

IANSA briefing paper
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Setting national and regional targets in implementing the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons



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I. Introduction

The proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons (SALW) are evident in various ways at the global, regional, national, and local levels. In response, States and international organisations have launched several initiatives to tackle this issue. Principal among those initiatives is the [United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects \(PoA\)](#), originally adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2001. The PoA was supplemented by the [International Tracing Instrument \(ITI\)](#) in 2005, making the PoA-ITI the global framework for addressing the illicit trade in SALW “in all its aspects” which has gained increasing attention throughout its implementation process.

Reinforcing the political commitments made by all States, two key international treaties have been adopted. In 2001 the General Assembly adopted the [Firearms Protocol](#) to curb illicit manufacture and trafficking of firearms, as well as their parts, components, and ammunition, supplementing the UN Convention on Transnational Organised Crime. In 2013 the [Arms Trade Treaty](#) was adopted covering the regulation of all conventional arms including SALW, as well as their ammunition, parts, and components. Many of these treaty obligations and measures are complementary to the principles and measures contained in the PoA-ITI.¹

However, recognising the unique circumstances and contexts that shape the challenges of controlling SALW and preventing illicit trade, a global approach will not be enough. Progress in PoA-ITI implementation requires clearly defined national and regional priorities, rooted in measurable and context-specific targets. Following an agreement reached by States at the 2018 PoA Review Conference (RevCon3),² the idea of encouraging States to set voluntary national and regional targets to implement the PoA-ITI that are measurable and that can be monitored, was elaborated by States at the 7th Biennial Meeting of States (BMS7) in July 2021.³ This set of commitments followed a recommendation put forth in the [2019 Report of the Secretary-General](#) (A/74/187) to address one of the shortcomings of the PoA-ITI – its lack of measurability of progress – and the [BMS7 outcome document](#) included the following addressed to all Member States for their consideration:

- Set voluntary targets at national and regional levels in line with the provisions of the PoA, strengthening national ownership, and taking into account varying local contexts to measure progress effectively (paragraph 50).
- Develop national plans, capacity building programs, and policies covering all weapon lifecycle stages, defining priorities, stakeholder involvement and resource allocation for PoA-ITI (paragraph 51).
- Collect gender-disaggregated data on SALW impacts (paragraph 52).

¹ The Firearms Protocol entered into force in 2005 and the Arms Trade Treaty entered into force in 2014. As of 1 September 2023, the Firearms Protocol has 122 States Parties, and the Arms Trade Treaty has 113 States Parties.

² At the Third Review Conference in 2018, participating States all agreed, amongst other things, to “encourage the adoption and full implementation of measures and best practices, including the establishment of measurable targets and timelines, at the regional and subregional levels” – see section II, paragraph 7, of the outcome document of the Conference, A/CONF.192/2018/RC/INF/3. Available [here](#).

³ Between the Review Conferences (RevCon) that are held every six years, Biennial Meetings of States (BMS) are convened. A BMS is generally designed for States to provide updates on the implementation of the PoA, while review conferences give States the opportunity to reach more substantial agreements to strengthen the PoA’s implementation. The PoA and the ITI are reviewed together.

- Encourage the States of relevant regional and sub-regional instruments to adopt measurable targets and action plans, ensuring sustained coordination and concrete goals (paragraph 57 and 58).
- Integrate PoA-ITI implementation with the 2030 Agenda in particular SDG 16 (paragraph 68).
- Establish voluntary national and regional targets with a view to ensure that ownership and priorities underpin resource allocation, assistance requests and assistance programmes (paragraph 116).

The issue of stakeholder involvement, including civil society, in helping national authorities to develop, monitor and implement such targets is important for sustaining political will and public understanding.

II. What national and regional targets could look like

“A range of factors drive the illicit trade, destabilizing accumulation and misuse of small arms and light weapons. National contexts are complex and distinct, thus necessitating varying priorities. The setting of voluntary national targets would be a concrete step towards stemming the illicit flow of weapons in a nationally driven and measurable manner, in line with the outcome document of the Third United Nations Conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the PoA.”

2019 Report of the Secretary-General (A/74/187), Annex, paragraph 1.

The process of target setting to effectively implement the PoA-ITI should not be seen only as a technical task but rather one that first requires strategic analysis and decision-making designed to address the threats identified from SALW proliferation and misuse in each context. The outcome document of RevCon3 highlighted key adverse consequences of the illicit trade in SALW of both State and civil society concerns namely:

- aiding crime, terrorism, and disrespect of human rights;
- exacerbating violence and conflict and impeding humanitarian aid;
- undermining sustainable development;
- facilitating gender-based violence;
- enabling diversion and proliferation of SALW and ammunition.

Overall, measurable national and regional targets should be reflected in the national action plans (NAP) of all States and aligned with strategies to address the illicit trade in SALW and its consequences in each context. NAPs and national targets are tightly linked, where the NAP can serve as a vehicle to set national voluntary targets.

The UN Secretariat is expected to be the main body providing guidance and support for the new target-oriented approach. The [UN Secretary General's 2019 report on small arms](#) outlines a list of general examples of national targets, adaptable to individual country needs and responsibilities. Some examples could be relevant to countries that are highly dependent on SALW imports whereas others could apply to SALW exporting countries. The list is by no means exhaustive but rather serves as a reference for officials looking to create measurable actions for SALW control. States are encouraged to tailor targets or create new ones to suit their national contexts.

To provide more concrete guidance, the Secretary General's report makes reference to the UN [Modular Small-arms-control Implementation Compendium \(MOSAIC\)](#), which offers a set of voluntary practical notes on the full range of SALW control measures. Each thematic area includes a reference to the respective modules for further guidance. The MOSAIC thematic areas are organised according to the existing PoA reporting framework and include:

• National action plan (MOSAIC 04.10) • National coordinating mechanisms (MOSAIC 03.40) • Manufacture (MOSAIC 03.10) • International transfers (MOSAIC 03.20) • Regulating civilian access (MOSAIC 03.30) • Stockpile management (MOSAIC 05.20)	• Collection (MOSAIC 05.40), deactivation, destruction (MOSAIC 05.50) • Marking and record-keeping (MOSAIC 05.30) • Tracing (MOSAIC 05.31) • Gender considerations (MOSAIC 06.10)
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Regional initiatives

Acknowledging the cross-border nature of arms trafficking and violence, regional initiatives have gained prominence in addressing SALW. While global agreements wield considerable authority, their consensus-driven decision-making process can sometimes hinder the adoption of more progressive measures, especially considering shifting priorities and implementation challenges. In other cases, regional measures may be weaker than those in international instruments. Regional roadmaps, on the other hand, have the potential to forge more ambitious agreements and creative solutions by working with a smaller, more like-minded group of States⁴. There are a number of examples of regional initiatives.

In 2018, the [“Roadmap for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of SALW and their ammunition in the Western Balkans by 2024”](#) was adopted and has been developed, for example to include civil society involvement. It represents the most comprehensive SALW control exercise in the region and defines clear goals, targets, and timeframes for SALW control.⁵

In 2020, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) States adopted the [Roadmap for Implementing the Caribbean Priority Actions on the Illicit Proliferation of Firearms and Ammunition across the Caribbean in a Sustainable Manner by 2030 \(Caribbean Firearms Roadmap\)](#). This instrument was inspired by the Western Balkans’ roadmap and includes four main goals, each containing pre-defined actions and targets which States have committed themselves to implement until 2030.⁶

Both the Caribbean and the Balkan roadmaps provide an overall platform for commonly agreed levels of performance, and each outline a framework of measures required at the strategic, policy and operational levels, building on the political commitment to the PoA-ITI as well as obligations under the Firearms Protocol and the Arms Trade Treaty. The provisions of other relevant international and regional instruments are also considered, for example, those addressing gender considerations.

In 2023, the Department of Public Security of the Organization of American States (DPS/OAS) and the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean (UNLIREC) initiated the development process for a [Central American Roadmap](#). Another roadmap initiative based on the [ECOWAS Convention on SALW, Ammunition, and Other Related Materials](#) is being discussed, creating an opportunity for setting regional targets relevant for West African States.

⁴ Issue Brief 1, From promises to progress - Opportunities for action on gender responsive small arms control in existing international commitments (2020), Gender Equality Network for Small Arms Control (GENSAC).

⁵ The Roadmap was developed by Western Balkans authorities with [SEESAC](#)’s technical support under the auspices of France and Germany and in consultation with the EU and all other relevant actors.

⁶ The [UNLIREC](#) and [CARICOM IMPACS](#), are the co-custodians of the Caribbean Roadmap and are supporting its effective implementation.

In 2022, following adoption of its 2020–2025 action plan on firearms trafficking to help curb illegal flows, the [European Commission presented a proposal](#) for a new regulation on import, export and transit measures for firearms, their essential components and ammunition. In contrast to the current Regulation (EU) 258/2012, which it replaces, the proposal broadens its scope to encompass exports, ensures a unified interpretation of rules among member States, and enables the exchange of data at the European Union level.

Post-shipment control: Another area where the EU is ready to take a leading role is the adoption of post-shipment control measures aimed at preventing the diversion of SALW after delivery. Such measures have gained popularity among exporting States. States that have implemented these measures present them as mutually agreed measures that build trust and confidence between the exporting and importing States. IANSA's 2022 paper [Post-Shipment Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons](#) outlines ways of preventing post-shipment diversion, highlights relevant international instruments, and defines post shipment measures.

Africa Amnesty Month: In the framework of the African Union's [Silencing the Guns](#) flagship initiative, African countries have committed to declare the month of September the [Africa Amnesty Month](#).⁷ Individuals who voluntarily surrender their illegally owned weapons during the Africa Amnesty Month will not face public exposure, arrest, or prosecution. However, those who do not surrender their illegal weapons during this period will be subject to legal action under national laws.

III. The benefits of national and regional target setting

Recognising the diverse nature of SALW issues, the new target setting approach proposes a shift towards nationally and regionally set priorities and action plans. Goals are measurable, monitored, and evaluated using specific indicators, aligning with the state's obligations and commitments. This approach has many benefits.

International assistance and cooperation: States in a position to provide bilateral or multilateral assistance are usually more willing to assist States that have set specific commitments to improve their SALW control systems and reduce SALW violence through clear targets with measurable outcomes. Assistance may include technical expertise and financial support, promoting stability in regions facing challenges. This way, strategic partnerships of international cooperation and assistance can be formed.

Combining short-term targets with long-term goals: Effective strategies combine shorter term targets with longer-term goals to prevent the proliferation and misuse of SALW. Examples of short-term targets are:

- closing gaps in legal frameworks to counter illicit possession, trafficking, and misuse;
- building the capacities of law enforcement agencies to seize and destroy illicit weapons;
- developing programs to encourage individuals to voluntarily surrender illegally possessed SALW without facing prosecution.

Examples of longer-term goals are:

- preventing the irresponsible and illicit supply and diversion of SALW, by establishing more robust export, import, transit, transshipment, retransfer and brokering controls;
- reducing excessive or unnecessary demand and misuse of SALW, through developing effective education and awareness campaigns, adopting a holistic multi-stakeholder approach to addressing SALW violence.

⁷ The commitment is fully supported by the UN through UN Security Council resolution 2457 ([S/RES/2457](#)).

Regional cooperation: Regional cooperation allows countries to combine their financial and human resources to collectively tackle the challenges they face. This can lead to more coherent control systems as well as to mobilization of resources, including financial and technical assistance to benefit States with limited capacities. Cooperation within regions can facilitate data and information sharing as well as exchanges regarding best practices, leveraging expertise. In regions prone to armed conflicts, regional targets can contribute to conflict prevention efforts by preventing the diversion of SALW and ammunition as well as, addressing the root causes of violence and instability. Regional organisations like [UNLIREC](#) stress the need for national target setting to align with targets set regionally, wherever applicable, to avoid competing on different priorities.

Political will: Setting targets that are integrated in national and regional action plans agreed at the highest levels of government can also generate political will, inspire action, and create a sense of urgency among decisionmakers. Target setting can remove ambiguity and define what needs to be accomplished. Time-bound targets also create a sense of urgency. Measurable targets with indicators of progress that can be monitored make it easier to hold governments and particular ministries and agencies accountable for their commitments and meeting these targets. Success stories can be used to gather support and demonstrate the feasibility of efforts. The peer pressure created through regional target setting can encourage States to earn international recognition and thereby enhance a state's positive reputation and constructive diplomatic influence.

Engagement with civil society: Engaging in dialogue with civil society can offer several benefits by drawing upon grassroots expertise and experiences of the effects of SALW-related violence. Civil society organisations which reach out to diverse constituencies can help governments and communities build mutual trust in public security. By generating public awareness civil society organisations can support efforts of national and local authorities to reach the targets set.

As one of the pioneering initiatives, IANSA's pilot project, titled *"Building Civil Society Dialogues with Governments to Promote National PoA Priorities"* presented an opportunity for States and civil society to work together to deter proliferation and promote better regulation of SALW, consistent with the state's relevant international and regional agreements. Twelve IANSA members from Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean, facilitated dialogues between government officials responsible for SALW control and relevant civil society stakeholders. The [project report](#) outlines substantive as well as procedural recommendations on planning productive environments for dialogue, suitable material on the PoA-ITI and involving stakeholders.

IV. Aligning PoA target setting with efforts to achieve relevant SDGs

States agreed at BMS7 that setting clear, measurable, and actionable targets to implement the PoA-ITI should be aligned with the most relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions.⁸ While it is possible to relate other SDGs and their targets to specific PoA-ITI targets, a concrete, measurable and achievable link must be established. The challenge arises due to the broad nature of SDG targets, creating the need for more specific examples of PoA-related target setting.

SDG 16 targets and indicators:

Target 16.1 is for all states to "significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere". According to the [2019 UNODC Global Study on Homicide](#), global data on homicide has

⁸ The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development revolves around adequate measurability through 17 concrete, time-bound goals broken down into specific targets. Each target is linked to coherent indicators which require measurable data collected in coordination with national statistical offices. In addition to the global process of developing indicators, the 2030 Agenda document encourages States to develop national and regional indicators.

seen some improvement in terms of quality and disaggregation since the previous edition. However, significant data gaps persist, particularly on homicides in certain regions like Africa and the Middle East, as well as for understanding the various types and drivers of homicide. Moreover, accurate data on other types of violence is often not available.

Target 16.4 is for all States to “Significantly reduce illicit arms flows by 2030”. Indicator 16.4.2, which measures progress to meeting this target, is the “Proportion of seized, found or surrendered arms whose illicit origin or context has been traced or established by a competent authority in line with international instruments.” Its heavy focus on tracing is challenging because of considerable gaps in data. Challenges related to data collection include 1) lack of a common definitions of key terms – ‘illicit’, ‘financial’ and ‘flow’ 2) difficulty in obtaining data on activities that are intentionally hidden and 3) limited capacity for effective data collection, particularly among affected States.⁹

“While tracing is a key measure in the process of investigating and disclosing the origins of illicit firearms, its systematic implementation remains a global challenge. On average, Member States with available data successfully traced one-third of seized weapons that are potentially traceable between 2016 and 2021”.

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Sustainable Development, progress on Goal 16.¹⁰

To improve the monitoring process, tools have been created and continuously developed to systematically collect data on Indicator 16.4.2. In addition to the revised template for the national reports to the PoA-ITI, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)¹¹ conducts a self-assessment questionnaire for implementation of the Firearms Protocol and has developed an annual Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire (IAFQ) to collect data on illicit trafficking in SALW. In addition, the Small Arms Survey has developed several databases that support the monitoring of illicit arms flows, including the [Small Arms Trade Transparency Barometer](#).

Broadening the scope, other targets for SDG Goal 16 relevant for implementing the PoA-ITI include:

- **Target 16.2:** End abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and all forms of violence against and torture of children
- **Target 16.3:** Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all.
- **Target 16.5:** Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms.
- **Target 16.6:** Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels.
- **Target 16.7:** Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making at all levels.
- **Target 16.10:** Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreement.
- **Target 16.a:** Strengthen relevant national institutions, including through international cooperation, for building capacity at all levels, in particular in developing countries, to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime.

⁹ On SDG Goal 16.4 and Indicator 16.4.2 see for example SIPRI “[Measuring Illicit Arms Flows: Key Challenges for SDG Goal 16.4 and Indicator 16.4.2](#)” and on SDG 16 in general see chapter 5 of the [SDG 16 Data Initiative Report 2022](#).

¹⁰ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Sustainable Development, [Goal 16](#), accessed 17.09.2023.

¹¹ The UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) are co-custodians for indicator 16.4.2. They provide training and other capacity-building and call for more efforts on the part of States to monitor progress.

V. Recommendations for States to move forward

Promote national and regional PoA target setting: Integrate target setting into national action plans and reporting. Use RevCon4 in June 2024 to develop preliminary sets of key national targets for the implementation of the PoA and ITI before RevCon4.

Engage all relevant stakeholders, including representatives of civil society who have considerable grassroots knowledge and expertise. Consider initiatives like IANSA's 2022 pilot project for effective engagement.

Use existing reporting instruments more effectively rather than creating new ones and prioritise the submission of reports under the PoA-ITI, Firearms Protocol, and the Arms Trade Treaty. Consider the development of additional indicators for assessing the achievement of SDG Target 16.4. in line with PoA implementation.

Prioritise gender mainstreaming: In line with the BMS8 outcome document, continue to emphasise target setting on gender mainstreaming at all levels. Align targets with those in the 2030 Agenda, and other relevant United Nations and international resolutions and agendas.

Take advantage of the MOSAIC modules: These are very useful sources of information and guidance on implementing the PoA-ITI and contain good practices for developing effective national targets to control SALW and their ammunition.

Develop regional roadmaps: Take inspiration from successful examples such as those in the Western Balkans, the Caribbean, and Central America and ensure the setting of measurable PoA targets that can be monitored in the process.

Facilitate international cooperation and assistance: Identify opportunities to match institutional needs and resources required to build capacities through target setting. Promote transparency in sharing information on national targets among States to build trust, and foster stakeholder commitment at the national, regional, and global levels. Build capacities for collection and destruction of illicit, obsolete, and surplus SALW and their ammunition.

Long-term planning: Develop longer-term national and regional action plans for sustained efforts to achieve PoA-ITI targets. Monitor, evaluate and regularly review progress towards achieving the targets and revising them, when necessary.

Promote a robust agenda for RevCon4: Contribute to setting a robust agenda and mandate for the fourth Review Conference on the PoA and ITI (RevCon4) in 2024. Propose programs and actions for improving PoA- ITI implementation including on national and regional targets and evaluate the effectiveness of national target setting as a method to curb SALW proliferation and related violence.

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