



Small Arms Survey

STRATEGY

2024–28



**OUR VISION
IS A WORLD
WITHOUT ILLICIT
ARMS AND
ARMED VIOLENCE**

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MISSION STATEMENT

‘This mission statement and the present strategy will guide our efforts to operationalize the Survey’s vision of a world without illicit arms and armed violence.’

The Small Arms Survey is a centre for applied knowledge in the field of proliferation and control of small arms, their associated parts, and ammunition. We inform policy and practice through a combination of data, evidence-based knowledge, authoritative resources and tools, tailored expert advice and training, and the convening of practitioners and policymakers.

Through these combined interventions we actively engage with a broad range of partner organizations, governments, national regulators, policymakers, practitioners, and civil society actors to help them reduce the risks that stem from illicit small arms and ammunition flows and use.

This mission statement and the present strategy will guide our efforts to operationalize the Survey’s vision of a world without illicit arms and armed violence. They set the framework for context-specific interventions and initiatives at the national, regional, and global levels in the areas of research, policy, and advisory services.

Our work directly contributes to the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the achievement of its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We generate insights and expertise to help countries reduce armed violence, promote peace, and build inclusive societies in order, among other things, to ‘reduce all forms of violence and related death rates’ (Target 16.1), ‘eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls’ (Target 5.2), and ‘reduce . . . illicit arms flows’ (Target 16.4).

The Small Arms Survey was founded in 1999 as an associated programme of the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies based in Geneva, Switzerland.

In this document, and unless otherwise stated, the term ‘small arms’ refers to small arms and light weapons, and their ammunition, parts, and accessories.

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STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

‘During the next five years we expect to see the increasing development of relatively “new” technologies that are mostly dual-use in nature and can easily be transformed into weapons.’

Multilateral framework

The Small Arms Survey’s work is founded on the collective will to reduce armed violence and the global circulation of illicit firearms, and is anchored in a multilateral normative framework. This framework includes the UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (UN PoA); the UN Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition (Firearms Protocol); the International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons (ITI); the Global Framework for Through-life Conventional Ammunition Management (A/CONF.239/2023/CRP.1/Rev.5); and the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). Additionally, Goal 16 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development specifically advocates reducing all forms of violence and illicit arms flows as ways to promote peaceful, inclusive, and just societies. Finally, important regional small arms control instruments complement the multilateral framework, including, but not limited to, the Economic Community of West African States Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons; Inter-American Convention against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives, and Other Related Materials; Nairobi Protocol; Southern African Development Community Protocol; and Wassenaar Arrangement.

In the period 2024–28 we expect that UN member states and regional and international organizations will continue to seek the Survey’s expertise in the development, implementation, and monitoring of these frameworks. The Survey—through its emphasis on inclusive research and policy development processes—is also uniquely positioned to support the international

community in integrating the small arms perspective in other instruments such as the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, and in pursuing whole-of-government approaches to tackling violence reduction, in line with the UN Secretary-General’s New Agenda for Peace. The Survey will therefore engage with relevant UN member states and regional and international organizations to accelerate the implementation of Agenda 2030, measure their progress towards achieving its goals and targets, and integrate gender into the implementation of all multilateral instruments.

Conflict trends

In recent years the level of armed confrontation between states has risen sharply. The war in Ukraine has brought back the reality of large-scale war in Europe. In Asia, tensions around North Korea and China’s increasing assertiveness have further intensified the arms race between the United States and China, and their regional partners. As a result, the geopolitical environment has become markedly more contested and trust in multilateralism has decreased. Many countries are re-evaluating their defence needs and capabilities, and providing an accelerated and significant boost to arms production the world over.

Intra-state conflicts are also intensifying, including, but not limited to, political violence and resource-driven clashes across the Sahel and Gulf of Guinea, South-east Asia, and the Middle East and North Africa. Climate change, socio-economic inequality, and demographic shifts are among the demand factors that are expected to exacerbate many of these conflicts. In this context,

the Survey's work on conflict analysis, the proliferation of improvised explosive devices, and the regulation of civilian firearms in post-conflict and transitional settings will continue to inform violence prevention and reduction efforts.

Organized crime and urban and domestic violence

In the past decade the lines between politically driven armed conflict and criminal violence have become blurred, and most violence happens outside the context of armed conflicts, with prominent examples in Central America, the Caribbean, and West Africa. Relationships between governments and societies are increasingly under strain, and politics within states is growing more contentious. The easy access to converted, 3-D printed, or trafficked weapons, on the one hand, and the availability of military-grade firearms among criminal actors, on the other hand, challenge law enforcement efforts, regulation, and tracing, and will demand more evidence-based knowledge of illicit arms circulation, production, and conversion.

Proliferation, diversion, and misuse of small arms

Small arms and light weapons remain the weapons of choice in armed conflicts, as well as for countries affected by civil strife, political violence, or organized crime. The illicit production, transfer, diversion, and accumulation of firearms are recognized vectors of small arms proliferation. Proliferation may lead to misuse, and thus contribute to criminal, political, resource-driven, and gender-based violence. These risks affect both state- and civilian-held weapons. While international standards and best practices have been developed for state-held weapons and ammunition, there is much less agreement on the regulation of civilian weapons. Some regional organizations, notably in Europe, have developed common minimum standards for the regulation of civilian weapons among their member states. Similar efforts may emerge in other regions to enhance the regulatory framework dealing with the production of artisanal and craft weapons (for instance in West Africa), or to curtail the trafficking of firearms from major arms-producing states.

Institutional and non-government actors will need not only to continue their efforts to prevent the illicit supply of firearms, but also to invest time and resources in reducing the demand for licit and illicit firearms more

effectively. Efforts to measure armed violence trends—which are particularly important in the context of Agenda 2030—will require reliable and current data of the kind that the Survey is well placed to provide. Equally, the Survey will keep focusing on the gendered impacts of armed violence, especially the role of small arms in facilitating gender-based violence, as well as the role that violent masculinities play in the demand for firearms.

Technological advances

During the next five years we expect to see the increasing development of relatively 'new' technologies that are mostly dual-use in nature and can easily be transformed into weapons. Some, such as the cheap and effective 3-D printing of firearms and their parts or the weaponization of low-cost commercial drones, will continue to present challenges to existing arms control frameworks. Other technologies that could facilitate the tracing of firearms and ammunition—such as the laser marking of ammunition or forensic analysis of 3-D printer nozzle patterns—will contribute to greater accountability. The full implementation of technological solutions will require increased collaboration with the private sector, however, while multilateral political agreements in this regard will remain elusive. The widespread use of social media, combined with advances in artificial intelligence and commercial satellite imagery, has already expanded the reach of open-source research, which is likely to develop further at a rapid pace. The Survey needs to be involved in the study of these technologies to ensure its continued relevance.

Funding environment

The Survey's traditional donors have seen their economies impacted by the pandemic, the rise in energy prices and inflation, the subsequent downturn, and the reprioritization of resources towards Ukraine, resulting in the provision of reduced development assistance. Against this backdrop we expect the funding environment to remain challenging. On the one hand, it may require a stronger shift towards larger, multi-year initiatives that are able to leverage support from and provide coordination platforms to multiple donors. On the other hand, if the Survey is to continue to demonstrate the value of its contributions to donors' priority areas, it will have to place a stronger emphasis on outreach and messaging to donors; adopt adaptive management approaches and methodologies; and implement effective monitoring, evaluation, and learning systems.



Soldiers escort the convoy of Burkina Faso's self-declared new leader Ibrahim Traore as he arrives at the national television in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, on 2 October 2022. Source: Vincent Bado/Reuters

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SIX LESSONS FROM THE SURVEY'S PREVIOUS STRATEGY CYCLE

‘The Survey’s form of engagement in a given environment and on a given project will depend on partners’ needs and capabilities, what support may already be in place, and where we can add the most value.’



Tailored dissemination

The Small Arms Survey derives considerable legitimacy from its data and analytical work. Its knowledge and policy advice are anchored in the

production of evidence-based knowledge at the sub-national, national, and regional levels, and are widely appreciated by the rest of the international community. At the multilateral level the Survey’s global databases have been used as resources for processes such as the Open-Ended Working Group on conventional ammunition and for monitoring progress towards achieving Agenda 2030 Target 16.1. The Survey’s audience—and the way it consumes information—has evolved over the last 20 years, however, and policy organizations now place more emphasis on using data visualization and short knowledge outputs to inform policy discussions. The active and effective dissemination of the Survey’s analytical work will therefore require a clear focus on our audience’s changing characteristics, and we will have to tailor the format and dissemination of our knowledge products to that audience, to ensure that our research feeds into its evolving information needs and the ways in which it uses that information.



Fostering collaboration

In 2024 the field in which the Survey operates is much more crowded than it was when we first started our work.

A range of NGOs, private sector companies, and multilateral and intergovernmental organizations now work on complementary aspects of small

arms control and proliferation. Focus and partnerships will be key for us to retain policymakers’ attention on matters of inclusive small arms control. We will seek to foster more systematic collaboration with like-minded organizations with complementary thematic focuses and a long-term presence in regions where the Survey operates, as well as with regional platforms and organizations from developing countries. We will also operationalize synergies with sector leaders in domains such as climate change, new technologies, and training.



Training and evaluating

In 2024 the Small Arms Survey is no longer a solely research-focused organization. In the past few years it has become a global centre for applied

knowledge in the field of small arms control and proliferation. While we continue to produce pertinent, often groundbreaking research on these issues, our work now routinely features tailored expert advice, training, and the convening of practitioners and policymakers. The combination of these complementary and mutually reinforcing streams of work is what sets us apart. We also intend to scale up our investment in evaluating the effectiveness of small arms control policies and interventions.



Building bridges between policy and practice

Arms control is a political agenda that often excludes relevant constituents from policy engagement and the design

and implementation of appropriate initiatives. Building and expanding on existing partnerships, the Survey will actively promote more socially inclusive and gender-responsive approaches to arms control. This will include a more systematic focus of the Survey's skills and resources on participatory research and networking events for practitioners in order to enable comparative learning for groups and constituencies that are regularly excluded from small-arms-related debates and processes. Doing so is expected to help bridge the gap between policy and practice in the field.



Effective project management

As the Survey continues its evolution in a more volatile environment, the need for new processes and tools has become apparent to drive performance and shape a culture of ever-greater efficiency. Embedding effective project management skills and processes will be a key priority for the upcoming period, to enable the organization to strengthen its position as a world-class centre for applied knowledge on all aspects of small arms control.



Continued evolution

Last but not least, adaptation will need to become a conscious feature of the Survey's practice, in order to remain relevant in a world where change is chaotic and increasingly more rapid. For the next five years the Small Arms Survey will more systematically learn from and evaluate the results of its activities, with a view to evolving in all areas of its work in real time and remaining a relevant partner for those in need of trusted analysis and advice on matters of small arms proliferation and control.





Civilians practise shooting under the guidance of the Ukrainian military on 26 February 2023 in Kyiv, Ukraine.
Source: Zinchenko/Global Images Ukraine via Getty Images

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OBJECTIVE AND THEORY OF CHANGE

‘In line with its mission statement, the Survey’s objective for the period 2024–28 is to more effectively inform, advise, and assist the processes, reforms, and actors that seek to reduce illicit arms flows and armed violence.’

Organizational theory of change

The theory of change (ToC) set out below serves to frame the Survey’s work at different levels, including country-specific work, regional analytical work, support to regional organizations, and policy advice in the framework of international instruments and protocols. It is not meant to be prescriptive. Rather, it is a reminder that, to be effective, small arms control and the reduction of illicit arms flows require engaging:

- with relevant partners and stakeholders (for example, regional and multilateral organizations, governments, think tanks, academia, civil society, and the private sector);
- at different levels (national, regional, global);
- across different thematic areas; and
- in a variety of complementary and appropriate ways.

Doing so will allow knowledge to inform practice (the Survey’s as well as that of others), which in turn can feed back into policy developments in what is meant to be a virtuous cycle.

Against this backdrop, the Survey’s ToC posits that:

If institutions and actors that seek to reduce illicit arms flows and armed violence acquire evidence-based, policy-relevant knowledge (Strategic Outcome 1), **if** they also acquire and apply new skills, expertise, and capabilities (Strategic Outcome 2), and **if** they network and collaborate more effectively with one another (Strategic Outcome 3), **then** small arms control and armed violence reduction initiatives, processes, and reforms will be better informed and become more effective at the country, regional, and global levels.

Thus, the Small Arms Survey will contribute to the long-term goal of reducing illicit small arms proliferation and armed violence.

The Survey’s logic model is predicated on a key assumption that the institutions and actors the Survey engages with will choose to sustain and leverage their political will to improve arms control and reduce illicit arms flows over time.

This ToC is a living document that will guide the Survey’s work for the next five years, which the organization will continuously put to the test and may adapt to the requirements of often rapidly evolving changes in its operating environment.

Partially finished lower receivers (also known as '80 per cent receivers') for AR-15 rifles are displayed in a gun store in California, United States, in April 2021. Partially finished receivers are inoperable as such, but can be used in the production of 'ghost guns'.
Source: Bing Guan/Reuters

THEORY OF CHANGE



VISION

A world without
illicit arms and
armed violence

IMPACT

Small arms control and armed violence
reduction processes, reforms, and actors
are better informed and more effective
at the country, regional, and global levels

STRATEGIC OUTCOME 1

Institutions
and actors
acquire and use
evidence-based
knowledge

STRATEGIC OUTCOME 2

Institutions
and actors acquire
and apply new
skills, expertise,
and capabilities

STRATEGIC OUTCOME 3

Institutions
and actors
network and
collaborate more
effectively

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HOW WE WORK: LINES OF WORK, THEMATIC AREAS, AND CAPABILITIES

‘The Survey will operationalize the proposed vision through three lines of work, seven thematic areas, and a broad range of capabilities.’

Three main lines of work

For the Survey to meet its strategic objectives, we need to harmonize our practice more consistently, so as to systematically equip institutions and actors with knowledge, skills, and access in order to influence the design and implementation of small arms control initiatives. More specifically, this can be split into three main lines of work:

1. **Institutions and actors need knowledge** that enables them to recognize and understand problems linked to the illicit proliferation and misuse of small arms and to their ability to effectively address these challenges. In a rapidly changing environment, the Survey will therefore continue to equip stakeholders with evidence-based, policy-relevant, and timely data and knowledge in all relevant areas of small arms control.
2. **Tailored expert advice and training** enable institutions and actors to act on the knowledge they acquire. They may typically need a combination of technical, planning, and organizational capacities to respond to the multiple challenges of illicit small arms proliferation and misuse. The Survey will focus on the facilitation of inclusive policy development processes and the provision of expert advice and training at both the planning and implementation stages to help strengthen our partners’ capacities at the sub-national, national, and regional levels.
3. **Connecting practitioners, experts, and policymakers** from government, civil society, academia, the private sector, and regional and multilateral organizations helps to create a more inclusive and supportive environment that will facilitate the design and

adoption of reforms to improve small arms control policies and practices. The breadth and depth of support among interest groups and policy stakeholders are key to influencing practice and bringing about change in these areas. The Survey already provides practitioners and experts with platforms where they can share their knowledge and experience. We will do so more systematically under this strategy, with a view to strengthening long-term engagement and collaboration within and between formal and informal ‘allied voices’ in the field of small arms control.

Seven thematic areas

Under the 2024–28 Strategy the Small Arms Survey will focus its efforts on seven thematic areas:

1. international instruments on matters of small arms supply and proliferation;
2. small arms and ammunition supply and flows;
3. armed violence and small arms demand;
4. gender-responsive small arms control;
5. national action plans and strategies;
6. weapons and ammunition management; and
7. improvised weapons and ammunition, and other emerging threats.



1. **International instruments on matters of small arms supply and proliferation.**

The international community has developed a substantial normative framework for conventional arms control over the years, including, but not

limited to, the UN PoA, ITI, ATT, and Firearms Protocol, and the new Global Framework for Through-life Conventional Ammunition Management. The Survey is in the right position to help others advance international norms, operationalize existing commitments and review mechanisms, and accelerate the implementation of Agenda 2030's targets for the reduction of deaths from armed violence (Target 16.1) and illicit arms flows (Target 16.4).



2. **Small arms and ammunition supply flows.**

Rigorous and timely research on small arms and ammunition supply flows at the local, regional, and global levels is critical for anticipating and addressing constantly evolving trends

in the proliferation of illicit weapons, including their diversion from legal to illicit spheres and various patterns of illicit manufacture. When communicated and put into action by the relevant stakeholders, this clear understanding of the problem will inform evidence-based policymaking and support more effective assistance in the field of small arms control.



3. **Armed violence and small arms demand.**

Monitoring levels of armed violence—in both conflict and non-conflict contexts—is critical for prioritizing efforts where they are most needed and for learning from policies and interventions. It is also essential to improve understanding of the multiple context-specific factors that drive armed violence and the demand for small arms, which requires rigorous and mixed-method approaches to data collection. The Survey's work on conflict analysis, surveys, and armed actor mapping can feed into the design of effective violence reduction strategies.



4. **Gender-responsive small arms control.**

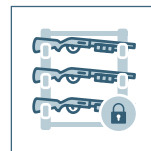
Gender-responsive small arms control involves integrating perspectives into national, regional, and international small-arms-related policies and programmes that account for how armed violence affects women, men, girls, boys, and gender minorities differently on the basis of their gender, and in combination with other intersectional factors. Given that arms control is a historically male-dominated field, gender-responsive arms control also involves ensuring that women and other historically

under-represented groups can participate meaningfully in all aspects of small arms control.



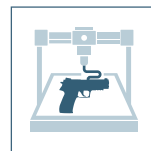
5. **National action plans (NAPs) and strategies.**

Nationally owned and inclusive NAPs and strategies are critical tools for systematically and effectively implementing, coordinating, monitoring, and evaluating small arms control measures at the regional and national levels. NAPs and small arms control strategies provide governments with the means and tools to operationalize global and regional small arms instruments in a way that is coherent with national regulations, budgetary cycles, and other country-level frameworks and action plans related to security sector reform; the prevention of violent extremism; and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, among others. They are also important instruments for facilitating inclusive dialogue among state, civil society, and the private sector at the country level; enhanced government coordination; and cooperation with external partners in identifying and funding priority needs.



6. **Weapons and ammunition management (WAM).**

Nationally owned and inclusive WAM refers to the good governance of arms and ammunition throughout their life cycle, including the establishment of relevant national frameworks, processes, and practices for the safe and secure production, acquisition, stockpiling, transfers, end-use control, tracing, and disposal of small arms and ammunition. The Survey's WAM-related offerings include the provision of technical, operational, and policy support to states that seek to efficiently, safely, and securely manage their stockpiles. Judging by the numerous requests for support from partner countries in Africa and Latin America, the Survey's in-house WAM expertise and inclusive approach to stockpile management remain an appreciated feature of our expert advice to country partners.



7. **Improvised weapons and ammunition, and other emerging threats.**

Improvised weapons and ammunition are generally made from materials available at hand and have one or more of the following three characteristics:

- They have not been subject to formal quality control during manufacture.
- They use components in ways that differ from these components' original design roles.
- They may be employed in ways that were not intended in their design.

Improvised explosive devices (IEDs), craft weapons, and privately made and modified firearms may typically fall within this thematic area. The Survey will build on its expertise in cross-border IED proliferation, craft weapons, and converted firearms to identify and research other emerging threats and provide appropriate advice on how to reduce the risks of their proliferation and misuse.

These main thematic areas highlight topics where the Survey can add value. They are not mutually exclusive, and most of the Survey's projects combine two or more of these thematic areas in a mutually reinforcing way. This is expected to remain a common feature of the Survey's work in the foreseeable future. For each of these thematic areas, interventions will be tailored to the needs and opportunities of a given environment, and may require any of the capabilities listed below.

A broad range of capabilities

The Survey's form of engagement in a given environment and on a given project will depend on partners' needs and capabilities, what support may already be in place, and where we can add the most value. Depending on these partners' needs and capacities, and the resources at their disposal, the Survey's work may feature one or several of the following capabilities:

- qualitative and/or participatory research;
- quantitative research, global and project data sets and databases, and data analytics;
- population surveys in fragile environments;
- the analysis of small arms supply and demand dynamics at the country and regional levels;
- policy briefings, webinars, and blogs;
- needs and capacity assessments;
- the design, monitoring, and evaluation of small arms control initiatives;
- expert technical assistance;
- the development of tools, handbooks, and reference materials;
- the facilitation of experience-sharing and experts' dialogues at the country, regional, and international levels;
- support to policy formulation;
- support to the development and implementation of small arms control strategies and NAPs;
- subject matter expertise and training on gender-responsive small arms control; and
- the design and delivery of tailored training programmes, including the training of trainers.

The Survey will seek to combine complementary forms of engagement across one or several of the seven thematic areas in order to maximize its ability to inform, advise, and assist others in an effective way. Field research will feed into the Survey's technical advisory work and contribute to adaptive design and management. Insights gained from the Survey's project work will, in turn, enable lessons from practice to feed back into the Survey's knowledge products and external engagements, completing the knowledge loop.

Where we work

The Survey works on global initiatives, as well as at the regional and national levels. Where we work depends on a careful examination of our partners' needs and capabilities, as well as where we can add value to the work of others. In the coming five years this will include further consolidating and expanding our engagement in the Caribbean, North Africa and the Middle East, and West and East Africa.

6

CAPACITIES REQUIRED TO OPERATIONALIZE THE STRATEGY

‘Delivering this strategy in a complex environment will require the Survey to be adaptable, build on its existing capabilities, and maximize existing processes.’

Delivering this strategy in a complex environment will require the Survey to be adaptable, build on its existing capabilities, and maximize existing processes. Within the first 12 months of the strategy period the Survey commits to developing internal strategy implementation plans to guide, roll out, monitor, and review progress in each of the following five areas.

Each member of the Survey’s management team will be designated to lead on the design, delivery, and monitoring of plans and tools to implement the Survey’s strategic commitments and report annually on progress.

1. STRENGTHENING ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE

2. REINFORCING THEMATIC AREAS OF EXPERTISE

3. INFORMATION DISSEMINATION AND EXTENDING OUR POLICY INFLUENCE

4. DEVELOPING AND EXTENDING STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

5. FUNDRAISING



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The Small Arms Survey is a centre for applied knowledge dedicated to preventing and reducing illicit small arms proliferation and armed violence. The Survey informs policy and practice through a combination of data, evidence-based knowledge, authoritative resources and tools, and tailored expert advice and training, and by bringing together practitioners and policymakers.

The Survey is an associated programme of the Geneva Graduate Institute, located in Switzerland, and has an international staff with expertise in security studies, political science, law, economics, development studies, sociology, criminology, and database and programme management. It collaborates with a network of researchers, practitioners, partner institutions, non-governmental organizations, and governments in more than 50 countries.

The Survey's activities and outputs are made possible through core support as well as project funding. A full list of current donors and projects can be accessed via the Small Arms Survey website. For more information, please visit: www.smallarmssurvey.org.

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