ Security Council, S/2023/108.

BOX 2.

Monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements

United Nations (UN) Security Council resolution 1960 (2010) established the monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements (MARA) on conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), including rape in situations of armed conflict, post-conflict and other situations of concern. The purpose of MARA is to ensure the systematic gathering of timely, accurate, reliable and objective information on CRSV. Beyond reporting, the MARA mechanism “aims to promote appropriate and timely action to prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual violence including strategic advocacy and dialogue with the conflict parties [and] contribute to the development of comprehensive prevention strategies at country-level.”⁴¹ The information can also serve as the basis for the UN Security Council to impose sanctions and other targeted measures and for the establishment of protection mandates for UN field presences in situations on the agenda of the Security Council. In addition, the information on CRSV incidents is used in the UN Secretary-General’s annual report on CRSV. The mechanism aims to be an opportunity to improve information and access to services for survivors, including through referrals to those services, if possible. This improvement in access to services may, in turn, lead to more accurate information on incidents.⁴²

The UN has provided a provisional guidance note on MARA to offer some direction on how to establish a MARA working group at mission level; the group is supposed to compile information from different UN entities receiving or gathering information on CRSV incidents (including relevant members of the UN country team, such as the UN Population Fund and UN Women). The guidance note outlines that information should be gathered according to basic principles of human rights reporting and recommends that information-sharing protocols should be established with the view of protecting victims. It does not give specific information on what kind of data should be collected as part of incident information and only specifies as follows: “Information on incidents including details on parties to conflict (entities and/or individuals) that are credibly suspected of committing or being responsible for acts of rape or other forms of sexual violence” and “information on patterns and trends of sexual violence in situations of conflict, post-conflict and other situations of concern”.⁴³

Despite this, most UN peace operations have developed standard categories that record the date of the incident, the location, the gender of the survivor or victim, and the identity of or the armed groups associated with the perpetrators. There is not currently a standard category describing the weapons involved in an incident. In some cases, this information can be found in the description of the event, such as where missions note that survivors or victims were “threatened by a weapon”. However, without being a standardized category, the information on weapons cannot be analysed or included in UN reporting.

⁴¹ Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, “Monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements (MARA)”, <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/tools-for-action/mara/>.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, *Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1960 (2010) on Women, Peace and Security (Conflict-related Sexual Violence)*. Provisional Guidance Note (June 2011), <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/tools-for-action/mara/MARA-Provisional-Guidance-Note-2.pdf>.

Democratic Republic of the Congo: MONUSCO

MONUSCO snapshot

YEAR OF ESTABLISHMENT

2010

LATEST UN SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION

S/RES/2765 (2024) extended MONUSCO's mandate until 20 December 2025.

S/RES/2765 (2024) urges MONUSCO and the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to intensify joint planning for: (i) the smooth and responsible transfer of the mission responsibilities to the Congolese authorities, with a particular focus on the protection of civilians, and (ii) a transfer of knowledge and capacity-building, including on child protection, prevention of CRSV and the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

S/RES/1925 (2010) Requests MONUSCO to support the efforts of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to (i) ensure the protection of civilians from violations of international humanitarian law and human rights abuses, including all forms of SGBV, and (ii) implement its zero-tolerance policy with respect to violations committed by elements of the security forces.

S/RES/1925 (2010) also calls on the Government to build on its cooperation with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

MANDATE RELATED TO ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT

S/RES/2765 (2024) encourages the UN and international partners to increase their support to the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to enhance WAM.

S/RES/2717 (2023) requests MONUSCO to:

- ▶ Advise and support the Democratic Republic of the Congo authorities in the disposal of weapons and ammunition of disarmed Congolese and foreign combatants in compliance with relevant UN Security Council resolutions as well as applicable international arms control treaties
- ▶ Provide enhanced support, including via the Mine Action Service of the United Nations, to strengthen and consolidate the capacities of the Congolese security forces, including on WAM, counter-IED (improvised explosive device), explosive ordnance disposal, and basic investigation and forensics exploitation related to IEDs
- ▶ Provide support to the disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration processes and mechanisms while paying specific attention to the needs of women and children formerly associated with armed forces and groups

MANDATE RELATED TO SANCTIONS OR ARMS EMBARGO (IN FORCE UNTIL 1 JULY 2025)

S/RES/2765 (2024) requests MONUSCO to monitor the implementation of the arms embargo, in cooperation with the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and observe and report on flows of military personnel, arms or related materiel across the eastern border of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and to seize, collect, record and dispose of arms or related materiel brought into the Democratic Republic of the Congo in violation of the measures.

NUMBER OF CRSV CASES RECORDED BY MINUSCA (JANUARY 2024 TO DECEMBER 2024)

442 cases affecting 827 survivors/victims in North Kivu, South Kivu, Ituri, Tanganyika and Maniema.

Since the late 2000s, there has been continued fighting in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo in a series of protracted armed conflicts involving more than 120 different armed groups.⁴⁴ Several peace agreements with some of the groups over the years were meant to see operations of armed groups stop and fighters integrate with the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo but have failed to permanently end the groups' activities.⁴⁵ In 2022, one of the prominent rebel groups to emerge in the early 2000s, the 23 March Movement (M23) resurfaced after five years of inactivity and gained control of North Kivu. As of February 2025, the conflict has intensified and M23 has captured several key cities, leading to widespread instability and humanitarian crises.⁴⁶

Conflict violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has resulted in millions of people being internally displaced due to the constant threat of violence and atrocities, as well as extreme poverty, especially in the North Kivu, Ituri and South Kivu provinces. Widespread CRSV has also been pervasive during the ongoing conflicts, perpetrated by both security sector forces such as the Congolese National Police and members of non-state armed groups.⁴⁷ From May to August 2023, at least 46,000 gender-based violence cases were reported in North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri, and Médecins Sans Frontières reported upward of 90,000 cases over the entire year.⁴⁸ More than two-thirds of these reports were rape, and armed strangers perpetrated most of the rapes.⁴⁹

While data on arms involved in CRSV cases have been scarce, according to Insecurity Insight, of the 129 cases of CRSV recorded by the organization between 2022 and 2024 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 109 cases (84%) involved a firearm.⁵⁰

The proliferation of SALW remains a grave concern for the country. As of 2018, the Small Arms Survey estimated that there were around 946,000 firearms in civilian possession, nearly all of them unregistered.⁵¹ Given the renewed fighting in the country, this number has likely gone up in the years since.

During the focus group discussion held in December 2024, MONUSCO mission experts noted that in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo there is a high correlation between CRSV and the illicit circulation of SALW. Weapons are used to intimidate victims, rape them and threaten

⁴⁴ BBC News, "DR Congo country profile", <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13283212>.

⁴⁵ S. Lawal, "A guide to the decades-long conflict in DR Congo", Al Jazeera, 21 February 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/21/a-guide-to-the-decades-long-conflict-in-dr-congo>.

⁴⁶ S. Cyuzuzo and M. Jones, "DR Congo violence: Panic in Goma as M23 rebels advance", BBC News, 10 February 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-68255614>.

⁴⁷ Security Council, "Conflict-related Sexual Violence", Report of the Secretary-General, S/2023/413, 22 June 2023.

⁴⁸ D. Cone and A. Boru Halakhe, *Ensuring Women's Protection amid Rising Conflict in Eastern DRC*. (Washington, DC: Refugees International, 2024), <https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports-briefs/ensuring-womens-protection-amid-rising-conflict-in-eastern-drc/>.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Insecurity Insight, "Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV) Data".

⁵¹ B.-M. Seiwoh et al., "Improving security in the DRC throughout weapons and ammunition management", *Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction* 24, (2020): 31–34, <https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2916&context=cisr-journal>.



them with retaliation if they report these crimes. Armed groups also engage in the trafficking of women for sexual slavery, which under the UN definition is a form of CRSV.

The experts noted that women are often kidnapped when travelling from one village to the next to find food or to undertake other subsistence activities and are then trafficked to other countries; SALW are used to intimidate and threaten these victims. In addition to the armed conflict, there are conflicts at the pastoralist community level with cases of sexual violence, and women are most often the victims of this kind of violence. According to one of the experts, these communities are frequently armed either with automatic weapons or traditional weapons.

In response to the widespread CRSV, MONUSCO's mandate has a strong focus on the protection of civilians, including extensive language on CRSV and SGBV. The arms embargo, in place since 2013, restricting the direct or indirect supply of arms to non-governmental entities, has been renewed annually. This is part of a wider sanctions regime that includes sanctions on individuals and entities who have committed mass rapes and SGBV.⁵² Implementation of the arms embargo is monitored by MONUSCO's Arms and Natural Resources Advisory Cell (ANRAC).

At MONUSCO, the MARA mechanism collects disaggregated data on CRSV through investigations by the UN Joint Office on Human Rights, which include WPAs. The WPAs have also been involved in providing critical assistance to military, civilian and judicial authorities in the investigation, prosecution and trial of individuals charged with sexual violence crimes across the Democratic Republic of the Congo.⁵³

⁵² J. Russo and L. McGowan, *UN Tools for Addressing Conflict-related Sexual Violence: An Analysis of Listings and Sanctions Processes*. (New York: International Peace Institute, 2024), https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/UN_Tools-for-Addressing-CRSV.pdf.

⁵³ Security Council, S/2023/413.

Haiti: BINUH

BINUH snapshot

YEAR OF ESTABLISHMENT
2019
LATEST UN SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION
S/RES/2743 (2024) renewed BINUH's mandate until 15 July 2025.
MANDATE RELATED TO CRSV
S/RES/2743 (2024) decides that BINUH's human rights unit would include dedicated capacity to address SGBV, including the identification of women's protection advisers.
S/RES/2743 (2024) encourages BINUH to ensure that gender equality issues are addressed as a cross-cutting issue throughout its mandate, including by supporting: women's political participation and attention to SGBV, the implementation of Haiti's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, and the inclusion of women's civil society organizations in peacebuilding and humanitarian action.
S/RES/2476 (2019) requests BINUH to reinforce the capacity of the Haitian National Police, including through training on human rights and crowd control, to respond to gang violence and SGBV and to maintain public order.
MANDATE RELATED TO ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT
S/RES/2476 (2019) requests that BINUH include advisory units on gang violence, CVR and weapons and ammunition management.
MANDATE RELATED TO SANCTIONS OR ARMS EMBARGO (IN FORCE UNTIL 18 OCTOBER 2025)
S/RES/2743 (2024) strongly urges Member States to implement the territorial arms embargo without delay to prohibit the supply, sale or transfer of small arms, light weapons and ammunition to non-state actors engaged in or supporting gang violence, criminal activities or human rights abuses, such as SGBV, in Haiti.
S/RES/2653 (2022) establishes a sanctions regime, including an arms embargo.
NUMBER OF CRSV CASES RECORDED BY MINUSCA (JANUARY 2024 TO DECEMBER 2024)
537 cases affecting 531 survivors/victims.

The assassination of Haiti's President Jovenel Moïse, in 2021, exacerbated a national crisis and, since then, Haiti has been overrun by criminal gangs, who have access to key infrastructure such as ports and airports. Due to weak governance and corruption within the country, gangs have been able to expand their control; around half the country, including more than 80% of Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince, is under the control of armed criminal gangs.⁵⁴ In 2025, violence in Haiti escalated to alarming levels, with reports of thousands of deaths, kidnappings and incidents of sexual violence and the forced displacement of more than 1 million people.⁵⁵

Displaced women and girls who live in inadequate and precarious displacement sites have been among the people most vulnerable to sexual violence in Haiti.⁵⁶ SGBV has systematically been used by certain gangs as a way to expand their territory and instil fear in the local population. The UN has observed that this type of violence has been facilitated by ready access to military-grade weapons and ammunition.⁵⁷ The proliferation of illicit firearms as well as the proliferation of routes for illegal arms trafficking in Haiti has resulted in an influx of hundreds of thousands of illegal weapons in the country.⁵⁸

Between August 2024 and January 2025, BINUH recorded 319 incidents involving 333 survivors of sexual violence (294 women, 38 girls and one man). This represents an increase of 254 % from the previous quarter.⁵⁹ Using a different methodology, Insecurity Insight reported 78 cases of SGBV in Haiti between 2022 and 2024. Of those, 68 cases (87 %) involved a firearm.⁶⁰

Haiti is the only non-conflict context where the UN Security Council has established a special political mission with a CRSV mandate in response to the levels of SGBV committed by the armed gangs. To carry out this mandate, the mission includes a gender advisory unit and has recently appointed a WPA.

During the focus group discussion held in October 2024, BINUH experts noted that recording SGBV incidents, and weapon type in particular, is challenging because little is known about the modus operandi of the gangs and the types of weapons involved, and BINUH is based in the capital, Port-au-Prince, and has no access to the areas controlled by gangs, due to the high level of gang violence. In addition, victims are unlikely to report such incidents because of the

⁵⁴ V. Felbab-Brown, "Haiti in 2023: Political abyss and vicious gangs", Brookings, 3 February 2023, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/haiti-in-2023-political-abyss-and-vicious-gangs/>; International Rescue Committee, "Crisis in Haiti: Gang violence's vice grip amidst political turmoil", 29 January 2024, <https://www.rescue.org/en/article/crisis-haiti-gang-violences-vice-grip-amidst-political-turmoil>.

⁵⁵ UN news, "Haiti: spiralling gang violence has left more than one million displaced" 14 January 2025, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/01/1158976>.

⁵⁶ OHCHR, "Women and girls bear the brunt of crisis ravaging Haiti, say UN experts", 6 May 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/05/women-and-girls-bear-brunt-crisis-ravaging-haiti-say-un-experts>.

⁵⁷ Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, *Conflict-related Sexual Violence – Report of the United Nations Secretary-General*, S/2024/292. (2024), <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/SG-2023-annual-reportsFINAL.pdf>.

⁵⁸ UNODC, *Haiti's Criminal Markets: Mapping Trends in Firearms and Drug Trafficking*. (Vienna: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2023), https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/toc/Haiti_assessment_UNODC.pdf.

⁵⁹ BINUH, "Quarterly report on the human rights situation in Haiti" January-March 2025, https://binuh.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/quarterly_report_on_the_human_rights_situation_in_haiti_jan_-_march_2025.pdf.

⁶⁰ Insecurity Insight, "Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV) Data", accessed 14 February 2025.



International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, Port au Prince, Haiti, June 2018. Credit: MINUJUSTH / Leonora Baumann.

extreme threat of retaliation. In the past, retaliation has taken the form of killings by decapitations, which are circulated on social media to deter survivors from reporting.

In addition to reporting cases of SGBV through MARA, the mission is mandated to assist national authorities with WAM and DDR-CVR by advising the government and coordinating actors working on these issues in Haiti. As part of this mandate, BINUH supported the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean (UNLIREC) in providing virtual training for the Haitian National Police (HNP) aimed at strengthening their capacities to trace seized firearms and carry out investigations to identify the origin of the weapons, how they were used, and whether they are linked to other crimes – potentially including cases of SGBV where firearms were involved.

As part of resolution 2476 (2019), the UN Security Council also requests that “BINUH mainstream gender considerations as a cross-cutting issue through its mandate and assist the Government of Haiti in ensuring the full, meaningful, and effective participation and involvement and representation of women at all levels, and further reaffirms the importance of gender expertise and capacity strengthening in executing the mission mandate in a gender-responsive manner.”⁶¹

⁶¹ Security Council, S/RES/2476, 2019.

South Sudan: UNMISS

UNMISS snapshot

YEAR OF ESTABLISHMENT
2011
LATEST UN SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION
S/RES/2779 (2025) extended UNMISS's mandate until 30 April 2026.
MANDATE RELATED TO CRSV
<p>S/RES/2779 (2025) provides guidelines for UNMISS to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Ensure that risks of SGBV in conflict and post-conflict situations are included in the mission's data collection, threat analysis and early warning system▶ Report specifically and publicly on violations and abuses committed against women and children, including SGBV, and accelerate implementation of new mechanisms to monitor, analyse and report on CRSV and abuses against children▶ Combat impunity and promote accountability, including through investigation and prosecution of SGBV, including CRSV▶ Provide specific protection for women and children, including through the continued and consistent use and deployment of UNMISS's child protection advisers, WPAs, and uniformed and civilian gender advisers, and share best practices with relevant local stakeholders for the purpose of capacity-building and to further deter, prevent and respond to SGBV, including by actively intervening to protect civilians threatened by, and survivors of, sexual violence▶ Provide support for the relevant national and state-level authorities and civil society organizations in developing and implementing gender-responsive CVR programmes to help de-escalate intercommunal violence and complement community disarmament initiatives in cooperation and coordination with development partners and community representatives, with a particular focus on members of armed groups ineligible or unwilling to be integrated into the Necessary Unified Forces and on women and youth
MANDATE RELATED TO ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT
S/RES/1996 (2011) requests UNMISS to support the Government of South Sudan in developing and implementing a national DDR strategy, in cooperation with international partners, with particular attention given to the special needs of women and child combatants.
MANDATE RELATED TO SANCTIONS OR ARMS EMBARGO (IN FORCE UNTIL 31 MAY 2025)
S/RES/1996 (2011) requests UNMISS to observe and report on any flow of personnel, arms and related materiel across the border with Sudan and to assist the sanctions committee and its panel of experts, particularly in implementing and monitoring provisions related to the arms embargo.
NUMBER OF CRSV CASES RECORDED BY MINUSCA (JANUARY 2024 TO DECEMBER 2024)
229 incidents affecting 260 survivors/victims.

South Sudan, the world's newest country, gained independence from Sudan in 2011. However, two years later, South Sudan descended into civil war following a political struggle between President Salva Kiir (head of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement) and ousted Vice-President Riek Machar.⁶² In the years since the civil war, conflict between the government, opposing forces and their respective allied militias, as well as intercommunal violence in pockets of the country, has resulted in the death, injury and displacement of thousands of civilians.⁶³

The humanitarian crisis has been further exacerbated by the recent conflict in neighbouring Sudan, which has led to an inflow of refugees and returnees into South Sudan. The widespread nature of SGBV and CRSV against women and girls in South Sudan has long been identified as a feature of the armed conflict. In 2015, reports emerged that government-allied militia groups in South Sudan were “allowed to rape women in lieu of wages”, suggesting that CRSV was being actively encouraged through official policy.⁶⁴

CRSV has also been used to transform regional demographics as part of an ethnically based strategy.⁶⁵ In the report of the Commission of Human Rights in South Sudan on CRSV against women and girls in South Sudan, many South Sudanese women and girls told the Commission that they were threatened with being killed if they resisted being raped, with many rapes taking place at gunpoint.⁶⁶ Beating with objects, often with the butt of a rifle, were described as common and causing massive injuries, with many survivors showing the Commission the visible physical scars from their ordeals, in most cases multiple scars from assaults with a piece of wood and/or gun or other blunt object.⁶⁷

The widespread proliferation of SALW has fuelled both SGBV and CRSV in South Sudan; however it has proved difficult to estimate the number of SALW circulating in the country.⁶⁸ The sources of illicit weapons in the country are many. Some are recirculated weapons from the civil war with Sudan, and diversions of arms transfers into and within South Sudan are a significant source of weapons, notably through cross-border trafficking, with Sudan's immediate neighbours acting as the main conduits, and sometimes sponsors, of weapons supplies to all sides in the conflict.⁶⁹

⁶² Center for Preventive Action, “Instability in South Sudan”, Global Conflict Tracker, 21 March 2025, <https://www.cfr.org/index.php/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/civil-war-south-sudan>.

⁶³ Human Rights Watch, “South Sudan: Events of 2023”, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/south-sudan>.

⁶⁴ M. Goetz and C. Priestley, *South Sudan Study on the Status of an Opportunities for Reparations for Survivors of Conflict-related Sexual Violence*. (Rights for Peace, Dialogue & Research Institute, Centre for Inclusive Governance, Peace and Justice, Global Survivors Fund, and Transitional Justice Working Group, 2022), https://www.globalsurvivorsfund.org/fileadmin/uploads/gsf/Documents/Resources/Global_Reparation_Studies/GSFReportSouthSudan_ENG_FINAL__1_.pdf.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Human Rights Council, “Conflict-related sexual violence against women and girls in South Sudan”, A/HRC/49/CRP.4, 21 March 2022, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/A_HRC_49_CRP_4.pdf.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ In a 2017 survey by the UN Development Programme, 15% of households in surveyed areas had at least one firearm and estimated it between 1.9-3.2 million SALW are in circulation in South Sudan.

⁶⁹ Saferworld, *Challenges to Small Arms and Light Weapons Control in South Sudan*. (Saferworld, 2022), <https://www.saferworld-global.org/resources/publications/1412-challenges-to-small-arms-and-light-weapons-control-in-south-sudan>.

In 2024, UNMISS documented 229 verified cases of CRSV involving 260 survivors nationwide. Of the survivors, 150 were women and 101 were girls. The mission also documented cases of CRSV committed against seven men and two boys. Using a different methodology, Insecurity Insight, recorded 52 cases of CRSV between 2022 and 2024 in South Sudan, out of which 42 cases (81%) involved a firearm.⁷⁰

UNMISS experts from the focus group discussion held in February 2025 noted that over the last 12 to 14 months, civil servants and military personnel had not been paid their salaries. There had been an increase in the number of soldiers who had been arrested for selling their weapons. This had resulted in easier access to weapons by civilians and increased the risk of CRSV. In some instances, soldiers had exploited weak security measures to steal weapons from the armoury to sell, and in other instances they had sold their own firearms.

UNMISS has documented many CRSV cases where women have been held at gunpoint or asked to choose at gunpoint whether to be raped or join the armed group. In the focus group discussions, the UNMISS experts mentioned that based on their investigations, the main source of weapons in the states of North Bahr El-Ghazal, Upper Nile and Jonglei is Sudan and in Western Equatoria and Central Equatoria, weapons are coming from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The conflict in Sudan has further exacerbated the situation, not only in weapons flow but also, as documented by UNMISS, in instances of defected Sudanese soldiers who have perpetrated CRSV after crossing the border.

In UNMISS, CRSV early warning indicators have been integrated into the mission's Early Warning and Early Response Working Group, enhancing prevention and protection. Proactive patrolling, including escorting women and girls leaving protection sites to fetch wood and water, has deterred and in some cases prevented attacks.⁷¹

Since 2024, UNMISS has developed specifically customized tactical operations known as "patrols to combat CRSV". These patrols have been deployed in response to early warning indicators of CRSV hotspots and include more women peacekeepers than usual; the patrols engage the community, with a focus on CRSV prevention. Furthermore, UNMISS supports efforts to promote protection, rule of law and accountability through the rapid deployment of temporary operating bases and support to mobile courts and by delivering specialized training on the prevention of SGBV.⁷²

⁷⁰ Insecurity Insight, "Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV) Data".

⁷¹ UN Peacekeeping, "Conflict-related sexual violence", <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/conflict-related-sexual-violence>.

⁷² UNMISS, "Press Release: Amidst a decrease in violence against civilians in South Sudan, a surge in conflict-related sexual violence", 10 May 2022, <https://unmiss.unmissions.org/press-release-amidst-decrease-violence-against-civilians-south-sudan-surge-conflict-related-sexual>.



International Women's Day celebration in Dungu, Bas-Uélé Province, Democratic Republic of the Congo, March 2016. Credit: MONUSCO / Lassana Dabo

3. Operationalizing the Arms Control and Disarmament Toolbox for CRSV and SGBV prevention in UN peace operations

In his 2024 annual report on CRSV, the UN Secretary-General recognized that “Gender-responsive and inclusive disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, weapons management and community violence reduction programmes hold the potential to address sexual violence.”⁷³ The Secretary-General also highlighted the importance of cross-leveraging these measures with arms embargoes to stem the proliferation of weapons, which can directly and indirectly facilitate CRSV.

The following sections look at how these measures are currently being implemented and discuss entry points and opportunities for UN peace operations to integrate these measures with CRSV and SGBV prevention efforts.

3.1. Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration

DDR is defined by the Integrated DDR Standards (IDDRS) as a process that contributes to security and stability in a post-conflict recovery context by “removing weapons from the hands of combatants, taking the combatants out of military structures and helping them to integrate

⁷³ Security Council, “Conflict-related sexual violence”, Report of the Secretary-General, S/2024/92, 4 April 2024, <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/report/report-of-the-secretary-general-on-conflict-related-sexual-violence/202404-SG-annual-report-on-CRSV-EN.pdf>.

socially and economically into society” by finding civilian livelihoods.⁷⁴ Integrated DDR is part of the UN system’s multidimensional approach that contributes to the entire peace continuum, from prevention, conflict resolution and peacekeeping, to peacebuilding and development.

DDR processes supported by UN peace operations in post-conflict contexts have often resulted in the collection and destruction of large amounts of arms and ammunition.⁷⁵ These processes have likely supported the prevention of CRSV by reducing the risk of weapons being recirculated and finding their way into the hands of CRSV perpetrators.

DDR has evolved from purely being a post-conflict tool into a more integrated and flexible process that includes tools such as CVR (discussed in Section 3.3), Transitional WAM (discussed in Section 3.2) and reintegration support, which can be used piecemeal and in contexts where the preconditions for a DDR programme are not met, including during a conflict.⁷⁶

UN peace operations have been supporting national DDR processes as part of their mandate to contribute to security and stability. Increasingly, peace operations have been explicitly mandated to integrate gender considerations by paying specific attention to the needs of women formerly associated with armed forces as well as ensuring women’s participation in DDR.⁷⁷ The IDDRS, which is the main operational guidance for UN DDR practitioners, includes a separate module on women, gender and DDR, providing recommendations regarding the inclusion of women who are directly or indirectly involved in armed groups and on the mitigation of risks related to sexual violence. For the disarmament components, the module acknowledges that involving non-governmental organizations and women community leaders in weapon collection and destruction as part of DDR programmes could help raise awareness of weapon spread and misuse and the implications of this in facilitating CRSV.⁷⁸

Despite clear mandates and detailed guidance for gender-responsive DDR, women’s participation both in planning and as participants in DDR programmes has remained low.⁷⁹ Women often face stigma for being associated with an armed group and are marginalized in the processes of negotiating a DDR agreement. Recent research by the Peace Research Institute Oslo’s DISARM project shows that of the 128 peace agreements established between 1975 and 2021 that contained at least one DDR component, only 11 DDR provisions (8.5%) referenced women. Even when included, DDR provisions for women combatants were often brief and generic, typically offering them only “special attention” as a vulnerable group.

⁷⁴ Inter-Agency Working Group on DDR, “Introduction to the IDDRS”, www.unddr.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/IDDRS-1.10-Introduction-To-The-IDDRS.pdf, p. 2.

⁷⁵ For example, following the end of the civil war in Liberia, the UN Mission in Liberia implemented a comprehensive DDR programme. This programme successfully disarmed over 100,000 combatants and collected and destroyed 27,000 weapons and 6.5 million rounds of ammunition. Source: Small Arms Survey, “Talking about disarmament”, in *Small Arms Survey 2003: Development Denied*, <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/resources/Small-Arms-Survey-2003-Chapter-09-EN.pdf>.

⁷⁶ Inter-Agency Working Group on DDR, “Introduction to the IDDRS”.

⁷⁷ Security Council, S/RES/2612, 2021; Security Council, S/RES/2709, 2023; Security Council, S/RES/1996, 2011.

⁷⁸ Inter-Agency Working Group on DDR, IDDRS module 2.30 on the UN approach to DDR, https://www.unddr.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/IDDRS-2.10-The-UN-Approach-to-DDR_19-Nov-2019.pdf.

⁷⁹ J. Palik and H. Salama, “Challenging the invisibility of women combatants: five steps towards gender-responsive DDR”, IPI Global Observatory, 21 October 2024, <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2024/10/challenging-the-invisibility-of-women-combatants-five-steps-towards-gender-responsive-ddr/>.

While women combatants may have been trained to handle and use weapons in battle, they often lack a weapon, preventing them from accessing reintegration benefits due to one weapon–one combatant eligibility criteria, which are set during the negotiation and planning of DDR processes, in which women are underrepresented.⁸⁰

Historically, there have been examples of successful DDR process supported by UN missions, most notably following the peace agreement in Colombia. Hailed as “one of the most successful weapon laydowns in history”, the DDR process supported by the UN Verification Mission in Colombia was also considered to be one of the most gender-sensitive processes, at least on paper: the peace agreement itself contained over 100 gender provisions.⁸¹ However, researchers have noted that only a few of these provisions were later implemented and that there were no clear mechanisms for the participation of women after demobilization.⁸²

3.1.1. DDR and CRSV prevention: views from practitioners

Across all focus group discussions, experts agreed that DDR processes that are successful in disarming and demobilizing armed groups are critical to prevent CRSV. Conversely partial disarmament may lead to the risk of re-occurrence of CRSV.

Experts from MONUSCO noted that in places like the province of Ituri, voluntary disarmament supported by MONUSCO has not been effective. Due to ongoing conflict, armed groups did not completely disarm; for example, some combatants were receiving support by handing over weapons while keeping other weapons hidden. Therefore, the criteria for eligibility for this programme (e.g. one weapon–one combatant) were not effective in disarming the groups.

Some combatants, despite gaining access to reintegration benefits including cash payments, entered the programme again using hidden weapons and different names, creating additional challenges to the programme. In addition, some armed groups that were part of the original peace agreement in the Democratic Republic of the Congo fractured off and formed groups that rearmed and violated the peace agreement.

The UNMISS focus group discussion highlighted that DDR efforts in South Sudan have been incomplete because of a lack of political consensus and sufficient resources. While UNMISS is mandated to support the national authorities in facilitating the demobilization and social–economic reintegration of ex-combatants, the authorities have not been able to do so because of insufficient funding for the national DDR programme.

Experts also noted that in the South Sudanese context, the legitimacy of the force that would be conducting disarmament and other arms control activities is important. UNMISS continues to face challenges in relation to working with different armed authorities that have varying levels of legitimacy. In fact, implementing arms control and disarmament measures such as DDR and

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, “Delivering on Colombia’s peace agreement: women call for action”, 24 July 2019, <http://www.peacewomen.org/e-news/delivering-colombia%E2%80%99s-peace-agreement-women-call-action>.

⁸² J.A. Gutiérrez and E. Murphy, “The unspoken red-line in Colombia: gender reordering of women ex-combatants and the transformative peace agenda”, *Cooperation and Conflict* 58, 2 (2022): 211–230.

WAM in South Sudan has proven to be difficult because of the absence of political consensus at the national level.

DDR processes which lack an informed gender perspective can inadvertently reproduce gender-based violence and lead to both women and men rejoining armed groups.⁸³ According to UNMISS experts, there is little understanding of the specific needs and vulnerabilities of women combatants and their experiences of potentially being both victims and perpetrators of sexual violence. Moreover, the ability to address both masculine and feminine vulnerabilities in relation to weapons possession and the loss of status that comes with the disarmament process is also a challenge.

An example of this complex situation is the reintegration of women ex-combatants in Colombia, which has tended to pressure women to conform to traditional gender roles, failing to address that in some cases disarmament may threaten the power or respect they felt their weapon gave them while they were combatants, just as is often the case for men combatants.⁸⁴

The National Commission on DDR, which has been leading the DDR process for all armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has started to make some efforts to respond to the specific needs of women, girls, men and boys associated with armed groups. For example, the Commission has several gender focal points in its field offices and has been raising awareness about the risk of sexual violence in communication campaigns.

During the focus group discussion, the Commission highlighted that, given that disarmament is led by the Congolese military (and not the Commission), the gender focal points are not involved in the planning and coordination of these campaigns, resulting in a minimal number of women being included in disarmament programmes. Discussion with National Commission staff revealed that they have a narrow view of CRSV, considering the victims as being almost exclusively women and the perpetrators as exclusively men. Although this understanding is aligned with available statistics, it may perpetuate the stigmatization of men victims and cause their specific needs to be overlooked when it comes to accessing health or humanitarian services.⁸⁵

CRSV prevention experts from all focus group discussions noted that there is a need to meaningfully integrate women in all steps and components of DDR. In relation to the disarmament component, experts noted that communications and advocacy done in advance of disarmament campaigns should be gender sensitive and mitigate the risk of gender identities being linked with weapons possession, as is also mentioned in the IDDRS.⁸⁶

⁸³ Ángela Aguirre, Ángela Gómez, Juanita Vélez, Sofia Rivas, and Siobhan O'Neil, *Sexual Violence and the Struggle for Justice: The Involvement of Indigenous Nasa Survivors in Armed Groups in Northern Cauca*. (UNIDIR, 2024), www.unidir.org/publication/sexual-violence-and-the-struggle-for-justice-the-involvement-of-indigenous-nasa-survivors-in-armed-groups-in-northern-cauca/.

⁸⁴ J.A. Gutiérrez and E. Murphy, "The unspoken red-line in Colombia: gender reordering of women ex-combatants and the transformative peace agenda", *Cooperation and Conflict* 58, 2 (2022): 211–230.

⁸⁵ International Committee of the Red Cross, *"That Never Happens Here": Sexual and Gender-Based Violence against Men, Boys, LGBTIQ+ People*. (ICRC, 2022), www.icrc.org/en/document/sexual-gender-violence-against-men-boys-lgbtq.

⁸⁶ Inter-Agency Working Group on DDR, "Women, Gender and IDDRS", <https://www.unddr.org/modules/IDDRS-5.10-Women-Gender-and-DDR.pdf>.

In addition to including women's organizations and gender focal points from national stakeholders such as the military or national DDR commissions in DDR programmes, advocacy messages could be crafted to raise awareness during the weapons collection and destruction campaigns of the linked risk of CRSV and firearms. These messages should target both men and women. Experts from the discussion groups also noted that DDR processes should move past the idea of supporting women only because they can disarm men and instead see women as actors in their own right.

Experts agreed that increasing women's participation in DDR, and in peace agreements more generally, is critical for supporting the long-term prevention of CRSV by changing gender norms and promoting gender equality. The discussion groups revealed that a context-sensitive approach to gender-responsive DDR will be required to adequately prevent CRSV; such an approach will particularly need to be employed by national entities, as they are in the lead in implementing DDR processes, with UN peace operations often having an advisory or support role only. This approach could be realized by increasing capacity-building and training among national authorities on gender-responsive DDR, including designing training based on the "Women, gender and DDR" module of the IDDRS.

3.2. Weapons and ammunition management

WAM is defined as oversight of, accountability for and governance of arms and ammunition throughout their life cycle, from manufacture to disposal, including destruction.⁸⁷ By improving stockpile management, preventing diversion and securing weapons allocated to military and security forces, WAM can reduce the risk of weapons being used to commit CRSV directly or to perpetuate instability that enables such violence indirectly.

WAM is an arms control tool that can be leveraged during conflict settings and in post-conflict settings to support both short-term and long-term prevention of CRSV.⁸⁸ A gender-responsive approach to WAM also address national legal frameworks and policies such as licensing of civilian firearms, policies and regulations about weapons used by the security sector to support the long-term structural prevention of CRSV and prevent the reoccurrence of CRSV in post-conflict settings.⁸⁹

Gender-responsive WAM examines how the diversion, theft and proliferation of weapons impact women, men, boys and girls differently across all phases of the weapons and ammunition life cycle. This requires integrating gender expertise and collecting sex- and age-disaggregated data to provide a better understanding of the dynamics of weapon-related violence, including in incidents of CRSV. Inclusive participation of both men and women in WAM activities is also part of gender mainstreaming.

⁸⁷ Definition based on H. Giezendanner and H. Shiotani, *A Reference Methodology for National Weapons and Ammunition Management Baseline Assessments*. (Geneva: UNIDIR, 2021), www.unidir.org/publication/reference-methodology-national-weapons-and-ammunition-management-baseline-assessments, p. 7.

⁸⁸ Security Council, S/2024/92.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

As WAM is a traditionally men-dominated field, targeted efforts should be made to include women in all phases of the management life cycle in both technical and non-technical roles. An example role could involve supporting community engagement while collecting weapons and raising awareness about the risk of firearms and CRSV in the community. In addition to ensuring the participation of both men and women, it may be relevant to ensure that WAM is being carried out by residents of the country where it is being implemented and to ensure inclusive representation of ethnic groups. This is because people with local knowledge and local languages skills may be better able to facilitate access in areas that otherwise would not be accessible due to security concerns.⁹⁰

WAM can be done in conjunction with a formal DDR process or when the preconditions for a DDR process are not in place. In the latter case, WAM activities can be implemented as part of a flexible approach referred to as Transitional WAM (TWAM). TWAM activities can be implemented during ongoing conflict, to support security and stabilization objectives.

UN peace operations are increasingly mandated to support WAM as part of integrated DDR processes in host countries, encompassing activities such as providing technical advice, building institutional capacity and directly implementing processes for the tracing, record-keeping, disposal and destruction of weapons and ammunition.⁹¹ In most cases, these activities are undertaken in collaboration with the military contingent of UNMAS, and a DDR unit team in the mission.

Where WAM is implemented as part of a DDR processes, the mission develops clear standard operating procedures (SOPs) and support plan for undertaking activities in coordinated manner. Currently, gender-responsive approaches to WAM are not specified in the mandates of any UN peace operations. However, recent mandates of BINUH and MONUSCO, for example, do include language on gender considerations as a cross-cutting issue, providing a good entry point to enhance links between CRSV prevention and WAM.⁹²

3.2.1. Gender-responsive WAM: The case of MONUSCO

WAM plays an important role in preventing weapons diversion, which can fuel CRSV and other human rights violations. Although WAM practitioners in peace operations have begun to integrate gender perspectives into their work, awareness among CRSV practitioners, such as WPAs, about WAM and its potential to be leveraged as a tool for CRSV prevention is low.

MONUSCO is mandated to “advise and support the DRC authorities in the disposal of weapons and ammunitions of disarmed Congolese and foreign combatants in compliance with relevant

⁹⁰ H. Salama and E. Bjertén-Günther, *Women Managing Weapons: Perspectives for Increasing Women's Participation in Weapons and Ammunition Management*. (Geneva: UNIDIR, 2021), <https://unidir.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Women-Managing-Weapons-UNIDIR.pdf>.

⁹¹ UN Office for Disarmament Affairs, “Aide-Memoire: Options for reflecting weapons and ammunition management in decisions of the Security Council”, October 2018, <https://disarmament.unoda.org/publications/aide-memoire/>.

⁹² Security Council, “United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti”, Report of the Secretary-General, S/2025/28, 13 January 2025; Security Council, S/RES/2765, 2024.

Security Council resolutions as well as applicable international arms control treaties”⁹³ and has worked to integrate gender considerations into its WAM activities in partnership with national authorities.

An example of this work is the support MONUSCO has provided the national authorities in developing objectives related to the gender mainstreaming of small arms control in the national action plan for the control of SALW.⁹⁴ The national action plan emphasizes the critical role of women in arms control, including for mediation, conflict resolution and peace consolidation, in the DRC. It also references international and political normative frameworks, such as UN Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, as well as the New Agenda for Peace of the Secretary-General.⁹⁵

At MONUSCO, WAM activities are implemented in partnership with UNMAS, which is embedded in the mission. In relation to the national action plan on SALW, UNMAS coordinated the establishment of a monitoring tool for the plan’s implementation, integrating gender dimensions, which will be validated by the National Commission on Small Arms and Light Weapons. In addition to this, UNMAS provides training to the national defence and security forces on WAM, incorporating modules on human rights abuses by state actors (delivered jointly with the MONUSCO Joint Human Rights Office) and on the proper use of weapons in law enforcement. Before receiving this training, all staff from the national defence forces undergo a human rights due diligence process, where they are screened for prior misconduct or allegations of human rights abuses, including SGBV.⁹⁶

Experts from MONUSCO agreed that better coordination and exchange of information between the WPA team and those implementing WAM activities in the mission, in this case UNMAS, could be mutually beneficial: It could support the WPAs in identifying CRSV trends and patterns and the modus operandi of armed groups for accountability purposes, and it could strengthen the work of UNMAS in supporting national authorities with gender-sensitive assessments of the national legal, regulatory and policy frameworks governing weapons (e.g. its support to the national action plan on SALW).⁹⁷

MONUSCO experts identified that including UNMAS in the MARA working group and the working groups regular meetings has facilitated such coordination. The experts also highlighted that capacity-building and training on gender analysis and the integration of CRSV awareness topics into UNMAS training programmes on WAM, facilitated by the Joint Human Rights Office, was also needed. A gender focal point has been established within UNMAS precisely to increase capacity on this issue.

⁹³ Security Council, S/RES/2717, 2023.

⁹⁴ MONUSCO, “DRC validates its national action plan for the control of small arms and light weapons”, 17 November 2022, <http://monusco.unmissions.org/en/drc-validates-its-national-action-plan-control-small-arms-and-light-weapons>.

⁹⁵ C. Watson, *Meaningful Partners*. (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2024), [SAS-BP-2024-WPS-EN.pdf](#).

⁹⁶ Mine Action Service, submission on the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the 2025 Secretary-General’s report on CRSV, emailed to author on 18 February 2025.

⁹⁷ MONUSCO, “DRC validates its national action plan”.

The experts agreed that better data collection and analysis linking CRSV and SGBV incidents to weapons is needed, particularly accurate recording of weapon specifics, including markings, model, calibre, serial number and origin, as well as details about the perpetrator. In addition to providing UNMAS and national authorities with valuable evidence on the role of SALW in enabling CRSV, this kind of documentation facilitates tracing efforts, which can identify if a weapon involved in a CRSV incident has come from a stockpile intended for national security forces. It may also highlight gaps in WAM and point to the need for stronger controls on physical security and stockpile management, among other areas.

3.3. Community violence reduction

Over the past decade, the mandates of UN Peace Operations have increasingly included references to CVR as part of an integrated DDR process.⁹⁸ CVR allows peace operations to conduct a wide range of activities, including community dialogue, provision of services (e.g. education or health) and livelihood activities, to mobilize the conflict-affected community towards mitigating local conflict and preventing recruitment into armed groups when preconditions for a formal DDR process are absent. The idea is to increase the resilience of these communities and increase their capacity to absorb ex-combatants.

CVR was also highlighted by the UN Secretary-General as critical tool for prevention of CRSV. It is considered a DDR-related tool because it can be implemented as an alternative to or in parallel with DDR. This is because CVR does not only target ex-combatants or weapon bearers; it also engages directly with members of the violence-affected communities. CVR is useful entry point for the prevention of CRSV and SGBV because it can address the underlying and root causes of this type of violence, including harmful gender norms, especially because most programmes seek to address the risk of recruitment of young people into armed groups.⁹⁹

Most mission experts agreed that CVR has the potential to prevent CRSV and its reoccurrence in conflict-affected communities; however, this has yet to be an explicit objective of current CVR programmes. Lack of capacity and funding were identified as challenges to the development of programmes that specifically address the gender norms that shape weapons use and misuse in the community, including issues such as norms that project an expectation that men and boys engage in conflict and violence. Experts in some focus groups, for example UNMISS, saw that the scale of the CVR programmes resulting in a relatively small number of beneficiaries made it difficult to assess the impact this was having on reducing conflict or CRSV.

3.3.1. CVR as a prevention tool: Experiences from UNMISS in South Sudan

UNMISS has piloted small-scale CVR projects (benefiting between 100 and 400 people per project) to try to minimize the risk of ex-combatants rejoining armed groups because of delays

⁹⁸ General Assembly, “Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration”, Report of the Secretary-General, A/77/610, 29 November 2022, <https://www.unddr.org/sg-report-on-ddr/>.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

in the national DDR programme.¹⁰⁰ These projects included working with communities to foster a conflict resolution mechanism, as well as to provide vocational training, mental health and psychosocial support, social cohesion activities, sports activities and community services to all members of the community. UNMISS CVR initiatives have actively tried to ensure that women also benefit from these initiatives, and on average women have constituted 40% of their participants.¹⁰¹

Some CVR projects had a focus on preventing gender-based violence and promoting gender equality, though this aspect was the focus of community or civil society organization (CSO) partners. Experts from the discussion group noted that, adequately funded, CVR projects could be scaled up and have a more nuanced approach to CRSV and SGBV by, for example, by addressing gendered norms around violence using a culturally sensitive approach.

In terms of directly addressing the risk of weapons held by civilians and the reoccurrence of CRSV and SGBV, experts from the focus group discussion said that this has been challenging, particularly as integrating any arms control and disarmament component into CVR initiatives has been difficult as communities have been reluctant to undergo voluntary civilian disarmament. Experts noted that in parallel to CVR programmes focused on conflict resolution and livelihood activities, it would be important to support WAM at a national level not only by providing assistance to national authorities on physical security and stockpile management, marking and record-keeping, and other aspects of WAM but also by supporting nationwide communication campaigns on the dangers of small arms and their gendered impacts, including CRSV and SGBV.

In fact, it was highlighted that consultations are under way for the new UN integrated security sector reform, DDR, CVR and WAM strategy for UNMISS, which would support national stakeholders to address the illicit proliferation and trafficking of SALW. The UNMISS Gender Section, the UNMISS Senior Women's Protection Adviser, the UNMISS Force Gender Adviser, the UN Police Force Gender Adviser, the UNMISS Corrections Gender Adviser, the UN Development Programme, and UN Women have provided contributions to ensure that gender-responsive measures targeted at CRSV prevention are included in this new strategy.

3.4. Arms embargo implementation and monitoring as part of UN sanctions regimes

Sanctions,¹⁰² including arms embargoes, have been part of UN efforts to address CRSV since the first WPS resolution dedicated to sexual violence in conflict (Security Council resolution

¹⁰⁰ UNMISS, internal factsheet on CVR, emailed to author, 26 February 2025.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, the UN Security Council can take measures to maintain or restore international peace and security, including the use of sanctions. UN sanctions can encompass a broad range of enforcement options that do not involve the use of armed force. Targeted sanctions, unlike blanket sanctions (which affect an entire country's economy and population), apply to specific individuals, entities or activities responsible for fuelling conflict, violating human rights or undermining peace processes. They can include measures such as arms embargoes, travel bans, and financial or commodity restrictions.

1820 adopted in 2008). Since then, several WPS resolutions¹⁰³ have noted that sanctions, without specifying arms embargoes, can be imposed on parties in armed conflict to protect women and girls from sexual violence.

In general, arms embargoes are linked to wider sanctions regimes in which countries, entities or specific individuals are designated for violating international humanitarian law and international human rights law, including SGBV. In fact, in his most recent report on CRSV, the UN Secretary-General highlighted the importance of cross-leveraging arms embargoes with other tools for CRSV prevention.¹⁰⁴

The UN Security Council imposes sanctions, which often include arms embargoes, as a non-military tool to pressure governments, entities or individuals to comply with international norms. These sanctions are aimed at preventing conflict from escalating by cutting off warring parties from access to weapons, finances or resources that could be used for violence. In some cases, they can act as a deterrent for states, groups or individuals from engaging in activities that threaten peace, such as violating international law, supporting terrorism or engaging in human rights abuses, including SGBV.

The SGBV criterion in the context of UN sanctions regimes refers to the inclusion of acts of SGBV as a basis for imposing targeted sanctions on individuals or armed groups during a conflict. The aim is both punitive, to signal that SGBV will not be tolerated, as well as preventive, as it can prevent known perpetrators from accessing funding, resources, and weapons and ammunition that could facilitate CRSV.¹⁰⁵

To date, the SGBV criterion has been used in seven sanctions regimes: in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, Libya, al-Shabaab (Somalia), South Sudan, and Yemen.¹⁰⁶ All these sanctions regimes include arms embargoes that prohibit the supply or transfer of arms, ammunition and related materiel to specific areas or actors, whether governmental forces, non-governmental armed forces or both.

While the use of the SGBV criterion is an improvement in making sanctions and arms embargoes more targeted to addressing gender-related crimes, this criterion is seldomly used. A 2024 report from the International Peace Institute notes that of the 614 individuals and 138 entities sanctioned by the UN, only 25 individuals and 2 entities have been designated for sanctions due to SGBV.¹⁰⁷

Decisions over who to designate for sanctions, including under the SGBV criterion, are based on multiple factors. In theory, the decisions should be based on evidence from the

¹⁰³ Security Council, S/RES/1820, 2008; Security Council, S/RES/1888, 2009; Security Council, S/RES/1960, 2010; Security Council, S/RES/2106, 2013; Security Council, S/RES/2242, 2015; Security Council, S/RES/2331, 2016; Security Council, S/RES/2467, 2019.

¹⁰⁴ Security Council, “Conflict-related Sexual Violence”, forthcoming (2025).

¹⁰⁵ S. Huvé, *The Use of UN Sanctions to Address Conflict-Related Sexual Violence*. (Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, 2018), <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Use-of-UN-Sanctions-to-Address-Conflict-related-Sexual-Violence.pdf>.

¹⁰⁶ Russo and McGowan, *UN Tools for Addressing Conflict-related Sexual Violence*, p. 8.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

UN Secretary-General reports, from UN human rights reporting, and from information from UN peace operations, but in practice they are more often based on a combination of factors, including interests of UN Security Council members.¹⁰⁸

3.4.1. The Arms and Natural Resources Advisory Cell in MONUSCO

In all mission settings with an arms embargo, data on weapons used in CRSV incidents could help to identify violations of the arms embargo and inform the UN Security Council sanctions committee and its group of experts about the monitoring and enforcement of compliance with the embargo. Evidence of recurring arms diversions could inform updates to the embargo's scope or the imposition of stricter controls on arms transfers and WAM benchmarks for the host government. Such evidence could also support the designation of additional individuals and entities under the sanctions regime.¹⁰⁹ However, this is not consistently done.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, for example, the UN Security Council established an arms embargo in 2003 in response to the continued violence in Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu and the illegal exploitation of natural resources. The embargo, which restricts the direct or indirect supply of arms to non-governmental entities, has since been renewed annually. Until 2022, arms shipments to the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo required notification to the sanctions committee.¹¹⁰ In addition to the arms embargo on the government, two armed groups and one individual from the Democratic Republic of the Congo are under UN sanctions for committing serious human rights violations, including sexual violence.¹¹¹

In relation to the arms embargo, MONUSCO is mandated to monitor the arms embargo in coordination with the Group of Experts on the DRC.¹¹² This includes:

- ▶ Tracking and reporting the movement of military personnel, arms and materiel across the Democratic Republic of the Congo's eastern border using surveillance tools like uncrewed aerial systems
- ▶ Seizing, documenting and disposing of illicitly imported arms
- ▶ Sharing intelligence with the Group of Experts to strengthen embargo enforcement

To strengthen its capacity, MONUSCO created the Arms Embargo Cell, which was transformed in 2023 into ANRAC (the Arms and Natural Resources Advisory Cell). This restructuring reflects a broader mandate, integrating arms tracking with efforts to curb the illegal resource trade that finances armed groups.

ANRAC plays a pivotal role in implementing and monitoring the arms embargo by:

- ▶ Responding to tracing requests from Democratic Republic of the Congo authorities and international partners to map arms trafficking networks

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Varisco, *Wezeman and Kuimova, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons in Sub-Saharan Africa*.

¹¹¹ Allied Democratic Forces; M23; Ntabo Ntaberi Sheka, the leader of Nduma Défense du Congo.

¹¹² Security Council, S/RES/2612, para. 38.

- ▶ Assisting the UN Security Council sanctions committee in identifying embargo violations
- ▶ Collaborating with MONUSCO's Joint Mission Analysis Centre and UNMAS to provide actionable intelligence

In May 2023, MONUSCO's Joint Mission Analysis Centre, ANRAC and UNMAS jointly briefed the UN Security Council sanctions committee on key arms trafficking patterns and embargo violations. This helped inform the committee's decision to extend the embargo.

Despite its critical role, ANRAC does not systematically track weapons linked to CRSV or other violent incidents. This gap persists even though several individuals and entities have been sanctioned under both arms embargo and SGBV criteria.

ANRAC operates with only six staff members and lacks the personnel, funding and logistical support to connect weapons tracking to specific attacks. ANRAC also lacks access to investigation sites. Investigations into mass violence incidents present rare chances to document arms-related evidence. However, mission transport is often prioritized for military, police or human rights components, preventing ANRAC from reaching crime scenes where weapons-related evidence (firearms, shell casings, packaging) could be collected. Such information could allow the cell to connect evidence and data to other field investigations, cross-reference ammunition data with broader data sets and manage trace requests submitted to national authorities and manufacturers. This could help determine if weapons and ammunition were diverted from authorized stockpiles, smuggled into the country or obtained through illegal networks.¹¹³ Without these data, key intelligence is lost.

To bridge this gap, MONUSCO experts have identified key ways to strengthen data collection on weapons and CRSV incidents:

- ▶ Embedding weapons experts in human rights investigations – Assigning ANRAC specialists to document arms evidence at crime scenes
- ▶ Training investigators to collect arms data – Teaching human rights investigators to photograph recovered weapons and ammunition with a focus on serial numbers and identifying marks. This would allow ANRAC to conduct remote tracing and generate actionable intelligence

By embedding arms expertise into investigations, MONUSCO could better leverage arms tracking as a tool for CRSV prevention and sanctions enforcement, reinforcing accountability and embargo compliance.

¹¹³ E. LeBrun and D. Lochhead, *Exploiting Evidence, Improving Protection: Weapons Technical Intelligence in UN Peace Operations*. (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2024), <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/resource/weapons-technical-intelligence-un-peace-operations>.



Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed addresses a special event on "Ending Violence Against Women in Politics", New York, March 2022. Credit: UN Photo / Manuel Elías.

4. Pathways for an integrated approach to CRSV prevention

This report found that UN peace operations are in a unique position to ensure that tools and processes such as DDR, WAM, CVR and arms embargoes are implemented in a coordinated and integrated way to address weapons proliferation, a driver and enabler of CRSV.

Over the course of this research, five overall enabling factors were identified to facilitate a more integrated approach to addressing weapons proliferation as part of CRSV prevention:

- ▶ Setting clear mandate language
- ▶ Improving data collection, sharing and analysis
- ▶ Enhancing the capacity of UN peace operations
- ▶ Updating operational guidance
- ▶ Engaging local actors, including women's organizations and survivors

The following sections discuss these factors, along with the associated challenges and opportunities.

4.1. Setting clear mandate language

The UN Security Council plays a crucial role in shaping the mandates of all UN peace operations, defining their scope, priorities and resource allocation. These mandates provide the strongest legal and operational foundation for missions to address CRSV, including through the deployment of specialized personnel such as WPAs and the allocation of financial resources to implement targeted prevention activities.

Linking arms control and disarmament with the prevention of and response to CRSV and SGBV in new mandates and mandate renewals is therefore a key enabling factor for UN missions to be able to integrate arms control and disarmament tools with CRSV prevention. This was a

key recommendation from the UN Secretary-General, who called on the security council to “ensure that mandate authorizations and renewals include gender-responsive and gender-inclusive security and justice sector reform and arms control and disarmament measures in order to prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual violence”.¹¹⁴

Current UN Security Council mandates of UN peace operations fail to recognize the links between CRSV and the proliferation of SALW in conflict and to integrate arms control and disarmament measures, such as DDR, WAM, CVR and arms embargo monitoring and implementation, into CRSV prevention strategies. Analysis of current and past mandates reveals that arms control and disarmament measures have yet to be connected to the prevention of CRSV or SGBV, even though the same missions that have a mandate to prevent CRSV and/or SGBV will be also mandated to assist their host governments with implementing DDR processes and/or WAM, implementing CVR projects and supporting national commissions on SALW. This is the case of UNMISS, for example. While it is mandated to address CRSV and support the government on DDR and CVR, no link is made in the mandate on how these efforts could be more gender responsive, beyond considering the specific concerns of women and children.

Additional challenges related to mandate language include:

- ▶ The use of different terminologies (e.g. “sexual and gender-based violence”, “sexual violence” and “gender-based violence”; “conflict-related sexual violence” and “sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations”). These terms and their meanings may differ from the definition used by UN Secretary-General and UN entities
- ▶ Limited opportunities to adopt new mandate language on gender within the Security Council due to growing polarization among states. In 2023, only 58% of the decisions of the Security Council explicitly included gender-related issues, the lowest level in seven years¹¹⁵

Experts across all the discussion groups noted that although setting clear mandate language that promotes the integration of arms control and disarmament tools with efforts on preventing CRSV would be beneficial, it should avoid making UN peace operations mandates a “catch-all”, where the mission is tasked with too many activities, without appropriate human or financial resources.

To support Member States with consolidating terminology in future renewals and making the link between arms control and disarmament and the prevention of CRSV and SGBV, the UN Secretariat could maintain a repository¹¹⁶ for Security Council members on SGBV and CRSV-related mandate language. This repository could also include mandate language that would incorporate gender-responsive arms control and disarmament with SGBV and CRSV prevention.

¹¹⁴ Security Council, S/2024/292, para. 93.

¹¹⁵ Security Council, “Women and peace and security”, Report of the Secretary-General, S/2024/671, 24 September 2024, <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/WPS.pdf>.

¹¹⁶ Aides-memoires/repositories and databases or dashboards have been created by different UN agencies and entities on mandate language, most notably the following: an aide-memoire on the protection of civilians, which includes UN Security Council language on the protection of children in armed conflict by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs; a dashboard on WPS language in United Nations mandates; and an aide-memoire on WAM language by the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs.

BOX 3.

Examples of strong United Nations Security Council mandate language on CRSV and SGBV prevention

BINUH

S/RES/2476 (2019) [emphasis added]: “The Security Council...requests that BINUH mainstream gender considerations as a cross-cutting issue throughout its mandate and assist the Government of Haiti in ensuring the full, meaningful, and effective participation and involvement and representation of women at all levels, and further reaffirms the importance of **gender expertise and capacity strengthening in executing the mission mandate in a gender-responsive manner**”.¹¹⁷

MINUSCA

S/RES/2709 (2023) [emphasis added]: “The Security Council... Decides that the mandate of MINUSCA shall include the following priority tasks:... To support the implementation of the UN and Government of CAR joint communiqué to prevent and respond to sexual violence in conflict and to **take into account these specific concerns throughout activities of all Mission components**, in line with the UN Field Missions policy on Preventing and Responding to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence”.

“The Security Council...requests MINUSCA to...take fully into account gender mainstreaming as a cross-cutting issue throughout its mandate, prioritizing the **full implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), resolution 2538 (2020) and all resolutions addressing Women, Peace, and Security**, and to assist the CAR authorities in ensuring the full, equal and meaningful participation, involvement and representation of women, **including survivors of sexual violence**, in all spheres and at all levels, including in the political and reconciliation process and the mechanisms established for the implementation of the APPR [Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic], stabilisation activities, transitional justice, the work of the SCC [Special Criminal Court] and of the Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation Commission, **SSR [security sector reform] and DDDR [disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation] processes**”.¹¹⁸

MONUSCO

S/RES/2612 (2021) [emphasis added]: “The Security Council... Decides that the mandate of MONUSCO shall include the following priority tasks... Strengthen the Mission’s early warning and response mechanisms, including by systematically recording and analysing its rate of response and **ensure that risks of sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations are included in the Mission’s data collection, threat analysis and early warning system**”.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Security Council, S/RES/2476.

¹¹⁸ Security Council, S/RES/2709.

¹¹⁹ Security Council, S/RES/2612.



Launch of “16 Days of Activism to End Gender-Based Violence against Women and Girls” campaign in Juba, South Sudan, November 2015. Credit: UN Photo / JC McIlwaine

UNMISS

S/RES/2677 (2023) [emphasis added]: “The Security Council... Decides that UNMISS shall have the following mandate... To provide support for the relevant national and state level authorities and civil society organizations in developing and **implementing gender-responsive community violence reduction (CVR) programs**, to help de-escalate intercommunal violence and complement community disarmament initiatives in cooperation and coordination with development partners and community representatives, with a particular focus on members of armed groups ineligible or unwilling to be integrated into the Necessary Unified Forces, women and youth”.¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Security Council, S/RES/2677, 2023.

4.2. Improving data collection, sharing and analysis

Improving data collection by UN peace operations on weapons involved in CRSV incidents was identified in the focus group discussions as another key enabling factor to better understand the links between the illicit proliferation of SALW and CRSV incidents and, subsequently, to design prevention activities based on these links. There is still a gap in data and knowledge about how and how often weapons are used in CRSV incidents, and collecting such information would be valuable for informing CRSV prevention strategies as well as gender-responsive arms control and disarmament activities implemented by UN peace operations.

Including a stand-alone category to document the types of weapons used in CRSV incidents could support a number of prevention and response efforts, including the following:

In the **short-term**:

- ▶ Identifying trends and patterns in CRSV, which can be reported to mission leadership for evidence-based advocacy with national counterparts
- ▶ Informing response by uniformed personnel, such as establishing weapons-free zones (establishing protection sites, temporary operating bases, etc.)
- ▶ In the context of sanctions, informing the panel of experts or the UN Security Council about compliance with arms embargoes

In the **long-term**:

- ▶ In the context of CVR programmes, strengthening community awareness about the links between SALW, CRSV and SGBV
- ▶ Informing gender-responsive weapons and ammunition policies and practices
- ▶ Informing DDR/CVR/WAM planning

However, experts from the focus group discussions highlighted several challenges in obtaining detailed information about weapons:

- ▶ The potential risk of retraumatizing survivors during the initial interview process by asking questions about weapons, as this could force them to recall distressing details associated with the violence they experienced
- ▶ The accuracy with which survivors might be able to identify the type of weapon used, either due to the time elapsed between the incident and the investigation or because of trauma impairing their memory
- ▶ Lack of access, emphasized by experts from BINUH, who noted that they have no access to areas controlled by armed gangs
- ▶ Potential sensitivity of storing information on weapons, particularly in insecure environments where breaches of confidentiality could place survivors at additional risk
- ▶ Lack of expertise among human rights officers and mission staff in posing questions related to weapons without causing harm or inadvertently collecting incomplete or inaccurate information. For instance, mission personnel may not possess the technical knowledge to differentiate between various types of SALW or other devices referenced by survivors

In addition, mission experts highlighted that data collection methodologies vary across organizations, leading to inconsistencies such as duplicate entries when victims report to multiple organizations providing services to survivors. The lack of centralized data collection and underreporting—especially regarding armed actors—highlight the need for improved coordination and training with UN and national partners to strengthen data accuracy and completeness.

Mission experts suggested that the challenges related to documenting weapons used in incidents of CRSV could be addressed through the MARA mechanism. While the MARA working group is intended to be composed of UN entities, the MARA mechanism could engage with a broad range of actors to enhance data collection and analysis, in the form of a joint consultation forum. Such a forum may include humanitarian organizations, CSOs and government representatives (where appropriate) to review aggregated and anonymized information from diverse sources and enhance the contextual analysis of incidents and perpetrators. Including CSOs and women’s organizations in particular was also highlighted as a way of obtaining access to information from “hard to reach” areas. However, while such broad consultation is encouraged by MARA guidance, in practice the analysis of incident-specific data in many missions is limited to a sub-working group comprising only a few mission components and select UN agencies.¹²¹ Notably, key sections, like the DDR unit or UNMAS, which assist host governments with WAM, are often excluded from these discussions.

The inclusion of mission components with expertise in weapons-related issues, such as UNMAS, DDR unit or the arms embargo cell, where applicable, could significantly enhance MARA. These entities could provide critical insights into armed group profiles, weapons trafficking and the potential links between arms proliferation, human trafficking for sexual slavery, and CRSV. For instance, at MONUSCO, the MARA working group includes UNMAS, which regularly contributes contextual information on the illicit proliferation of SALW in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and its gendered implications. This type of information, even if only contextual and not incident specific, can provide valuable information to inform advocacy to the national authorities on CRSV, led by the senior WPAs.

To overcome some of the challenges mentioned by the discussion group and streamline the collection of weapons data, the following actions are recommended:

- ▶ Systematically collect information on types of weapons in mission-level data-collection efforts, including in MARA, and consider reporting on trends related to SGBV and CRSV facilitated by weapons in quarterly and annual reports
- ▶ Develop standardized weapon categorization protocols and trauma-informed interview techniques to prevent the traumatization of survivors. For example, the use of flashcards or visual aids could help survivors identify weapons more easily
- ▶ Include mission components with expertise in weapons-related issues, such as UNMAS, DDR unit or the arms embargo cell, where applicable, in the MARA working group

Currently, most UN peace operations mainly collect CRSV data and information through human rights officers and WPAs in field offices. They use these data for monthly and quarterly

¹²¹ Center for Civilians in Conflict, *“We Have to Try to Break the Silence Somehow”*.



Sit-in by Central African women on the occasion of the International Day for the elimination of violence against women, November 2013. Credit: MINUSCA / flickr.com.

reporting on trend and pattern analysis. In some cases, such as in MINUSCA, the data and trends are presented and discussed with the MARA working group for a coordinated response on CRSV.

Beyond the MARA mechanism, some UN peace operations (including UNMISS and MINUSCA) are mandated to ensure that “risks of sexual and gender-based violence in conflict and post-conflict situations are included in the Mission’s data collection, threat analysis and early warning system,”¹²² which has the potential to greatly improve early warning and the situational awareness of the mission itself.

In 2011, UN Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict created a CRSV early warning matrix of indicators “to help field personnel to detect and anticipate spikes in conflict-related sexual violence” to support the timely prevention of widespread and systematic CRSV.¹²³ The matrix covers a wide range of contextual factors, such as political, social, economic, humanitarian and security factors, that can indicate a risk of CRSV in conflict or fragile settings. The matrix is currently being reviewed by UN Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict; however, it has already been adapted to certain missions.

¹²² Security Council, S/RES/2677.

¹²³ Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, *Early-Warning Indicators of Conflict-related Sexual Violence*. (UN Action, 2011), <https://www.stoprapenow.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Matrix-Early-Warning-Indicators-of-CRSV-Online-Version.pdf>.

BOX 4.

MINUSCA's early warning indicators

MINUSCA has created a CRSV early warning indicators checklist, which has been circulated across the mission, including among the uniformed components of the mission that go on patrol.

Whereas the behaviour of security forces and the behaviour of non-state armed groups feature as indicators of potential and imminent threats of CRSV on MINUSCA's checklist, weapons proliferation indicators or the misuse of these weapons by security forces are not included.¹²⁴

Several challenges were identified in the MINUSCA focus group discussion with regard to including weapons-related indicators for early warning of CRSV:

- ▶ Lack of expertise and knowledge of where to find information on arms flow by most mission components
- ▶ Human rights guiding principles on data collection and the protection of victims and survivors potentially being contrary to the collection and storage of these data
- ▶ Lack of timely reporting of indicators due to lack of awareness and high turnover of uniformed components
- ▶ Difficulty in coordinating a response with other components of the mission

To improve on CRSV early warning, missions need to ensure that the personnel responsible for collecting information have a basic understanding of the warning signs of CRSV and prioritize collecting gender-disaggregated information on threats and information related to sexual violence. In addition, indicators on arms-related risks can strengthen early warning and early action on CRSV. This could include indicators that factor in gender-disaggregated data on the impact of armed violence and weapons possession, use and misuse, as well as information on weapons accumulation by armed groups and on the diversion and trafficking of arms and ammunition. Indicators relating to firearms licencing legislation or policies and the number of firearms held by civilians could also be included, as past research has demonstrated that in certain conflicts, sexual violence may be more frequently perpetrated by civilians.¹²⁵

Based on MINUSCA's experience, the following recommendations could be considered by all missions to improve early warning of CRSV:

- ▶ Establish mission-wide early warning indicators on arms flow and weapons, which can also be included in CRSV early warning
- ▶ Enhance coordination between security sector reform; disarmament, demobilization and reintegration; the Mine Action Service; and women's protection advisers to share information on arms flow, which may be relevant to CRSV early warning
- ▶ Create guidance for mission staff and uniformed personnel on the most relevant arms-related data for early warning of CRSV

¹²⁴ J.A.E. Bata, M. Vecchioni and U. Hofmann, *Pathways to Action: Harnessing Arms Flow Data for Conflict Early Warning*. (Geneva: UNIDIR, 2025), <https://unidir.org/publication/pathways-to-action-harnessing-arms-flows-data-for-conflict-early-warning/>.

¹²⁵ For more on arms-related risks indicators: S. Yazgi and E. Mumford, *The Arms-Related Risk Analysis Toolkit*. (Geneva: UNIDIR, 2021), <https://unidir.org/publication/the-arms-related-risk-analysis-toolkit-practical-guidance-for-integrating-conventional-arms-related-risks-into-conflict-analysis-and-prevention/>.

4.3. Enhancing the capacity of UN peace operations

Another key enabling factors that was identified in all focus group discussions was the importance of enhancing the capacity of UN peace operations to apply a gender lens to arms control and disarmament as well as the capacity of WPAs, gender advisers and human rights officers to assess weapons-related risks.

Gender awareness training is mandatory for all personnel of UN peace operations; however, compliance with this requirement in some missions has been low. Data from 2021 show that only 5% of civilian staff in UNMISS and 31% of civilian staff in MONUSCO had completed a mandatory online course on gender.¹²⁶ Participants from the focus group discussions attributed this to a lack of priority given to gender considerations for those who are not gender experts or do not have a gender focal point role. It was also noted that WPAs and human rights officers do not view the consideration of weapons-related issues as part of their mandate and generally lack knowledge on weapons-related issues.

The following ideas emerged from the focus group discussions on improving mission capacities on weapons-related issues:

- ▶ Establish a weapons focal point in the mission who can be deployed with human rights teams and WPA teams during investigations
- ▶ Institute regular training sessions on weapons categorization and methods for photographing recovered weapons and ammunition during investigations
- ▶ Continue strengthening the role of gender focal points in the DDR, security sector reform and UNMAS sections and ensure that gender is mainstreamed across objectives and workplans

4.4. Updating operational guidance

In addition to mandates, there are several guidance resources and tools for UN uniformed and civilian mission staff on preventing CRSV and SGBV.

In operational guidance, weapons issues and issues related to CRSV or SGBV tend to be siloed. In the UN Department of Peace Operations' *Operational Readiness Preparation for Troop Contributing Countries in Peacekeeping Missions*,¹²⁷ reference to sexual violence is limited to the minimum requirement for Non Commissioned Officers (or equivalent ranks) and soldiers to have adequate knowledge of the mandatory reporting requirements relating to SGBV. It lacks detailed explanation on how peacekeepers should handle cases of SGBV, what to do in instances where the victim or survivor is struggling with reporting, and so forth.

¹²⁶ J. Russo, *UN Peacekeeping and the Protection of Civilians from Sexual and Gender Based Violence*. (New York: International Peace Institute, 2022), <https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/POC-and-SGBV-Web.pdf>.

¹²⁷ UN Department of Peace Operations, *Operational Readiness Preparation for Troop Contributing Countries in Peacekeeping Missions*. (Geneva: UNDPO, 2018), https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/3_military_-_4_guidelines_on_opr.pdf.

Similarly, the *United Nations Police Gender Toolkit* does not link CRSV and weapons explicitly, and the link even appears to be negated. In discussing myths surrounding acts of sexual violence, intended to educate UN Police, it is listed as a myth that rape involves a great deal of physical violence or the use of a weapon.¹²⁸

While some UN documents are less detailed in connecting the dots between weapons and CRSV, others have a more comprehensive outline. This is reflected in the *Handbook for United Nations Field Missions on Preventing and Responding to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence*,¹²⁹ which does explicitly point to weapons culture and armed groups as a major source of sexual violence in conflict zones. Additionally, the UN Department of Peace Operations' *Gender Equality and Women, Peace and Security Resource Package*¹³⁰ puts forth a recommendation for peace operations to support preventive approaches in national legislative reform (e.g. national small arms control or anti-trafficking legislation) that could specifically respond to security implications for women and girls.

The IDDRS have a separate module on CVR as well as on women, gender and DDR and provide detailed recommendations regarding the inclusion of women who are directly or indirectly involved in armed groups or, in the case of CVR, women from the communities receiving ex-combatants. The IDDRS module on transitional WAM explicitly recognizes that “inadequately secured weapons and ammunition can facilitate inter-personal armed violence, including sexual and gender-based violence” and highlights the importance of a gender-responsive and inclusive approach.¹³¹ However, this module and the WAM standard operating procedures (SOPs) for UN peace operations could be reviewed with a view to explicitly outlining gender considerations in WAM functional areas and raising awareness of the links between SALW proliferation and CRSV. There is scope for the UN Secretariat, such as the UN Department of Peace Operations in collaboration with other entities, to:

- ▶ Review operational guidance on CRSV and SGBV prevention, DDR, and CVR to better address the role of the proliferation of SALW in CRSV and SGBV
- ▶ Review UN guidance related to WAM (e.g. Handbook on Effective WAM in a Changing DDR Context, WAM SOPs in UN Peace Operations, Disarmament and Transitional WAM Modules in the IDDRS, SALW control in DDR Settings and others) to mainstream gender considerations and raise awareness about links between SALW, CRSV and SGBV

¹²⁸ UN Police, *United Nations Police Gender Toolkit*. (UN Police, 2015), https://police.un.org/sites/default/files/united_nations_police_gender_toolkit_handbook1.pdf.

¹²⁹ United Nations, *The Handbook for United Nations Field Missions*.

¹³⁰ UN Department of Peace Operations, *Gender Equality and Women, Peace and Security Resource Package*. (Geneva: UNDPO, 2020), https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/gewps19_respack_v7_eng_digital.pdf.

¹³¹ Inter-Agency Working Group on DDR, “Transitional Weapons and Ammunition Management”, www.unddr.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/IDDRS-4.11-Transitional-Weapons-and-Ammunition-Management.pdf, p. 3.

4.5. Engaging local actors, including women's organizations and survivors

In all focus group discussions, the participation of women and community-based organizations was highlighted as an important cross-cutting consideration in the design, planning and implementation of arms control and disarmament activities.

Despite the establishment of quotas and targets to ensure women's participation in DDR, for example, mission experts highlighted that challenges remain in ensuring that women are not only represented among beneficiaries but also in decision-making and implementation roles.

Experiences from the withdrawal of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) showed that sustained engagement and capacity-building with local CSOs on various aspects of prevention and response to CRSV, such as training on monitoring and reporting and engagement in the MARA mechanism helped ensure that the work continued in certain areas of the country even following MINUSMA's withdrawal.¹³² This demonstrates the need to integrate capacity-building and awareness on the role arms control and disarmament play in the prevention of CRSV when engaging with national authorities and local CSOs. In that regard, UN peace operations should:

- ▶ Continue efforts to promote the participation of women, including survivors of SGBV and CRSV and their representative organizations, in DDR and CVR and provide opportunities for them to raise awareness about weapons-related risks relating to SGBV and CRSV during these programmes
- ▶ Strengthen national stakeholders' capacity for a gender-responsive approach to DDR
- ▶ Develop guidance to support capacity strengthening for national partners and CSOs to address CRSV in a sustainable manner by integrating arms control into CRSV prevention efforts

¹³² UN Department of Peace Operations, internal document on MINUSMA and MONUSCO case studies, emailed to author, August 2024.



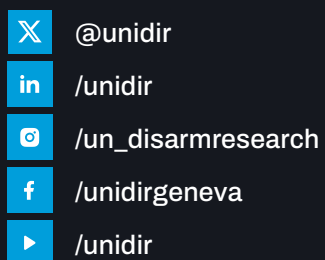
Conclusions

This research found that UN peace operations are in a unique position to ensure that tools such as DDR, WAM, CVR and arms embargoes are cross-leveraged to address weapons proliferation, a driver and enabler of CRSV.

To do so efficiently, the report emphasized the importance of setting clear mandates that highlight the need for gender-responsive DDR, WAM and CVR in addressing CRSV, improving data collection on weapons in CRSV incidents and sharing this information across the mission to improve situational awareness and early warning as well as the importance of advocacy with the host country and with the UN Security Council in situations where an arms embargo is in place.

Enhancing the capacity of mission staff working on arms control and disarmament and those working on addressing and preventing CRSV to understand the links between CRSV and the proliferation of SALW will be key and can be embedded into existing operational guidance. Prioritization of this work by the UN Security Council is crucial, and it should be supported by clear mandate language and the allocation of financial and human resources to internal capacity-building activities, data collection and coordination mechanisms such as the MARA.

Finally, an integrated approach to CRSV prevention that leverages gender-responsive arms control and disarmament needs to not only foster women's meaningful participation at all levels but also engage national partners, local CSOs and women's organizations, and survivors and their representative organizations. Such involvement can ensure the sustainability of efforts in the wake of planned or unexpected mission drawdowns or withdrawals and, more importantly, contribute to changing harmful gender norms – a root cause of CRSV – that normalize the possession, use and misuse of small arms.



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