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**12 Steps  
towards  
Sustainable  
Gender  
Mainstreaming  
in SALW  
Control**

LESSONS  
LEARNED FROM  
THE WESTERN  
BALKANS:  
**WHAT WORKS?**

The South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC) is a joint initiative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) aimed at strengthening national and regional capacities to control and reduce the proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons, thus contributing to enhanced stability, security, and development in South Eastern and Eastern Europe.

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# **12 Steps towards Sustainable Gender Mainstreaming in SALW Control**

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LESSONS  
LEARNED FROM  
THE WESTERN  
BALKANS:  
**WHAT WORKS?**

## List of Acronyms

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AVMP	Armed Violence Monitoring Platform
RCC	Regional Cooperation Council
SALW	Small Arms and Light Weapons
SEE	South East Europe
SEESAC	South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WB	Western Balkans
WPS	Women, Peace, Security

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# About this Primer

The South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (**SEESAC**) has undertaken long-standing efforts to mainstream gender perspective into security sector reform and small arms and light weapons (SALW) control. These efforts have contributed to building the hands-on experience and practical know-how in integrating the gender perspective into this field.

This Primer, as an introductory document, aims to share experiences and lessons learned by SEESAC in cooperation with its partners, highlighting the practices that work, as well as the ongoing challenges in advancing gender equality in SALW control. It provides actionable guidance for practitioners and policymakers, supporting the efforts to develop inclusive and effective approaches to SALW control. The Primer also draws on extensive experiences related to advancing gender equality in policing and the implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda in the region.



As the world marks the 25th anniversary of **UN Security Council Resolution 1325** and the 30th anniversary of the **Beijing Platform for Action**, the progress made in advancing gender equality is increasingly being challenged. There is a growing global concern that hard-won gains are at risk of being reversed, undermining decades of progress. It is, therefore, of critical importance to sustain and accelerate efforts toward gender equality, including in security sector policies in general, and in SALW control in particular.

To contribute to this end, this Primer:

- Highlights and shares lessons learned and practical strategies from the Western Balkans in advancing gender-responsive approaches to SALW control.
- Provides an overview of tools and resources for policymakers and practitioners in SALW control-related domains.

Focusing on knowledge sharing and contextualized practice, the Primer provides guidance illustrated by practical examples of gender mainstreaming from Western Balkans jurisdictions. These examples offer relatable lessons that can be adapted and applied in other regions around the world. They also aim to document how mainstreaming gender in arms control strengthens the nexus between gender, security and development, and reinforces the practical convergence between **Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs), in particular **SDG 5** on gender equality (specifically, target 5.2 on the elimination of violence against women and girls, target 5.5 on women’s full and effective participation) and **SDG 16** on peace, justice and strong institutions (especially target 16.4 on significantly reducing illicit financial and arms flow).

The measures and practice examples outlined in this Primer are not intended as a step-by-step guide. In practice, these measures are most impactful when implemented simultaneously rather than sequentially. Specific measures, the order and the pace of their implementation, will vary depending on the context and the nature of the SALW control challenge at hand, institutional capacities, the level of intersectoral and regional cooperation, and numerous other factors. Notwithstanding these variations, which highlight the importance of a deep understanding of the local environment, the overarching objective remains the same: to demonstrate that gender-responsive SALW control is essential to building safer and more secure societies.

The document is intended for government officials and policymakers, in particular SALW commissions, personnel in security sector institutions, international gender equality, development and peacebuilding actors, and civil society organisations.

By bridging theory and practice, this Primer supports efforts towards building more responsive, inclusive, and accountable SALW control systems.



# 1. INTRODUCTION

The South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (**SEESAC**) operates as a joint initiative of the United Nations Development Programme (**UNDP**) and the Regional Cooperation Council (**RCC**). It was established to assist the governments in the region in addressing the challenges posed by post-conflict proliferation of small arms and light weapons to peacebuilding and long-term economic and social development.

Since its inception in 2002, SEESAC has focused on strengthening the capacities of national and regional stakeholders to control and reduce the proliferation and misuse of SALW, thereby enhancing stability, security, and development in the region. In doing so, it has progressively been using a 360-degree approach to providing SALW control assistance to its counterparts.

As the South East Europe (SEE) SALW Control Focal Point, SEESAC supports the regional dialogue and coordination of efforts through various forums. As the executive arm of the **Regional Implementation Plan on Combating the Proliferation of SALW**, SEESAC is enabling information exchange, knowledge sharing, and

coordination of efforts through the **Regional Steering Group meeting on SALW in South East Europe**. In addition, SEESAC is responsible for coordinating and monitoring the implementation of the **Western Balkans SALW Control Roadmap**. Further, it facilitates the **Regional Platform of SALW Commissions** and the **South East Europe Firearms Experts Network**, both of which serve as the backbone of the SALW control efforts in the region.

SEESAC provides support for the development of legislation and policy frameworks, as well as for the harmonisation of the SALW control legislation with the EU *acquis*. To contribute to evidence-based policymaking, it continuously invests in data collection, research and analysis, and dissemination of the SALW-related knowledge. To increase the security and safety of the existing SALW and ammunition stockpiles and to reduce the risk of proliferation, SEESAC has been providing assistance to the authorities in enhancing weapons and ammunition stockpile security by supporting security upgrades and by reducing surplus stocks of SALW and their ammunition, as well as by training. Through the provision of technical assistance, training, and analysis, direct support is provided to local institutions in the establishment or enhancement of firearms registration, marking, and tracing systems, as well as in strengthening investigation capacities by the establishment of Firearms Focal Points. Comprehensive support to the border and criminal police services is provided to enhance the detection and investigation of firearms-related crimes. Additional support

is provided in strengthening the transparency of arms transfers by capacity development, regional exchanges, and production of regional and national reports on arms exports. Finally, SEESAC has also supported several jurisdiction-level as well as implemented regional public education and awareness campaigns to address the impact of SALW and armed violence.

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**Mainstreaming the gender perspective across all functional areas of SALW control has been central to SEESAC’s evidence-based and gender-responsive approach to SALW control.**

Strategic directions of gender mainstreaming are articulated in the Regional Implementation Plan and SEESAC Gender Equality Strategies 2007-2017, 2017-2023, and 2025-2030.

In parallel to gender mainstreaming in SALW control, **since 2009, SEESAC has been working on the mainstreaming of the gender perspective in security sector reform and practical implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Agenda in the Western Balkans.** Its collaboration with security sector institutions, both the **ministries of defence** and **police directorates**, has bolstered the recruitment, retention, and professional development of women in the security sector. This collaboration has also enhanced the security institutions’ capacities to recognise and respond to the distinct security threats faced by women and girls, particularly in addressing and preventing gender-based violence. Notwithstanding the results achieved thus far, there are opportunities for further improvement while solidifying the accomplishments.

## 1.1 Global policy landscape: Growing convergence between gender equality and SALW control frameworks

Over the past two decades, there has been a steady convergence of global agendas on sustainable development, gender equality, the sustaining peace agenda, and SALW control, highlighting the need for concerted and holistic implementation efforts. Gender considerations have already influenced multilateral arms control and disarmament frameworks, including treaties and resolutions. Similarly, arms control and disarmament have been integrated into the WPS Agenda and other normative frameworks that promote gender equality, peace and security, and sustainable development. Gender mainstreaming in SALW control is backed by a robust normative framework that provides mandates and guidance for action.<sup>1</sup>

Most recently, at the **Fourth Review Conference (RevCon4)** of the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat, and Eradicate the Illicit Trade of Small and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, which took place from 18-28 June 2024 in New York, the governments were called to “mainstream a gender perspective in the design and implementation of gender-responsive policies and programming on small arms and light weapons control.”<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, governments are called “to exchange and, as appropriate, apply experiences, lessons learned, and good practices.”<sup>3</sup> across SALW control, and to “incorporate good practices in mainstreaming a gender perspective into policies and programmes on small arms and light weapons.”<sup>4</sup>

1 For an overview of international normative frameworks, please see: UNODA, *Training Manual on Gender-Mainstreaming Small Arms Control*. New York, NY: United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, (2022).

2 United Nations General Assembly, *Report of the Fourth United Nations Conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects*. (2024), 8.

3 *Ibid.*, 14.

4 *Ibid.*, 31.

**Box 1: What is gender mainstreaming?**

Gender mainstreaming is “the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies and programmes in political, economic, and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is achieving gender equality.”<sup>5</sup>

In the context of SALW control, gender mainstreaming means integrating gender perspective into the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of arms control policies and operations to ensure they are inclusive, equitable, and effective, and that specific needs and risks women and men face with regard to firearms are addressed.

**Gender-responsive SALW control** refers to arms control legislation, policies, programmes, and operations that take into account and actively respond to different experiences and roles of women, men, girls, and boys related to firearms and the gender-specific risks they face with respect to SALW proliferation and misuse.<sup>6</sup>

**1.2 Gender and SALW control in the Western Balkans**

The Western Balkans (WB), particularly due to the legacy of armed conflicts and unrest in the 1990s, continues to face security challenges, including illegal possession, misuse, and trafficking of firearms. Despite significant progress in disarmament and SALW control, firearms continue to pose a threat to the safety of both women and men, and the cumulative effects are severe, ranging from fatal and non-fatal physical injuries to psychological trauma.

Prevalent gender norms and roles condition the demand for firearms and shape specific risks that women and men face with respect to their misuse, in particular, the forms and extent of their exposure to armed violence. Ownership, demand, and access to firearms in the Western Balkans are distinctively gendered. Men hold 97.2% of all legally owned firearms, while women account for just 2.8%. These disparities are consistent and reflected in the steady annual trends in new firearm license acquisitions.<sup>7</sup>

A regional survey conducted in 2024<sup>8</sup> found that men are 3.5 times more likely than women to express a desire to own a firearm (10.4% of men compared to 2.9% of women). This trend is particularly pronounced among young men aged 18 to 30, who show the most favourable attitudes toward firearm ownership across all age groups. Gender norms influence attitudes toward firearms that are frequently associated with masculine identities as tools of power and control.

5 United Nations Economic and Social Council, *ECOSOC Resolution 1997/2: Agreed Conclusions*, (1997).

6 LeBrune, Emile, (ed.) *Gender-Responsive Small Arms Control: A Practical Guide*, Geneva: Small Arms Survey (2019).

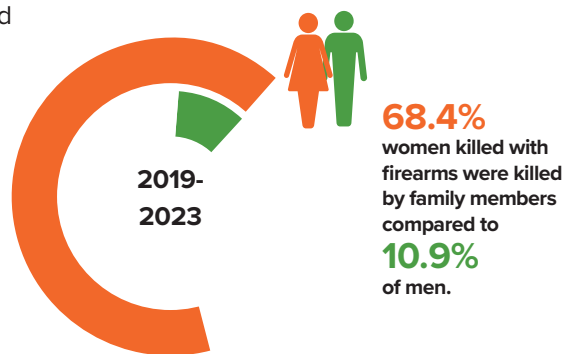
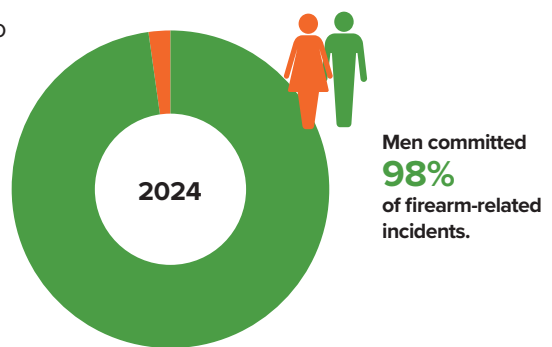
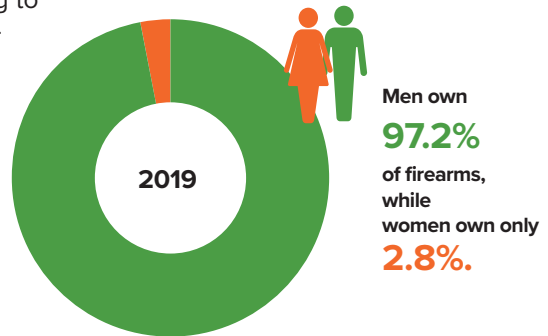
7 Data in this section are extracted from SEESAC, *A Brief Guide to Gender Analysis for Firearms Focal Points*, (2025).

8 SEESAC, *Understanding the Factors Fuelling the Demand for Firearms in the Western Balkans - Research Findings and Recommendations* (2025).

Beyond civilian ownership, men overwhelmingly dominate professions and activities involving firearms. According to a 2019 SEESAC research,<sup>9</sup> 91.2% of all security sector personnel authorized to carry firearms in the region are men, compared to just 8.8% women. Men also predominate in firearm-related recreational activities such as hunting and sport shooting.

Patterns of firearm-related offending behaviour are also strongly gendered. In 2024, men were responsible for 98% of all firearm incidents, reaffirming long-standing trends. Young men, particularly those aged 19 to 35, are more likely to misuse firearms than older men, accounting for 45% of perpetrators of firearm-related incidents in 2024 alone. The risks associated with firearms differ significantly between men and women. Armed violence against men most often occurs in the context of public disputes, criminal activity, or undetermined shootings. Women, on the other hand, are ten times more likely to be victims than perpetrators of firearm violence. This stark imbalance is primarily driven by intimate partner and domestic violence involving firearms. Between 2019 and 2023, of all women killed with firearms in the region, 68.4% were killed by family members, compared to 10.9% of men.<sup>10</sup>

Notwithstanding the significant research-supported strides towards integrating gender in SALW control policies, the consistent patterns of victimisation over the years point to the need for continued interventions to address the issue of armed violence through gender-responsive SALW control measures.



9 SEESAC, *Men and Firearms in Southeast Europe*, (2019).

10 SEESAC, *The Misuse of Firearms in Domestic Violence in the Western Balkans: Key Trends and Main Concerns*, (2025).

### 1.3 From policy commitments to gender-responsive operations

The SEESAC's 2016 baseline study extensively documented that gender perspective had not been integrated into arms control and that gender considerations were rarely a part of prevailing arms control debates in the region.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, a gender perspective was underprioritized and not considered an essential part of arms control policy development.

On a practical level, relevant policies failed to recognize linkages between armed violence and gender-based violence, the differentiated impact of firearms on women and men, as well as the role of gendered factors, including specific notions of masculinity, in fuelling demand and misuse of firearms. A gender-blind approach to a highly gendered phenomenon such as firearms misuse cannot adequately address the challenges at hand and hinders the effectiveness of operational measures to curb and prevent armed violence. Such an effect was documented by persistent trends of femicides committed with firearms as well as young men's exposure to armed violence, as both perpetrators and victims.

The same research identified the factors hampering gender mainstreaming in arms control, such as insufficient knowledge and low awareness among decision-makers and policy-makers about the gendered aspects of small arms, underrepresentation of women, gender equality agencies, and women's organisations, lack of gender statistics, and the underuse of gender analysis in policy development.

Building on such an extensive evidence base, SEESAC, in cooperation with SALW commissions in the region and supported by the European Union, undertook a comprehensive set of activities to address these trends and tackle identified challenges by bringing the gender perspective to the core of policymaking.

The holistic approach to enhancing gender responsiveness of SALW control measures is based on four interconnected pillars:

1. Data collection and research;
2. Raising awareness about links between gender and small arms;
3. Building the capacities of institutions in charge of SALW control to mainstream gender in their work;
4. Increasing participation of women in SALW control policymaking.

A large-scale gender analysis conducted in 2021 documented **significant progress by the institutions in the Western Balkans in integrating the gender perspective into small arms control policies** as a result of the activities based on the approach mentioned above.<sup>12</sup> This has been particularly the case with the [Western Balkans SALW Control Roadmap](#) and the accompanying [strategies and action plans for its implementation](#), adopted across the region. These foresee multiple measures to:

- Address linkages between firearms and domestic violence;
- Respond to gendered aspects of firearm demand, use, and misuse – including linkages between socially dominant masculine norms and firearms;
- Increase participation and representation of women in SALW control; and
- Further build institutional capacities for gender mainstreaming and improve gender-sensitive data collection and record-keeping.

11 SEESAC, *Gender and SALW in South East Europe. Main Concerns and Policy Response*, (2016).

12 SEESAC, *Guidelines for Gender Analysis of Legislation and Policies Relevant for Small Arms Control*, (2022).

In addition, there have been noticeable efforts to ensure that weapons laws prevent firearms from being used in the context of domestic violence, alongside the progress in establishing legislative and policy frameworks for eliminating domestic violence. The analysis also found that these frameworks are not necessarily coherent, and that gaps exist in their practical operationalisation. The analysis extensively mapped legislative and policy preconditions for gender mainstreaming and women's participation in SALW control. In addition, the existing record-keeping practices were analysed to identify entry points for gender-sensitive data collection.

The analysis resulted in a wide range of recommendations on how to further strengthen the response to gendered aspects of firearms through legislative and policy actions, particularly those related to the prevention of the use of firearms in domestic violence. The findings and accompanying recommendations have already been used in ongoing revisions of SALW control strategies and action plans in the Western Balkans.

In the most recent period, **efforts in the region increasingly shifted to mainstream gender at the operational level of SALW control**, thereby demonstrating the practical value added to arms control efforts. For instance, a set of practical guidelines (see under 2.8) were developed through an **extensive regional process** that involved more than 100 police officers and 17 women's organisations: **Guidelines for Assessing and Addressing Risks Related to Firearms Misuse in Domestic Violence**, which aim to assist police officers in assessing the risks of firearms misuse in domestic violence and responding to them with the required urgency; and **Guidelines for Gender Responsive Firearms License Approval**, which support professionals in incorporating a gender perspective into the

firearms licensing process to prevent firearms misuse in domestic violence.

Practice in WB has demonstrated that integrating a gender perspective into arms control significantly broadens its scope and effectiveness by addressing the traditionally overlooked issues like gender-based violence, masculinities, and women's participation in policymaking. It highlights the gendered nature of armed violence, linking firearms proliferation and misuse to domestic violence and power imbalances, and emphasizes the urgency of coherent strategies tackling both armed violence and gender norms. Gender mainstreaming strengthens the nexus among security, gender equality, and development, aligning arms control with global frameworks like the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. Crucially, the participation of women and gender equality agencies in arms control policymaking is essential to achieving gender-responsive, impactful interventions, creating safer and more resilient communities, and fostering sustained peace and equality.

Integrating the gender perspective into all aspects of SALW control and management enhances understanding of the complexity of SALW-related issues. As a critical part of the overall approach to SALW control, gender analysis enables the creation of innovative, more appropriate, and more effective policies, better suited to the challenges at hand.

Extensive efforts in practical gender mainstreaming in SALW control, addressing multiple challenges along the way, and facilitating organisational change, have generated significant practical know-how and lessons learned in steering change and developing effective strategies towards more gender-responsive approaches in SALW control.

Such practical strategies include the following:

- Data and gender analysis are crucial for making the case for gender mainstreaming;
- Gender-responsive leaders are informing and driving a meaningful change in policies and operations;
- Gender and SALW control training plays a key role in establishing an enabling environment for a gender-responsive approach;
- For sustainable results, gender must be mainstreamed into key developments, including regional Roadmaps;
- Commitments for a gender-responsive approach must be embedded in national normative and strategic policy frameworks;
- Full and meaningful participation of women is a precondition for any effective arms control;
- Women's organizations are key partners in pursuing gender-responsive SALW control;
- Gender mainstreaming in operational SALW control demonstrates practical value in strengthening the effectiveness of armed violence prevention and criminal justice response;
- Training the trainers not only embeds knowledge within institutions but also creates agents of change;
- Gender-responsive monitoring and evaluation of strategic frameworks advances progress;
- Impactful gender mainstreaming requires a long-term commitment, continued technical assistance, and sustainable financial support;
- Local ownership, regional cooperation, and context sensitivity amplify impact.

In the next chapter, each of these lessons learned is further elaborated and backed by practical examples.

## 2. LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE WESTERN BALKANS – STRATEGIES THAT BRING RESULTS

### 2.1 Data and gender analysis are crucial for making the case for gender mainstreaming

The availability and systematic collection of gender statistics and the application of gender analysis play a critical role, especially in the initial stages, in building a robust evidence base to advocate for gender mainstreaming in SALW control.

Gender analysis allows for effective identification of the main gender-related concerns surrounding firearm ownership, use, and misuse, and armed violence – such as the heightened risk of domestic violence associated with firearms or the disproportionate exposure of young men to armed violence.

In the Western Balkans, such evidence, including that presented in SEESAC’s baseline research [Gender and SALW in South East Europe](#), not only highlighted the necessity of gender mainstreaming in SALW control but was also crucial in garnering institutional buy-in and overcoming resistance, which is often particularly pronounced when introducing gender equality work into traditionally male-dominated and technically oriented fields like SALW control.

To facilitate these processes, research and data-collection exercises in the region have been grounded in gender-sensitive methodologies, contributing to increased availability of gender statistics and greater visibility of the gender dimension of SALW control.

A wide range of knowledge products available at SEESAC SALW Knowledge Base, such as [SALW Surveys](#), [Gender and Small Arms Fast Facts](#), [In Focus Armed Violence Monitors](#), provide an extensive evidence base that has been instrumental for the development of SALW control strategies in the region and for the design of awareness-raising campaigns. [The Armed Violence Monitoring Platform](#) (AVMP), run by SEESAC, has been essential in bridging the gaps and improving the availability of gender statistics. In addition, [Key Performance Indicators](#), which measure progress in implementing the Western Balkans SALW Control Roadmap, generate crucial sex-disaggregated data, enabling trend monitoring.

Aiming to enhance the gender sensitive data collection and application of the gender analysis at the operational SALW control, SEESAC developed a Brief Guide to Gender Analysis for Firearms Focal Points (FFPs) that aims to support them in integrating a gender perspective across their activities through consistent gender-sensitive data collection and the effective application of gender analysis to enhance the intelligence picture.

## 2.2 Gender-responsive leaders are informing and driving a meaningful change in policies and operations

Senior leaders, such as heads of SALW commissions, are key to fostering political will and driving organisational change for gender-responsive policies. By setting goals, mobilizing resources, and ensuring accountability, they can foster systemic change. Gender-responsive leadership ensures that policies are inclusive, impactful, and beneficial to all. Gender equality is as essential to leadership as strategic planning and resource management.

**The Gender Coach Programme (GCP)** is an innovative approach to *boosting the gender-responsiveness of security sector institutions by developing competencies and fostering commitment of the senior management*.<sup>13</sup> The Programme was developed and first implemented in Sweden in 2007 within the context of the implementation of UNSCR 1325. The GCP aims to increase the competencies and skills of the senior management in security sector institutions to mainstream gender in their work. In doing so, *it enables participants to encourage change in their institution and become leaders in integrating the gender perspective into their operations*.<sup>14</sup>

In 2015, SEESAC piloted the GCP as part of the project **Strengthening of Regional Cooperation on Gender Mainstreaming in Security Sector Reform in the Western Balkans**. By building on this experience, the GCP was **initiated in 2017 to strengthen the capacities of heads of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) Commissions** in Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Albania to integrate the gender perspective into SALW control policymaking. In parallel, the GCP was implemented with senior officials in the defence sector in the region. The GCP is based on individual work between a representative of a relevant institution and the coach, and it includes regular, individual, informal meetings and consultations. During these informal learning sessions, a wide range of gender-related topics is discussed, and a bespoke learning programme is tailored to each participant's needs.

The implementation of the GCP in the region has demonstrated its transformative potential. Heads of SALW commissions in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro initiated a wide range of gender-related activities, facilitating the integration of gender-responsive measures into SALW control strategies, fostering interinstitutional cooperation, including with women's organisations and gender equality agencies. To realize this potential, the GCP must be clearly linked to broader gender equality initiatives, and support for a participant must be long-term and include multiple capacity-building activities.

<sup>13</sup> For a detailed overview of the Gender Coach Programme and its implementation in Sweden, please see Dr Louise Olsson and Capt. Anna Björsson, *Gender Training for Leaders: The Swedish Gender Coach Program*, Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, Washington, (2017).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

### 2.3 Gender and SALW control training plays a key role in establishing an enabling environment for a gender-responsive approach

Gender training for members of SALW commissions and other institutions involved in SALW control plays an important role in fostering commitment and establishing an enabling institutional environment for gender responsive SALW control. It is also a building block in establishing the consensus on the importance of a gender perspective in SALW control. In the WB region, these trainings are tailored to the specific needs and challenges of each jurisdiction, ensuring that the specific contexts and requirements of local environments are addressed effectively. Training for SALW commissions was commonly conducted alongside the Gender Coach Program to foster synergy and ensure that changes initiated by the heads of SALW commissions were understood and supported by staff.

Through these initiatives, participants build the capacity to integrate gender perspectives into SALW control policies, address the gendered impacts of firearms, and promote the safety of both women and men. By focusing on issues such as the misuse of firearms in domestic violence, the role of gender norms in driving firearm demand, and the differentiated effects of armed violence on genders, these trainings enhance the effectiveness and inclusivity of SALW control measures.

In addition to jurisdiction-level training, regional training programs are organised to strengthen commitment, facilitate the exchange of experiences and best practices, promote regional cooperation, and ensure that SALW commissions remain up to date on the latest

trends and advancements in SALW control. The **advanced regional training** in 2024 brought together representatives of SALW commissions and gender equality agencies to further strengthen the institutional capacities for gender-responsive SALW control policymaking and facilitate interinstitutional cooperation.

Due to the high staff turnover, which is common across all jurisdictions in the region, ever-evolving SALW-related challenges, and ongoing reforms of normative and legislative frameworks, capacity building needs to be permanent and ongoing. In the WB region, such training is also integrated into the SALW control strategies and action plans.

### 2.4 For sustainable results, gender must be mainstreamed into key SALW control developments, including regional Roadmaps

To achieve maximum results, gender must be fully mainstreamed into key SALW control developments and ongoing reforms, as well as into normative and policy frameworks. By prioritizing gender mainstreaming in initiatives that galvanize political will and mobilize the most resources, the potential for meaningful change is significantly amplified. Embedding gender considerations into these processes not only strengthens the effectiveness of SALW control but also builds a foundation for sustained progress in advancing gender equality and achieving transformative outcomes in disarmament and arms control efforts.

In the Western Balkans, this has clearly been the case with the Roadmap for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse, and trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons, their ammunition and explosives in the Western

Balkans, adopted in 2018.<sup>15</sup> The Roadmap serves as a guiding and consensual document developed and owned by the regional authorities in achieving a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse, and trafficking of SALW and their ammunition in the WB.<sup>16</sup> In 2023 and 2024, through extensive regional processes, the Roadmap text was revised for phase II to be implemented in the **2025-2030** period. The Roadmap aims to establish the WB as a safer region and an exporter of security, where comprehensive and sustainable mechanisms, harmonised with the European Union and other international standards, are in place to prevent, identify, investigate, prosecute, and adjudicate the illegal possession, misuse, and trafficking of arms, ammunition, and explosives.

Under Goal 2, on evidence-based and intelligence-led arms control policies, there is a specific gender-related target: *Fully integrate gender and age concerns in arms control policies and prioritise women's participation in policymaking.* Such a target was also defined in the initial Roadmap document covering the period until 2024.

The adoption of the regional Roadmap has had a trickle-down effect, as the regional commitments and goals have been successfully incorporated into jurisdictional strategies, aligning jurisdictional efforts with broader regional and international priorities and fostering a unified approach to SALW control.

**The Western Balkans Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) Control Roadmap Multi-Partner Trust Fund** supports a donor-coordinated approach to the implementation of the Roadmap. This pooled fund strengthens coordination, planning, and communication among all partners, fosters collaboration, and reduces risks to governments and financial

contributors. The Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MTPF) ensures that gender considerations are systematically integrated into eligibility assessments, thereby promoting inclusive and equitable programming from the outset. In addition, the MPTF supported gender-specific initiatives such as the UNDP Serbia project **Reduce Risk Increase Safety**, which has generated significant know-how in the region.

## 2.5 Commitments for a gender-responsive approach must be embedded in national normative and strategic policy frameworks

Building on regional commitments, SALW control strategies adopted across the region have localized and expanded upon these goals by addressing the linkages between firearms and domestic violence, the gendered aspects of firearm demand, use, and misuse – including the connections between socially dominant masculine norms and firearms, promoting women's participation and representation in arms control processes, enhancing institutional capacities for gender mainstreaming, and improving gender-sensitive data collection and record-keeping. This was further operationalised through the accompanying action plans and facilitated the establishment of policy frameworks conducive to gender-responsive SALW control.

As mentioned previously, policy developments in the region are based on a full-fledged **gender analysis of legislation and policies relevant to arms control.** The analysis extensively mapped the legislative and policy preconditions for mainstreaming gender and women's participation in SALW control. In addition, existing record-keeping practices

<sup>15</sup> The Roadmap was developed as a follow-up to the High-Level Meeting on SALW control in South East Europe held on 1 February 2018 in Podgorica, Montenegro. The official adoption of this document took place at the EU-Western Balkans Summit in London on 10 July 2018.

<sup>16</sup> For more information, see *Roadmap for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW)/firearms and their ammunition in the Western Balkans*

were analysed to identify entry points for gender-sensitive data collection. The analysis resulted in a wide range of recommendations on how to strengthen the response to gendered aspects of firearms through legislative and policy actions, particularly those related to the prevention of the use of firearms in domestic violence. The findings and accompanying recommendations were thoroughly discussed with SALW commissions in the region and have been used in ongoing revisions of SALW control strategies and action plans in WB. By building on this experience, SEESAC developed [Guidelines for Gender Analysis of Legislation and Policies Relevant for Small Arms Control](#). The Guidelines aim to consolidate the main methodological lessons learned in carrying out such gender analysis and facilitate future gender analysis of legislation and policies relevant for small arms control.

The SALW control strategies and action plans for the Western Balkans jurisdictions, available at the [Regional Arms Law Compendium](#), provide concrete examples of how gender was mainstreamed in these strategic documents.

## 2.6 Full and meaningful participation of women is a precondition for any effective arms control

The active participation of women is indispensable to achieving meaningful and sustainable SALW control. Women can bring critical perspectives, particularly in addressing the intersection of firearms and gender-based violence, and their full participation is a precondition for more gender responsive policy solutions to be articulated. Across the region, women police officers' networks have not only been agents of change towards increasing gender responsiveness of their institutions

but have also been engaged in SALW control efforts in the region.

[Regional Analysis on Women in SALW Control in the Western Balkans](#) emphasized the essential contributions of women and their significant role in advancing SALW control. This analysis documented notable progress in women's participation in decision-making processes while highlighting the ongoing challenges to achieving gender balance across the technical and operational aspects of this field. The analysis also proposed a comprehensive set of recommendations that build on previous achievements, aiming to improve recruitment, retention, and professional development of women in the security sector, including in the [armed forces](#) and [police services](#).<sup>17</sup> The recommendations include improving gender-disaggregated data collection, implementing targeted recruitment strategies, supporting women through capacity-building actions and technical training, developing workplace policies to promote family-friendly practices, and fostering more enabling environments for women's advancement in operational roles. These measures aim to dismantle barriers to equal participation and ensure the inclusion of women's voices and expertise at all levels of SALW control.

## 2.7 Women's organizations are key partners in pursuing gender-responsive SALW control

In WB, women's organisations have played a pivotal role in promoting peace, advocating for disarmament, and combating gender-based violence. Women's organisations have done pioneering work in collecting data on the misuse of firearms in violence against women and advocating for stricter weapons regulation,

<sup>17</sup> For additional information, see SEESAC. *Regional Handbook on Preventing and Responding to Gender-Based Discrimination, Sexual Harassment and Abuse*. 2021; and SEESAC. *Integrating a Gender Perspective into Military Education and Training in the Defence System of the Western Balkans*. 2022.

particularly from the perspective of domestic violence and violence against women. In recent efforts in the region, their expertise contributed to the implementation of gender analysis of legislation and policies relevant to SALW control, and particularly to the development of the guidelines mentioned below. They not only provided substantial input to their development but also engaged in the peer-review process, paying particular attention to ensuring that concerns related to the safety of victims of domestic violence are adequately addressed. To facilitate their inclusion in SALW control policy-making, SEESAC gathered representatives of 18 women's organisations from the Western Balkans at a [Workshop on Gender and SALW](#). Partnering with [Journalists against Violence against Women](#) has been of critical importance in raising awareness on the role of firearms in gender-based violence.

## 2.8 Gender mainstreaming in operational SALW control demonstrates practical value in strengthening the effectiveness of armed violence prevention and criminal justice response

Integrating gender perspective at the operational level of SALW control is fundamental for addressing the main gender concerns related to firearms. It ensures that interventions practically and actively respond to the differentiated risks women, men, boys, and girls face. By applying gender-responsive practices, operational SALW control can effectively target specific risks, such as the role of firearms in gender-based violence. It also helps translate commitments to gender equality into practical actions, embedding them into day-to-day practices within institutions. Furthermore, by demonstrating the practical value of gender mainstreaming, it sustains momentum for the adoption and implementation of gender responsive and impactful SALW control measures.

To address and prevent the misuse of firearms in domestic violence, SEESAC developed two practical guidelines that aim to inform the daily operation of law enforcement in the region:

1. **Guidelines for Assessing and Addressing Risks Related to Firearms Misuse in Domestic Violence:** Intended for police officers, these guidelines provide practical checklists to assess risks associated with firearms misuse in domestic violence cases, involving both legally and illegally owned weapons. Covering key operational stages, including receiving reports, assessing risks, intervention, and incident aftermath, the guidelines ensure that police officers are equipped with tools and knowledge to respond with urgency and precision to such incidents.
2. **Guidelines for Gender-Responsive Firearms License Approval:** These guidelines focus on integrating the gender perspective throughout the firearms license approval process. A key objective is preventing the misuse of firearms in domestic violence, as well as preventing the misuse of firearms by groups most at risk of such behaviours, in particular men aged 18-30. Detailed checklists offer practical advice on conducting gender-sensitive background checks, reviewing applications for gun licenses, making informed decisions, and monitoring compliance to prevent firearms misuse.

These guidelines were developed through an extensive consultative process involving police officers, firearms licensing professionals, and women's civil society organisations. Region-wide focus groups were conducted with 68 police officers and 17 women's organisations to identify gaps and ensure that the guidelines effectively addressed the safety needs of domestic violence survivors.

## 2.9 Training the trainers not only embeds knowledge within institutions but also creates agents of change

**Training of Trainers (ToT)** is vital for ensuring the sustainability of technical knowledge and enabling widespread skill development within organisations. It facilitates continuous knowledge transfer, mitigates the risk of expertise loss due to staff turnover, and allows adaptation of training content to organisational needs over time. Ultimately, it fosters institutional memory, enhances institutional capacity, and ensures a longer-lasting impact on professional development and organisational effectiveness. Investing in trainers also creates networks of agents of change who can initiate improvements within their organisations to increase gender responsiveness.

Following the finalisation of the Guidelines (see under 2.8), SEESAC organised two regional ToTs on their practical application for police officers from the Western Balkans, thereby establishing a pool of 30 trainers. Participants attained practical knowledge on the application of Guidelines in their everyday work, gained necessary trainer skills, practiced design and delivery of the training related to the Guidelines, and further refined their understanding of domestic violence, its dynamics, characteristics, and types, and the role of firearms in domestic violence. In 2025, trainers delivered 10 trainings in Podgorica, Pristina, Skopje, Tirana, and Sarajevo. In total, over 130 police officers working on domestic violence cases and professionals handling firearm license approvals have been trained by their peers. The program ensures sustainable results by embedding the knowledge directly within institutions through peer-led learning. In addition, the trainers have undertaken further initiatives, such as discussions on integrating the guidelines into regular operations through standard operating procedures, and additional training within their institutions.

## 2.10 Gender responsive monitoring and evaluation advances progress

Monitoring and evaluation are essential for the effective implementation of sustainable gender mainstreaming in small arms control. The experience in WB, where a regional **mechanism for monitoring** and **coordination** of the Roadmap has been established, provides insights into how structured progress tracking can contribute to achieving objectives while also enhancing gender responsiveness. The Roadmap incorporates measurable Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) at strategic, policy, and operational levels, providing a framework for monitoring. Importantly, some of the KPIs are designed to provide sex-disaggregated data, enabling stakeholders to assess the specific dynamics of how small arms control measures impact men and women differently. Key Performance Indicator 2 (KPI2) specifically tracks progress in this area by providing information on the existence of gender-responsive SALW controls and the implementation of concrete activities to address gender aspects of small arms control, including efforts to combat gender-based violence or exposure of young men to armed violence.

Twice a year, SEESAC organises Regional Roadmap Coordination meetings to take stock of progress and information exchange at the regional level. In addition, SEESAC supports the organisation of local coordination meetings, facilitated by SALW Commissions, with the aim of coordinating efforts and monitoring progress at the jurisdictional level in the implementation of the Roadmap. Periodic **reviews** of the Roadmap and evaluation of SALW control strategies in the region are conducted so that their goals are reviewed according to the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria: Relevance, Impact, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Coherence, Sustainability, and Gender, thereby providing guidance and recommendations on how to enhance gender mainstreaming in SALW control.

## 2.11 Impactful gender mainstreaming requires a long-term commitment and sustainable financial support

Sustainable financing is critical to embedding gender-responsive approaches in SALW control. Long-term funding ensures continuity in implementing gender-responsive policies, capacity-building, and targeted support to security sector personnel and civil society actors. In the Western Balkans, comprehensive and sustainable donor and political support has been of utmost importance, enabling the overcoming of limitations of a project-based approach. Without stable financial commitments, gender considerations risk being deprioritized in favour of immediate security concerns. Readily available on-demand technical assistance and in-house expertise are the key to ensuring that gender concerns are adequately taken into account in major policy developments. From the perspective of institutions in the region, the possibilities for utilizing gender budgeting within the programme budget should be further explored and used.

## 2.12 Local ownership, regional cooperation, and context sensitivity amplify impact

**Local ownership** is a prerequisite for the sustainability and impact of gender responsive SALW control. To enhance local ownership, **gender-responsive SALW control must focus on the most pressing issues in a specific context, such as gendered dynamics of armed violence, the role of firearms in gender-based violence and violence against women, or the links between masculine norms and demand and misuse of firearms.**

**Regional cooperation** is a cornerstone in addressing SALW control challenges, fostering partnerships, information sharing, and advancing joint activities to enhance security in the region and gender responsiveness of SALW control. Regional forums, such as SALW commissions meetings, are a crucial mechanism for sharing best practices, lessons learned, and innovations in gender-responsive SALW control. Through information exchange, joint capacity-building, and shared policy commitments, jurisdictions in the Western Balkans have benefited from peer learning and strengthened mutual support. Regional platforms also help maintain momentum for gender responsive SALW control.

**Flexibility and context sensitivity are key.** There is no one-size-fits-all approach to gender mainstreaming in SALW control. Strategies must be adapted to local contexts, taking into account specific challenges faced by each jurisdiction, policy developments, institutional structures, and social dynamics. Flexibility in implementation allows for innovation and responsiveness to emerging challenges.

# SEESAC's Gender-related Resources

[A Brief Guide to Gender Analysis for Firearms Focal Points](#), (2025).

[The Misuse of Firearms in Domestic Violence in the Western Balkans: Key Trends and Main Concerns](#), (2025).

[Regional Analysis on Women in SALW Control in the Western Balkans](#), (2025).

[Understanding the Factors Fuelling the Demand for Firearms in the Western Balkans - Research Findings and Recommendations](#), (2025).

[Guidelines for Communication in Crisis Situations Linked to Firearms](#), (2025).

[Guidelines for Officials of the Ministries of Interior and Police Services for Communication with the Media in Cases of Firearm Misuse in Gender-Based Violence](#), (2024).

[Analysis of Media Reporting on Firearm Misuse in Male Gender-Based Violence Against Women in the Western Balkans](#), (2024).

[Guidelines for Assessing and Addressing Risks Related to Firearms Misuse in Domestic Violence](#), (2024).

[Guidelines for Gender-Responsive Firearms License Approval](#), (2024).

## [In Focus Armed Violence Monitors](#)

[Integrating a Gender Perspective into Military Education and Training in the Defence System of the Western Balkans](#), (2022).

[Guidelines for Gender Analysis of Legislation and Policies Relevant for Small Arms Control](#), (2022).

[Gender Analysis of SALW Control Legislation and Policies in the Western Balkans – reports](#) (2022).

[Policy brief: Small Arms Control - The Case for Gender Mainstreaming](#), (2022).

[The Position of Women in the Armed Forces in the Western Balkans](#), (2021).

[Regional Handbook on Preventing and Responding to Gender-Based Discrimination, Sexual Harassment and Abuse](#), (2021).

[SALW Surveys](#), (2019).

[Men and Firearms in Southeast Europe](#), (2019).

[Gender and Small Arms Fast Facts](#), (2019).

[Gender and SALW in South East Europe. Main Concerns and Policy Response](#), (2016).

[A Practical Tool for Integrating the Gender Perspective in SALW Legislative and Policy Frameworks](#), (2016).

[Women in Police Services in South East Europe](#), (2015).

[Guidelines for Gender Sensitive Policing with an Emphasis on Recruitment, Selection and Professional Development of Women in Police Services](#), (2012).

[Firearms Possession and Domestic Violence in the Western Balkans: A Comparative Study of Legislation and Implementation Mechanisms](#), (2007).

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