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REPORT

Small Arms and Light Weapons Flows and Transfer Controls

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Abbreviations

ATT	Arms Trade Treaty
ATT WGETI	Arms Trade Treaty Working Group on Effective Treaty Implementation
CASA	Coordinating Action on Small Arms (United Nations)
DIEF	Diversions Information Exchange Forum (ATT)
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EU	European Union
iArms	INTERPOL Illicit Arms Records and Tracing Management System
MOSAIC	Modular Small-arms-control Implementation Compendium (United Nations)
NGO	non-governmental organization
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PoA	Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in SALW in All its Aspects (Programme of Action)
PoE	Panels of Experts
RECA	Regional Centre on Small Arms and Light Weapons
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SALW	Small arms and light weapons
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SEESAC	South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (UNDP)
UN	United Nations
UN Comtrade	United Nations International Trade Statistics Database
UNIDIR	United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research
UNODA	United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNROCA	United Nations Register of Conventional Arms
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNSCAR	United Nations Trust Facility Supporting Cooperation on Arms Regulation



Executive Summary

International flows of small arms and light weapons (SALW) fuel conflict, crime and terrorism, and undermine sustainable peace, security, and development efforts. In the summer of 2001, United Nations Member States adopted the Programme of Action on Small Arms (PoA) and the Firearms Protocol to strengthen life-cycle control of SALW and counter diversion and illicit trafficking. These UN instruments, and the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) and regional SALW control instruments, require or request that States provide data and information on authorised SALW transfers, illicit SALW flows, and national transfer control systems. This report reviews official State data and information provided under the ATT, the Firearms Protocol, and the PoA to assess the utility of UN reporting mechanisms for monitoring SALW flows and identifying risks, gaps, and effective practices to counter the illicit SALW trade and reduce its negative impacts.

States provide information annually on authorised imports and exports of SALW to the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms (UNROCA) and United Nations International Trade Statistics Database (UN Comtrade), as well as via the ATT and regional organizations. A comparison of information on SALW exports and imports provided under UN instruments and the ATT reveals that more than half of Member States have reported at least once to either the ATT or UNROCA, and three-quarters have reported to UN Comtrade. Unfortunately, several States considered major exporters and importers still do not report consistently or publicly. Further, States do not provide information under United Nations instruments that would help to understand decision-making processes and potential diversion and trafficking risks, such as:

- ▶ end user information;
- ▶ licensed production and technology transfers;
- ▶ transit and brokering activities; and
- ▶ authorization denials.

While there are many ways in which the United Nations gathers official information on seizures of illicit SALW, there is no single global, actionable data set. It is difficult to estimate the scale of the illicit SALW trade. PoA national reports, the illicit arms flows questionnaire, data on Sustainable Development Goal indicator 16.4.2, and information gathered by United Nations Panels of Experts on sanctions, and UN field missions indicate that diversion and trafficking:

- ▶ routinely undermine Security Council arms embargoes;
- ▶ fuel and prolong conflicts;
- ▶ sustain organized crime and extreme violence, particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean;
- ▶ empower terrorist organizations; and
- ▶ facilitate widespread gender based and sexual violence.

There appears to be Member State consensus on seven key elements of an effective national SALW transfer control system:

1. legal and regulatory framework;
2. designated and competent institutional structures, including inter-agency cooperation mechanisms;
3. clear and transparent procedures for reviewing, issuing, and denying transfer authorizations;
4. transfer control documentation;
5. record-keeping mechanisms;
6. enforcement of national laws and regulations; and
7. international cooperation.

One hundred and fifty-seven member States have provided information on their national transfer controls in ATT initial reports or PoA implementation reports at least once during 2014–2024. These reports indicate that many States have legal and regulatory frameworks and designated national transfer control authorities, but there is limited information on national procedures for conducting risk assessments and enforcing national systems. There are new opportunities to strengthen post-delivery cooperation between importing and exporting states, as well as to share information on diversion and trafficking cases and on risk indicators.

There are clear signs of progress in implementing the Firearms Protocol and the PoA over the past 25 years, but more could be done to mitigate the negative consequences of the international SALW trade. For example, the United Nations is well placed to support the development and implementation of regional SALW control instruments, to increase understanding of regional and subregional dynamics in SALW diversion and trafficking, and to develop effective countermeasures and strategies.

This report proposes the following actions for the United Nations system and interested stakeholders:

1. Address the data deficit on SALW flows and transfer controls
 - a. Raise awareness on the benefits of data collection and information-sharing
 - b. Ensure that the requested information is useful
 - c. Coordinate capacity-building efforts for data collection and information-sharing
2. Facilitate the sharing of useful information
 - a. Exploit synergies across reporting and information-sharing platforms
 - b. Support platforms for sharing information that can be used to prevent illicit transfers, illicit trafficking, and diversion
 - c. Create opportunities for technical experts to identify effective measures for preventing and responding to illicit transfers, illicit trafficking, and diversion
3. Promote the use of information to prevent conflict, armed violence, and human suffering.
 - a. Develop guidance and deliver capacity-building programmes
 - b. Enhance the use of United Nations data and information for conflict early warning and to prevent 'risky' transfers
 - c. Track the use and impact of shared information

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Arabian Sea. A cache of seized weapons is assembled on the deck of USS Gravelly. © U.S. Navy photo/U.S. Navy, 2016

1. Introduction

The number of armed conflicts is at the highest level in almost three decades.¹ Both authorized and illicit flows and use of small arms and light weapons (SALW) play a critical role in prolonging conflict and contributing to the insecurity of regions affected by climate change, intercommunal violence, migration, poverty, exclusion, terrorism, and transnational organized crime.² SALW (which includes firearms) differ from other conventional arms because large numbers of these weapons are not only in the hands of national armed forces, law enforcement, and other State entities, but also in the hands of civilians, private security companies, and non-State armed groups.³ The widespread availability and misuse of SALW in fragile and conflict-affected settings overwhelm health services; limit access to education, food security, employment, and business opportunities; and displace millions. The New Agenda for Peace and the Pact for the Future highlight the need to strengthen efforts to address SALW proliferation, armed conflict, and violence in order to achieve the 2030 Agenda.⁴

1 Uppsala University, “UCDP: Sharp Increase in Conflicts and Wars”, Uppsala University Conflict Data Program, 11 June 2025, <https://www.uu.se/en/news/2025/2025-06-11-ucdp-sharp-increase-in-conflicts-and-wars>

2 Security Council, S/2025/670, 23 October 2025, para. 3, <https://docs.un.org/en/S/2025/670>

3 Small Arms Survey, *Global Firearms Holdings*, <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/database/global-firearms-holdings>

4 United Nations, *Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 9: A New Agenda for Peace*, July 2023, p. 5, https://www.un.org/climatesecuritymechanism/sites/default/files/2025-06/our-common-agenda-policy-brief-new-agenda-for-peace-en_0.pdf; General Assembly, A/RES/79/1, 22 September 2024, Action 26 (g), <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/79/1>

Twenty-five years ago, Member States adopted both the Programme of Action on Small Arms (PoA)⁵ and the Firearms Protocol to counter the illicit arms trade and its negative consequences.⁶ While the PoA contains a range of political commitments to strengthen through-life control measures for SALW used by State armed forces and law enforcement agencies and prevent diversion to non-State armed groups, and the Firearms Protocol obliges States Parties to take measures to prevent the illicit manufacture and trafficking of firearms that can be authorized for civilians.⁷ These instruments provide comprehensive frameworks for preventing illicit trafficking and the diversion of weapons to the illicit market and into the hands of criminals, terrorists, and other unauthorized end users. They are also complemented by regional instruments, which also include provisions for strengthening transfer controls to counter illicit trafficking and diversion (see Table 1.1).

The number of SALW that have been produced, combined with their portability, longevity, and ease of diversion, means that even legally authorized transfers (i.e., those conducted in accordance with national law and international obligations) can have destabilizing effects, particularly where end users are unclear or insufficiently monitored. Therefore, the Pact for the Future underscored existing PoA commitments and Firearms Protocol obligations by inviting Member States to ensure that there is a national legal and regulatory framework to control international arms transfers and manage risks to prevent violations of international humanitarian and human rights law.⁸

The fourth Review Conference of the PoA in 2024 recommended that Member States use a range of measures to prevent diversion;⁹ many of these measures have been recommended for more than 25 years, in international and regional SALW or broader arms control instruments and their guidance documents (see section 5.1). What is the status of implementation of the PoA and Firearms Protocol, plus the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)¹⁰ and regional instruments, which require effective controls on international transfers of SALW to reduce diversion into the illicit trade and the human suffering caused by their misuse?

This report seeks to provide an overall assessment of the contribution of United Nations resources for helping States and other interested stakeholders to:

- ▶ monitor authorized international SALW transfers;
- ▶ counter illicit SALW flows; and
- ▶ control international SALW transfers.

5 *Report of the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects*, A/CONF.192/15, 20 July 2001, [https://docs.un.org/A/CONF.192/15\(SUPP\)](https://docs.un.org/A/CONF.192/15(SUPP))

6 General Assembly, A/RES/55/255, 8 June 2001, <https://docs.un.org/A/RES/55/255>

7 This report does not provide a comparison of the provisions in the PA and the Firearms Protocol, or other related SALW control instruments. For an example of such a comparative study, see Sarah Parker with Marcus Wilson, *A Guide to the UN Small Arms Process: 2016 Update*, Small Arms Survey, June 2016, <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/resource/guide-un-small-arms-process-2016-update>

8 General Assembly, A/RES/79/1, 22 September 2024, Action 14 (h), <https://docs.un.org/en/a/res/79/1>

9 General Assembly, A/CONF.192/2024/RC/3, 5 July 2024, paras. 45–48, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/CONF.192/2024/RC/3>

10 Arms Trade Treaty, 2013, https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=XXVI-8&chapter=26&clang=_en

TABLE 1.1

Regional SALW Control Instruments

Date Adopted (Entered Into Force)	Regional Instrument	Region(s)	Instrument Character	
			Legally Binding	Political Commitment
1997	Inter-American Convention against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives, and Other Related Materials	Americas	✓	
2000	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Document on Small Arms and Light Weapons	Europe, Central Asia, North America		✓
2001 (2004)	Southern African Development Community Protocol on the Control of Firearms, Ammunition and Other Related Materials	Southern Africa	✓	
2002	Arab Model Law on Weapons, Ammunitions, Explosives, and Hazardous Material	North Africa, West Asia		
2003	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Document on Stockpiles of Conventional Ammunition	Europe, Central Asia, North America		✓
2004 (2005)	Nairobi Protocol for the Prevention, Control and Reduction of Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa	Central and East Africa	✓	
2006 (2009)	Economic Community of West African States Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and Other Related Materials	West Africa	✓	
2010 (2017)	Central African Convention for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons, their Ammunition and all Parts and Components that can be used for their Manufacture, Repair and Assembly	Central Africa	✓	
2011	African Union Strategy on the Control of Illicit Proliferation, Circulation and Trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons	Africa		✓
2016	African Union Silencing the Guns by 2030	Africa		✓
2018	European Union Strategy Against Illicit Firearms, Small Arms and Light Weapons and their Ammunition	Europe		✓
2018	Roadmap for a Sustainable Solution to the Illegal Possession, Misuse and Trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons and Their Ammunition and Explosives in the Western Balkans by 2030	South-Eastern Europe		✓
2020	European Union Action Plan on Firearms Trafficking	Europe		✓
2020	Roadmap for Implementing the Caribbean Priority Actions on the Illicit Proliferation of Firearms and Ammunition across the Caribbean in a Sustainable Manner by 2030	Caribbean		✓
2021	Directive 2021/555 of the European Parliament and of the Council on Control of the Acquisition and Possession of Weapons	Europe	✓	
2023	Association of Southeast Asian Nations Declaration on Combating Arms Smuggling	South-East Asia		✓
2024	Roadmap to Prevent the Illicit Trafficking and Proliferation of Firearms, Ammunition and Explosives	Central America, Dominican Republic		✓
2025	Regulation 2025/41 of the European Parliament and of the Council on Import, Export and Transit Measures for Firearms, Essential Components and Ammunition	Europe	✓	



Aleppo, old city, at the frontline. A mirror used to watch opposite fighters' movements. Syria. © ICRC/VOETEN, Teun Anthony, 2013

The report identifies areas of progress and effective measures to support the implementation of the PoA and Firearms Protocol, as well as the ATT and regional instruments, ensuring that national transfer control systems can counter the illicit SALW trade in all its aspects. The report also highlights persistent and emerging challenges that require attention. It is intended to support United Nations programming:

- ▶ to address gaps in data collection and analysis on authorized SALW flows;
- ▶ to identify effective approaches for increasing understanding of the dynamics of illicit trafficking and diversion of SALW; and
- ▶ to enhance national SALW transfer control systems and counter-diversion and trafficking efforts.

1.1 Report Methodology

This report relies primarily on official government data and information provided to United Nations reporting mechanisms related to the PoA and the Firearms Protocol, as well as to the Register of Conventional Arms (UNROCA) and the ATT. The authors recognize that States provide official government information unilaterally and via regional organizations. Other organizations have also provided a large volume of relevant information on SALW flows and transfer control systems, but such information is usually focused on particular countries or regions. This report seeks to provide a global picture using comparable official information provided to the United Nations. Where relevant, effective measures and initiatives that could be applied more widely are highlighted.

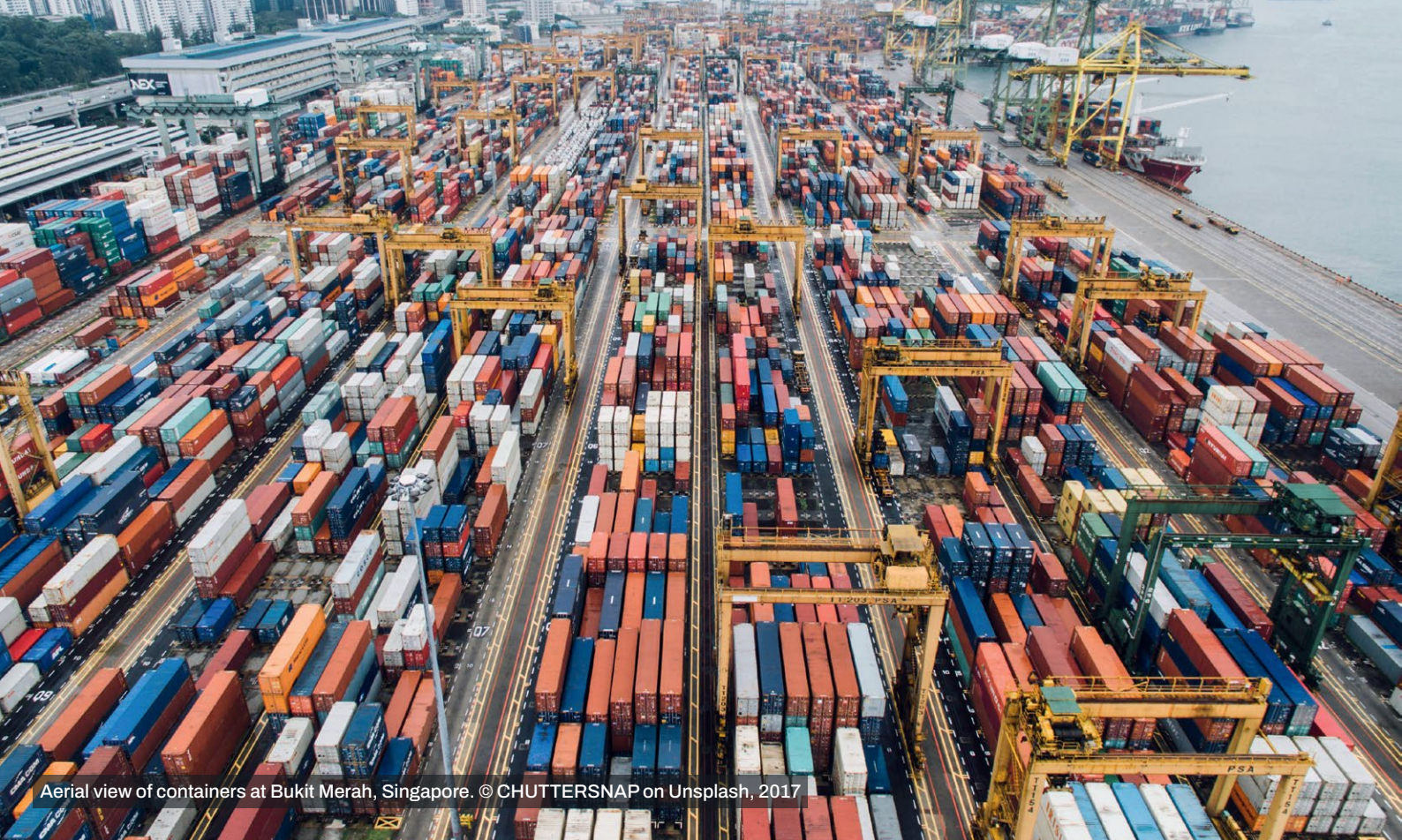
By taking this approach, there are certain States and subregions that have not been analyzed. While many States provide information on their national SALW transfer control systems, fewer submit such data to UNROCA or to the Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) or the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) regarding seizures and diversion incidents. This is due to security concerns, resource constraints, bureaucratic challenges, and a lack of political will. While there are concerns that opacity regarding SALW transfers may conceal corrupt practices and intentional diversion by high-ranking government officials, this report does not address that issue.¹¹

Each substantive chapter provides information on its main sources, and some considerations on the strengths and limitations of those sources.

1.2 Report Overview

Chapter two examines multilateral reporting instruments that gather official government data on authorized SALW exports and imports. It assesses the types of information provided and identifies gaps to address to strengthen monitoring and leverage results to prevent conflict, violence, and diversion. Chapter three explores estimates of the scale of the illicit SALW trade and identifies its impacts. Chapter four highlights key elements of an effective national SALW transfer control system. It also examines national reports on the implementation of the ATT and PoA to provide a global picture of whether Member States' national SALW transfer control systems have the key elements in place and where significant gaps exist. Chapter five summarizes the report's key findings and recommendations.

¹¹ General Assembly, A/HRC/56/42, 18 April 2024, para. 12, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/56/42>



Aerial view of containers at Bukit Merah, Singapore. © CHUTERSNAP on Unsplash, 2017

2. Authorized International Transfers

The estimated value of the authorized global international arms trade in 2022 was USD 138 billion, accounting for 0.5 per cent of global trade in goods and services.¹² This estimate covers a wide range of conventional arms and military equipment, but does not include a specific estimate of the authorized trade in SALW. Analysis of national customs data submitted to the United Nations International Trade Statistics Database (UN Comtrade) suggests that the value of SALW deliveries and related parts, components, and ammunition was worth at least USD 7 billion in 2022 and USD 9 billion in 2024.¹³

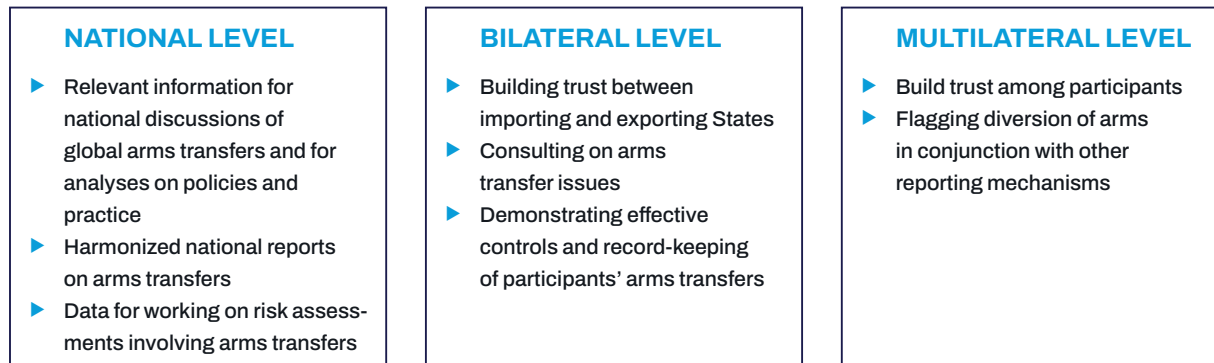
Do these figures enable an understanding of patterns of contemporary conflict and armed violence? Do they help to identify risks or incidents of diversion to the illicit arms trade? Answers to such questions should be among the benefits of States providing official government data on their SALW exports and imports (see Figure 2.1). States are requested or obliged to provide official government data and information every year on their international arms transfers, including SALW, to the United Nations and other international and regional organizations. The monitoring and analysis of such data should contribute to

12 Siemon T. Wezeman et al., “International arms transfers”, *SIPRI Yearbook 2024. Armaments, Disarmament and International Security*, 2024, p. 252. SIPRI did not provide an update for the financial value of the international arms trade in the SIPRI Yearbook 2025 nor its database of the financial value of the global arms trade, see <https://www.sipri.org/databases/financial-value-global-arms-trade>

13 Nicolas Florquin with Victor de Oliveira, *The Authorized Trade in Small Arms: Latin America from a Global Perspective*, Small Arms Survey, October 2025, p. 4, <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/highlight/new-situation-update-global-authorized-trade-small-arms>

FIGURE 2.1

Benefits of Participating in UNROCA¹⁴



early warning and conflict prevention efforts, assist in the identification of diversion risks and potential arms embargo violations, as well as help us to understand national decisions on arms transfers and compliance with international obligations, particularly relating to international humanitarian law and international human rights law, including on gender-based violence.¹⁵

This chapter examines official data on authorized international SALW transfers across United Nations and other multilateral transparency mechanisms. It examines the extent to which reporting systems enable States to understand national decision-making and to assess diversion risks for international arms transfers. The chapter highlights progress in these areas and indicates the types of additional data and information that could help to deliver the benefits identified in Figure 2.1.

2.1 United Nations Sources on Authorized Transfers of SALW

Since the 1990s, governments have provided data on authorized international arms transfers under international and regional transparency and confidence-building mechanisms, as well as via national reports on arms exports for parliaments and the public.¹⁶ These official government sources provide data and information with varying purposes, scopes, and levels of detail. These data sources are complemented by specialized non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and media organizations that provide data and information on orders, contracts, and deliveries of conventional arms.¹⁷ Notably, all of these sources provide more information on international transfers of major conventional arms than on SALW. This chapter provides key findings from a systematic review of the three international reporting mechanisms that collect official government data on international SALW transfers (see Table 2.1).

14 General Assembly, A/80/121, 9 July 2025, p. 47, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/80/121>

15 United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), *The Global Reported Arms Trade: Transparency in Armaments Through the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms*, 2023, p. v, <https://publications.unoda.org/publications/unoda-occasional-papers-no-39-apr-2023>

16 SIPRI no longer maintains a database of national reports on arms exports, but provides an archive of such reports at <https://www.sipri.org/databases/national-reports>

17 UNIDIR's 'Arms Flows and Early Warning Dashboard' provides an overview of organizations that provide information on arms and ammunition flows, available at: <https://unidir.org/arms-flows-early-warning-dashboard/>

TABLE 2.1

International Reporting Mechanisms for SALW Transfers

Source	Start	Status	Frequency	Availability	SALW Definition
ATT annual reports	2015	Obligation	Annual	Public and Restricted	ITI
UN Comtrade	1962	Voluntary	Monthly	Public	HS Code 93
UNROCA	1991	Voluntary	Annual	Public	UNROCA

2.2 International Reporting Mechanisms on SALW Flows

The oldest transparency and confidence-building mechanism that collects information on authorized exports and imports of conventional arms is UNROCA. The General Assembly established the Register in 1991, requesting that all Member States volunteer data and information on imports and exports of seven categories of major conventional arms, and inviting background information on military holdings, procurement through national production, and relevant policies. For decades, groups of governmental experts have considered proposals to create a formal eighth category in UNROCA for reporting on international transfers of SALW. In 2004, for the first time, the Secretary-General invited Member States to provide information on international transfers of SALW to the UNROCA.¹⁸ The status of reporting on SALW was upgraded in 2016 so that Member States, in a position to do so, provide data on SALW transfers alongside data on UNROCA's long-standing seven categories.¹⁹ Since 2003, 105 Member States have provided information on international transfers of SALW at least once, as shown in Figure 2.2.

The ATT was adopted by the General Assembly in April 2013 and entered into force in December 2014. Article 13 of the ATT obliges all States Parties to report annually on exports and imports of eight categories of conventional arms, of which SALW is one. The Treaty notes that States Parties may provide the same data and information they provide to UNROCA. Therefore, the UNROCA standardized reporting form and the ATT reporting template are very similar, seeking annual data and information on the quantity of weapons exported or imported, as well as the importing and exporting States. Both allow States to provide information on the weapon designation, type, or model, as well as other comments on the transfer. The ATT reporting template allows for States Parties to indicate if they are reporting on authorized or actual transfers, as well as on the number of items transferred or their financial value.²⁰ The Seventh Conference of States Parties to the ATT, held in 2021, endorsed a revised template for annual reports on exports and imports of conventional arms, which allowed for States Parties to tick a box indicating

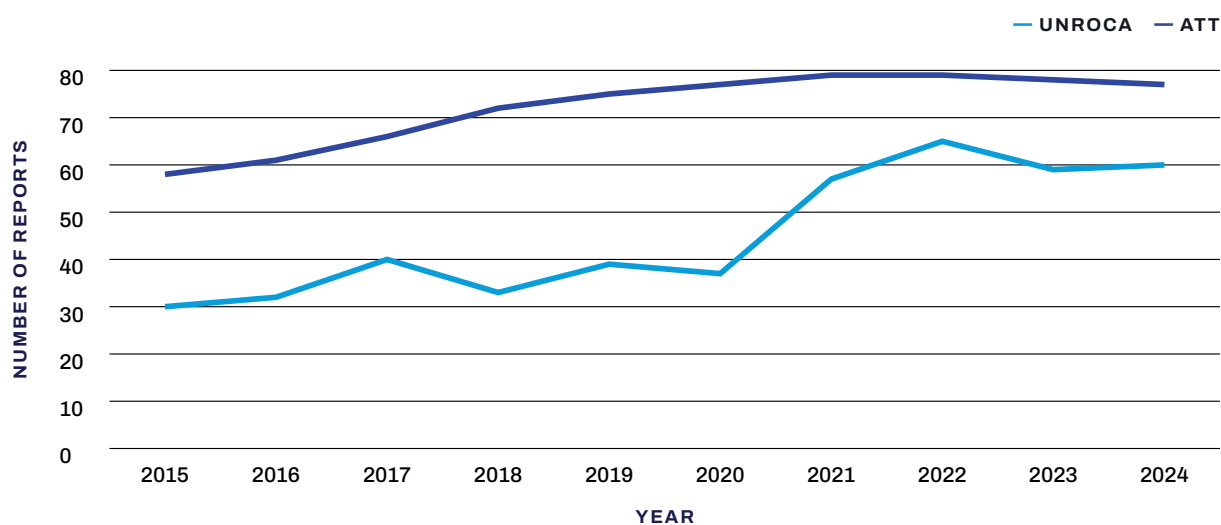
18 General Assembly, A/RES/58/54, 8 January 2004, para. 2, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/58/54>; the recommendation for inviting Member States to provide background information on international transfers of SALW was made by the 2003 group of governmental experts, see General Assembly, A/58/274, 13 August 2003, para. 113 (e), <https://docs.un.org/en/A/58/274>

19 General Assembly, A/RES/71/44, 9 December 2016, para. 2, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/71/44>; the recommendation for the 'seven plus one' reporting formula for SALW is contained in General Assembly, A/71/259, 29 July 2016, para. 83, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/71/259>

20 For greater detail on reporting synergies among multilateral conventional arms treaties and instruments, see UNIDIR, *Reporting on Conventional Arms Trade: Synthesis Handbook*, 2018, <https://unidir.org/publication/reporting-on-conventional-arms-trade-synthesis-handbook/>

FIGURE 2.2

National Reporting Under ATT and UNROCA, 2015–2024



Note: The year shown on the horizontal axis refers to the year in which the international transfer took place, not the year in which the Member State submitted its report. For example, Member States are called upon to report on international transfers that took place in 2024 by 31 May 2025. Data as of 7 February 2026.

Source: UNROCA and ATT websites, and UNIDIR’s internal database on UNROCA submissions and ATT annual reports

that the ATT Secretariat could share the annual report with UNODA as a UNROCA submission.²¹ As of 31 March 2025, 44 State Parties had used this option at least once, with 110 ATT annual reports submitted to UNROCA.²²

One positive consequence of the ATT is that the number of States reporting on their international SALW transfers has increased.²³ Before 2015, nine African States had reported on their international SALW transfers to UNROCA at least once. Since the ATT entered into force, an additional eight African States have reported on such transfers. Among these States is South Africa, which began providing aggregated information on SALW exports in its 2016 ATT annual report and then, in its 2018 report, began providing disaggregated information by SALW subcategory for importing State.²⁴ Thus, while the ATT has yet to achieve universal reporting, it has contributed to an increase in the number of States reporting on SALW transfers.

UN Comtrade is a publicly available international trade database that provides official customs declaration data on exports and imports of goods and services. While States are neither obliged nor required to provide data and information on international SALW transfers to UN Comtrade, it has proven a useful mechanism over the past 25 years for identifying significant exporters and importers of SALW, their parts,

21 Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) Secretariat, ATT/CSP7/2021/SEC/681/Conf.FinRep.Rev1, 2 September 2021, para. 26 (h). The ATT website is being renovated at the time of publication. Official documents from Conferences of States Parties and Working Groups, as well as resources (tools and guidelines) do not have stable URL.

22 General Assembly, A/80/121, 9 July 2025, para. 40, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/80/121>

23 Lara Maria Guedes Gonçalves Costa and Paul Holtom, *Arms Trade Treaty Reporting on Small Arms Transfers: What Have We Learned?*, UNIDIR, 2026, <https://unidir.org/publication/arms-trade-treaty-reporting-on-small-arms-transfers-what-have-we-learned/>

24 ATT Secretariat, “Annual Reports”, <https://thearmstradetreaty.org/annual-report>

components, and ammunition. For example, during 2019–2024 more than 150 States reported information on the financial value of their SALW transfers.²⁵

The ATT and UNROCA contain similar data on SALW exports and imports, with many States using the same data for reporting to both instruments. UN Comtrade data uses a different categorization, with financial values provided systematically and less clarity about what the ‘number of units’ reported refers to. These global mechanisms provide more data on international SALW transfers than were available in 2001, when the PoA and Firearms Protocol were adopted. Yet, there are still challenges for those seeking to monitor authorized SALW flows that could threaten international peace, security, and sustainable development around the globe.

2.3 What Does the Information Tell Us?

Since the turn of the century, the amount of publicly available official government data on international SALW transfers has increased. As outlined above, many States provide data to United Nations reporting instruments on their SALW transfers. According to UN Comtrade data, Brazil, Germany, Italy, and the United States (in alphabetical order) have consistently been the world’s largest exporters of SALW (including their parts, components, and ammunition). During 2019–2024, the United States, Italy, Türkiye, Germany, and Brazil were the top five SALW exporters, accounting for 54 per cent of the reported financial value of SALW exports. UN Comtrade data suggest that Canada, Germany, and the United States (in alphabetical order) have consistently ranked among the largest importers by financial value over the past decade. During 2019–2024, the United States accounted for 46 per cent of all reported SALW imports. In contrast to the largest exporters, the largest importers, according to UN Comtrade data, change more frequently. For example, the data indicates that Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Indonesia were among the top SALW importers during 2014–2018, but not during 2019–2024.²⁶

When comparing the aggregated totals for SALW exports in UNROCA for the five largest SALW exporters as indicated by UN Comtrade data, a different picture emerges. Of these, Brazil, Germany, Italy, and Türkiye provided information on their SALW exports to UNROCA for all years 2019–2024, while the United States provided data for 2019–2023. Table 2.2. shows that for the years 2019–2024, Brazil reported exporting the most SALW units, followed by Türkiye, Italy, the United States, and Germany. Of course, aggregating SALW mixes a variety of weapons with different financial values. Therefore, one should not expect a perfect overlap with the UN Comtrade data. While the overall financial value recorded in UN Comtrade or the number of SALW units exported according to UNROCA can be useful for identifying broad

25 Nicolas Florquin with Victor de Oliveira, *The Authorized Trade in Small Arms: Latin America from a Global Perspective*, Small Arms Survey, October 2025, p. 2, <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/highlight/new-situation-update-global-authorized-trade-small-arms>

26 The data in this paragraph is taken from: Nicolas Florquin, Elodie Hainard, Benjamin Jongleux, *Trade Update 2020: An Eye on Ammunition Transfers to Africa*, Small Arms Survey, December 2020, p. 20 and 25–6, <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/resource/trade-update-2020-eye-ammunition-transfers-africa>; Nicolas Florquin with Victor de Oliveira, *The Authorized Trade in Small Arms: Latin America from a Global Perspective*, Small Arms Survey, October 2025, p. 4, <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/highlight/new-situation-update-global-authorized-trade-small-arms>; Paul Holtom and Irene Pavesi, *Trade Update 2017: Out of the Shadows*, Small Arms Survey, September 2017, pp. 17–20 and 22–24, <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/resource/trade-update-2017-out-shadows>

TABLE 2.2

Top SALW Exporters Reporting Units of SALW to UNROCA²⁷

State	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Total
Brazil	956	194,861	489,884	955,284	842,805	647,270	3,131,060
Germany	48,848	40,957	22,787	89,287	57,526	59,719	319,124
Italy	48,340	140,046	116,281	169,917	533,714	116,102	1,124,400
Türkiye	100,087	415,304	660,800	468,272	350,850	740,860	2,736,173
United States	221,653	67,054	179,395	66,305	103,619	NA	638,026

trends and patterns in arms flows, as well as for flows to conflict-affected areas and countries in which the risk of the use of SALW for violations of international human rights or humanitarian law is high, this data alone does not provide a sufficient level of detail to understand the risks of diversion or misuse fully. When States report SALW exports, disaggregated by subcategory, in their annual UNROCA submission or ATT annual report, such data can help to increase understanding of potential risks (see Chapter 4).

A further key advantage of UNROCA submissions and ATT reports for monitoring purposes, compared to UN Comtrade, is that some States include information on the intended end use or end user. Although there is no dedicated reporting field for this information, seven States have provided it annually to UNROCA for international transfers of SALW carried out during 2020–2023, with several more providing it on an ad hoc basis.²⁸ For example, Germany's 2023 UNROCA submission highlighted that the export of 20 assault rifles to Iraq was destined for end use by United Nations missions, while Canada, Hungary, Mexico, Peru, and Slovenia provide detailed information in both their UNROCA submissions and ATT reports on the end use or end users of transferred SALW. Such data are particularly relevant for assessing risks associated with international transfers of SALW, as the likelihood of diversion or misuse varies significantly depending on the recipient and intended use – factors that States are expected to consider in their risk assessments. In this way, UNROCA and the ATT have contributed to greater transparency in SALW reporting, particularly over the past decade.

For the past quarter of a century, monitoring of authorized international SALW transfers has relied heavily on official government data from States reporting their SALW exports. The Small Arms Survey Transparency Barometer identified the five least transparent major small arms exporters for 2006–2017 as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, and the United Arab Emirates.²⁹ These States did not provide data on their SALW exports to UN Comtrade, UNROCA, or any other international, regional, or national reporting mechanism for public

27 Author calculations from UNROCA website, <https://www.unroca.org/>

28 General Assembly, A/80/121, 9 July 2025, para. 33, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/80/121>

29 Paul Holtom and Irene Pavesi, *Trade Update 2017: Out of the Shadows*, Small Arms Survey, September 2017, pp. 60–63, <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/resource/trade-update-2017-out-shadows>



Weapons seized from Rebels in DR Congo shortly before they're destroyed. Goma, North Kivu. © UN Photo/Sylvain Liechti, 2012.

scrutiny. Yet reports by States that imported SALW from these States, as well as reports from arms embargo investigators and other sources, indicate that these States are significant SALW exporters.³⁰ Therefore, even though the volume of data on SALW exports and imports has increased since 2001, significant SALW producers, exporters, and importers are not providing data on their authorized SALW flows to United Nations instruments.

2.4 What Information Are We Missing?

Despite progress in official reporting on international SALW transfer over the past decade, significant structural challenges persist. A first limitation concerns the continued opacity of several major exporting States.³¹ Some prominent suppliers of SALW remain absent from reporting to either mechanism or, in the case of ATT State Parties, submit restricted reports, accessible only to other State Parties.³² This lack constrains the ability to develop a comprehensive picture of global authorized SALW flows and creates structural blind spots that hinder shared understandings and confidence-building. There are four areas where additional data on international SALW transfers could help to increase understanding of national decision-making on SALW transfers and to inform States' diversion risk assessments. Some Member States already provide such information, suggesting that it is feasible to collect and to share.

30 Ibid., p. 77.

31 General Assembly, A/HRC/56/42, 18 April 2024, para. 2, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/56/42>

32 UNIDIR released a paper addressing the contributions and persistent challenges of ATT annual reporting in February 2026. It underscores that the number of restricted reports has increased over the past decade. In 2024, 31 per cent of reports were not publicly available. Moreover, 16 ATT States Parties have only submitted restricted-access annual reports since the ATT entered into force. See Lara Maria Guedes Gonçalves Costa and Paul Holtom, *Arms Trade Treaty Reporting on Small Arms Transfers: What Have We Learned?*, UNIDIR, 2026, <https://unidir.org/publication/arms-trade-treaty-reporting-on-small-arms-transfers-what-have-we-learned/>

First, we lack systematic information on intended end users and end uses. Over the past decade, only 34 ATT States Parties have publicly provided such information at least once in their annual reports. It is challenging to fully understand potential diversion risks without sufficient information, because every State has different risk levels associated with SALW transfers intended for the armed forces, law enforcement, private security companies, or civilian markets. Without consistent end-user data, it is challenging to use official government data on SALW transfers for early warning or for understanding States' transfer decisions.

Second, current international transparency mechanisms remain primarily oriented towards international transfers of physical items. The international SALW trade involves licensed production and technology transfer arrangements, as well as transfers of parts and components, used to develop domestic manufacturing capacity. As of April 2026, no State has reported on licensed production arrangements to either UNROCA or the ATT. Some States have provided information in submissions to the ATT, UNROCA, and UN Comtrade on transfers of parts and components that can be assembled into functioning small arms. Yet it remains difficult to determine the use and intended end users from the available information.

Third, the United Nations reporting instruments and the ATT focus primarily on exports and imports, thereby overlooking other forms of authorized transfers. At the regional and national levels, however, some States provide public data on authorizations for transit, trans-shipment, and brokering.³³ All European Union (EU) member States are required to provide information on brokering authorizations in annual reports, which are made available online.³⁴ Therefore, this is an area where a request to provide information to the United Nations would build upon regional practices. Collecting such information globally would help to increase understanding of international SALW trade dynamics and of important actors and transportation nodes that are currently not visible.

Fourth, a notable gap in the international reporting mechanisms reviewed in this chapter relates to the systematic provision by States of information on denials of authorization. While some regional mechanisms and national reports provide such data, it is not reported under multilateral transparency instruments. Without information on authorization denials, as well as revocations and suspensions of issued authorizations, current frameworks capture only transfers that were authorized or delivered. Such data does not allow States and other interested stakeholders to fully understand the decisions made by national transfer control systems. Further, such information would be useful for strengthening risk assessment practices.

Continued attention to both the substance and reliability of authorized transfer reporting may therefore enhance risk assessment, support diversion mitigation, and reinforce confidence-building among States. Strengthened transparency in authorized trade also facilitates a clearer baseline against which to assess illicit transfers and diversion dynamics, which are examined in the following chapter.

33 Ibid., p. 4.

34 The European Union's online database of arms export licences and actual arms exports is available at <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/eeasqap/sense/app/75fd8e6e-68ac-42dd-a078-f616633118bb/sheet/74299ecd-7a90-4b89-a509-92c9b96b86ba/state/analysis>



Some ammunitions used in the fighting, some of them unexploded, have been collected by a man and exposed in a shop. Misrata, Tripoli street, Libya. © ICRC/ELMAZI, Herbi, 2011

3. Illicit Flows

The negative impacts of the illicit trade in SALW on security, stability, peace, and development have long been highlighted by the United Nations and recognized by the General Assembly and the Security Council. Illicit trafficking and the diversion of SALW fuel, exacerbate, and prolong armed conflicts and armed violence, including gender-based violence, crime, and acts of terrorism, and negatively impact the United Nations system's ability to fulfil its mandates, both directly or indirectly.³⁵

This chapter draws on several United Nations data sources on illicit SALW flows, but for various reasons. There is no single global data set or source of actionable information on illicit SALW flows and risk indicators. This lack hampers the ability of United Nations entities, Member States, and partners to shift from a reactive to a preventive approach. Even within the United Nations, there are different mechanisms that request similar information and data from Member States, but which are compartmentalized and administered by different United Nations entities.

³⁵ See, for example, United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), *The Impact of Poorly Regulated Arms Transfers on the Work of the United Nations*, 2013, <https://www.un-ilibrary.org/content/books/9789210561051>

This chapter examines official sources of information on illicit SALW flows, covering illicit trafficking and diversion of international arms transfers to the illicit arms trade and unauthorized end users. While the following chapter highlights how international instruments encourage the collection and sharing of data and information relating to SALW diversion, this chapter considers challenges in collecting and using data on illicit SALW flows to estimate the scale of the illicit SALW trade and to understand diversion and trafficking dynamics. Without such an evidence base, it is difficult to formulate appropriate and effective policies and practices to counter diversion.

3.1 United Nations Sources on Illicit SALW

There is a wide variety of information sources on illicit SALW flows, ranging from official government sources to NGO investigations into diversion and trafficking cases. The United Nations, as well as other international and regional organizations, request official government information on seizures and diversion to increase understanding of illicit SALW flows and dynamics. The United Nations appoints independent experts to monitor sanctions violations, while United Nations peacekeepers and political missions also gather information on illicit SALW flows. Official government information and United Nations data on illicit SALW flows vary in quantity and quality, and there is no systematic approach to collecting information on types of arms, the entities involved, destinations, routes, and methods used to facilitate diversion and trafficking. This chapter relies on the following official government and United Nations sources:

- ▶ information on seizures and diversion incidents provided in national voluntary reports on PoA implementation;
- ▶ data on seizures and illicit firearms provided by States Parties to the Firearms Protocol via the illicit arms flows questionnaire;
- ▶ information provided on the proportion of seized, found, or surrendered arms whose illicit origin or context has been traced in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goal Indicator 16.4.2;
- ▶ World Customs Organization data on seizures of illicit SALW;
- ▶ publicly available reports of panels or groups of experts appointed by the Secretary-General to monitor the implementation of sanctions imposed by the Security Council;³⁶ and
- ▶ reports of United Nations special political missions and peacekeeping operations, or other peace operations mandated by the Security Council, that monitor, inspect, document, register, or dispose of illicit SALW.

3.2 Estimating the Illicit SALW Trade

Estimating the scale of the illicit SALW trade, including the financial value and number of illicit SALW, is fundamentally challenging. This is primarily due to the hidden nature of transactions, various types of

36 At the time of writing, 11 of the 14 Security Council sanctions regimes have an established arms embargo monitoring mechanism, but only seven have a dedicated ‘arms expert’; see “Sanctions Committees” at <https://main.un.org/security-council/en/sanctions/information>

‘grey’ transfers, the context-specific and dynamic nature of diversion from licit and legal sources, the complexities of global markets, rapidly evolving technologies, and the absence, incompleteness, or inconsistency of official data.³⁷

At the turn of the century, estimates of the value of the illicit global SALW trade ranged from 10 per cent to 50 per cent of the financial value of the overall global SALW trade.³⁸ Given that the value of the authorized SALW trade is not known, as noted in Chapter 2, one should not be surprised that few are willing to estimate the value of the illicit SALW trade.³⁹ Another method for estimating the scale of the illicit SALW trade is to use data on registered SALW or seizures. This approach is also challenging because, as will be shown below, such data is also lacking for many States. Thus, estimates of the size of the global illicit SALW trade should always be treated with caution, given their implications for policy initiatives to address it (see Box 3.1).

Under the PoA, Member States have committed to national-level measures to prevent and combat the illicit trade in SALW and have emphasized the need for international cooperation, coordination, and information-sharing to address diversion.⁴⁰ Of the 153 States that submitted PoA reports between 2014 and 2024, 47 reported collecting information on “domestic incidents” of diversion related to international SALW transfers. Of these 47 States, 25 provided information on the “number of incidents of diversion related to international transfers”. Between 2014 and 2024, only four States provided more detailed information (e.g., a description or number of incidents). For some States, it is clear that this type of information is not systematically collected at the national level. For others, there are concerns about the sensitive nature of such information, and therefore, some States are not willing to share via publicly available PoA reports.⁴¹

The collection of data to measure progress towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Target 16, in particular Indicator 16.4.2 on the “proportion of seized, found or surrendered arms whose illicit origin or context has been traced or established by a competent authority in line with international instruments”,⁴² has resulted in one of the most comprehensive data sets on the illicit trade in SALW (see

37 Mark Bromley, Marina Caparini and Alfredo Malaret, *Measuring Illicit Arms and Financial Flows: Improving the Assessment of Sustainable Development Goal 16*, SIPRI, July 2019, p. 9, <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2019/sipri-background-papers/measuring-illicit-arms-and-financial-flows-improving-assessment-sustainable-development-goal-16>

38 United Nations, “We the Peoples: The Role of the United Nations in the 21st century”, 2000, p. 52, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/413745>; Small Arms Survey, *Small Arms Survey: 2001, Profiling the Problem*, 2001, p. 165, <https://www.smallarms-survey.org/sites/default/files/resources/Small-Arms-Survey-2001-Chapter-05-EN.pdf>

39 Guillermo Vázquez del Mercado, Ruggero Scaturro, and Alex Goodwin, *Measuring the Scope and Scale of Illicit Arms Trafficking*, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, January 2025, pp. 20–21, <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Measuring-the-scope-and-scale-of-illicit-arms-trafficking-GI-TOC-January-2025.v2-.pdf>

40 See PoA national reports, <https://smallarms.un-arm.org/national-reports>

41 Ruben Nicolin, Paul Holtom, and Anabel García García, *Insights from Reporting on Conventional Arms Control*, UNIDIR, 2025, <https://unidir.org/publication/insights-from-reporting-on-conventional-arms-control-supporting-preparations-for-reporting-on-implementation-of-the-global-framework-for-through-life-conventional-ammunition-management/>

42 See global indicator framework adopted in General Assembly, A/RES/71/313, 10 July 2017, Annex, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/71/313>; Economic and Social Council, E/CN.3/2020/2, 20 December 2019, Annex II, <https://docs.un.org/en/E/CN.3/2020/2>; Economic and Social Council, E/CN.3/2025/6, 13 December 2024, Annex II, <https://docs.un.org/en/E/CN.3/2025/6>; and annual refinements contained in E/CN.3/2018/2 (Annex II), E/CN.3/2019/2 (Annex II), E/CN.3/2020/2 (Annex III), E/CN.3/2021/2 (Annex), E/CN.3/2022/2 (Annex I), E/CN.3/2023/2 (Annex II), E/CN.3/2024/4 (Annex I) and E/CN.3/2025/6 (Annex I).

SDG Indicator and Data Deficit

Agenda 2030 acknowledges the negative impacts of illicit arms, including SALW flows, on peace, security, and development. The globally agreed target is to significantly “reduce illicit arms flows by 2030”, measured by the “proportion of seized, found or surrendered arms whose illicit origin or context has been traced or established by a competent authority in line with international instruments”.⁴³ Indicator 16.4.2 is classified as Tier 2, because while it has a degree of methodological clarity, insufficient information is available or can be generated by States, resulting in a data deficit.⁴⁴ The Indicator also allows for differing interpretations. For example, the term “arms” encompasses a broader range of weapons than SALW or firearms – thus, data on “seized, found or surrendered arms” do not necessarily correlate with the total volume of illicit arms flows. Even with this data, it is challenging to reliably estimate illicit SALW flows.⁴⁵ Based on the Indicator and data, it is also challenging to ascertain if an increase, or decrease, reflects a change in the scale of illicit arms flows, including the SALW trade, or improved regulation, controls, or enforcement, or national capacity to report information, or a combination of these. Rather, what is being measured is the efficiency with which the international community combats illicit firearms trafficking. Relying on the Indicator and the corresponding data is therefore insufficient to provide reliable estimates of the flow of illicit arms, including SALW trade.

Box 3.1). Progress has been made by using proxy indicators (i.e., measurable, indirect variables used instead of direct measures) to estimate the size of the illicit firearms trade, based on reported seizures. The Global Firearms Study of 2020 reported that at least 550,000 firearms were seized in 2016–2017.⁴⁶ There were large variations across States, with reports ranging from 10 firearms seized annually at one end of the spectrum to 300,000 at the other. United Nations analysis of data from 14 States suggested that the illicit origin or context was established for just 28 per cent of cases.

3.3 Diversion and Illicit Trafficking in SALW

The General Assembly has recognized that the diversion of SALW to the illicit trade can happen at any stage of their long life cycle, and at any of the phases of international SALW transfers, including in transit, whether by air, land, or sea.⁴⁷ However, the ‘when, where, by whom, and for whom’ of SALW diversion and trafficking are context-specific variables. Context-specificity comprises local, national,

43 General Assembly, A/RES/70/1, 21 October 2015, p. 25, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/70/1>.

44 See <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/tierIII-indicators/files/Tier3-16-04-02.pdf>

45 Mark Bromley, Marina Caparini and Alfredo Malaret, *Measuring Illicit Arms and Financial Flows: Improving the Assessment of Sustainable Development Goal 16*, SIPRI, July 2019, <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2019/sipri-background-papers/measuring-illicit-arms-and-financial-flows-improving-assessment-sustainable-development-goal-16>

46 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020*, 2020, p. 21, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/firearms-protocol/firearms-study.html>

47 General Assembly, A/CONF.192/2024/RC/3, 5 July 2024, para. 20, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/CONF.192/2024/RC/3>



Aleppo, Sheikh Massoud neighbourhood, near the frontline. Fighters of the Free Syrian Army. Syria. © ICRC/VOETEN, Teun Anthony, 2013

and (sub)regional contexts, as well as contexts affected by armed conflicts and those experiencing high or extreme levels of armed violence and organized crime. The spectrum of actors involved is equally broad. Diversion can involve State officials, and it can involve unscrupulous brokers, criminals, transnational organized crime groups, non-State armed groups (including groups designated as terrorist groups), their affiliates, and individuals. At the other end of the spectrum, diversion and ‘unauthorized’ users and end users can also be civilians. Furthermore, diversion trends are dynamic, with supply-and-demand factors driving the illicit trade.⁴⁸ Given the high demand, production, and rates of trade, ammunition diversion and illicit trafficking trends are likely even more dynamic.⁴⁹ Moreover, actors involved in diversion and illicit arms trafficking can adapt and innovate faster than systemic and practical measures taken by States and the international community.

There is wide variation across the globe in the scale of diversion and illicit trafficking of SALW. At one end of the spectrum is the cumulative, low-volume, so-called ‘ant trade’, and at the other end is the large-scale diversion of international arms transfers in contexts of armed conflicts and Security Council arms embargoes. The ant trade includes small-quantity cross-border movements by individuals or small groups over time, and while each transaction is limited in scale, the aggregate effect can be

48 World Customs Organization, *Enforcement and Compliance. Illicit Trade Report 2024*, 2026, p. 20, <https://www.wcoomd.org/en/topics/enforcement-and-compliance/resources/publications.aspx>

49 General Assembly, A/RES/78/47, 4 December 2023, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/78/47>

significant and sustain criminal violence or insurgent activities in neighbouring territory. Large-scale diversion of international arms, including SALW transfers, involves substantial quantities of weapons diverted to unauthorized end users or end uses. The illicit trade can range from diffuse, low-visibility patterns that incrementally erode security to more visible patterns and high-impact illicit transfers that can rapidly alter local, national, or regional conflict dynamics. Thus, no single approach can counter illicit SALW flows.

Technological change is reshaping the global landscape of diversion, illicit trafficking, and trade, lowering barriers to entry, creating ambiguities in international regulation, and accelerating the diffusion of knowledge. Whereas traditionally the focus has been on industrially manufactured SALW and the regulation of their life cycle to prevent diversion, technological developments and knowledge diffused independently of the physical movement of items have enabled craft-produced or privately manufactured SALW, ranging from rudimentary guns produced by blacksmiths to 3D-printed weapons.⁵⁰ In relation to this trend, international transfers of parts and components not covered by international instruments or national laws and regulations can also be used to illicitly manufacture SALW. This could signal a necessary shift from the diversion and illicit trafficking of fully manufactured SALW to a more complex landscape, in which we should focus more on the international transfer of parts and components, as well as on the knowledge and know-how to illicitly produce SALW.

The rest of this chapter examines the uses and impacts of illicit SALW flows in different contexts.

3.3.1 Illicit SALW and Security Council Arms Embargoes

Diversion and illicit trafficking of arms, including SALW and ammunition, undermine the effectiveness of Security Council arms embargoes and, more broadly, sanctions. Currently, 12 of the 15 United Nations sanctions regimes include an arms embargo,⁵¹ which prohibits or restricts the direct or indirect supply, sale, or transfer by nationals and entities of States, whether operating on their territory or abroad, to designated entities or States.⁵² Such arms embargoes and sanctions are part of broader United Nations conflict management efforts. While their purposes may be distinct, the effectiveness of arms embargoes depends on all Member States' implementation of international conventional arms transfer control measures and their prevention, detection, and addressing of diversion and illicit trafficking of arms.⁵³ All too often, however, arms embargoes continue to be violated, as demonstrated by the latest reports by United Nations monitoring mechanisms that assist Council Committees. This may be due to a lack of collective political will and consensus, a lack of awareness of the applicable measures, negligence, or a lack of capacity among States to implement and enforce systemic and practical arms transfer control measures.

50 Matilde Vecchioni, *Unregulated Production: Examining Craft-Produced Weapons from a Global Perspective*, UNIDIR, 2024, <https://unidir.org/publication/unregulated-production-examining-craft-produced-weapons-from-a-global-perspective/>

51 See "Sanctions" at <https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/sanctions/information>

52 Most of the United Nations arms embargoes currently in place are import embargoes (i.e., import prohibitions or restrictions); a few are import and export embargoes (e.g., also export prohibitions or restrictions).

53 See Judith Vorrath, *UN Arms Embargoes Under Scrutiny: Obstacles and Options for an Effective Contribution to Conflict Resolution*, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, 2024, https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/research_papers/2024RP12_UNArmsEmbargoes_Web.pdf

3.3.2 Illicit SALW and Conflict-Affected Settings

Diversion and illicit trafficking of arms, including SALW, ammunition, and related material, fuel, exacerbate, and prolong armed conflicts. An often-cited example is the situation in Libya in 2011. Following the erosion and collapse of State authority, illicit transfers (including those violating the established United Nations arms embargo), diversion, and proliferation out of Libyan territory to and between non-State armed groups (including groups designated as terrorist groups), contributed to the eruption of armed conflicts and violence in Mali, the Niger, and Burkina Faso.⁵⁴ These negative impacts continue to be felt and to pose obstacles to peace, security, stability, and development in the West African region and the Sahel.

3.3.3 Illicit SALW and Crime

Diversion and illicit trafficking of SALW and ammunition play a central role in fuelling and sustaining organized criminal violence worldwide. The Latin American and Caribbean region, for example, is characterized by a high availability of illicit SALW diverted from legal (including commercial) channels and sources, and illicitly trafficked to, by, or for armed gangs, armed groups, criminals, and organized criminal groups.⁵⁵ The latter are often involved in the trade of other illicit goods. As a result, the region continues to rank globally among those with the highest levels of SALW-related armed violence.⁵⁶ Beyond direct, lethal violence, diversion, illicit transfers, and trafficking in SALW fuels the displacement of people, weakens public trust in State institutions, puts pressure on criminal justice and public health systems, and hinders socioeconomic development.

3.3.4 Illicit SALW and Terrorism

Diversion, illicit trafficking, proliferation, and circulation of SALW and ammunition, and their misuse by groups and individuals committing acts of terrorism, undermine security, stability, peace, and development of States, people, and civilians worldwide. Despite the Security Council's prohibition, direct or indirect supplies to, between, or by such groups, their networks, and affiliates continue to affect all regions,⁵⁷ including the African and Asia-Pacific regions. For example, Council-mandated Panels of Experts have documented and traced the origins of illicit arms transfers that have enabled both Yemen-based actors and Somalia-based groups designated as terrorist groups to bolster their power.⁵⁸ One trend highlighted in such reports published in 2024 and 2025 is that transfers have grown in sophistication and increasingly

54 Security Council, S/2012/163, 20 March 2012, paras. 127–144, <https://docs.un.org/en/S/2012/163>

55 Anne-S  verine Fabre, Nicolas Florquin, Aaron Karp, and Matt Schroeder, *Weapons Compass: The Caribbean Firearms Study*, Small Arms Survey and CARICOM IMPACS, April 2023, <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/resource/weapons-compass-caribbean-firearms-study>

56 Gianluca Boo and Gergely Hideg, *Broken Ambitions: The Global Struggle to Halve Violent Deaths by 2030*, Small Arms Survey, November 2024, <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/resource/broken-ambitions-global-struggle-halve-violent-deaths-2030>

57 See, for example, Counter-Terrorism Committee, *Global Survey of the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1373 (2001) and Other Relevant Resolutions by Member States*, 2021, https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/sites/www.un.org/securitycouncil.ctc/files/ctc_1373_gis.pdf

58 Security Council, S/2024/731, 11 October 2024, paras. 39–41, <https://docs.un.org/en/S/2024/731>; Security Council, S/2025/650, 17 October 2025, paras. 74–82, <https://docs.un.org/en/S/2025/650>



include categories of larger weapon systems, parts and components, in addition to SALW, such as assault rifles and man-portable air defence systems, and ammunition. The diversion environment that enables these groups to acquire more advanced weapons capabilities not only poses risks and threats to the situations in Yemen and Somalia, but also to maritime security in one of the most important locations for global trade.

3.3.5 Illicit SALW and Gender-Based Violence

Globally, SALW are the categories of weapons most implicated in human rights violations in general and in gender-based violence in particular. Gender-based violence is that directed at a person based on discriminatory norms and practices specifically relating to sex, gender, or role in society.⁵⁹ Unregulated international SALW transfers and SALW transfers diverted to unauthorized end users or end uses may have a gendered impact,⁶⁰ where these SALW are used to commit such violence.⁶¹ Criminals, gangs, and non-State armed groups (including groups designated as terrorist groups) often use SALW in the commission of gender-based violence. One particularly egregious example is the current crisis in the Latin American and Caribbean region, particularly in Haiti. An estimated 270,000 to 500,000 SALW and corresponding ammunition present there have been used by armed gangs in the coordinated massacres of civilians and the systematic perpetration of thousands of cases of gender-based violence, including sexual violence directed at women and girls, as a deliberate strategy to terrorize communities and consolidate territorial control.⁶²

59 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Integrating a Gender Perspective into Human Rights Investigations: Guidance and Practice*, 2018. p. 7, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/Integrating-GenderPerspective_EN.pdf

60 General Assembly, A/HRC/44/29, 19 June 2020, para. 16, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/44/29>

61 Anne-Séverine Fabre, Gian Giezendanner, Paul Holtom, and Emilia Dungal, *At Whose Risk ? Understanding States Parties' Implementation of Arms Trade Treaty Gender-Based Violence Provisions*, Small Arms Survey, 2022, <https://www.smallarms-survey.org/sites/default/files/resources/SAS-ATT-GBV-BP.pdf>

62 Security Council, S/2025/588*, 18 September 2025, paras. 20–25, <https://docs.un.org/en/S/2025/588>



LEAP Programme: Southeast Asia Customs Officers Training on Timber Trade Enforcement and Port Visit, Da Nang, Viet Nam 2025.
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4. National Transfer Control Systems

International and regional SALW control instruments require or recommend establishing and maintaining a national transfer control system to ensure the responsible export, import, transit/trans-shipment, and brokering of SALW.⁶³ A robust national system for controlling international arms transfers is an important pillar for maintaining peace and security, and for preventing their use in committing or facilitating international crimes and violations of international humanitarian law, human rights law, and conventions against transnational organized crime and terrorism.⁶⁴ It is also a key component of national efforts to counter illicit SALW trafficking and diversion to unauthorized end users.⁶⁵ The ATT, Firearms Protocol, and PoA do not provide detailed guidance on national processes for deciding or denying international SALW transfers, as this is left to States' discretion. National transfer control systems and processes differ, influenced by legal and regulatory traditions, levels of involvement in the international arms trade,

63 This report does not provide a detailed comparison of the ATT, Firearms Protocol, PoA, and other international and regional instruments. For a comparison of the ATT and the Firearms Protocol, see UNODC, *The Firearms Protocol and the Arms Trade Treaty: Divergence or Complementarity?*, 2016, <https://www.unodc.org/documents/firearms-protocol/SynergiesPaper.pdf>

64 Coordinating Action on Small Arms (CASA), Modular Small Arms Control Implementation Compendium (MOSAIC), MOSAIC 03.20:2014(E)V1.0, 17 June 2014, p. vi, <https://front.un-arm.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/MOSAIC-03.20-2014EV1.0.pdf>

65 UNODC, *Technical Guide to the Implementation of the Protocol Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms*, 2011, p. 63, https://www.unodc.org/documents/firearms-protocol/Publications/10-56148_Ebook.pdf

and participation in multilateral arms control frameworks. Yet, the United Nations and other international and regional organizations have developed guidance to support national efforts to develop and strengthen national control systems for implementing these instruments (see Section 4.1).

This chapter serves two functions. First, it provides an overview of the seven key elements of a national SALW transfer control system, as outlined in international instruments and their guidance (see Table 4.1):

1. legal and regulatory framework;
2. designated and competent institutional structures, including inter-agency cooperation mechanisms;
3. clear and transparent procedures for reviewing, issuing, and denying transfer authorizations;
4. transfer control documentation;
5. record-keeping mechanisms;
6. enforcement of national laws and regulations; and
7. international cooperation.

Second, the chapter assesses the extent to which Member States have implemented these seven key elements, judging by national government information extracted from ATT initial reports and reports on the implementation of the PoA.

TABLE 4.1

Key Elements of a National Transfer Control System

Element		ATT	Firearms Protocol	PoA
Legal and regulatory framework	Laws for control	–	–	✓
	Criminal offences in law	–	✓	✓
Institutional structures	National point of contact	✓	✓	✓
	Competent national authorities	✓	–	–
Procedures	Information-sharing before authorization	✓	✓	✓
	Risk assessment	✓	–	✓
Documentation	Use of authenticated EUC	(✓)	✓	✓
	Detailed authorization/licence	✓	✓	–
Record-keeping	Contents	✓	✓	–
	Maintain the records	10 years	10 years	Indefinite
Enforcement		✓	✓	✓
International cooperation	Information-sharing for countering diversion	✓	✓	✓
	Sharing best practices	✓	✓	✓

4.1 United Nations Sources on National Transfer Control Systems

The key elements of a national control system for international transfers of SALW are derived from the following guidance documents developed to support the implementation of the ATT, Firearms Protocol, and PoA:

- ▶ ATT – Voluntary Basic Guide to Establishing a National Control System;⁶⁶
- ▶ Modular Small-arms-control Implementation Compendium (MOSAIC) module 03.20 – Controls Over the International Transfers of Small Arms and Light Weapons;⁶⁷
- ▶ UNODC – Technical Guide to the Implementation of the Protocol Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms.⁶⁸

To provide an overview of Member States’ national SALW transfer controls, official government information has been extracted from two sources:

- ▶ the latest reports on the implementation of the PoA during the period 2014–2024; and
- ▶ publicly available ATT initial reports.⁶⁹

By relying on these two sources, this chapter is constrained by the questions asked in the ATT and PoA reporting templates, as well as by the information that States chose to share and make publicly available.

TABLE 4.2

Regional ATT and PoA Reporting Breakdown

Region	PoA Reports	ATT Initial Reports	States Not Reviewed
Africa (54 States)	44	9	10
Americas (33 States)	29	15	5
Asia-Pacific (54 States)	38	8	20
Europe (52 States)	42	36	1
Total	153	68	36

66 Arms Trade Treaty Working Group on Effective Treaty Implementation (ATT WGETI), *Voluntary Basic Guide to Establishing a National Control System*, 26 July 2019.

67 CASA, MOSAIC 03.20:2014(E)V1.0, 17 June 2014, <https://front.un-arm.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/MOSAIC-03.20-2014EV1.0.pdf>

68 UNODC, *Technical Guide to the Implementation of the Protocol Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms*, 2011, p. 63, https://www.unodc.org/documents/firearms-protocol/Publications/10-56148_Ebook.pdf

69 The research team recognizes that some States make information on their national transfer control system available via government websites. However, the required information for this report was also available in their ATT initial reports or PoA/ITI implementation reports. See: ATT initial reports at <https://www.thearmstradetreaty.org/initial-report> and PoA national reports at <https://smallarms.un-arm.org/national-reports>

In particular, very few States use these opportunities to provide information on their regulation of international transfers of firearms for civilians and non-State entities compared to international transfers of SALW for State end users. While this chapter does not consider all Member States, it presents a snapshot of the national SALW transfer control systems of a large majority (see Table 4.2).

4.2 Legal and Regulatory Framework

Appropriate legislation and government regulations are the foundation of an effective national transfer control system. For this reason, the United Nations and other entities have developed and shared model laws to support the implementation of the ATT and Firearms Protocol.⁷⁰ Most Member States (142) have provided information in their national reports on PoA implementation on the legislation and regulations that underpin their national control systems for SALW transfers. These reports show that national SALW transfer controls are based on legislation and regulations covering firearms control, import/export or strategic trade controls, customs procedures, and relevant international and regional obligations.⁷¹ This is so because legislation and subordinate instruments for national SALW transfer control systems should:

- ▶ define SALW (or firearms) and transfer-related activities to be controlled;
- ▶ designate competent authorities for assessing applications and issuing or denying authorizations;
- ▶ indicate when a written authorization from competent government authorities is required;
- ▶ outline application procedures, including risk assessment criteria and information and documentation requirements;
- ▶ establish obligations for recordkeeping, information exchange, and reporting; and
- ▶ provide for enforcement powers and proportionate, dissuasive penalties.⁷²

The ATT reporting template asks for more detailed information on legislation, regulations, and procedures for controlling exports and regulating imports, transit/trans-shipment, and brokering than does the PoA reporting template. These reports show that 7 ATT States Parties define import in their national legislative and regulatory framework, 11 define transit, and 49 define brokering. It should be noted that many States have indicated that they would like to review and update their national legislative and regulatory framework, or are in the process of doing so, and are seeking international assistance to undertake the task (see Box 4.1). Thus, the number of States that have such definitions in their legislation and regulations is likely to increase in the coming years.

70 For example, see League of Arab States, *Arab Model Law on Weapons, Ammunition, Explosives and Hazardous Materials*, 2002, unofficial English language translation, <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/research/disarmament/dualuse/pdf-archive-att/pdfs/arab-league-model-law-on-weapons-ammunitions-explosives-and-hazardous-material.pdf>; New Zealand and Small Arms Survey, *Arms Trade Treaty: Model Law*, October 2014, <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/resource/arms-trade-treaty-model-law-co-publication>; UNODC, *Model Law Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition*, 2nd rev. ed., 2014, https://www.unodc.org/documents/firearms-protocol/14-08330_Firearms_revised_ebook.pdf

71 ATT WGETI, *Voluntary Basic Guide to Establishing a National Control System*, 26 July 2019, p. 4.

72 Ibid.

International Assistance for Transfer Controls

States can request international assistance to strengthen their national transfer control systems through PoA reports and initial ATT reports.⁷³ During 2014–2024, 60 States used PoA reports to request international assistance in developing laws, regulations, and administrative procedures for effective SALW transfer control.

There are various opportunities to receive assistance for developing and strengthening national transfer control systems at the global and regional levels, as well as through bilateral cooperation with States and NGOs.⁷⁴ At the global level, these include the United Nations Trust Facility Supporting Cooperation on Arms Regulation, administered by UNODA to support implementation of the PoA and its International Tracing Instrument; and the ATT Voluntary Trust Fund, administered by the ATT Secretariat to support ATT implementation.

It is important to determine which aspects of the system should be addressed in primary legislation, and which in regulations, policy documents, and administrative procedures. It is recommended that primary legislation designate competent authorities, core principles for control, and aspects of the national system that are not expected to change. Regulations and subordinate instruments usually provide detailed descriptions of items to be controlled (e.g., in a ‘national control list’), detailed procedural requirements, and document templates, as these aspects of the system may need to be updated regularly.⁷⁵

4.3 Institutional Structures

More than half of ATT States Parties (63) have reported a designated competent national authorities for controlling international arms transfers. ATT and PoA reports indicate which government entities are responsible for controlling transfers but provide limited information about their roles in the national control system. As noted in Box 4.1, these reports provide insufficient information on institutional arrangements for controlling international firearms transfers to non-State end users versus SALW transfers to government end users. Some States report the involvement of more than five government entities in their national transfer control system, while a few report a single specialized government agency. Due to differing constitutional requirements, administrative traditions, and capacity, there are three main

73 Ruben Nicolin, Paul Holtom, and Anabel García García, *Insights from Reporting on Conventional Arms Control*, UNIDIR, 2025, p. 11, <https://undir.org/publication/insights-from-reporting-on-conventional-arms-control-supporting-preparations-for-reporting-on-implementation-of-the-global-framework-for-through-life-conventional-ammunition-management/>

74 Giovanna Maletta and Sibylle Bauer, *Taking Stock of the Arms Trade Treaty: International Assistance to Support Implementation*, SIPRI, August 2021, <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2021/policy-reports/taking-stock-arms-trade-treaty-international-assistance-support-implementation>; Paul Holtom and Mark Bromley, *Implementing an Arms Trade Treaty: Mapping Assistance to Strengthen Arms Transfer Controls*, SIPRI, July 2012, <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2012/sipri-insights-peace-and-security/implementing-arms-trade-treaty-mapping-assistance-strengthen-arms-transfer-controls>

75 CASA, MOSAIC 03.20:2014(E)V1.0, 17 June 2014, p. 16, <https://front.un-arm.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/MOSAIC-03.20-2014EV1.0.pdf>

approaches to institutional arrangements for controlling international transfers of conventional arms, including SALW.

- ▶ **Single lead authority.** One government ministry, department, or agency serves as the main entity for controlling international transfers of SALW or firearms. The most commonly designated entities are ministries of defence, foreign affairs, home affairs/interior, public security, and trade. In such systems, the risk assessment process will nevertheless likely require inter-agency government cooperation.
- ▶ **Several competent authorities with coordination mechanisms.** Separate entities are responsible for controlling exports, imports, transit/trans-shipment, and brokering authorizations of SALW and firearms. For example, the Ministry of Defence might be responsible for SALW exports and brokering, as well as imports for national government end users; the Ministry of Interior for imports of firearms for civilians; and the customs authority under the Ministry of Finance for transit/trans-shipment of SALW and firearms. Such an approach requires formal mechanisms to enable cooperation and consistency.
- ▶ **Standing interministerial committees.** While there might be one lead entity that receives applications for transfer authorizations, these are assessed by committees that consist of representatives from customs, defence, finance, foreign affairs, intelligence, interior/home affairs, justice and other relevant ministries.⁷⁶

Irrespective of the structure, the designated competent authorities for controlling international SALW transfers will be expected to perform the following core functions:

- ▶ serving as the primary interface for transfer authorization applicants;
- ▶ collecting, verifying, and analyzing information relevant to proposed transfers as part of an objective and transparent risk assessment;
- ▶ recommending whether to authorize, deny, or revoke authorizations;
- ▶ maintaining records of transfers, denials, and revocations;
- ▶ overseeing compliance with legislation and policy; and
- ▶ coordinating and sharing information across government, and with other States as required.⁷⁷

International guidance highlights the importance of effective inter-agency cooperation and coordination to ensure responsible arms transfers and to counter diversion and trafficking, particularly regarding risk assessment, record-keeping, reporting, and enforcement. As indicated above, arrangements for inter-agency cooperation vary depending on the items to be transferred (i.e., SALW or firearms) and the end user (i.e., armed forces, police, a private security company, or a civilian). Table 4.3. shows some of the common challenges to effective inter-agency cooperation and potential solutions.

76 Paul Holtom, *The Role of Interagency Cooperation in the Effective Implementation of Arms Trade Treaty Provisions: Brainstorming Workshop Summary*, UNIDIR, Conflict Armament Research, Stimson, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania, 2024, p. 12, <https://unidir.org/publication/the-role-of-interagency-cooperation-in-the-effective-implementation-of-arms-trade-treaty-provisions-brainstorming-workshop-summary/>

77 Arms ATT WGETI, *Voluntary Basic Guide*, p. 10.

TABLE 4.3

Inter-agency Cooperation Challenges and Solutions⁷⁸

Challenge	Potential Solution
Differing mandates, responsibilities, and priorities for government entities involved in SALW transfer controls	Discussion of roles and responsibilities to ensure mutual understanding, leading to a written agreement endorsed by senior officials
Government entities involved in SALW transfer controls have limited understanding of others' mandates, responsibilities, and priorities	Peer-to-peer information-sharing and cooperation
Government entities involved in SALW transfer controls have differing levels of awareness and understanding of their responsibilities	Awareness-raising to ensure officials have the requisite knowledge
Poor or lacking communication among government entities involved in SALW transfer controls	Establish focal points and prepare for sustainable cooperation modalities (outlined in written agreement)
Differences in power and influence across government entities	Secure buy-in and shared ownership from all parties, and then proceed to a discussion of roles and responsibilities to ensure mutual understanding, leading to a written agreement endorsed by senior officials
Differences in resources and capacity across government entities involved in SALW transfer controls	
Differences in seniority of officials engaged in inter-agency cooperation (i.e. some are senior staff, while others are more junior)	
Frequent changes in personnel involved in inter-agency cooperation for SALW transfer controls cause loss of institutional memory or prioritization of transfer controls	Allow time for discussion and possible setbacks; institutionalize cooperation and provide appropriate training
Differing professional backgrounds and training of assigned personnel, with relevant technical knowledge lacking in some entities	Training to ensure officials have requisite technical knowledge
Government entities unnecessarily involved in inter-agency coordination and cooperation for SALW transfer controls; in other cases, relevant government entities not actively involved	Consideration of when active cooperation is necessary, to avoid meeting for the sake of meeting

4.4 Clear and Transparent Procedures

The legal and regulatory framework should provide information on the procedures for controlling international arms transfers and countering their diversion. To promote predictability and transparency, and

78 Figure 4.3 is adapted from the working paper of the Presidency of ATT Tenth Conference of States Parties, ATT/CSP10/2024/PRES/798/Conf.WP.IAC, 19 July 2024, para. 11 and Paul Holtom, *The Role of Interagency Cooperation in the Effective Implementation of Arms Trade Treaty Provisions: Brainstorming Workshop Summary*, UNIDIR, Conflict Armament Research, Stimson, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania, 2024, pp. 13–14, <https://unidir.org/publication/the-role-of-interagency-cooperation-in-the-effective-implementation-of-arms-trade-treaty-provisions-brainstorming-workshop-summary/>

also to ensure that applicants submit the necessary documents completely and accurately, States should provide clear information on the application requirements for engaging in the international arms trade and authorizations for international SALW transfers, prohibitions and risk assessment criteria, measures to mitigate the risk of diversion, and procedures for revoking decisions relating to international SALW transfers.⁷⁹

Six primary approaches are used by Member States for controlling the export, import, transit/trans-shipment, and brokering of SALW.

1. **Registration to be involved in the international arms trade.** Under this approach, in which an operating licence is issued to engage in international trade, the successful applicant may engage in the international arms trade for defined categories of weapons and defined States for a fixed period. This approach focuses on the applicant being a responsible natural or legal person with no criminal record, having appropriate knowledge of the international arms trade, and maintaining an internal compliance system. This option is rarely used for export and import, but is used by some States to control SALW brokering activities (see Box 4.2).
2. **Written authorization for a transfer.** A natural or legal person applies to the competent government entity for a written authorization (i.e., licence or permit) to engage in a specific international transfer of SALW. Under this approach, risk assessment considers the items to be transferred, the destination jurisdiction, the end user, and the entities involved in the transfer.
3. **Written time-limited authorization for transfers of particular items between designated States.** A natural or legal person applies to the competent government entity for a written authorization (i.e. licence or permit) to engage in international transfers of particular types of items (e.g. SALW) between prescribed States. Also called an ‘open license’, this approach is recommended only for trusted entities involved in the arms trade of specified items and transfer parties that are likewise trusted.
4. **A two-stage process.** This approach combines approaches 1 and 2, with only registered natural or legal persons able to apply for a written authorization to engage in a particular international transfer of SALW.
5. **Notification process.** This approach is only recommended for use in cases of transit/trans-shipment.
6. **Prohibition on international arms transfers.**⁸⁰

A substantial number of States (135) have reported requiring a licence or other form of written authorization for any entity seeking to transfer SALW into or out of their territory, and in 139 States it is a criminal offence to do so without government authorization. Forty-two States report having measures in place to prevent the unauthorized re-export of SALW. Sixty-six States indicate in their ATT or PoA reports that they conduct a risk assessment for SALW export applications – 36 of these States are in Europe, 10 in the Americas, 9 each in Africa and Asia, and 2 in the Pacific. Many European States, in their initial ATT

79 UNODC, *Technical Guide to the Implementation of the Protocol Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms*, 2011, p. 65, https://www.unodc.org/documents/firearms-protocol/Publications/10-56148_Ebook.pdf

80 For example, Palau has declared that it bans all international arms transfer, while other states prohibit brokering. Hardy Giezendanner et al., *Regulating Brokering to Reduce the Risk of Diversion*, UNIDIR, Conflict Armament Research, and Stimson, 2025, pp. 44–45, <https://unidir.org/publication/the-arms-trade-treaty-regulating-brokering-to-reduce-the-risk-of-diversion/>

Regulating SALW Brokering

Individuals and companies can be involved in brokering (i.e., mediating and facilitating) authorized SALW transfers between States and between State and non-State entities. Brokers involved in the international transfer of SALW attracted international attention in the 1990s in connection with the supply of arms to conflicts in Angola and West Africa. Twenty years ago, the General Assembly established a Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on illicit brokering in small arms.⁸¹ In 2003, 17 States indicated in their PoA reports that their national legislation provided for the control of brokering activities;⁸² by 2024, this number had increased to 108 (see Table 4.4). The current PoA reporting template asks States if they require brokers to register and to have a licence, permit, or other authorization for each brokering transaction. States Parties' reports show the following approaches: registration to be a broker: 3 States Parties require registration to be a broker; 17 require written authorization (licence) for individual transactions; 26 use a two-stage process; and 2 prohibit brokering.⁸³

Table 4.4 shows that less than a third of the States that report regulating arms brokering have taken action against groups or individuals engaged in illegal brokering during 2022–2024. There is limited information provided in cases where action has been taken.

TABLE 4.4

PoA Reporting on Brokering⁸⁴

Does your State have laws, regulations, and/or administrative procedures governing the brokering of SALW?	Yes	108
	No	25
	No response	18
Does your State require registration of SALW brokers?	Yes	92
	No	13
	No response	46
Does your State require a licence, permit, or other authorization for each brokering transaction?	Yes	94
	No	9
	No response	48
Does your State regulate activities that are closely associated with the brokering of SALW?	Yes	94
	No	22
	No response	35
During the reporting period, was action taken against groups or individuals engaged in illegal brokering (e.g., prosecution)?	Yes	29
	No	79
	No response	43

81 General Assembly, A/RES/60/81, 8 December 2005, <https://undocs.org/A/RES/60/81>

82 Elli Kytömäki and Valerie Yankey-Wayne, *Implementing the United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons: Analysis of the Reports Submitted by States in 2003*, UNDP, UNIDIR, UNDDA, and Small Arms Survey, 2004, p. 92, <https://unidir.org/files/publication/pdfs/implementing-the-united-nations-programme-of-action-on-small-arms-and-light-weapons-analysis-of-the-reports-submitted-by-states-in-2003-320.pdf>

83 Anna Mensah, Rob Perkins, and Ryan Fletcher, *The Role of Industry and Other Private Sector Actors in Efforts to Counter the Diversion of Conventional Arms*, UNIDIR, Conflict Armament Research, and Stimson, 2023, p. 29, <https://unidir.org/publication/the-role-of-industry-and-other-private-sector-actors-in-efforts-to-counter-the-diversion-of-conventional-arms-att-issue-brief-4/>; CASA, MOSAIC 03.20:2014(E)V1.0, 17 June 2014, p. 46, <https://front.un-arm.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/MOSAIC-03.20-2014EV1.0.pdf>

84 Research team analysis of publicly available PoA reports submitted during 2014–2024.

reports, referred to the European Union Common Position on arms exports as the basis for their risk assessment procedures. Several States that indicated in their initial ATT reports that they do not have an export risk assessment process declared that they do not export arms or are in the process of developing the relevant legislation. To support the risk assessment process in an exporting State, 58 ATT States Parties have reported structures in place to provide information to assist other States' export risk assessments. This is generally done through established procedures, such as the provision of end-use documentation, but can also occur on an ad hoc basis through diplomatic channels.

United Nations guidance for firearms transfers to non-State end users recommends that the competent authorities of exporting States ensure that the competent authorities of the importing State have provided written authorization (i.e., an import authorization and a certified end-user statement).⁸⁵ Before the competent authorities in the importing State issue the import authorization, the non-State end user should have satisfactorily completed a background check and demonstrated their ability to provide secure storage for the imported firearms.⁸⁶ International guidance also recognizes that 'simplified procedures' can be used for the temporary export and import of SALW, including for hunting, sport shooting, evaluation, exhibitions, or repair.⁸⁷ In such cases, the risk of diversion is noted, and it is recommended that customs and law enforcement officials should "be trained to ensure that when firearms are being returned to the country of original export, the description and quantity of the firearms matches the export and import documentation".⁸⁸

International guidance documents provide examples of measures to mitigate the risk of SALW diversion during and after transfers:

- ▶ only transfer 'marked' SALW;
- ▶ secure assurances from the importing State not to re-export or re-transfer imported SALW without authorization from the exporting State;
- ▶ commitments to report losses, thefts, or diversions;
- ▶ post-delivery monitoring and cooperation programmes (see Box 4.3); and
- ▶ capacity-building for recipient stockpile management and transfer controls.⁸⁹

Fifty-seven ATT States Parties report having procedures in place to regulate the transit and transshipment of weapons through their territory, ranging from notifications issued by the customs authorities of States in the transfer chain, to a requirement for a written transit authorization. To issue an authorization,

85 CASA, MOSAIC 03.20:2014(E)V1.0, 17 June 2014, p. 10, <https://front.un-arm.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/MOSAIC-03.20-2014EV1.0.pdf>

86 UNODC, *Technical Guide to the Implementation of the Protocol Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms*, 2011, p. 80, https://www.unodc.org/documents/firearms-protocol/Publications/10-56148_Ebook.pdf

87 CASA, MOSAIC 03.20:2014(E)V1.0, 17 June 2014, p. 10, <https://front.un-arm.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/MOSAIC-03.20-2014EV1.0.pdf>; UNODC, *Technical Guide to the Implementation of the Protocol Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms*, 2011, pp. 21–22, https://www.unodc.org/documents/firearms-protocol/Publications/10-56148_Ebook.pdf

88 Ibid.

89 ATT WGETI, ATT/CSP10.WGETI/2024/CHAIR/799/Conf.Rep, 19 July 2024, paras. 111–125; CASA, MOSAIC 03.20:2014(E)V1.0, 17 June 2014, pp. 80–84, <https://front.un-arm.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/MOSAIC-03.20-2014EV1.0.pdf>

many States require end-use documentation and import/export authorizations associated with the transfer. This requires functional information-sharing channels between the States involved in a transfer.

To ensure the security of the SALW shipment during transit from the exporting State to the importing State, some recommended security procedures include:

- ▶ using authorized and vetted carriers;
- ▶ transporting SALW and ammunition separately;
- ▶ using secure containers;
- ▶ constant supervision;
- ▶ minimizing transit time and stops; and
- ▶ sharing routes and points of entry/exit among States in the supply chain.⁹⁰

Additional security measures are recommended for international transfers of SALW that are considered attractive to criminal and terrorist organizations, particularly man-portable air defence systems.

UNIDIR has noted that technological solutions to counter the diversion of SALW appear underutilized. To overcome barriers to the greater use of technology, it is recommended to:

- ▶ strengthen international and regional collaboration and inter-agency cooperation;
- ▶ build up the evidence and knowledge base on available technologies that can be used to enhance supply chain security;
- ▶ reinforce or set up appropriate physical, regulatory, and digital infrastructure; and
- ▶ undertake institutional capacity-building and individual training on counter-diversion technologies.⁹¹

A final consideration for national procedures concerns the ability to suspend or revoke the registration of an authorized arms trade entity or written authorization for a SALW transfer. The conditions that would lead to such a decision include:

- ▶ application information for a transfer is found to be false or incomplete;
- ▶ the security or humanrights situation in the recipient State deteriorates;
- ▶ a United Nations arms embargo is imposed;
- ▶ diversion risks increase; and
- ▶ parties involved in the transfer are discovered to be involved in criminal activity or embargo violations.⁹²

90 UNODC, *Technical Guide to the Implementation of the Protocol Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms*, 2011, p. 82, https://www.unodc.org/documents/firearms-protocol/Publications/10-56148_Ebook.pdf

91 Sarah Grand Clement, *Assessing Technologies to Counter the Diversion of Small Arms and Light Weapons*, UNIDIR and Flemish Peace Institute Project DTECT, 2024, <https://unidir.org/publication/assessing-technologies-to-counter-the-diversion-of-small-arms-and-light-weapons/>

92 UNODC, *Technical Guide to the Implementation of the Protocol Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms*, 2011, p. 69, https://www.unodc.org/documents/firearms-protocol/Publications/10-56148_Ebook.pdf

4.4.1 Risk Assessment

International and regional instruments contain prohibitions and risk assessment criteria that States are expected to use when considering authorizations to transfer SALW, with less attention paid to the transfer of firearms to non-State entities. While all Member States are expected to implement arms embargoes established by Security Council resolutions, other prohibited transfers or situations that are considered ‘high risk’ for an arms transfer depend on the international or regional treaties to which a State is party, other international commitments, and national foreign and security policy interests.

For example, ATT States Parties are prohibited from authorizing the transfer of conventional arms, including SALW, if they have knowledge that the transferred weapons would be used to commit or facilitate international crimes. In addition, the ATT requires States Parties to assess the risk that a transfer would contribute to or undermine peace and security, or that the transferred arms could be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of international humanitarian or human rights law or offences under international conventions relating to terrorism or transnational organized crime to which the State is a party. Further, this assessment should take into account the risk of the transferred arms being used to commit or facilitate acts of gender-based violence and violence against women and children, as well as of diversion.

Prohibitions and risk assessment criteria can be included in legislation, regulations, and policy guidance. States may also have to apply risk assessment criteria agreed at the regional level or national criteria provided by parliament. To support the conduct of risk assessments, guidance has been developed that provides risk indicators and sources of information for use in national risk assessment processes to support implementation of the ATT and regional instruments.⁹³ Key questions to ask in risk assessments for prospective international transfers of SALW include the following:

- ▶ What are the arms requirements of the importing State?
- ▶ Does the importing State have the necessary capacity to control the imported arms?
- ▶ Are there any particular risks associated with the SALW to be transferred?
- ▶ Are there any concerns with the legitimacy of the intended end user (e.g., records of past misuse of arms)?
- ▶ Are there any concerns with the legitimacy and reliability of other entities involved in the proposed transfers (e.g. brokers, transportation companies)?
- ▶ Is the recipient located in a region near States under embargo, that are conflict affected, or that have a high level of armed violence?
- ▶ What is the importing State’s record on diversion and other violations of national export controls, as well as their response in such cases?⁹⁴

93 ATT WGETI, *Voluntary Guide to Implement Articles 6 & 7*, para. 81; ATT WGETI, ATT/CSP7.WGETI/2021/CHAIR/675/Conf.Rep, 22 July 2021, Annex A.

94 Brian Wood and Paul Holtom, *Arms Trade Treaty Issue Brief No. 2: Measures to Prevent, Detect, Address and Eradicate the Diversion of Conventional Arms*, UNIDIR, 30 October 2020, pp. 18–21, <https://unidir.org/publication/the-arms-trade-treaty-measures-to-prevent-detect-address-and-eradicate-the-diversion-of-conventional-arms/>

4.5 Transfer Control Documentation

National transfer control systems generate a lot of documentation. In addition to authorization application forms, other documents include:

- ▶ export authorizations;
- ▶ import authorizations;
- ▶ end user documentations
- ▶ customs documentations
- ▶ transit documentation (e.g., invoices, manifests, waybills);
- ▶ reports from registered arms trade entities and holders of written authorizations; and
- ▶ delivery verification certificates.

One hundred and twelve States have reported that they require end-use/r certificates as part of an application for an export authorization (see Table 4.5). Ninety States require verification and authentication of end-use documentation before a transfer. Seventy-two States have reported measures in place to prevent forgery and misuse of end-use/r documentation, including requiring the submission of original or certified copies of documents as part of the application process, or issuing end-use documentation that is difficult to forge or falsify. At the same time, as some States move to electronic licensing systems, other approaches are being explored to ensure the security of documentation, such as distributed ledger technology (blockchain).

TABLE 4.5

Regional End-Use/r Certificate Requirements⁹⁵

		World	Africa	Americas	Europe	Asia	Oceania
Does your State require an EUC to authorize an export of SALW?	Yes	112	29	16	25	38	4
	No	20	9	6	1	2	2
	No response	19	6	6	5	1	1

While international instruments do not provide detailed guidance on what to include in an application for a transfer authorization, it is recommended that national authorities make the information publicly available in regulations and online.⁹⁶ International guidance provides some suggestions on what to include in applications and written authorizations. For example, UNODC guidance recommends that an application to import SALW include contact details of the importer and any other involved parties, a description of the goods, the mode of transport and route, the intended use, and details of previous applications and licenses; and that an application to export include contact details of the exporter and any other involved parties, a description of the goods and their intended use, a contract number, the

95 Research team analysis of publicly available PoA reports submitted during 2014–2024.

96 Ibid., pp. 16–36.

mode of transportation and route, the end-use/r certificate, and details of previous exports.⁹⁷ As shown in Table 4.6, there is also considerable agreement among international and regional guidance documents on the information to be provided in end-use/r documentation.

TABLE 4.6

Key Elements for End-Use/r Documentation⁹⁸

Element	ATT	ECOWAS	EU	OSCE	RECSA	United Nations (MOSAIC)	Wassenaar
Details of the exporter (at least name, address, and business name)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Details of the end user (at least name and address)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Contract number or order reference and date	✓	–	–	✓	–	✓	–
Country of final destination	–	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Description of the goods being exported (type, characteristics) or reference to the contract concluded with the authorities of the State of final destination	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Quantity and/or value of the exported goods	✓	✓ (b)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Signature, name, and position of the end user's representative	✓	✓ (c)	✓	✓	–	✓	✓
Date of issue of the end-user certificate	✓	–	✓	✓	–	✓	✓
Description of the end use of the goods	–	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Full details, where appropriate, of any intermediaries involved in the transfer	✓ (a)	✓	✓ (d)	✓	✓	– (f)	✓
Name, address, and contact details of the government agency issuing the certificate	✓	✓	✓ (e)	✓	–	✓	✓
Expiry date of the end-user certificate	✓	–	–	✓	–	✓	–
Register number of the end-user certificate	✓	–	–	✓	–	✓	–

Notes: (a) details of the intermediate consignee or final consignee as optional; (b) quantity, exact type, and kind of arms using the ECOWAS classification system, including all serial numbers and other marks; (c) the details of the final end user – name of individual/company/institution and representative responsible and confirmation from relevant national authority that the end user is authorized to import weapons; (d) if appropriate, details of the relevant broker (and broker details, and if available, registration number); (e) if applicable (and other than the end user), date, name, title and original signature of the certifying authority and official; (f) regarded as optional in MOSAIC and should be included if known.

NB. The table does not include the types of assurances, undertakings, or commitments included in end-use and end-user documentation.

97 UNODC, *Technical Guide to the Implementation of the Protocol Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms*, 2011, pp. 65–66, https://www.unodc.org/documents/firearms-protocol/Publications/10-56148_Ebook.pdf

98 Paula Soumaya Domit et al., *Preventing Diversion Through End-Use and End-User Controls*, UNIDIR, Control Armament Research, and Stimson, 2025, p. 15.

4.6 Record-Keeping

International instruments and guidance place emphasis on the importance of effective record-keeping for national transfer control systems for several reasons, including:

- ▶ to fulfil national legal requirements for retaining government documentation regarding applications for transfer authorizations;
- ▶ to facilitate assessing future applications;
- ▶ to provide support in cases of suspected diversion and trafficking (i.e. for tracing, investigations, etc.); and
- ▶ to fulfil reporting commitments for UNROCA, similar obligations for ATT States Parties, or national requirements to report to the government or public.

The ATT and Firearms Protocol require their States Parties to retain records of exports and imports for at least 10 years, while the International Tracing Instrument requires records to be maintained for at least 20 years.⁹⁹ One hundred and five States indicate that they keep records of arms transfers for at least 10 years, with 55 reporting they are kept indefinitely. Unfortunately, neither the ATT nor the PoA reports provide information on the use of records. However, some States provide information on SALW that are seized, surrendered, or found in their PoA reports and responses to the UNODC illicit arms flows questionnaire.

While instruments do not specify which documents to retain, they do indicate that records should include information on the quantity and value of SALW being transferred, the model/type of SALW, serial numbers and other markings, details of the exporting State(s), importing State(s), transit and trans-shipment State(s), and end users. International guidance indicates that this information could be included in:

- ▶ transfer authorizations;
- ▶ documentation supplied for an application (e.g. end-user certificates);
- ▶ customs data;
- ▶ reports on activities by registered or authorized companies; and
- ▶ delivery verification certificates and other documents confirming delivery.¹⁰⁰

There is no obligation regarding the specific format in which records should be retained (e.g., paper or electronic). Still, it is recommended that documents be stored securely and treated as confidential, with procedures in place to ensure access is limited.¹⁰¹ At the same time, access should be possible for those who need information for the purposes outlined above. The challenge is that it is not always possible to

99 General Assembly, A/60/88, 27 June 2005, para. 12, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/60/88>

100 ATT WGETI, *Voluntary Basic Guide to Establishing a National Control System*, 26 July 2019, p. 14; UNODC, *Technical Guide to the Implementation of the Protocol Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms*, 2011, pp. 13–23, https://www.unodc.org/documents/firearms-protocol/Publications/10-56148_Ebook.pdf

101 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

have a single centralized database when multiple government entities are involved in the national transfer control system at different stages of the SALW life cycle. To avoid fragmentation and inconsistency, authorities should adopt common definitions of controlled items and activities and agree on standard data fields and templates.¹⁰²

In addition to requiring record-keeping by government entities involved in the transfer control system, it is also recommended that entities registered to engage in the international SALW trade, or that hold a written transfer authorization, be legally obliged to maintain records of their transactions, subject to inspection by national authorities.

4.7 Enforcement

Enforcement is another area in which international SALW control instruments do not provide detailed guidance, but indicate several areas in which to consider the issue, including:

- ▶ national government authorities engage with industry;
- ▶ customs and border controls;
- ▶ intelligence and law enforcement;
- ▶ prosecution and judiciary; and
- ▶ penalties and sanctions.

While 60 ATT State Parties reported having measures in place to enforce national laws and regulations that implement ATT provisions, limited information is available about these measures. Neither the ATT nor PoA reports provide information on procedures for regulating the arms trade or on measures to counter violations of national laws. Overall, States provide little information on their capacity to enforce laws and regulations in either their ATT or PoA reports.

International guidance indicates that government engagement with entities involved in the international SALW trade is an important element for preventing irresponsible and illicit arms transfers and diversion. In broad terms, such engagement would include the following.

- ▶ Providing information – through a guidance document or training courses – on the national system in order to ensure compliance, including on laws, international and regional instruments, controlled items, multilateral arms embargoes, application forms and processes, customs procedures, and other aspects of the national transfer control system.
- ▶ Providing for informal consultations before approved entities engage in a potential SALW transfer.
- ▶ Conducting inspection or audit visits to ensure compliance, checking documentation, verifying processes, etc.

102 Ibid., pp. 17–18; *Voluntary Basic Guide to Establishing a National Control System*, 26 July 2019, p. 15.

- ▶ Requiring or encouraging an internal compliance programme.¹⁰³ Such a programme is an arrangement that a company or other entity can put in place to ensure compliance with its own internal policies as well as with relevant national controls, including arms transfer controls.¹⁰⁴

Further, there are growing calls for companies involved in the international arms trade to adhere to the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights – for example, conducting their own due diligence to ensure their actions comply with international human rights law and international humanitarian law.¹⁰⁵ While neither ATT nor PoA reports include such information, States have shared some examples of their engagement with industry in ATT working group meetings.¹⁰⁶

To ensure that border and customs officials can detect diversion attempts during shipment, UNODC guidance recommends providing training, communications systems, and equipment for monitoring and controlling transfers. Specialized training should be provided to enable officials to analyse and identify falsified or forged documentation, as well as to identify SALW and key components.¹⁰⁷ It is also recommended that information in documents be cross-checked against the actual serial numbers, types, and quantities in the shipment in cases of concern.¹⁰⁸ Cooperation between customs and those involved in processing transfer authorization applications is important too, in order to provide information not only on authorizations but also on entities involved in denied applications.¹⁰⁹

Regarding intelligence and law enforcement, it is necessary to collect and analyse data on seizures, diversion, and trafficking patterns to generate actionable intelligence on routes, methods, actors, and hotspots. This intelligence picture should not only be used by law enforcement for their investigations but also be provided to those involved in reviewing and deciding on transfer authorization applications, to ensure a feedback loop that prevents risky transfers from being authorized. In addition to ensuring adequate resources and training, it is recommended that specialized investigative teams be established to investigate suspected trafficking and diversion cases, and which are capable of tracing firearms and conducting financial investigations.¹¹⁰

Sixty-two States have reported taking action against groups or individuals engaged in transferring SALW illegally, and 29 taking action with regard to illegal brokering. A successful investigation hopefully

103 Anna Mensah, Rob Perkins, and Ryan Fletcher, *The Role of Industry and Other Private Sector Actors in Efforts to Counter the Diversion of Conventional Arms*, UNIDIR, Conflict Armament Research, and Stimson, 2023, p. 29, <https://unidir.org/publication/the-role-of-industry-and-other-private-sector-actors-in-efforts-to-counter-the-diversion-of-conventional-arms-att-issue-brief-4/>; CASA, MOSAIC 03.20:2014(E)V1.0, 17 June 2014, pp. 36–37, <https://front.un-arm.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/MOSAIC-03.20-2014EV1.0.pdf>

104 Sibylle Bauer, Kolja Brockmann, Mark Bromley, and Giovanna Maletta, *Challenges and Good Practices in the Implementation of the EU's Arms and Dual-User Export Controls*, SIPRI, 2017, p. vii, https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2017-07/1707_sipri_eu_duat_good_practices.pdf

105 General Assembly, A/HRC/58/41, 9 January 2025, para. 10, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/56/42>

106 ATT Secretariat, ATT/CSP9/2023/SEC/773/Conf.FinRep.Rev2, 25 August 2023.

107 UNODC, *Technical Guide to the Implementation of the Protocol Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms*, 2011, p. 83, https://www.unodc.org/documents/firearms-protocol/Publications/10-56148_Ebook.pdf

108 Ibid.

109 CASA, MOSAIC 03.20:2014(E)V1.0, 17 June 2014, p. 38, <https://front.un-arm.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/MOSAIC-03.20-2014EV1.0.pdf>

110 UNODC, *Illicit Firearms Trafficking: Addressing the Criminal Side of Diversion*, 2024, pp. 34–35, https://www.unodc.org/documents/firearms-protocol/2024/Diversion_Issue_Paper_ENG_web.pdf

Post-Delivery Cooperation

The emphasis in national transfer control systems of major SALW-exporting States has been on robust risk assessments conducted before issuing or denying a transfer authorization. As highlighted above, there are also recommended security and mitigation measures to be taken during a transfer to prevent diversion to the illicit arms trade. Cooperation between exporting and importing States after delivery has traditionally received the least attention in international instruments. Such instruments and related guidance recommend that competent authorities in exporting States request written confirmation (i.e., a delivery verification certificate) from their counterparts confirming receipt of a shipment of SALW. In practice, such confirmation is not always requested, or the requested documents are not provided.¹¹¹

Since the mid-2010s, government officials of EU member States and Switzerland have shown increased interest in conducting on-site inspections of SALW delivered to an importing State – that is, a physical inspection of exported SALW conducted by the exporting State on the territory of the importing State.¹¹² For many years, this option has primarily been used only by the United States. Other major exporting States have placed emphasis on risk assessments conducted before issuing or denying a written authorization for an arms transfer. These States have highlighted concerns and challenges regarding:

- ▶ establishing a legal basis for on-site inspections;
- ▶ not creating a sense of extraterritorial controls in the importing State;
- ▶ determining whether on-site inspections are effective in preventing diversion; and
- ▶ the costs involved and potential lack of necessary resources and technical expertise.¹¹³

The option of using on-site inspections has been included in guidance for many years. During the Eighth Conference of States Parties to the ATT, the German presidency introduced a working paper that provided practical steps for introducing and implementing post-delivery cooperation measures.¹¹⁴ It contains guidance on ensuring political commitments from partner States, legal considerations for exporting and importing States, and identifying the resources required to conduct on-site inspections (e.g., which government entities will be involved and staff training). It also provides a step-by-step guide for the preparation phase before an on-site visit, the on-site visit itself, and the post-visit phase.

111 UNIDIR, *Strengthening End Use/r Control Systems to Prevent Arms Diversion: Examining Common Regional Understandings*, UNIDIR Resources, 2017, p. 30, <https://unidir.org/publication/strengthening-end-use-r-control-systems-to-prevent-arms-diversion-examining-common-regional-understandings/>

112 Andrea Varisco and Mark Bromley, *Good Practice Guide on Post-Shipment On-Site Inspections of Military Materiel*, SIPRI, 2022, p. 1, <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2022/other-publications/good-practice-guide-post-shipment-site-inspections-military-materiel>

113 Ibid., pp 5–7; UNODC, *Technical Guide to the Implementation of the Protocol Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms*, 2011, p. 73, https://www.unodc.org/documents/firearms-protocol/Publications/10-56148_Ebook.pdf

114 ATT WGETI, *Post-Delivery Cooperation: Operational Steps for the Introduction and Implementation of Post-Shipment Control (Annex to Possible Measures to Prevent and Address Diversion)*, 15 July 2023.



US Navy Aviation Ordnanceman 3rd Class Colby Willett uses a barcode scanner and printer to inventory cases of ammunition at the Naval Air Station's weapons department. Sigonella, Sicily, Italy. © U.S. Navy photo by Photographer's Mate 2nd Class Damon J. Moritz, 2003

leads to a successful prosecution of those involved in the diversion, trafficking, or otherwise illicit SALW trade. To this end, it can be useful to strengthen inter-agency cooperation between law enforcement investigators and prosecutors.¹¹⁵ Such cooperation could also extend to working with specific courts and judges with the necessary knowledge, training, and expertise to navigate the complexities of international illicit arms cases.

115 UNODC, *Illicit Firearms Trafficking: Addressing the Criminal Side of Diversion*, 2024, p. 39, https://www.unodc.org/documents/firearms-protocol/2024/Diversion_Issue_Paper_ENG_web.pdf

4.8 International Cooperation

All international and regional SALW control instruments emphasize the importance of international and regional cooperation in regulating the international arms trade and countering the illicit arms trade.¹¹⁶ International cooperation takes a variety of forms, ranging from information-sharing to joint operations and investigations.

First, international instruments recommend that States share information on their national transfer control systems. This chapter has drawn on one form of such information-sharing: reports on the implementation of the ATT and PoA. Conferences and meetings convened under international instruments provide another opportunity for States to share information on key elements of their national control systems. Neither of these approaches is systematically used to share information about decision-making processes and enforcement practices. States use meetings under regional instruments and SALW/ firearms roadmaps to share information on effective measures, and also to support the functioning of national systems. For example, EU Member States share information on denials of export and brokering authorizations for military equipment, including SALW.

Second, States can provide information on the functioning of their systems via United Nations mechanisms. As discussed in Chapter 2, States provide data on their SALW exports and imports to the ATT and UNROCA, as well as on transit, brokering, and denials, either through regional instruments or unilaterally. States are also requested to share information on diversion incidents and seizures of illicit SALW via the PoA reporting template and the illicit arms flows questionnaire.

Third, international instruments encourage States to share information on diversion risks and cases, including on brokers and entities involved in diversion, trafficking routes and techniques, and diversion risk indicators. At the multilateral level, much remains to be done. Although still in its early stages, the ATT Diversion Information Exchange Forum (DIEF) and related regional meetings could help to provide opportunities for States to exchange operational information on detected or suspected diversion, including trafficking routes, brokers, concealment methods, and points of dispatch and destination (see Box 4.4).

Fourth, international and regional instruments encourage bilateral and multilateral operational cooperation, including tracing illicit SALW, investigating seized SALW, conducting joint investigations, providing mutual legal assistance, and using ‘controlled deliveries’ to identify entities involved in diversion and trafficking.¹¹⁷ Fifty-four ATT States Parties report that their legislation allows the provision of jointly agreed assistance to another State Party in investigations, prosecutions, and judicial proceedings. Ensuring that States have the legal basis for judicial cooperation, mutual legal assistance, the sharing of admissible evidence, the summons of witnesses, the service of documents, and extradition helps to enable the successful prosecution of entities involved in the illicit international arms trade and diversion.¹¹⁸

116 For a comparison of the ATT and Firearms Protocol, see UNODC, *The Firearms Protocol and the Arms Trade Treaty: Divergence or Complementarity?*, 2016, p. 2, <https://www.unodc.org/documents/firearms-protocol/SynergiesPaper.pdf>

117 UNODC, *Illicit Firearms Trafficking: Addressing the Criminal Side of Diversion*, 2024, p. 37, https://www.unodc.org/documents/firearms-protocol/2024/Diversion_Issue_Paper_ENG_web.pdf

118 *Ibid.*, pp. 34–35.

Sharing Information on Diversion

All international and regional SALW control instruments require or encourage information-sharing among States to counter diversion and illicit trafficking.¹¹⁹ At the international level, the ATT framework has made the most progress in providing a platform for this purpose, operationalizing several ATT articles that encourage information-sharing to counter diversion. The Sixth Conference of States Parties to the ATT decided to establish the Diversion Information Exchange Forum (DIEF) for ATT States Parties and signatory States to share information on cases of detected or suspected diversion and more general operational diversion-related information.¹²⁰ The DIEF's terms of reference encourage States Parties and signatories to share diversion-related information.¹²¹ While non-State Party experts may be invited to provide information, the meeting is for delegations of States Parties and signatories only. The DIEF Chair can brief the ATT Working Group on Effective Treaty Implementation.¹²²

The first of the DIEF's five substantive meetings to date took place during the Eighth Conference of States Parties on 24 August 2022.¹²³ Through these meetings, several States from Europe and the Americas have shared information on investigations into diversion cases, as well as information on their national counter-diversion systems and diversion analyses. An initial review of the first three meetings was conducted in 2024.¹²⁴ It concluded that the exchanges were promising and that the DIEF plays a unique and valuable role, as no other multilateral body facilitates operational exchanges and trust-building to counter diversion. During the review, a proposal was made for "regional operational exchanges on diversion".¹²⁵ At the Eleventh Conference of States Parties, Brazil and France presented a working paper encouraging regional, subregional, and bilateral information exchange meetings to build confidence and facilitate sharing information on diversion.¹²⁶ The EU has provided financial support to the ATT Secretariat for five regional/subregional workshops on diversion during 2026–2027.¹²⁷

119 General Assembly, A/CONF.192/2024/RC/3, 5 July 2024, para. 104, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/CONF.192/2024/RC/3>

120 ATT WGETI, ATT/CSP6.DIEF/2020/CHAIR/632/Conf.DIEFToRS, 23 July 2020, para. 1; ATT Secretariat, ATT/CSP6/2020/SEC/635/Conf.FinRep.Rev1, 21 August 2020, para. 40.

121 ATT WGETI, ATT/CSP6.DIEF/2020/CHAIR/632/Conf.DIEFToRS, 23 July 2020, para. 19.

122 ATT WGETI, *Terms of Reference*, para. 2.

123 ATT Secretariat, ATT/CSP8/2022/SEC/739/Conf.FinRep.Rev 2, 26 August 2022, para. 28.

124 Arms Trade Treaty Diversion Information Exchange Forum Chair, ATT/CSP10.DIEF/2024/CHAIR/802/Conf.Rep, 19 July 2024.

125 *Ibid.*, para. 10.

126 Brazil and France, "Working Paper: Regional and Sub-Regional Meetings on Diversion Information Exchange", undated working paper submitted during ATT CSP11.

127 European Union, *Council Decision (CFSP) 2025/2367 of 20 November 2025 on Union Support for Activities of the ATT Secretariat in Support of the Implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty*, 21 November 2025, pp. 5–6, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec/2025/2367/oj>



A view of the Trusteeship Council Chamber during the special event marking the opening for signature of the ATT.
© UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe/UN Photo, 2013

5. Conclusion and Considerations

On the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the Firearms Protocol and PoA, these United Nations instruments, along with the ATT, have clearly influenced the public release of more official government information on authorized and illicit SALW flows and national transfer control systems than was the case at the turn of the century. This report has highlighted positive developments in data collection and sharing, as well as effective approaches to controlling international SALW transfers and countering diversion and illicit trafficking. It has also been shown that, in several areas, United Nations information exchange platforms lag in the types of information available to prevent and mitigate the risks posed by SALW flows to peace, security, and sustainable development. This report has identified gaps in our understanding and both persisting and emerging challenges in countering the illicit SALW trade.

More than half of Member States have provided data on their international SALW transfers at least once since 2003, with around three-quarters providing some data on their SALW exports and imports to UN Comtrade. However, it remains challenging to use these data sources to obtain an accurate picture of authorized SALW flows and to systematically identify ‘risky transfers’.¹²⁸ Differences across the data mean that analysts face a challenge akin to creating a picture from jigsaw puzzle pieces from different

128 General Assembly, A/HRC/56/42, 18 April 2024, para. 17, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/56/42>

sets, with many pieces missing. And even with the recent increase in the number of States reporting on SALW exports and imports, some of the world's largest arms exporters do not report international SALW transfers to UNROCA.

This report recognizes the inherent challenges in generating reliable estimates of the scale of the illicit SALW trade and in monitoring illicit SALW flows. The United Nations system has several approaches to gathering official government data on illicit SALW flows. These range from requests to Member States to provide information on seizures of illicit arms and diversion and trafficking cases via their national reports on the implementation of the PoA and responses to the illicit arms flows questionnaire, to data collected by special political missions and peacekeeping operations and panels of experts that monitor arms embargoes imposed by the Security Council. Unfortunately, the data and information shared by Member States remain patchy.

International and regional SALW control and transfer control instruments highlight the same key elements for an effective transfer control system, ranging from a legal and regulatory framework to enforcement structures and measures to prevent and detect violations of national laws. ATT initial reports and national reports on the implementation of the PoA suggest that many Member States have national legal and regulatory frameworks that provide adequate foundations for controlling the export, import, transit/trans-shipment, and brokering of SALW, designating competent national authorities to register natural and legal persons involved in the international SALW trade, and providing written authorizations for transfer activities. At the same time, these sources do not provide information on how national risk assessment processes are conducted in practice or on the effectiveness of national enforcement measures.¹²⁹ Even in official meetings on the PoA or ATT, one can only get a partial view of these issues. Thus, important aspects of national transfer control systems remain publicly unknown.

To build on the progress made over the past 25 years, this report concludes with considerations on how the United Nations could help strengthen efforts to control international SALW transfers and to counter diversion and illicit trafficking, thereby creating conditions for peace, security, and sustainable development. In addition to enhancing the utility of global SALW control instruments for these ends, there are opportunities for building on positive developments at the regional and subregional levels (see Box 5.1). The remainder of this chapter presents considerations for the United Nations system and other interested stakeholders to reduce and mitigate the negative consequences of the international SALW trade by way of:

1. addressing the data deficit on SALW flows and transfer controls;
2. facilitating the sharing of useful data and information to counter the illicit SALW trade; and
3. promoting the use of data and information on SALW flows and transfer controls for preventing conflict, armed violence, and human suffering.

129 General Assembly, A/HRC/58/41, 9 January 2025, para. 17, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/56/42>

5.1 Addressing the Data Deficit

This report has shown that important SALW exporting and importing States do not provide data and information on their international SALW transfers to United Nations reporting mechanisms or make it publicly available via other platforms. Even when some States report on their authorized transfers, seizures and diversion incidents, and national transfer control systems, it is difficult to fully understand whether the systems effectively control transfers and counter diversion and illicit trafficking. The reasons for this are well documented, including a lack of political will, limited capacity, and inadequate inter-agency cooperation.¹³⁰ The United Nations could address these challenges via three pathways.

- ▶ **Raise awareness on the benefits of data collection and information-sharing.** To overcome the lack of political will, the 2025 Group of Governmental Experts on UNROCA clearly outlined the benefits of data collection and information-sharing at the national, bilateral, and global levels (see Figure 2.1). A similar approach could be useful for other reporting mechanisms. Evidence on the ground suggests that the United Nations should work closely with civil society, parliamentarians, and relevant government officials to enhance data collection and information sharing.
- ▶ **Ensure that the requested information is useful.** The United Nations reporting mechanisms should not only seek to build trust and confidence among States, but also enable the sharing of information useful for risk assessments for authorizations, identifying transfers of concern, and understanding the national control systems of States. This report has highlighted the benefits of requesting States to share information on licensed production and technology transfer arrangements, transit/transshipment and brokering authorizations, as well as denials to advance the objectives of the ATT, Firearms Protocol, PoA, and other relevant instruments. It is recommended that the United Nations engage with national experts and other key stakeholders to review requests for official government information and ensure that useful information is shared.
- ▶ **Coordinate capacity-building efforts for data collection and information-sharing.** UNODA and UNODC support capacity-building to overcome some of the challenges faced by States and regions that have not regularly reported on PoA implementation or submitted a completed illicit arms flows questionnaire or a UNROCA return. UNODC and the South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearing-house for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons cooperate to build capacity to deliver on the objectives of the Western Balkans SALW roadmap, including data collection and information-sharing. While UNODA, the EU, and the ATT Secretariat seek to coordinate responses to requests to provide resources for regional organizations and NGOs to work with States to build such capacity, more could be done to coordinate the various efforts of United Nations entities in this area. The UN CASA could be used for this purpose.

130 Ruben Nicolin, Paul Holtom, and Anabel García García, *Insights from Reporting on Conventional Arms Control*, UNIDIR, 2025, pp. 22–26, <https://unidir.org/publication/insights-from-reporting-on-conventional-arms-control-supporting-preparations-for-reporting-on-implementation-of-the-global-framework-for-through-life-conventional-ammunition-management/>

5.2 Facilitating the Sharing of Useful Information

The United Nations provides opportunities for Member States to share information on the implementation of the Firearms Protocol and PoA via reporting templates and questionnaires, as well as meetings of States. The overall level of reporting has fluctuated over the past 25 years, while PoA meetings of States focus on negotiating outcome documents rather than providing a platform for States to share information on effective measures to counter illicit trafficking and diversion, and the results of these efforts on illicit flows. Therefore, reviewing multilateral information-sharing mechanisms and the types of data and information shared can improve the utility of such platforms, ensure they do not simply become ‘fixtures’ that lose relevance over time, and help to identify new opportunities. There are three ways in which the United Nations could take advantage of opportunities to enhance information-sharing among States.

- ▶ **Exploit synergies across reporting and information-sharing platforms.** This report has highlighted the benefits of aligning annual ATT reports and UNROCA submissions, and notes the benefits of similarly aligning requests in the PoA reporting template and the illicit arms flows questionnaire for data on seizures and illicit arms flows. UNIDIR has previously highlighted how the same information is requested under various instruments, highlighting synergies and ways to reduce the reporting burden.¹³¹ Building on this experience, UNODA and UNODC could provide a single United Nations ‘dashboard’ to bring together all available official government information on national SALW transfer control systems for each Member State, and include items not only relating to the systems but also to the processes for control, such as risk assessment, and for enforcement (e.g., seizure data, investigations, prosecutions).
- ▶ **Support platforms for sharing information that can be used to prevent illicit transfers, illicit trafficking, and diversion.** While there remains value in an information-sharing platform to build confidence and trust among States, especially in today’s geopolitical environment, it is important to ensure that shared information can be used for risk assessments and operations to prevent and detect illicit transfers, trafficking, and diversion. This report has shown that States do not currently use their PoA reports nor the illicit arms flows questionnaire to share such information. There is also anecdotal evidence that not all States are comfortable sharing information about diversion cases and risks through the ATT DIF or in global efforts. At the same time, it appears that States are comfortable sharing information at the regional and subregional levels (see Box 5.1).¹³² While maintaining global platforms, the United Nations could support regional and subregional information-sharing platforms.
- ▶ **Create opportunities for technical experts to identify effective measures for preventing and responding to illicit transfers, illicit trafficking, and diversion.** The CASA brought together national and non-governmental technical experts to develop the Modular Small Arms Implementation Compendium (MOSAIC), but that project is now dormant. The module on international SALW transfers is more than 10 years old and would benefit from a review and update to support the implementation of the Firearms Protocol and PoA. There are now models from other instruments that could inform an

131 UNIDIR, *Reporting on Conventional Arms Trade: Synthesis Handbook*, 2018, <https://unidir.org/publication/reporting-on-conventional-arms-trade-synthesis-handbook/>

132 Anna Mensah-Sackey and Paul Holtom, *Universalization and Effective Implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) in Africa*, UNIDIR, 2025, p. 22, <https://unidir.org/publication/universalization-and-effective-implementation-of-the-arms-trade-treaty-in-africa-lessons-learned-from-the-2024-monrovia-workshop/>

Support for Regional Efforts to Counter the Illicit SALW Trade

The United Nations has contributed to the development and implementation of the regional SALW control instruments introduced in Chapter 1, coordinating regional roadmaps in the Americas and Europe with regional and subregional organizations. Thus, the United Nations is well placed to realize opportunities to build capacity for data collection and analysis and to support the sharing not only of information on effective measures and national systems, but also of data and information on seizures, routes, actors, and concealment methods. This can help to increase understanding of regional and subregional dynamics in SALW diversion and trafficking, and thus help to develop effective counter-measures and strategies.

update to the module. The ATT Working Groups on Effective Treaty Implementation bring together participants at ATT meetings to contribute to the preparation of voluntary guidance to support implementation of the ATT. The available guidance documents draw on information from initial reports and from national experts, international and regional organizations, NGOs, and industry representatives. In 2025, UNODA established a working group on supply chain security under the UN SaferGuard Technical Review Board, composed of national and non-governmental technical experts, to develop guidance to support implementation of the Global Framework for Through-life Conventional Ammunition Management. CASA should explore ways for bringing technical experts together to use information shared by States to prepare guidance to help States prevent and respond to illicit transfers, illicit trafficking, and the diversion of SALW.

5.3 Promoting the Use of Shared Information

To encourage the collection and sharing of information on authorized SALW transfers, illicit flows, and national transfer control measures, it is important to show how this information can be used to positively address the illicit proliferation, diversion, and misuse of SALW. This is a dimension of the SALW control issue that is often overlooked. To fully realize the call in the New Agenda for Peace and the Pact for the Future to ‘mainstream’ SALW control in national prevention strategies and agendas, it is important to generate useful information and ensure that it gets into the right hands to have a meaningful impact for peace, security, justice, and sustainable development. There are three ways in which the United Nations can demonstrate how the collection, sharing, and analysis of information on SALW can support conflict prevention and the reduction of armed violence.

- ▶ **Develop guidance and deliver capacity-building programmes.** The previous sets of considerations have highlighted how the United Nations provides guidance and builds national capacity in Member States to regulate SALW transfers, counter illicit trafficking and diversion, and collect information on the effects of these national SALW control efforts. For this consideration, it is recommended to pay particular attention to how the information collected and shared can be used in risk assessments and in counter-trafficking and diversion efforts.

- ▶ **Enhance the use of United Nations data and information for conflict early warning and to prevent ‘risky’ transfers.** Timely data on SALW flows are a prerequisite for identifying, understanding, and addressing arms-related risks and the dynamics of violence. Such data can therefore enable anticipatory action to prevent the outbreak, escalation, and relapse of armed violence, or to mitigate its consequences. Various United Nations efforts have emerged to strengthen the understanding, use, and utility of arms-related data in conflict analysis, prevention, and early warning. For example, UNIDIR has created platforms for knowledge-sharing and partnerships among arms flow and prevention experts on early warning,¹³³ the Department of Peace Operations has developed an early-warning toolkit for peace operations, including indicators of arms flows. Other options to explore include:
 - ▶ further supporting United Nations political missions, peacekeeping missions, and country teams to enhance their expertise to collect, access, interpret, and harness arms-related risk data for conflict analysis, early warning, and prevention programming;¹³⁴
 - ▶ continuing to collect and disseminate good practice on effective use of small arms flow data for conflict prevention;¹³⁵ and
 - ▶ taking further advantage of improved field methodologies and technological innovations for the timely collection and analysis of SALW flow data.¹³⁶

- ▶ **Track the use and impact of shared information.** There is a ‘data deficit’ on how the information shared by States on authorized SALW transfers, illicit flows, and controls is used. Groups of Governmental Experts on UNROCA have shared anecdotal evidence of how their States use data provided to UNROCA and included in ATT annual reports, alongside other data sources, to inform export risk assessments before authorizing or denying an export.¹³⁷ In this report, we have noted that during 2014–2024, 60 Member States used their PoA national report at least once to request international assistance to strengthen their national SALW transfer controls. However, it is unclear how many of these requests were met and whether any assistance rendered has had a positive effect on the national capacity to control international SALW transfers. It is also important to look not only at the impact of efforts in SALW control, but also at the broader benefits of using high-quality data on SALW flows.


133 UNIDIR, “Optimizing Arms Flows Data for Stronger Conflict Prevention”, 21 November 2024, at <https://unidir.org/optimizing-arms-flows-data-for-stronger-conflict-prevention/>; UNIDIR, “Arms Flows and Early Warning Dashboard”, updated March 2025, at <https://unidir.org/arms-flows-early-warning-dashboard/>

134 Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, CTOC/COP/WG.6/2025/4, 2 June 2025, recommendation 7, <https://docs.un.org/en/CTOC/COP/WG.6/2025/4>

135 Ibid., recommendation 8.

136 Joshua Angelo Bata, Matilde Vecchioni, and Ursign Hofmann, *Pathways to Action: Harnessing Arms Flow Data for Conflict Early Warning*, UNIDIR, CAR, PRIO, and VIEWS, 2025, pp. 8–11, <https://unidir.org/publication/pathways-to-action-harnessing-arms-flows-data-for-conflict-early-warning/>

137 General Assembly, A/80/121, 9 July 2025, para. 112, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/80/121>

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