



Small Arms, Children and Education

– What is the Future?



SEESAC

South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse
for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons



The **South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons** (SEESAC) has a mandate from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe (SCSP) to further support all international and national stakeholders by strengthening national and regional capacity to control and reduce the proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons, and thus contribute to enhanced stability, security and development in South Eastern and Eastern Europe.

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**NO GUNS,
PLEASE
WE ARE CHILDREN!**

Acronyms

CBP	Community Based Policing
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSO	Civil Society Organization
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
EU 2PP	EU Second Pilot Project on SALW
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
RMDS/G	Regional Micro-Disarmament Standards and Guidelines (SEE)
SALW	Small Arms and Light Weapons
SCP	Safer Community Plan
SEESAC	South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of SALW
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
USA	United States of America
WHO	World Health Organization



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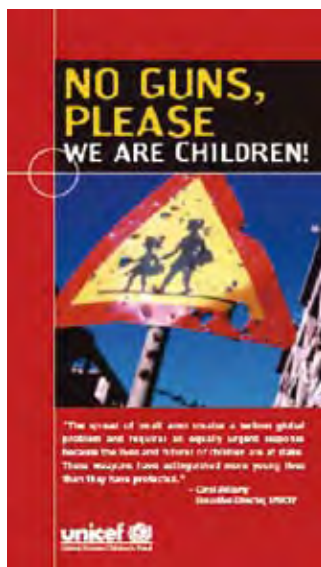
Small Arms, Children and Education – What is the Future?

1 Introduction

In 2005 SEESAC produced a report *SALW Awareness in Schools: Towards a National Curriculum*. This document was a preliminary review of some of the issues relevant to education and small arms, but it was written from a SALW Awareness perspective and not from an educational perspective. The report made a number of assumptions:

- Since the countries of SEE are committed under the Stability Pact to ‘continued tangible progress’ in SALW Awareness, the inclusion of ‘risk education’ in schools would support this requirement;
- Risk education could prevent tragic accidents involving small arms and children; and
- Education on the negative impact of weapons could reduce future violent and criminal behaviour among young people.

More in-depth study and discussion during an education consultancy conducted in 2006 as part of the EU Western Balkans SALW Control Support Plan (EU 2PP),¹ has raised doubts about all of these assumptions and resulted in questioning the current concept of small arms² risk education for children.



This 2006 research strongly suggests that such risk education programmes should not be introduced into schools, as they lack educational validity and are not particularly effective. The logical next step within the education consultancy was then to review the available knowledge about child development, research on risk-taking, research on safety and risk education, the public health approach to small arms and violence, and the role of media violence in influencing children’s attitudes to weapons. This was important as such reviews had not been done before in relation to the issue of small arms and the results could inform policy and programming for children and young people. Extensive literature reviews were conducted, resulting in a range of *Literature Review* documents which have been placed on the SEESAC website. A range of literature relevant to the issue of children, youth and small arms, have been included in a *Review of Key Literature on Children, Youth and Small Arms*, which lists links to organisations working on the issue. Annex A contains an overview of the framework within which any programmes involving children and small arms should be considered.

This Strategic Summary is based upon the *Consultancy Report: Small Arms, Children and Education*.³

Picture 1: UNICEF pamphlet, July 2001

2 A Public Health approach

‘SALW Risk Education’ has been defined in the following way:

*“SALW Risk Education is a process that promotes the adoption of safer behaviours by at-risk groups and by SALW-holders by informing people of the dangers and threats of SALW and educating them about alternatives and safer behaviours”.*⁴

¹ Meetings were held with staff of Ministries of Education, UNDP Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) Control Project staff, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), local Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and contacts were made with those experienced with issues relevant to small arms and children. Attempts were made to gather all materials used in education projects with children, both in the region and internationally, including project reports and, where available, evaluations.

² See Annex A for a definition of small arms.

³ This report is available to download from our website: <http://www.seesac.org>.

⁴ As defined in the SALW Awareness Support Pack, 2006 <http://www.seesac.org/reports/SASP%20%20handbook.pdf>.



One of the problems in considering the possible impact of small arms on children and young people is the lack of data, particularly age disaggregated data. The concept of 'small arms risk education' for school children is based on the assumption that children are at risk of unintentional injury and death from finding and using guns, or of accidentally injuring or killing others. Although there have been a number of tragic examples of children in South Eastern Europe (SEE) finding guns and injuring themselves or others, the data has only been available from press accounts and there is no way of knowing how frequent these occurrences are.⁵

Moreover, this may well be a useful approach to take with adult gun users, but there is no evidence that such an approach is appropriate for children and young people. Little attention has been given in SEE to attempts to protect children by requiring gun owners to store guns safely, nor to education and awareness programmes for adults (aside from weapons collections).

The public health approach to injury prevention is a coherent and well-established approach that is now being more widely applied to violence and small arms. The advantages of the public health approach to the issue of children and small arms are:

- It is an evidence-based approach, which begins with data collection before decisions are made about the need for programmes or the kinds of programmes;
- There is already a large body of scientific and medical research on public health which can inform discussion of the particular problems posed by small arms;
- It attempts to ascertain why a problem occurs, the risk factors, and the factors that could be modified through targeted interventions;
- It adopts a scientific approach to designing, implementing and evaluating programmes;
- It works on multiple levels – individual, relational, communal and societal, and adopts an ecological approach, that is, that no single factor can account for the problem of violence, and there is an interaction of factors at different levels;
- It includes advocacy by medical organisations on the issue;
- It focuses on the needs of survivors of small arms injuries, a still neglected issue; and
- By applying a public health approach the World Health Organization (WHO) hoped to broaden the definition of the problem beyond the realm of legal, industrial, strategic or tactical considerations and to introduce to this discussion the public health community's longstanding emphasis on scientific methodologies and prevention.⁶

As a result of the background research done on children and small arms, it became clear that the public health approach was lacking in discussions of the issue in SEE, and the resource guide *Children and Small Arms Resource Guide: Public Health Approaches* was produced, disseminated to partners and stakeholders, and placed on the SEESAC website.

3 The educational context

A hidden assumption in many proposals to create curricula on particular topics is that schools either provide a positive environment for children or, at the very least, a neutral environment, so that the outcomes intended by curriculum developers and programme funders will automatically be what they envisage.⁷ This is a naïve and simplistic view, which ignores the reality that schools are complex and chaotic systems embedded in complex societies, which are in turn increasingly affected by globalisation. Without entering into the complexities of this topic, something must be said about the potential of schools, particularly in post-conflict societies, to contribute to war and peace.

⁵ Annex B contains an overview of the global impact of small arms on children.

⁶ *Small Arms and Global Health*, WHO, 2001 http://whqlibdoc.who.int/hq/2001/WHO_NMH_VIP_01.1.pdf, accessed 17 August 2006.

⁷ The hidden curriculum is the idea that schools do more than simply aid the transmission of knowledge between one generation and the next, and involves a process that involves the transmission of norms and values as well as a body of socially-approved knowledge. <http://www.sociology.org.uk/tece1tl.htm>, accessed 20 May 2006.



Professor Lynn Davies pointed out that the ‘defence curriculum’ in the former-Yugoslavia and Albania presented conflict as a constant threat and taught students how to use weapons.⁸ The influence of this curriculum in SEE until its cessation in the 1990s should not be underestimated. The countries of former-Yugoslavia are in varying stages of educational reform, with initiatives by UNICEF and international NGOs on ‘active learning’, ‘child-centred learning’, ‘child friendly schools’, critical thinking,⁹ and the introduction of Parents’ Councils as well as new subjects such as Civic Education and Human Rights Education.¹⁰ The International Committee of the Red Cross’ course on ‘Exploring Humanitarian Law’ can also be included in this category of attempts to reform and democratise schools and the curriculum.

3.1 ‘Gun safety’ programmes for children

There is no evidence to support the introduction of ‘gun safety’ education programmes in schools, nor for the concept of ‘small arms risk education’. The USA is the only country where there are programmes related to ‘gun safety’ for preschool (4 - 5 years), elementary and secondary school students. Research conducted by paediatricians and psychologists has found no evidence of the effectiveness of these programmes, many of which are based on the NRA (National Rifle Association) model.

The concepts of ‘gun safety’ education and ‘small arms risk education’ are not based on knowledge of child development. Knowledge from child development makes it clear that such programmes are inappropriate and unlikely to succeed, as young children do not have the cognitive maturity to make the necessary decisions and adolescents frequently see themselves as invulnerable to danger and harm, especially boys, who are the main group at risk of playing with guns and using them inappropriately.

The injury prevention approach requires that the first line of protection from the risk of guns must be the safest, that is, the physical separation of the gun from the child. Another problem with education programmes for children is that they give parents a sense of complacency (they believe that the child has the necessary information and the skills to protect themselves) without altering the child’s behaviour. In this sense, such programmes have unintended negative consequences. Many injury prevention programmes also include an education component, but in the case of risk from guns, there is no evidence that the programmes work.¹¹

Box 1: Professional Views on Protecting Children from Guns

Adolescent Health Committee, Canadian Pediatric Society (2005)

‘Injury prevention educational programs may have unintended effects. It is possible that firearm safety education for children may increase their comfort level around guns, particularly in programs that include gun-handling techniques. Parents may be inclined to reduce their supervision or use of safe storage practices if their children learn gun safety at school. At present, no children’s firearm safety programs have been shown to be effective in simulated real-life situations. Further research is required to find an effective way to change children’s behaviour around firearms. Widespread use of these programs is unwise until an effective program is developed.’

Source: *Youth and Firearms in Canada*, Adolescent Health Committee, Canadian Pediatric Society, <http://www.cps.ca/english/statements/AM/Ah0.htm>, accessed 14 August 2006

American Academy of Pediatrics

The single most important step is to keep guns away from children. The safest thing for your family is not to keep a gun in the home. But, if you keep a gun at home, unload it and lock it away. Separate the ammunition. A gun in the home significantly increases risks for suicide, domestic homicide and accidents.

Source: *Guns and Children*, American Academy of Pediatrics, <http://www.aap.org/advocacy/childhealthmonth/Guns.htm>, accessed 07 March 2006

American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Injury and Poison Prevention

For developmental reasons, educational interventions are unlikely to be effective for many children and adolescents.

Source: *Firearm-Related Injuries Affecting the Pediatric Population Pediatrics* 2000;105:888-895 DOI: 10.1542/peds.105.4.888 <http://www.pediatrics.org/cgi/content/full/105/4/888>, accessed 14 March 2006

⁸ <http://www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/EducationSupplement/07.pdf>, accessed 30 September 2006.

⁹ Mostly sponsored by the Soros Foundation and its local organisations.

¹⁰ Civic Education and Human Rights Education have been supported by a variety of external actors: OSCE, the Soros Foundation, the Council of Europe.

¹¹ Firearm Injury Prevention: Failure of Gun-Safety Education, M. Denise Dowd, Robert Sege, Gary A. Smith, Joseph L. Wright and Raymond G. Miltenberger, *Pediatrics* 2004;113:1847-1848 DOI: 10.1542/peds.113.6.1847, <http://www.pediatrics.org/cgi/content/full/113/6/1847>, accessed 07 March 2006.



Fig 3. Example of a safe storage campaign poster

Picture 2: Example of a US campaign for safe storage practices

- Children and young people are particularly difficult targets for behavioural change programmes.
- Young children are cognitively immature and have difficulty in making probability judgements such as, 'How likely is it that I will get hurt?' They have difficulty in:
 - Identifying hazardous situations, and when they do, they react slowly;
 - Responding to complex and changing situations; and
 - Making the causal connections necessary to decide if a situation or object is safe or unsafe.

- Responsibility for the safety of young children rests with adults (parents, teachers and care-providers), the community and governments. It can be argued that it is both unreasonable and a violation of children's rights to protection to expect them to take responsibility for protecting themselves against dangers such as guns in the home.
- There is considerable evidence that many adolescents perceive themselves as invulnerable. While they are more able to identify dangerous situations, they may underestimate the danger to themselves and fail to take precautions. For example, children who handle a firearm once without accident or injury may perceive the activity as safe and themselves unlikely to be injured. Older children, especially boys, may experience peer pressure to experiment and seek danger. Older children are also less likely to want to follow rules and seek adult approval; rather they want to experiment and push the limits.
- There is little evidence to support the idea that children can translate information from education programmes into safe behaviour. Children are unable to hypothesize about new situations, or situations only experienced in the classroom or other artificial settings.
- Children and young people are curious and it is natural for them to explore and try out new behaviours.
- There is little evidence that girls are interested in guns or likely to use them if they find them at home, whereas, there is strong evidence that boys are interested, if not fascinated. This interest is fuelled by the media, (films, TV, video and computer games).

Information about small arms education projects and materials were gathered during the consultancy. Apart from the integrated safety curriculum in Albania (covering weapons, landmines, fireworks and first aid) and the curriculum on mines and small arms in Bosnia and Herzegovina, most activities were short-term, stand-alone and relatively expensive. No independent evaluations of the effectiveness of these projects are available.

3.2 Overview of life-skills, peace education and related education programmes

There are a range of education programmes already being implemented which are relevant to the issue of small arms and children – learning to solve problems and conflicts peacefully, peace education, human rights education, schools as zones of peace, schools without violence – so that there is no need for a special programme addressing small arms. In particular, it will be demonstrated that there is no educational and developmental validity to the concepts of 'gun safety' education and 'small arms risk education'. As part of this SALW Education work, the relevant literature on 'gun safety' education programmes for children and other practices such as safe storage was reviewed. The document *Review of Literature on 'Gun Safety' Education* has been widely distributed.

Research and consultation has revealed that there were already a wide variety of programmes in schools teaching knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours relevant to the issues raised by the excessive numbers of weapons in SEE. Even if the concept of 'small arms risk education' were educationally valid, there is still the question of whether schools have the capacity to continue adding topics and single-issue curricula to their programmes. Existing initiatives are more than adequate for assisting young people to respond to the risks and challenges of small arms where they do have an impact on their present experience. These initiatives are:

- Peace and Disarmament Education;
- Critical Thinking and Decision-making Skills;
- Exploring Humanitarian Law;
- Civic Education;
- Human Rights Education;
- Crime Prevention and Safe Communities;
- Conflict Resolution;
- Health Education; and
- Personal and Social Development.

4 Conclusions

Notwithstanding the findings of the SALW Education Consultant about the appropriateness of SALW Education being included within national school curricula, much useful data and experience was obtained on the linkages and psychology of children, youth and weapons. It is hoped that this work will inform reasoned, evidence-based debate and discussion on the issues. Furthermore, after an extensive review of the psychological, public health and educational literature on child development, risk-taking among children and youth, injury prevention, 'gun safety' education and the role of media violence and wide-ranging consultations with relevant organisations and professionals (UNICEF, ICRC, OSCE, WHO, Ministries of Education, NGOs) the following can be concluded:

4.1 Impact data

- There is a need for public health data on the impact of small arms on children, both directly (injuries and deaths) and indirectly (the impact of suicide in the family and domestic violence).
- There was little evidence of a direct impact of weapons on children and youth.

4.2 Understanding the issue

- Approaches to the issue of children and small arms in SEE generally lacked a children's rights approach and were not based on knowledge of child development and education.
- There is a disturbing lack of awareness of the Convention on the Rights of the Child among some UN staff and staff of Ministries of the Interior.
- Addressing the issue of small arms and children from a technical perspective, based on an arms control model, or by analogy with mine action programmes, is misconceived.
- There has been little consultation with young people about their concerns (including security concerns), combined with a tendency to assume that small arms is an issue for them, and fund projects designed by external actors.

4.3 Educational programmes

- The concept of 'small arms risk education' is not an educationally valid concept. The Canadian and American Pediatric Societies have both made formal official statements drawing attention to the research that questions the validity and effectiveness of 'gun safety' programmes, and advising against their use at the present time.
- The small arms education projects already implemented were generally stand-alone, short-term projects, adding to the burden of schools and teachers and without demonstrated effectiveness.



- Some of the small arms programmes already implemented were relatively expensive, short-term, and added on to the school curriculum, occasioning resentment from badly paid teachers at the extra work, and achieving relatively little.
- Emphasising small arms as an issue and funding specific programmes targeting the issue with children has the potential to do harm, in making gun owners and government authorities complacent community safety, and removes the responsibility from the appropriate people.
- There have been weapons collections programmes and some awareness raising about gunfire at celebrations, but otherwise few attempts to target gun owners who must hold the responsibility for the safe use and storage of their lethal weapons.
- Educational systems in the region are still in a process of reform and attempts to add single topics to the curriculum are unlikely to succeed.
- Ministries of Education and children's organisations do not see small arms as a priority issue in education or child protection, although they are aware of the problem of excess weapons in SEE.
- Little attention has been paid to the role of the media in presenting images of violence to children, often in contexts where such violence had no negative consequences, and was even presented as glamorous.

5 Recommendations – what next?

5.1 The need for data

There is a need for public health data¹² on the impact of small arms on children and young people. This should be implemented as part of an integrated programme to improve data collection about the incidence and causes of all accidents and injuries among young people.

There is also a need for research in the region on the impact of violence in the media on children and young people, and the role that the media play in glamorising weapons and violence.

5.2 Inclusion in broader issues

It is recommended that a public health approach be introduced to respond to the problem of small arms in the region, as there is a lack of 'actionable' data on the impact of small arms on children and youth. A public health approach would also highlight the role of small arms in domestic violence and in suicide, both of which impact on the whole family. There is a particular need in Croatia, based on evidence from the SALW Survey, for research and programming to address the employment and mental health needs of veterans and their families.

The UN Secretary General's Study on Violence against Children has revealed disturbing levels of violence against children and the lack of awareness of adults, both at the individual and policy making level, of this issue. Children have reported that they do not feel adults listen and respond to their concerns about bullying and other forms of violence in school, family and community. The issue of firearms should be viewed as one aspect of this larger problem, and programmes should address the root causes of such violence. Ministries of Education should continue and strengthen their commitment to the development of schools as 'zones of peace' and safe places for children, where children's rights are integral to the functioning of the schools. The issue of violence in schools, an international problem, should be addressed as a matter of urgency.

As the presence of firearms in the home contributes to increasing the level of violence where domestic violence is already present, the appropriate response is to continue with arms control and weapons collection programmes, changes in the law to make domestic violence illegal, programmes to raise awareness of the extent and costs of domestic violence, and improved reporting and data collection.

¹² See *Strategic overview of armed violence data collection and analysis mechanisms (South Eastern Europe)*, SEESAC 2006 <http://www.seesac.org>.



Many small arms control and security sector reform programmes have an overly technical focus, and do not address the security concerns of the community. In view of the fact that many guns owners give personal and family security as their reason for gun ownership, this is a significant gap. Civil society groups such as those working on behalf of women, religious communities, veterans, youth etc, should be consulted on small arms and security issues, so that safer communities, free of excess weapons, can be created together. Furthermore, there are high levels of dissatisfaction among young people in the region, combined with low levels of participation in society. Governments, community groups, parents and teachers need to create opportunities for young people's voices to be heard, and then create programmes together to address their concerns.

5.3 What kind of education?

As the proposed concept of 'small arms risk education' for children has been shown to lack validity in the majority of cases, such programmes should not be supported and encouraged. Where they are already planned, as in Bosnia and Herzegovina, there should be a comprehensive independent evaluation.

Education and awareness programmes on small arms should focus on adults, particularly gun owners, and should support the significant number of citizens, especially women, who see weapons as dangerous and do not want them in homes.

5.4 Whose responsibility?

The governments of SEE have a clear responsibility through their ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child to protect children from violence and harm. Governments and gun owners must be held to account for any violence involving children and small arms. Gun owners must be held responsible under the law if a minor has access to their weapons and harms themselves or others.

UNICEF is the lead agency on education and child protection in the UN system, and should take the lead role in responding to the issue of small arms and children. Their assessment of the level of priority of this issue for children, based on well-established principles of children's rights programming, coherent planning based on the Millennium Development Goals and consultation with governments and other stakeholders, should be respected. UNDP's role should be to consult with young people about their security concerns, and support the development of programmes responding to the needs of young people, such as National Youth Action Plans.

The temptation to create a new issue of 'small arms and children', with specific funding, should be resisted. The impact of small arms on children in the region needs more attention, but within the context of the safety and security of children and support for peaceful conflict resolution in post-conflict societies. Existing programmes on child protection, education for peace, conflict resolution, human rights education, schools without violence, should be funded and supported so that these approaches become integral to curricula and the functioning of the school system.



Annex A – Programming for Children

Defining Small Arms

For the purpose of educators, ‘small arms’ are guns, pistols, rifles, and may include grenades. It is not helpful to use the term ‘SALW’,¹³ as it can be considered a technical term and may give the impression that technical knowledge is needed to discuss the issue, whereas in reality the issue for children and young people in SEE is one of injury and violence.¹⁴

Convention on the Rights of the Child

Any discussion of children and small arms must be based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).¹⁵ Some research and programmes have been conducted with children without parental consent or consent of children. Young people have not been consulted about their concerns, but rather presented with pre-prepared questionnaires and in some cases, programmes. As a result of this realisation, a section on *Professional Issues Relevant to Children and Small Arms* is included in the Education Section of the SEESAC website.¹⁶ This includes material on children’s rights, participation, child development, research with children and UNICEF’s Guidelines on ethical reporting on children. It is hoped that those working on small arms issues who are unfamiliar with children’s rights programming will inform themselves of these issues.

Research on risk-taking

It is a matter of some concern that small projects on ‘small arms risk education’ have been funded and implemented in schools, without any review of the research data on risk-taking and children. Some very simplistic assumptions have been made:

- There are too many weapons in the countries of SEE, therefore children are at risk;
- Children and young people do not know that weapons are dangerous, therefore there should be education programmes about guns;
- Information given to children about the dangers of weapons will automatically translate into safe behaviour; and
- Children are isolated individuals who are able to change their behaviour as a result of new information, irrespective of the attitudes and values of society (parents, teachers, the community, the media).

As the question of what we know about children, youth and risk-taking had not been asked, it was decided to review the literature: *Literature Review on Children and Risk-Taking: Implications for Education and Small Arms* has been distributed and will be placed on the SEESAC website.

¹³ SEESAC uses the term SALW (Small Arms and Light Weapons) which is defined as ‘all lethal conventional munitions that can be carried by an individual combatant or a light vehicle, that also do not require a substantial logistic and maintenance capability’. For the general reader, perhaps an educator or NGO staff involved in policy development on children’s issues, the term SALW (Small Arms and Light Weapons) is unnecessarily technical and confusing. Light weapons are not relevant to the issues of children and youth, except in relation to armed conflict and its impact. Many sources referring to children use the term ‘small arms, or ‘guns’, ‘weapons’, and ‘firearms’ interchangeably, so for the purposes of this paper however the term ‘small arms’ will be used to refer to ‘weapons designed for individual use. They include, *inter alia*, revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines, sub-machine guns, assault rifles and light machine guns.

¹⁴ Fortunately there is no problem of child soldiers in the region. This and other issues are covered in the support document *Review of Key Literature on Children, Youth and Small Arms*, <http://www.seesac.org>.

¹⁵ Convention on the Rights of the Child, <http://www.ohchr.org/english/law/pdf/crc.pdf>, accessed 09 May 2006.

¹⁶ *Professional Issues Relevant to Children and Small Arms*, <http://www.seesac.org>.

United Nations' engagement

The UN Secretary General's *Study Report on Violence against Children* was released in October 2006.¹⁷ The full report is available as a hard copy as of 01 December 2006. The issue of small arms and children would most appropriately be addressed within this framework.

As well as advocacy for small arms control, UNICEF has responded to the issue by:

"Promoting schools as 'zones of peace' in which children can learn and develop, safe from violence and free from the pressure of small arms and light weapons".¹⁸

As a result of UNICEF and SEESAC discussions, the current thinking is now to place the issue within the framework of violence and children, which is one of the top five priorities for UNICEF, and draws in UNICEF's wealth of experience on child protection.¹⁹ This is important, as there is little value to children in framing small arms as a new or stand-alone issue.

¹⁷ At the time of writing the full report is not available, just the executive summary. The Education Consultant and other staff members of UNDP SEESAC were consulted about the small arms section of the Report.

¹⁸ [http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/No_Guns_Please_-_We_Are_Children\(1\).pdf](http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/No_Guns_Please_-_We_Are_Children(1).pdf), accessed 12 May 2006.

¹⁹ Meetings with Paula Claycomb and Julie Myers, UNICEF, 'Landmines and Small Arms', New York, 09 November 2006.



Annex B – Global Impact of Small Arms on Children

Background

It is important to state that the presence or number of weapons (legal and illegal) does not automatically translate into a risk to children and young people. The international data currently available suggests that small arms can potentially have a range of impacts on children and young people:

- Death and injury;
- Human rights abuses;
- Displacement;
- Psychological trauma;
- Insecurity;
- Culture of violence; and
- Loss of opportunities.²⁰

Security and youth

There is now a much greater focus on ‘security’ and an increasing awareness that this issue must include consideration of young people. However, it is important not to establish youth and small arms as another niche ‘market’.²¹ Viewing children and youth as victims of small arms proliferation, which is not supported by the evidence in SEE, can lead to ill-advised school-based programmes rather than focusing on legislation, enforcement and weapons collections from gun owners, who are overwhelmingly adult males.²² Although there have been a number of surveys of the attitudes of young people to SALW in the region, the quality of these surveys has generally been of very variable quality, making it difficult to draw any conclusions to inform policy and programme development.

Crime

In some countries small arms have a disproportionate impact on young people involved in gang violence and other forms of juvenile offending/delinquency. There is no evidence that guns play a significant role in juvenile offending in SEE. Governments in SEE, supported by UNDP, have begun a number of ‘safer community plan’ (SCP) projects, linked with community based policing (CBP). These are promising ways of responding to crime and people’s security concerns; however, it is important that young people be given the opportunity to participate.

Media violence

One of the key issues in examining the impact of small arms on children is the role of the media.²³ No studies on media violence were identified for the region, but concern was expressed in research done in Montenegro about the effect of increasing violence in the media. To summarise the available data, research has now confirmed the link between media violence and aggressive behaviour.²⁴ If young people also have ready access to guns, then the likelihood of violent behaviour, against themselves and others, increases.

²⁰ *Putting Children First: Building a Framework for International Action to Address the Impact of Small Arms on Children*, Biting the Bullet series, Rachel Stohl with Sarah Aird, Laura Barnitz, Jimmie Briggs, Rebecca Catalla, Boia Efraime Junior, Antoinette Errante, Heang Path, Stephanie Powell, Frank Smyth and Christina Torsein, <http://www.smallarmsnet.org/issues/themes/children/childrenfirst05.pdf>, pp.7-11, accessed 28 November 2006.

²¹ Emphasis added.

²² Angela McIntyre and Tara Weiss, *Exploring Small Arms Demand: A Youth Perspective* p. 67.

²³ Including mass media (TV, newspapers and radio) as well as the internet and computer / video games.

²⁴ American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on Public Education: Media Violence, *PEDIATRICS* Vol. 108 No. 5 November 2001, p. 3.

As this was also a neglected issue in discussion of small arms and children a *Literature Review on Media Violence, Children and Small Arms* was prepared and disseminated.

Gender

Small arms are a highly gendered issue, although gender is often invisible in such terms as ‘parents’ (meaning fathers, who are overwhelmingly the gun owners), ‘gun owners’ (overwhelmingly men, mostly over 30), and children (when referring to interest in weapons, mostly boys). It is difficult to understand why attention and funding has been given to education for school children when the main target group should be adult male gun owners.



Annex C – South Eastern Europe

In South Eastern Europe (SEE), small arms impact on children through the continuing effects of the conflicts of the 1990s:

- Displacement as a result of the conflicts;
- A sense of insecurity among some adults resulting in gun ownership; and
- The potential for conflicts to become violent given the excessive number of weapons in civilian hands, many left over from the conflicts of the 1990s.

What is noteworthy in SEE is the lack of information about the serious impact on children and young people, in terms of unintentional injuries, homicide and injuries caused by violence, and suicide. In all countries of the region there have been SALW Surveys, and these have been consulted for any data relevant to the issue of impact on children. It is important to note, however, that the specific impact on children was not part of the brief of these surveys.

Box 2: Summary of impact of small arms on children and young people in SEE

- There is an overall lack of data relating to the number of children and young people involved in small arms abuse (homicides, suicides, injuries) and accidents, either as victims or perpetrators.
- The available data support the global picture, that young males, 15 to 29 are overwhelmingly represented as victims and perpetrators, but it is not clear how many 15-18 year olds are involved.
- Domestic violence, which clearly has an impact on children and young people, is under-reported and given insufficient attention by authorities.
- People who attempt suicide using firearms are more likely to be successful; a suicide in the family has profound effects on children and young people.
- There is no evidence of firearms problems in schools.
- There is no evidence of specific juvenile crime related to firearms use.
- There is little or no data available on the attitudes of children and young people to firearms.
- Children have a right to feel safe, so the lack of data on children's experience of the excess of small arms in SEE is a deficiency.
- The confusion in adults' attitudes to small arms and security suggest that even if the issue of the role of small arms in society were addressed in schools, it is unlikely that teachers would be able to deal with the issue coherently.



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