



# Assessing Transparency in Small Arms Exports: The Small Arms Trade Transparency Barometer

Two main factors continue to hamper our understanding of international small arms and light weapons transfers: states' limited transparency and inadequate reporting practices. The July 2012 negotiations on an Arms Trade Treaty—during which states failed to approve the anticipated instrument—illustrated just how difficult it is to reach agreement on binding standards in both areas.

This *Research Note* focuses on the Small Arms Trade Transparency Barometer. Introduced in the *Small Arms Survey 2004*, the annual Barometer is designed to encourage individual states to make public information about their transfers of small arms and light weapons,<sup>1</sup> their parts, accessories, and ammunition.<sup>2</sup>

While the Transparency Barometer does not independently verify the accuracy of provided information, it evaluates the data and assesses changes in states' transparency over time. It relies on guidelines to evaluate the quantity, detail, and usefulness of the data, thereby promoting best practices. Each set of requirements contained in these categories has been fulfilled by at least one state, meaning that states can fulfil all the criteria set out in the Transparency Barometer guidelines.

## The Transparency Barometer's aims and features

As the international community, civil society, and the media have shown growing interest in information sharing and transparency with regard to international small arms transfers, more weight has been placed on the evaluation of national reporting activities. Against that backdrop, the Transparency Barometer captures information on producers as well as countries that sell or donate significant surpluses; specifically, it examines countries that have declared—or are believed to have approved—small arms exports<sup>3</sup> worth at least USD 10 million during at least one calendar year since 2001.<sup>4</sup>

Since the Transparency Barometer assesses exclusively states whose exports have reached the USD 10 million threshold, it currently only evaluates 52 states (see Box 1). As a result, it cannot be used as a tool to measure transparency in global small arms transfers; nevertheless, it may be able to serve as the basis for a tool to evaluate commitments under a future arms trade treaty.

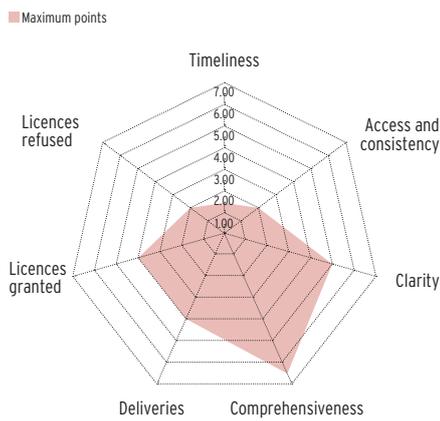
In order to assess countries' transparency in their small arms exports, the Transparency Barometer evaluates:

### Box 1 The 52 countries evaluated by the Transparency Barometer

- Argentina
- Australia
- **Austria**
- **Belgium**
- Bosnia and Herzegovina
- **Brazil**
- Bulgaria
- **Canada**
- China
- Croatia
- Cyprus
- **Czech Republic**
- Denmark
- Finland
- **France**
- **Germany**
- Greece
- Hungary
- India
- Iran
- **Israel**
- **Italy**
- **Japan**
- Lithuania
- Luxembourg
- Mexico
- Montenegro
- Netherlands
- North Korea
- **Norway**
- Pakistan
- Philippines
- Poland
- Portugal
- Romania
- **Russian Federation**
- Saudi Arabia
- Serbia
- Singapore
- Slovakia
- South Africa
- **South Korea**
- **Spain**
- **Sweden**
- **Switzerland**
- Taiwan
- Thailand
- **Turkey**
- Ukraine
- United Arab Emirates
- **United Kingdom**
- **United States**

**Notes:**  
**Bold:** Countries that exported at least USD 100 million worth of small arms and light weapons, their parts, accessories, and ammunition at least once between 2001 and 2010.  
**Red:** Countries that exported USD 100 million worth of small arms and light weapons, their parts accessories, and ammunition at least five times between 2001 and 2010.

Figure 1 Maximum level of transparency



- national arms export reports;
- reporting to the EU Report;<sup>5</sup>
- submissions to the UN Commodity Trade Statistics Database (UN Comtrade); and
- information provided to the UN Register of Conventional Arms.

The scoring guidelines encompass seven parameters: *timeliness*, *access and consistency*, *clarity*, *comprehensiveness*, the inclusion of data on *deliveries*, and reporting on *licences granted* and *refused*.<sup>6</sup> To earn points in each parameter, a state must fulfil specified criteria.

Scores are awarded based on a 25-point scale. A state can earn full points, partial points, or no points at all. The more overall points a state receives, the higher its ranking in the Transparency Barometer. Figure 1 illustrates how the 25 points are distributed among the seven parameters.

Table 1 Increase in the average level of transparency in each parameter

| Parameter                            | Average points in 2001 | Average points in 2010 | Progress in per cent |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|
| Deliveries (4.00 points)             | 2.27                   | 2.41                   | 6.27                 |
| Timeliness (1.50 points)             | 1.26                   | 1.40                   | 11.11                |
| Clarity (5.00 points)                | 1.43                   | 2.07                   | 44.76                |
| Comprehensiveness (6.50 points)      | 1.88                   | 2.79                   | 48.40                |
| Access and consistency (2.00 points) | 0.68                   | 1.04                   | 52.94                |
| Licences granted (4.00 points)       | 0.37                   | 1.13                   | 205.41               |
| Licences refused (2.00 points)       | 0.08                   | 0.37                   | 362.50               |

### A decade of reporting

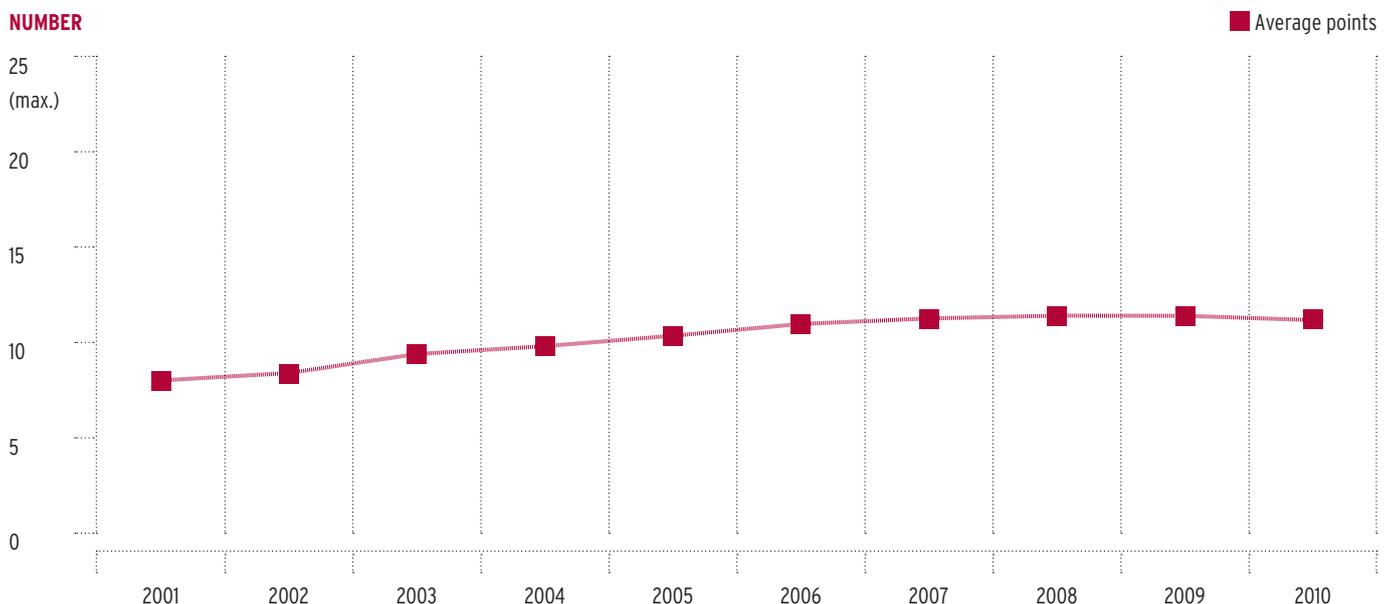
Transparency in reporting on small arms transfers has increased over the past ten years. Figure 2 shows the average points received by all covered states each year. States received an average of 7.98 points for their reports on 2001 activities and 11.22 points for their reports on 2010 activities. This represents an increase of 40 per cent, but the average points earned by states still remains below half the maximum total of 25 points. In addition, none of the 52 evaluated countries has achieved the maximum points. Switzerland earned the highest score over the ten-year period, gaining 21 points for reporting on 2007–10 activities. The UK earned 20 points for reporting on its 2009 activities. Other than these two states, no other country managed to receive more than 20 points. This

means that all states, including those scoring better than average, still have some way to go before achieving full transparency in their export reporting.

On average, the states under review have provided increasingly detailed data in all seven parameters. Over the period in question, scores improved the most in the parameters *licences granted* and *licences refused* (see Table 1); this progress reflects the fact that states are increasingly sharing information on their licences granted and denied to alert other states about licence applications for sensitive materiel or destinations.

No country reports fully on all criteria in the scoring guidelines. A closer look at the seven parameters illustrates that some countries get top marks in individual parameters, but none leads across all seven categories

Figure 2 Average total points received by all 52 states for reports on 2001-10 activities



Note: The average for reporting on 2001-05 activities is based on 51 states because Serbia and Montenegro were not separate independent states. For 2006-10 activities the average is calculated for 52 states.

Table 2 Countries achieving maximum points in any of the seven parameters for reporting on 2001-10 activities

| Year of activity | Timeliness (1.50 max) | Access and consistency (2.00 max)                         | Clarity (5.00 max)   | Comprehensiveness (6.50 max)               | Deliveries (4.00 max) | Licences granted (4.00 max) | Licences refused (2.00 max)                 |
|------------------|-----------------------|---|--|--|-----------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| 2001             | 43 countries          | –   | –<br>Best score:<br>Germany (3.5)                          | –<br>Best score:<br>Italy (4.75)           | –                     | –                           | Denmark                                     |
| 2002             | 43 countries          | –   | –<br>Best score:<br>Germany, UK (3.5)                      | –<br>Best score:<br>Italy, US (4.75)       | –                     | –                           | –   |
| 2003             | 49 countries          | Netherlands,<br>Sweden, UK                                | –<br>Best score:<br>Sweden, UK (3.75)                      | –<br>Best score:<br>Netherlands (4.75)     | Poland                | –                           | –   |
| 2004             | 49 countries          | Belgium,<br>Netherlands,<br>Sweden, UK                    | –<br>Best score:<br>Sweden (3.75)                          | –<br>Best score:<br>Netherlands, US (4.5)  | –                     | France                      | –   |
| 2005             | 49 countries          | Belgium,<br>Netherlands,<br>Sweden, UK                    | –<br>Best score:<br>Norway, Sweden (4.00)                  | –<br>Best score:<br>Italy (5)              | Canada,<br>Poland     | –                           | –   |
| 2006             | 49 countries          | Belgium,<br>Netherlands,<br>Sweden, UK                    | –<br>Best score:<br>Norway, UK (3.75)                      | –<br>Best score:<br>UK (5.25)              | Poland                | –                           | Montenegro,<br>Romania                      |
| 2007             | 50 countries          | Belgium,<br>Netherlands,<br>Sweden, UK                    | –<br>Best score:<br>Norway (4.25)                          | –<br>Best score:<br>Switzerland (5.25)     | Spain                 | Switzerland                 | –   |
| 2008             | 49 countries          | Belgium,<br>Netherlands,<br>Sweden, UK                    | –<br>Best score:<br>France, Norway,<br>Switzerland, UK (4) | –<br>Best score:<br>Switzerland (5.25)     | Poland, Spain         | Switzerland                 | Germany,<br>Romania,<br>Serbia              |
| 2009             | 49 countries          | Belgium,<br>Netherlands,<br>Romania,<br>Sweden, UK        | –<br>Best score:<br>Norway, Switzerland,<br>UK (4.00)      | –<br>Best score:<br>Switzerland (5.25)     | Poland, Spain         | Switzerland                 | Romania,<br>Serbia                          |
| 2010             | 48 countries          | Belgium,<br>Netherlands,<br>Romania, Spain,<br>Sweden, UK | –<br>Best score:<br>Denmark (4.75)                         | –<br>Best score:<br>Switzerland, UK (5.25) | –                     | Switzerland                 | Belgium,<br>Romania,<br>Serbia,<br>Slovakia |

(see Table 2). For example, no country reported in enough detail to receive the full points available under the parameters *clarity* or *comprehensiveness*.

## Conclusion

Over the past ten years our understanding of the small arms trade has deepened as major exporting states have become increasingly transparent in reporting on their small arms and light weapons transfers. This trend towards greater transparency is bolstered by some states' efforts to broaden the contents of their national arms export reports while simultaneously

providing more detailed and reliable information on their transfers. Yet, although transparency has grown across all seven parameters for both high-scoring and low-scoring countries, progress is not uniform and the average score of all states remains below 50 per cent of the maximum possible. From this perspective, reporting practices still leave much to be desired. ■

## Sourcing

Written by Jasna Lazarevic, this *Research Note* is based on Lazarevic (2010; 2012a; 2012b). The author was an associate researcher at the Small Arms Survey from May 2007 until June 2012.

## Notes

- 1 The definition of small arms and light weapons used in this *Research Note* covers both military-style weapons and commercial firearms. It broadly follows the guidelines set out in the 1997 *Report of the Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms* (UN, 1997). *Small arms* include revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines, assault rifles, sub-machine guns, and light machine guns; *light weapons* include heavy machine guns, hand-held under-barrel and mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-tank and anti-aircraft guns, recoilless rifles, portable launchers of anti-tank and anti-aircraft missile systems, and mortars of 120 mm calibre or below (Batchelor, 2001, p. 8; Berman and Leff, 2008, p. 10).

- 2 To access the individual editions of the Transparency Barometer, see Small Arms Survey (n.d.).
- 3 Exports can refer to newly produced goods, transfers, temporary exports, re-exports, and sales of surplus stockpiles.
- 4 The Small Arms Survey relies on the Norwegian Initiative on Small Arms Transfers (NISAT) Database on Authorized Small Arms Transfers to determine which states meet the minimum export threshold for inclusion. The NISAT database draws exclusively on the United Nations Commodity Trade Statistics Database (UN Comtrade). A recent Small Arms Survey initiative has supplemented UN Comtrade data with information from the UN Register of Conventional Arms and information received directly from government and industry officials. For more information, see Small Arms Survey *Research Notes* 11 and 12 (Berman, 2011a; 2011b).
- 5 If other regional organizations make their reports publicly available, the relevant information will be included in the Transparency Barometer.
- 6 The Transparency Barometer guidelines are used to award points to states that indicate that they do not export or have not exported a particular type of small arm or light weapon. This 'nil reporting' is considered complete information for the purposes of attributing points under relevant categories of the Barometer. For more information on the latest scoring guidelines, see Small Arms Survey (n.d.).

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**For more information on the Transparency Barometer, please visit: <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/weapons-and-markets/tools/the-transparency-barometer.html>.**

## About the Small Arms Survey

The Small Arms Survey serves as the principal international source of public information on all aspects of small arms and armed violence, and as a resource centre for governments, policy-makers, researchers, and activists. The Survey distributes its findings through Occasional Papers, Issue Briefs, Working Papers, Special Reports, Books, and its annual flagship publication, the *Small Arms Survey*.

The project has an international staff with expertise in security studies, political science, international public policy, law, economics, development studies, conflict resolution, sociology, and criminology, and works closely with a worldwide network of researchers and partners.

The Small Arms Survey is a project of the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva. For more information see [www.smallarmssurvey.org](http://www.smallarmssurvey.org).

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