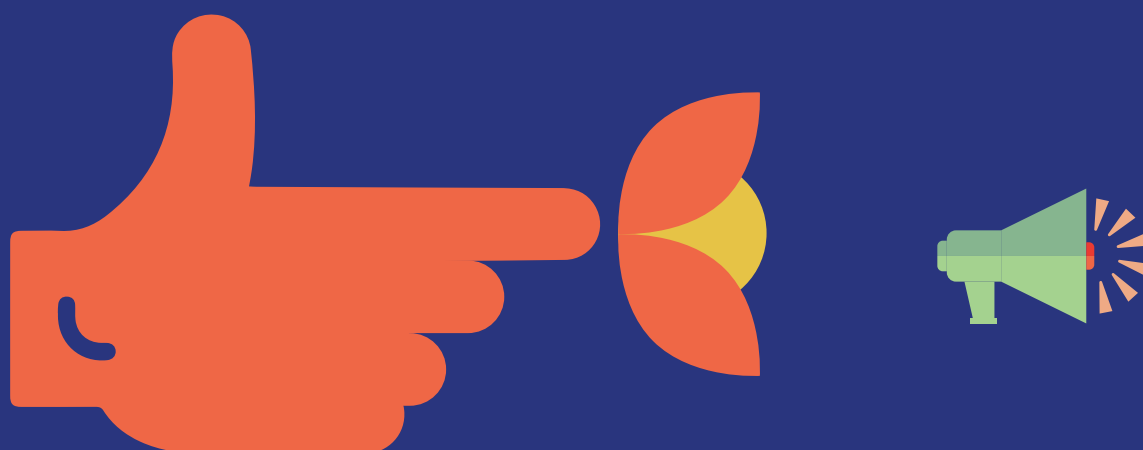


# BEYOND THE HEADLINES A JOURNALIST'S HANDBOOK TO REPORTING ON SECURITY, SALW AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN ALBANIA

Assisting the National Authorities of the Republic of Albania to Decrease the Risk of Weapon Proliferation and Misuse of Small Arms and Light Weapons



**It takes courage to be gun free**



## BEYOND THE HEADLINES

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March 2025



Co-funded by  
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**RÉPUBLIQUE  
FRANÇAISE**

*Liberté  
Égalité  
Fraternité*

*This report was developed by Michelle Betz, an international consultant and contextualized by Thanas Goga, a national consultant, who were contracted by the OSCE Presence in Albania, as part of the project “Assisting the national authorities of the Republic of Albania to decrease the risk of weapon proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons (SALW)”. The project is implemented by the OSCE Presence and funded by the European Union, Germany and France. The views and opinions expressed in this document are those of the authors and participants in the study and do not necessarily reflect those of the OSCE Presence in Albania or of the European Union, Germany and France.*

## Contents

Foreword.....	7
Acronyms .....	8
Introduction.....	9
Why this handbook? .....	10
Key terms.....	12
Essential guidelines for reporting on GBV and SALW.....	14
Ethics in reporting GBV and SALW .....	14
Key definitions .....	15
Chapter 1 Reporting on small arms and light weapons .....	16
1.1 What are small arms and light weapons?.....	16
1.2 Global impact of SALW .....	18
1.3 SALW life cycle and proliferation.....	20
1.4 The role of media in SALW awareness .....	24
1.5 Ethical reporting and best practices.....	25
1.6 Small arms and light weapons in Albania.....	28
Case Study: Reporting on police misconduct and SALW in Central Europe.....	34
Chapter 2 Gender-based violence and its intersection with SALW .....	35
2.1 What is GBV?.....	35
2.2 Gender-based violence in Albania.....	36
2.3 The role of SALW in exacerbating GBV .....	37
2.4 Why report on SALW and GBV?.....	39
2.5 GBV and SALW in Albania.....	40
2.6 Case studies .....	43
2.6.1 Case study: Media coverage of gender-based violence in the Balkans.....	43
2.6.2 Case study: Covering domestic violence in Eastern Europe .....	44
2.6.3 Case study: South Africa's gender-based violence crisis.....	44
2.6.4 Case study: Domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States..	45
Chapter 3 Reporting on security, SALW and GBV: Best practices.....	46
3.1 Finding and developing story ideas.....	46
3.2 Finding sources .....	47
3.3 Using data .....	49
3.4 Interviewing .....	50
3.5 Trauma-informed reporting.....	52
3.6 Collaborative reporting.....	54
3.7 Case studies .....	56
Annex I Works cited .....	59
Annex II Additional resources .....	61
Local resources.....	62
Organizations.....	63
Experts .....	63
Websites and resources.....	65



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# Foreword

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In today's world, the media play a crucial role in shaping public awareness and influencing policy responses to critical issues, including Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) and Gender-Based Violence (GBV). Accurate, sensitive and responsible reporting on these matters is essential for advancing public understanding, informing effective interventions and ultimately driving meaningful societal change.

Albania has taken significant strides in addressing the impact of SALW proliferation and GBV on communities nationwide. However, challenges persist and media professionals hold a critical responsibility to shed light on these complex issues with integrity and insight. Recognizing the pivotal role that journalists play, the OSCE Presence in Albania is pleased to support the development of this essential handbook, aimed specifically at equipping media practitioners with the knowledge and skills necessary to report accurately and responsibly on these sensitive topics.

This handbook is designed to enhance journalists' understanding of the complex interconnections between SALW and GBV, offering practical guidance for ethical reporting, storytelling techniques and methods to avoid perpetuating stereotypes or unintentionally exacerbating harm. It emphasizes the importance of maintaining a survivor-centred and human-rights-based approach in all media coverage, ensuring voices are amplified, rights are respected and dignity upheld.

The OSCE Presence in Albania remains committed to strengthening Albania's media landscape through capacity-building initiatives and fostering partnerships aimed at enhancing professional journalism standards. We believe firmly that informed responsible journalism not only informs the public, but also catalyses positive change in our societies.

I extend my deepest gratitude to all journalists who engage daily in the vital task of covering these challenging issues. Your commitment significantly contributes to building a more informed, empathetic and just society.

I encourage all media professionals to use this handbook as a practical resource in their work and to continue advocating for transparent, sensitive and impactful journalism in Albania.

**Ambassador Michel Tarran**

**Head of OSCE Presence in Albania**

## Acronyms

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ASP	Albanian State Police
EU	European Union
GBV	Gender-based violence
LSC	Local Safety Council
MEICO	Military Export Import Company
Mol	Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Albania
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
SALW	Small Arms and Light Weapons
SEESAC	South-Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNODA	United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs
WHO	World Health Organization



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# Introduction

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The impact of uncontrolled proliferation and possession of small arms and light weapons, ammunition and explosives remains a significant threat to Albania's social and economic development, as well as public safety. Poorly controlled and illegal SALW, ammunition and explosives sustain criminal elements and organized crime, by enabling violence and insecurity. Each of these elements has a negative impact on the security and confidence-building measures of both the country and the region.

Preventing, controlling and eradicating the proliferation of SALW in accordance with international initiatives and standards and as underlined in the National SALW Strategy, remain strategic priorities of the Albanian government.

The Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Albania and the Albanian State Police, as the main drivers of the SALW National Strategy and Action Plan, identified several priority areas where the OSCE support is welcome. One of these priority areas was to increase the capacities of Albanian authorities, media, civil society and Local Safety Councils in raising public awareness on the dangers of misuse and proliferation of SALW.

The journalist's handbook to reporting on security, SALW and gender-based violence is a comprehensive guide designed for journalists as they seek to cover the unique challenges posed by these complex issues in Albania. Developed based on an extensive assessment of media reporting and the capacity-building needs of journalists, this handbook serves as both a theoretical framework and a practical toolkit for media professionals across various platforms, including broadcast, print and online outlets so they can effectively and professionally cover these critical and sensitive issues.

The handbook is more than just a guide – it is a catalyst for change and is designed to be a living document that evolves as the media landscape and the issues surrounding SALW, security and GBV continue to change. By adhering to the guidelines and best practices outlined here, journalists can contribute to a safer, more informed public discourse and play a vital role in reducing the risks associated with illegal firearms and gender-based violence in Albania.

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# Why this handbook?

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Media plays a crucial role in raising public awareness about the dangers of SALW. Through accurate and responsible reporting, journalists can inform the public about the risks associated with illegal firearms and advocate for stronger control measures. Increased awareness and education through the media contribute to the reduction of the supply, demand and misuse of firearms. Media can only be effective if they have adequate and accurate information about SALW and GBV. Media reporting can improve public dialogue on security issues between local communities and local government structures.

The primary aim of this handbook is to elevate the professional standards of Albanian journalists and enhance their engagement in initiatives that increase public awareness of the risks and dangers associated with the illegal possession of firearms. By equipping journalists with the necessary knowledge and tools, the SALW project aspires to foster more informed, responsible and impactful media coverage of security issues, SALW and gender-based violence.

Journalists can be pivotal decision-makers in newsrooms when it comes to determining how issues and specific incidents of violence against women are covered. By influencing the awareness of their colleagues, journalists can help change the news agenda.<sup>1</sup>

In Albania, possession of uncontrolled weapons in many cases has resulted in gender-based violence bringing insecurity not only to families and local communities, but to the country overall. Since gender-based violence against women and girls has deep roots in patriarchal traditions and customs, significant efforts are needed from the to influence the reduction of SALW and GBV.

The Media Monitoring and Journalists needs assessment provides a thorough analysis of the current state of media reporting on gender-based violence caused by the firearms, as well as provide recommendations for further media development activities.<sup>2</sup>

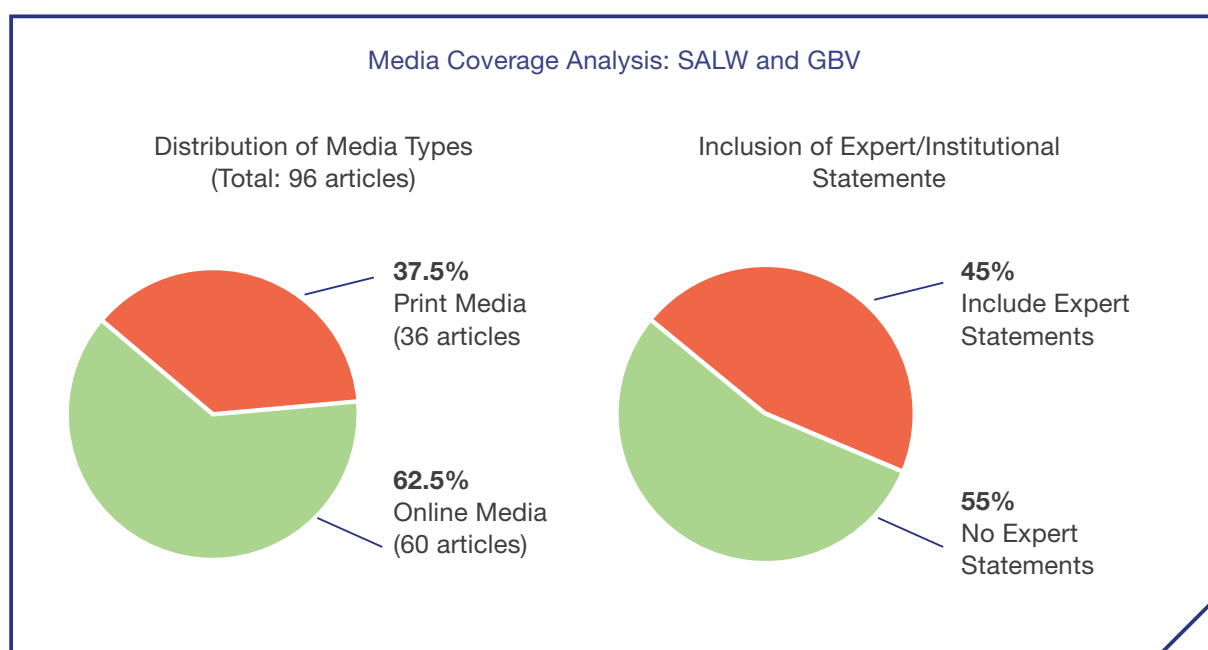
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1 Morgan & Simons. (2017) in OSCE, (2024). Journalists' Needs Assessment, p. 9.  
2 OSCE (2024), p. 10.

The study found that:

- Among the 36 print media stories/articles which were included in the study, only one specifically discusses gender-based violence as a distinct phenomenon, encompassing it within the broader context of the domestic violence.
- Online media often focuses on the legitimacy of firearms used by perpetrators in events involving threats, injuries, or murders of girls/women.
- From the monitoring of 96 articles, it was found that 55% do not contain statements from relevant institutions or experts.
- Monitoring a total of 96 articles, of which 60 are from online media and 36 from print media, none of them served an educational function regarding the misuse of firearms.
- Media frequently published photographs to provoke emotional responses.
- A significant number of monitored articles presented details about how the violence or crime unfolded, thus often exceeding the informative function of the news media. In addition, some details were highlighted in the headlines to attract clicks (online media) or to boost newspaper sales (in the case of print media).
- There was an absence of journalists elucidating the issue of SALW and GBV as a social problem based on unequal power relations between men and women.

Figure 1 Analysis of media coverage in Albania



## Key terms

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**Ammunition:** The participating States agree that the scope for addressing stockpiles of conventional ammunition, explosive material and detonating devices in surplus and/or awaiting destruction has to be as broad as possible. Ammunition refers to conventional munitions designed to be fired, detonated, or exploded from small arms, light weapons, or artillery, including any explosive or incendiary charge.

The document outlines conventional ammunition as being intended for use with various types of weapons (e.g., small arms, light weapons, mortars and artillery) and emphasizes the importance of safe and secure storage, as well as effective inventory control, to prevent accidents or illicit diversion.

**Artificial intelligence (AI):** The ability of a digital computer or computer-controlled robot to perform tasks commonly associated with intelligent beings.

**Arms embargo:** A ban on the trade of SALW to specific countries or groups, usually enforced by international bodies such as the United Nations to prevent further conflict (UNODA).

**Circulation:** Number of SALW have been already transferred to a certain area and have been moving through illicit or licit transactions, or grey or black-market trade.

**Demobilization and reintegration (DDR):** A framework for disarming combatants, disbanding armed groups and helping former combatants reintegrate into civilian life, which often includes controlling and managing SALW (UNODA).

**Diffusion:** Implies that weapons have spread across and within national borders, at the state and sub-state levels. It combines both the concepts of circulation and proliferation together. The diffusion model depicts SALW trade taking place through thousands of small-scale transactions at the societal rather than through large-scale shipments typical to major conventional weapons systems.

**Disarmament:** The process of reducing or eliminating SALW within a country or conflict zone, often part of peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery efforts (OSCE SALW).

**Explosives:** materials or devices that are designed to produce a large amount of energy in a short period of time. This includes high explosives used in munitions, landmines and improvised explosive devices.

The document emphasizes the need for proper storage, management and disposal of explosives to prevent accidental detonations or the potential misuse of these dangerous materials, particularly in conflict zones or unstable regions.

**Firearms:** Any firearm type (pistol, rifle, explosive etc.)

**Gender-based male violence against women (GBV):** All forms of violence against women by men, committed owing to the victims' sex, i.e. because they are women.

**Illicit trafficking:** The illegal movement and trade of SALW, often contributing to violence and crime in conflict zones and beyond (UNODA).

**Light weapons:** Weapons designed for use by a small crew, including heavy machine guns, hand-held, underbarrel and mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-tank and anti-aircraft systems, portable launchers of anti-tank missile and rocket systems; portable launchers of anti-aircraft missile systems; and mortars with calibres below 100 mm (OSCE SALW).

**Proliferation:** The rapid spread and availability of SALW, which can lead to destabilization in regions, particularly in weak or failed states (World Customs Organization) (UNODA).

**SALW Commission:** The National SALW Commission is an inter-departmental advisory body responsible for advising the Government on the development and implementation of SALW control policies. Typically, such commissions consist of representatives from various departments, including defence, security, foreign affairs, law enforcement and others. Its main responsibilities include strategic and policy development, providing advisory support to national and international stakeholders, co-ordinating and overseeing implementation efforts, conducting research and data collection, raising awareness, advocating for arms control and fostering international co-operation.

**Small arms:** Firearms designed for individual use, including pistols, revolvers, rifles, carbines, submachine guns, assault rifles and light machine guns (UNODA) (OSCE SALW).

**VAWG:** Violence against women and girls

For a comprehensive list of terms associated with SALW see: <https://www.msag.es/index.php/about-msag/31-glossary-of-salw-ca-terms>

## Essential guidelines for reporting on GBV and SALW

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If you read only one section of this handbook read this one.

### **Ethics in reporting GBV and SALW**

#### ***Trauma-informed reporting:***

- Understand the psychological impact of violence on survivors. Avoid retraumatizing individuals by using careful language and framing stories respectfully.
- Use a survivor-centred approach that prioritizes the well-being of those involved.

#### ***Avoid sensationalism:***

- Present facts without exaggeration or provocative imagery that could distort public perception or glorify violence.
- Refrain from highlighting lurid details, especially in headlines or visuals, that serve to attract clicks rather than inform responsibly.

#### ***Ensure balanced representation:***

- Provide context to avoid perpetuating stereotypes or one-sided narratives, especially regarding perpetrators and survivors.
- Highlight the systemic issues, such as societal norms or policy gaps, rather than focusing solely on individual cases.

#### ***Be culturally sensitive:***

- Be mindful of cultural norms and sensitivities where traditional values may influence the discourse around GBV and SALW.
- Strive to challenge harmful stereotypes while respecting local contexts.

#### ***Ensure transparency and accountability:***

- Clearly differentiate between facts, opinions and advocacy in reporting. Maintain transparency about sources and avoid conflicts of interest.

#### ***Remember the educational role of media:***

- Serve as a platform to educate the public about the dangers of SALW proliferation and the societal impact of GBV, including its roots in gender inequality.
- Avoid normalizing violence or perpetuating fear by instead focusing on solutions, such as disarmament and survivor support systems.

#### ***Collaborate with experts:***

- Work with legal, psychological and policy experts to ensure accuracy in describing laws, trauma responses and the broader implications of GBV and SALW.

**Protect vulnerable groups and respect victims:**

- Take extra precautions when reporting on children, survivors of sexual violence, or other marginalized groups, ensuring their privacy and dignity.
- Maintain dignity and privacy when covering sensitive issues. Avoid sensationalism, graphic imagery and intrusive questioning.

**Protect sources:**

- Ensure the confidentiality of whistle-blowers and survivors through encrypted communication and anonymity, where necessary.
- Gain trust from survivors and communities by demonstrating sensitivity and commitment to ethical journalism.

**Informed consent:**

- Always seek explicit consent from survivors before sharing their identities or stories.

**Contextual reporting:**

- Frame reports with societal, cultural and legal contexts to avoid perpetuating stereotypes or biases.

**Accuracy and clarity:**

- Use precise terminology and avoid mislabelling weapons or oversimplifying complex issues.

**Key definitions**

**Gender-based violence (GBV):** Harmful acts committed based on gender, including physical, sexual and psychological abuse, rooted in power imbalances.

**Small arms and light weapons (SALW):** Portable weapons for individual or small crew use, including handguns, rifles, machine guns and grenade launchers.

**Illicit trafficking:** Generally understood as the illegal trade, transfer, or distribution of SALW in violation of national laws, international agreements, or arms control regulations. This trafficking typically involves the unauthorized movement and possession of SALW across borders or within a state.

**Disarmament:** Efforts to reduce or eliminate SALW in a country or region to enhance safety and security.

**Weaponization of gender-based threats:** Using firearms to intimidate and control, further silencing survivors and perpetuating abuse.

# Chapter 1 Reporting on small arms and light weapons

Knowing about SALW allows journalists to report responsibly on international arms flows, illicit trafficking and the policies aimed at regulating these weapons. Understanding the types, sources and routes of these arms can help journalists expose how local violence connects to global networks, highlighting the economic, political and humanitarian implications. In-depth knowledge of SALW also enables journalists to critically examine government and military actions, report on disarmament efforts and raise awareness about the social impact of these weapons on affected communities, fostering informed public discourse and policy development.

## 1.1 What are Small Arms and Light Weapons?

There are several definitions of **Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW)**, as the term is used in various contexts by different organizations, but generally, it refers to a broad category of firearms. The most commonly referenced definitions come from:

1. **The United Nations (UN):** The UN defines SALW broadly, including weapons such as rifles, handguns, machine guns and rocket launchers that are easily portable and used by individual soldiers or small groups.
2. **The World Health Organization (WHO):** The WHO focuses on the impact of these weapons on public health, defining SALW primarily as firearms and light weapons that are frequently used in civilian contexts as well as military ones.
3. **The European Union (EU):** The EU's definition of SALW is similar but focuses on the need to regulate these weapons to prevent illicit trafficking, especially in conflict zones.
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6. **The European Union (EU):** The EU's definition of SALW is similar but focuses on the need to regulate these weapons to prevent illicit trafficking, especially in conflict zones.
7. **The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE):** The OSCE defines SALW as weapons designed for individual use, including small arms: rifles, revolvers, pistols and shot-guns intended for use by a single person; and light weapons: heavier weapons that can be operated by a small team, such as machine guns, grenade launchers and portable missile systems.



- 8. National definitions:** Some countries have their own definitions based on the specific needs of their arms control policies.

In essence, while definitions may vary slightly depending on the organization, most definitions align on the general classification of small arms (weapons designed for individual use, like pistols and rifles) and light weapons (heavier, but still portable weapons, like machine guns and grenade launchers). Therefore, there is no single universally accepted definition but rather multiple interpretations depending on the context.

#### KEY DEFINITIONS:

##### Small arms and light weapons (SALW) as defined by the OSCE Document on SALW

- Small Arms are those firearms designed for use by one person. Examples include:
  - Revolvers and self-loading pistols
  - Rifles and carbines
  - Sub-machine guns
  - Shotguns
- Light Weapons are weapons that are heavier than small arms, but still portable and can be operated by a small team. Examples include:
  - Heavy machine guns
  - Hand-held under-barrel and mounted grenade launchers
  - Portable anti-aircraft guns
  - Portable anti-tank guns
  - Portable launchers of anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles (OSCE SALW).

These weapons are significant because they are widely accessible, easy to operate, conceal and transport, making them the primary tools of armed violence linked to terrorism, organized crime, violent extremism and social instability. They are also used in many modern conflicts, both in conventional warfare and in criminal activities. Because these weapons play a key role in exacerbating violence and instability globally, regionally and nationally and because they are often the weapons of choice in a variety of security contexts including civil wars, insurgencies, criminal activities, acts of terrorism and gender-based violence, understanding SALW is essential for journalists.

The widespread availability and ease of proliferation of SALW make them a significant factor in global violence and human rights abuses. Journalists who cover conflict zones, crime, or security issues need to be familiar with SALW terminology (see key terms on pages 7-8) and characteristics to accurately report on their role in fueling instability and contributing to large-scale civilian harm. Understanding these terms helps journalists to prepare their reports in a more informed and precise manner, which is crucial for accurately conveying the role of SALW in global security challenges.

Moreover, national and regional actors are increasingly focused on educating journalists on this topic as their reporting has become an important source of open-source information that can supplement the decision-making processes. One example of such collaboration is the News-SALW Control - Armed Violence Monitoring Platform: 2023 Firearm Incidents Overview - SEESAC as well as the Flemish Peace institutes Project Insight.

Familiarity with the multifaceted nature of SALW and why its proliferation represents such a versatile threat and risk also enables reporters to track and investigate arms flows, shedding light on issues like arms smuggling, trafficking networks and the challenges of disarmament and control efforts.

### **Recognizing Small Arms and Light Weapons**

*Figure 2 Small arms and light weapons<sup>3</sup>*



## **1.2 Global impact of SALW**

SALW have a significant and far-reaching impact on global security, contributing to widespread violence, instability and human suffering. These weapons are responsible for the majority of deaths in armed conflicts and are often used in criminal activities and interpersonal violence. Understanding their prevalence and the challenges they pose is essential for journalists reporting on conflict, crime and human rights issues.

### *Prevalence of illegal firearms*

According to the Small Arms Survey, there are an estimated 1 billion small arms in circulation globally, with a significant portion of these weapons being in the hands of civilians. It is believed that approximately 85% of these firearms are owned by civilians, with the remaining percentage held by military and law enforcement agencies. However, a large number of these weapons are in illegal circulation, fueling violence and instability in various regions around the world. The illicit trade in SALW is estimated to be worth \$1 billion to \$2 billion annually, often thriving in regions affected by weak governance, corruption and conflict.

Illegal firearms are trafficked across borders and can easily enter the hands of criminal organizations, insurgent groups and terrorists. These weapons are commonly used in gang violence, organized crime and acts of terrorism, leading to widespread insecurity in both developed and developing countries. In

3 <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/5/4/359006.pdf>

regions like the Western Balkans, the Middle East and parts of Africa, illegal SALW flows have perpetuated cycles of violence and undermined efforts to stabilize post-conflict societies.

The impact of illegal firearms extends beyond public safety concerns, contributing to broader societal instability. SALW misuse has been linked to family disputes, criminal enterprises and cross-border trafficking, often perpetuating cycles of violence. While Albania has made progress through initiatives aimed at curbing the illicit arms trade and enhancing public awareness, more robust cross-border co-operation and investment in law enforcement capabilities are needed to address the enduring challenges posed by the prevalence of illegal firearms.

### *SALW and violence in communities*

The presence of illegal SALW in communities dramatically increases the risk of violence, particularly in areas already experiencing instability. The availability of firearms makes interpersonal conflicts, criminal activity and domestic violence more deadly. In conflict zones, armed groups use SALW to terrorize civilian populations, leading to mass displacement, human rights abuses and protracted conflicts.

Even in non-conflict settings, the proliferation of SALW contributes to high levels of violence. In Latin America, for example, where many countries have high rates of firearm ownership, the use of SALW in gang violence and organized crime has led to some of the highest homicide rates in the world.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, in the United States, the widespread availability of firearms, including illegal weapons, has resulted in a high incidence of gun-related deaths, including suicides, homicides and mass shootings.

In Albania, firearms are most often misused in illicit activities such as illegal possession, sale and manufacture, as well as in domestic violence, criminal incidents and public disputes. Their misuse is notably lethal in domestic violence cases, with data from the 2015–2016 SALW Survey indicating that firearms were used in one-third of homicides committed by family members, predominantly targeting women.

While men constitute the majority of firearm-related victims (86.4%), women are disproportionately affected in domestic violence cases, with higher fatality rates (while women were victims in 13.6% incidents).<sup>5</sup> The gendered impact of firearm misuse highlights its significant role in perpetuating violence in both public and private spheres.

### *The role of SALW in perpetuating insecurity*

SALW exacerbate insecurity not only by increasing the lethality of violence but also by undermining state authority and law enforcement capabilities. In regions where armed groups possess significant firepower, governments struggle to maintain control and law enforcement agencies often find themselves outgunned. This weakens state institutions, fosters impunity and allows criminal organizations and insurgents to operate freely.

Additionally, the illicit trade in SALW is often linked to other forms of transnational crime, including drug trafficking, human trafficking and terrorism. Criminal networks use firearms to protect their operations, intimidate communities and fight off rival groups. The resulting violence destabilizes entire regions, deters investment and hampers development efforts.

In Albania, the prevalence of SALW poses significant challenges to public safety and governance. The illegal possession and misuse of firearms have been linked to organized crime and undermines law enforcement's ability to maintain order. Criminal groups often use illicit weapons to resist enforcement,

4 SEESAC. (2019a). Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) Survey: Albania 2012 – 2016. Accessed November 25, 2024. [https://www.seesac.org/f/docs/SALW-Surveys/web\\_Albania-SALW-Survey\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.seesac.org/f/docs/SALW-Surveys/web_Albania-SALW-Survey_ENG.pdf)

5 See: [https://www.seesac.org/f/docs/Gender-and-SALW/Gender-And-Small-Arms\\_ALBANIA\\_ENG\\_WEB\\_1.pdf](https://www.seesac.org/f/docs/Gender-and-SALW/Gender-And-Small-Arms_ALBANIA_ENG_WEB_1.pdf)

intimidate communities and perpetuate impunity. These issues are particularly acute in rural areas, where state presence and regulatory enforcement are weaker, exacerbating risks to public safety.<sup>6</sup>

Firearms also play a significant role in domestic violence and family disputes, with a disproportionate lethality rate in such cases. Reports show that firearms are commonly used in gender-based violence, underscoring the human cost of SALW proliferation. While Albania has implemented legislative reforms and participated in regional disarmament efforts, such as those led by SEESAC and supported by the Western Balkans SALW Roadmap,<sup>7</sup> enforcement gaps and the persistence of unregistered firearms remain significant obstacles. Addressing these issues requires sustained regional co-operation, enhanced law enforcement capacity and robust public awareness initiatives

Efforts to address these challenges include Albania's adoption of a National Strategy on Small Arms, Light Weapons and Explosives Control for 2019-2024.<sup>8</sup> This strategy aligns with international frameworks like the Western Balkans SALW Roadmap and aims to modernize enforcement capabilities, improve the legal framework and integrate gender considerations in SALW control. Additionally, projects supported by organizations like the UNDP and OSCE focus on enhancing the capacities of law enforcement, improving evidence management and raising public awareness about the dangers of firearms proliferation.

### 1.3 SALW life cycle and proliferation

SALW can be misused in environments where the state is unable to fully control the accessibility to and illegal possession of arms in many ways. Political, economic and social transformations within countries tend to increase the availability of arms with SALW, unlike heavy arms, circulating in both the military and civilian markets.

While it is not always possible to accurately pinpoint how illegal SALW and ammunition find their way into one country from another and eventually into the hands of civilians, there are several possible ways:

- Arms captured from enemies during fighting
- Soldiers defecting from armed groups
- Lost, stolen or captured peacekeeping stocks (from international peacekeeping troops)
- Arms supplied by the armed forces
- Purchase through the open market
- Supply from government stockpiles of neighboring states
- Inheritance from family and relatives or friends.

6 UNDP Albania. Project Support Albania's Law Enforcement Authorities to Strengthen Firearms Criminality Evidence Management and Investigation Capacities. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Accessed November 24, 2024. <https://www.undp.org/albania/projects/support-albanias-law-enforcement-authorities-strengthen-firearms-criminality-evidence-management-and-investigation-capacities>.

7 SEESAC. Roadmap for a Sustainable Solution to the Illegal Possession, Misuse and Trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) and Their Ammunition in the Western Balkans by 2024. South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons. September 27, 2019. Accessed November 24, 2024. <[www.seesac.org/f/docs/publications-salw-control-roadmap/Regional-Roadmap-for-a-sustainable-solution-to-the.pdf](http://www.seesac.org/f/docs/publications-salw-control-roadmap/Regional-Roadmap-for-a-sustainable-solution-to-the.pdf)>.

8 Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and Explosives Control Strategy, 2019-2024, Albania. South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons. 2019. Accessed November 24, 2024. [https://www.seesac.org/f/docs/Albania-1/ENG\\_Albanian\\_Strategy\\_on\\_Firearms\\_Control-24-06-2019.pdf](https://www.seesac.org/f/docs/Albania-1/ENG_Albanian_Strategy_on_Firearms_Control-24-06-2019.pdf).

## Key statistics

Here are some key statistics related to small arms and light weapons (SALW):

**Global circulation:** It is estimated that there are over 1 billion small arms in circulation worldwide, with the vast majority—approximately 85%—held by civilians, around 13% by government armed forces, and about 2% by law enforcement agencies (see [World Customs Organization](#)).

**Illicit trade:** The illicit trade in SALW is valued at around \$1 billion to \$2 billion annually. This trade significantly contributes to violence and conflict, particularly in regions with weak governance ([UNODA](#)).

**Civilian ownership:** Civilian ownership of SALW is highest in the United States, which accounts for nearly 40% of all civilian-owned firearms globally. This figure illustrates the significant role that private ownership plays in the global distribution of small arms ([UNODA](#)).

**Deaths and injuries:** SALW are responsible for a significant portion of conflict-related deaths, with estimates suggesting that 500,000 deaths per year are linked to firearms, both in conflict zones and through criminal activity ([World Customs Organization](#)) ([UNODA](#)).

**Armed conflicts:** In modern armed conflicts, SALW are the weapons of choice, used in 95% of violent conflicts. They are preferred due to their portability, ease of use, and availability ([UNODA](#)).

The arms industry has less mandatory and enforceable international legislation than the banana or soy industry, leading experts to previously claim that the sector has accounted for at least [40% of known global corruption](#).

Just [10 countries provide 90% of the global arms supply](#). In recent years, almost 40% of documented global supply came from the US. About half of US arms exports went to the Middle East, chiefly Saudi Arabia, the [world's biggest arms importer](#).

## Licit or illicit SALW trade?

The distinction between licit (legal) and illicit (illegal) trade in SALW is essential for journalists to understand, as these two markets often overlap, creating challenges in reporting and regulation.

**Licit SALW trade** refers to the legal production, sale and transfer of weapons between countries, organizations and individuals in accordance with national and international laws. This includes government-approved arms sales for legitimate defense purposes or to authorized private entities. Albania, for example, has engaged in legal arms exports through its state-owned company, MEICO (Military Export Import Company). Established in 1991, MEICO operates under the Ministry of Defense and manages the import and export of military equipment. For instance, in 2004, Albania legally exported 10 million rounds of ammunition to Iraq, 10 tonnes of TNT to Bulgaria in exchange for industrial explosives and 200 trophy items to Germany, adhering to international and national regulations.<sup>9</sup>

9 Holtom et al., 2005, p. 81.

**Illicit SALW trade**, on the other hand, involves the unauthorized or illegal production, sale, transportation, ownership and unauthorized use of SALW, often fueling interpersonal violence, armed conflict, terrorism, organized crime and human rights violations.<sup>10</sup> In Albania in December 2019, authorities from Albania and Kosovo, supported by Eurojust and Europol, dismantled an arms trafficking network operating in both countries. The suspects were involved in the unauthorized supply, transport and sale of weapons and explosive materials, creating complex smuggling routes into the European Union. This operation led to the arrest of 14 individuals, highlighting the challenges posed by illicit arms trafficking in the region.<sup>11</sup>

As suggested above, the line between licit and illicit trade can blur for several reasons. Legally manufactured weapons often enter the illicit market through corruption, theft, or diversion, where arms intended for military or police forces are stolen or illegally resold. Additionally, some countries may engage in covert arms deals, blurring the legality of transactions. Weak regulations, inadequate border controls and poor record-keeping further exacerbate the problem, making it difficult to trace the flow of weapons. For journalists, understanding this grey area is crucial when investigating arms trafficking and reporting on the consequences of poorly regulated arms flows that contribute to violence and instability.

**Tip:** To find more information on investigating arms trafficking see:  
<https://gijn.org/stories/investigating-arms-trafficking/>

**Illicit possession:** Arms from the 1997 civil unrest in Albania are still in circulation, creating the foundation for a limited criminal market in SALWs and dismantled weapon parts. Many of these SALWs are destined for other European markets, but some appear to be sold on the domestic market.<sup>12</sup>

Table 1 - Estimated numbers of registered and unregistered firearms<sup>13</sup>

Country	Registered Firearms		Unregistered Firearms		Total	
	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High
Albania	70,000	70,000	200,000	210,000	270,000	280,000

Note: The values are rounded to the nearest ten thousand.

10 See: World Customs Organization and OSCE SALW.

11 See: <https://www.eurojust.europa.eu/news/arms-trafficking-group-uncovered-albania-and-kosovo>

12 OC Index. *Global Organized Crime Index*, 2023. Accessed November 24, 2024. <https://ocindex.net/2023/country/albania>.

13 Holtom et al. 2005, pp. 45–48; SEESAC, 2006a, p. 11 as quoted in Carapic, J., 2014, p. 5. Handgun Ownership and Armed Violence in the Western Balkans. Small Arms Survey. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep10623> See also: [https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwiFt\\_f5zJuMAxWdJzQl-HU5rPCIQFnoECBkQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.saferworld-global.org%2Fdownloadfile.php%3Ffilepath%3Ddownloads%2Fpubdocs%2FAlbania%2520ENG%2520%2520CH3.pdf&usg=AOvVaw3NkOTEFotP320IPfyTgbkF&opi=89978449](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwiFt_f5zJuMAxWdJzQl-HU5rPCIQFnoECBkQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.saferworld-global.org%2Fdownloadfile.php%3Ffilepath%3Ddownloads%2Fpubdocs%2FAlbania%2520ENG%2520%2520CH3.pdf&usg=AOvVaw3NkOTEFotP320IPfyTgbkF&opi=89978449)

Table 2 – Estimates of household firearms possession in Albania<sup>14</sup>

Country	Total households in population	Direct (self-reported)		Indirect (opinion about how many households own firearms in the area)		Average	
		% of households	Low estimate number	% of households	High estimate number	Average	Average number
Albania	722,600	6.5	46,969	17.2	124,287	11.9	85.628

**Illicit trade:** Between 1997 and 2002, it is estimated that 100,000 to 150,000 SALW were trafficked out of Albania.<sup>15</sup> These figures were commonly cited by sources such as the UNDP and government reports from the period, with some estimates suggesting as many as 200,000 SALW were smuggled to Kosovo, North Macedonia and other destinations. However, experts have highlighted a lack of detailed analysis to provide precise figures on current trafficking trends.

**Firearms trafficking methods:** Firearms traffickers reportedly hide weapons in vehicles, buses, trucks, cars or keep them on their body thus enabling them to cross the border illegally. Firearms trafficking tends to be carried out in small numbers such as one or two pieces at a time. To enable concealment, firearms are often disassembled into basic components. Most traffickers are men from 16-45 years old.<sup>16</sup>

**Voluntary surrender of weapons:** Following the mass looting of state armouries in 1997, Albania implemented several amnesty programmes to encourage the voluntary surrender of illegal weapons and military equipment. Key initiatives included the first amnesty (1998–2002) and a second (2003–2005), both of which aimed to recover state-owned weapons through voluntary surrender and police-led efforts.

Table 3 – Weapons collected during both amnesties.<sup>17</sup>

	Ammunitions	Explosives	Weapons
Looted in 1997	839,310,038	16,000,000	549,775
March 1997 – June 2005	118,134,222	1,539,828	222,918 or 40.54%

A third amnesty in 2017 saw the surrender of 1,603 firearms, 1,558 grenades and over 580,000 rounds of ammunition, highlighting the persistent issue of widespread illegal weapon possession among citizens.

**Organized crime:** A significant number of organized crime-related killings in Albania involve firearms stolen during the 1997 unrest. Weapons such as sniper rifles, suppressed pistols and automatic rifles are commonly used in such incidents, emphasizing the link between illicit arms and organized crime violence.

<sup>14</sup> Carapic, J., 2014, *Handgun Ownership and Armed Violence in the Western Balkans*. Small Arms Survey, p.8. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep10623>

<sup>15</sup> Holtom et al., 2005, p. 39.

<sup>16</sup> SALW and Explosives Control Strategy 2019-2024 and its Action Plan 2019-2021.

<sup>17</sup> SEESAC. (2019). *Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and Explosives Control Strategy, 2019-2024, Albania*, p.9. Accessed November 24, 2024. [https://www.seesac.org/f/docs/Albania-1/ENG\\_Albanian\\_Strategy\\_on\\_Firearms\\_Control-24-06-2019.pdf](https://www.seesac.org/f/docs/Albania-1/ENG_Albanian_Strategy_on_Firearms_Control-24-06-2019.pdf)



**Tip:** For further data and insights on SALW in Albania see: [SEESAC](#) and the [Global Initiative Risk Bulletin](#). These provide detailed reports and updates on Albania's efforts to control the circulation and impact of SALW.

## 1.4 The role of media in SALW awareness

Small arms, such as handguns, rifles and submachine guns and light weapons, including grenades, mortars and rocket launchers, are force multipliers and violence amplifiers in many conflicts, from urban crime to insurgencies and civil wars and as we'll see later, gender-based violence. Their accessibility, ease of use and portability make them common in both organized and unorganized violence, fuelling prolonged conflicts and destabilizing regions. By being well-informed on SALW, journalists can better interpret and provide context to stories on conflict zones, prevalence of armed violence in society, arms proliferation and the impact on civilian populations, giving audiences a clearer understanding of how these weapons exacerbate tensions and contribute to loss of life, societal tensions, economic and development loss and higher medical and social spending.

***Reporting on SALW presents significant challenges for journalists, particularly in accessing reliable data, understanding the technical complexities of weaponry and ensuring the safety of sources.*** One of the primary difficulties is the lack of transparency and accurate data on arms transfers. Many governments and organizations involved in SALW trade do not publicly disclose detailed information, making it hard for journalists to trace the flow of weapons and identify their final destinations. Additionally, the illicit arms trade, by nature, is secretive, often involving black markets and unauthorized actors, which complicates efforts to gather verifiable data.

To deal with such challenges, journalists must not only familiarize themselves with SALW and the issues they present, but also consistently ask sources and institutions for accurate information pertaining to technical descriptions of SALW. These questions include:

- Are the weapons locally or regionally produced or something else entirely?
- Is there any preliminary information on whether the weapons are legal or illegal?
- Was the firearm registered to the victim? The perpetrator? Someone else? Not registered at all?
- Do the authorities know if there is any relationship between the victim and the perpetrator? If so, what is that relationship?

While journalists are not expected to be experts in the area of SALW, acquiring technical language to accurately report on SALW. This may be as simple as obtaining photos of the firearm related to the case which will allow them to accurately identify it using open sources such as Weapons - SALW Guide or An Introductory Guide to the Identification of Small Arms, Light Weapons and Associated Ammunition | Small Arms Survey. Over time, journalists will gain an understanding of different types of weapons, their uses and their effects to provide accurate and insightful reports. Without this, it is easy to misinterpret weapon systems or overlook critical details, potentially leading to misinformation. Continuous learning and consulting experts in the field are vital for clear and responsible reporting. This handbook serves as a starting point and hopefully will inspire you to continue conversations with colleagues and experts about the importance of covering SALW-related issues.



Ensuring the safety of sources is another significant hurdle. Many individuals with firsthand knowledge of SALW trafficking or usage may fear retribution, particularly in conflict zones or authoritarian states. Journalists must balance the need for credible sources with the ethical responsibility of protecting them. This often involves using encrypted communication tools and adhering to strict confidentiality protocols. The danger of exposing informants or being targeted themselves adds a layer of complexity to reporting in this sensitive area.

**Tip:** There are many resources available about ensuring safety of journalists and what you can do to protect yourself and your sources. See:

<https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/d/7/85777.pdf>

<https://cpj.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/guide.pdf>

<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000243986>

## 1.5 Ethical reporting and best practices

Journalists reporting on SALW-related stories must carefully navigate a variety of ethical challenges to ensure their coverage is accurate, responsible and does not contribute to harm.

Ethical reporting on SALW requires a balanced approach that prioritizes accuracy, minimizes sensationalism, protects sources and focuses on the human consequences of weapon proliferation. By adhering to these principles, journalists can help inform the public responsibly while contributing to broader efforts to reduce the harmful impacts of SALW.

Best practices include:

### ***Sensitivity to victims***

When covering incidents involving SALW, it is essential to handle the stories of victims with care, ensuring their privacy and dignity are respected. Article 1 of the Albanian Code of Ethics for Journalists emphasizes the importance of respecting the dignity of individuals affected by news events. When covering incidents involving SALW, journalists are encouraged to show compassion, ensuring that victims' privacy is upheld. By adhering to this principle, journalists can avoid further harm to vulnerable populations, maintaining their human rights and dignity in line with the Code. This is discussed further in Chapter 2.

### ***Be clear and accurate***

One of the most important aspects of reporting on SALW is accuracy. Misinformation or misrepresentation of weaponry can have far-reaching consequences, particularly when reporting from conflict zones. Article 5 of the Code stresses that journalists must strive for truth and accuracy, avoiding distortion of facts. In reporting on SALW, this means accurately identifying weaponry and clearly presenting the circumstances surrounding its use. Mislabeling small arms, such as confusing an assault rifle with a sub-machine gun, can mislead your audience and distort the understanding of the situation. You may need to consult military experts or specialized sources on arms to clarify these details.

### ***Avoid sensationalism***

SALW are inherently linked to violence, conflict and tragedy and it is easy for reporting on these issues to veer into sensationalism. Article 2 of the Code stresses that journalists should avoid sensationalism and ensure their reporting is measured and responsible. Sensational headlines or exaggerated descriptions can perpetuate fear, misinform the public and potentially contribute to the glamorization of violence. Instead, look at the human cost and broader social consequences of weapons proliferation. Sensationalizing these topics can create fear, contributing to a cycle of misinformation and misrepresentation and can lead to fearmongering and misinformation, which may further entrench the culture of violence.

### ***Context, context, context***

Provide thorough context as you strive for accurate and responsible journalism. Article 7 of the Code calls for journalists to provide necessary context for their reporting to ensure that stories are both meaningful and understood in their full complexity. By providing context about the historical and geopolitical causes of arms proliferation in the Western Balkans, journalists can help readers understand the broader impact of SALW beyond the immediate news event. Context helps audiences understand not only the technical aspects of the weapons but also the broader socio-political implications surrounding their use, distribution and impact. SALW are not just weapons; they are intertwined with issues such as global security, human rights, conflict escalation and organized crime. Without adequate context, reports on SALW may oversimplify complex issues, leaving the audience with a narrow understanding of the situation. For example, reporting solely on the numbers of weapons trafficked without exploring the reasons behind the trade, its beneficiaries, or its impact on local populations risks missing the full story.

### ***Global, local or somewhere in between?***

It is vital to connect local instances of SALW violence or trafficking to global patterns of arms proliferation. Article 6 of the Code calls for journalists to connect local news to broader issues. When covering SALW, journalists should link local events to global trends, such as the proliferation of weapons in the Balkans and their international consequences. This contextualization not only informs the public but also promotes awareness of the role local incidents play in wider international security issues.

Providing historical and international context, such as how certain regions became arms hubs due to past conflicts or international policies, allows readers to grasp the broader implications. This connection between local events and global dynamics helps frame SALW within international security concerns and diplomatic efforts, such as arms control treaties. By including accurate context into reports on SALW, you will not only inform but engage your and provide them with a fuller understanding of the broader issues at play, from political implications to humanitarian impacts.

The Western Balkans, including Albania, became an arms hub due to several key historical and geopolitical factors. The 1997 collapse of Albania's pyramid schemes led to the mass looting of military depots, releasing over 550,000 weapons into civilian and black-market circulation. The disintegration of Yugoslavia in the 1990s further fuelled arms proliferation, as stockpiles were seized by militias or sold via organized crime networks. Despite disarmament efforts, significant numbers of weapons remained in private hands, facilitating illegal arms trafficking into Western Europe.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> ReliefWeb, 2002, *Albania, Kosovo, and Macedonia: Armed to the teeth*, August 5. Retrieved from <https://reliefweb.int/report/albania/albania-kosovo-and-macedonia-armed-teeth>

For instance, weapons from the Balkans, such as Zastava M-70 assault rifles, were reportedly used in high-profile attacks like the November 2015 Paris attacks and the 2015 Charlie Hebdo shooting.<sup>19</sup> The cost of firearms highlights the demand disparity, with Kalashnikovs costing €300-€500 in the Balkans but rising to €2,000 in Western Europe. Research by the Flemish Peace Institute indicates that the Balkans serve as a primary smuggling route for illegal weapons into the European Union (EU), with more illegal firearms circulating than legally owned ones in countries including Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Albania.

### ***Be thoughtful about your choice and use of sources***

You will likely rely on various sources, including government officials, arms dealers and individuals involved in conflicts. Article 8 of the Code highlights the importance of using credible sources. In reporting on SALW, journalists must ensure that they verify the accuracy of information coming from sources and the credibility of these sources, especially those involved in the illicit trade of arms. By relying on reputable experts, journalists can mitigate the risks of spreading false information, particularly when dealing with sensitive security-related matters. This is discussed further in Chapter 2.

### ***Protect your sources***

You must always take steps to protect sources who may be at risk, such as whistle-blowers, individuals providing information from dangerous environments or victims of violence. Article 10 of the Code calls for protection of sources, particularly in sensitive investigations like arms trafficking. Journalists covering illicit arms trade should take extra precautions to protect the identities of whistle-blowers, victims, or informants who may be at risk. Secure communication methods and protecting identities can safeguard sources from retaliation.

### ***Off or on the record?***

Don't allow your source to speak "off the record" or anonymously unless that is clearly the only way to get the information. Article 9 of the Albanian Code of Ethics stresses that sources should only be quoted off the record if necessary and that journalists should take responsibility for verifying information. But keep in mind that if you agree to this, not only are you ethically bound to respect any agreement you've made but then you also are in the position of finding another source to confirm this information.

In arms trafficking cases, where information may be confidential or sensitive, it's crucial to handle sources carefully and responsibly, ensuring that agreements are respected and that subsequent verification from alternative sources is sought.

### ***Don't forget the human impact***

The stories aren't just the SALW, but the people affected. SALW are not just tools of war or conflict – they have profound impacts on civilian populations, perpetuating cycles of violence and undermining peace efforts. Article 3 of the Code emphasizes the importance of highlighting the human aspect of any story. For SALW-related stories, you should focus on how these weapons affect communities, especially vulnerable groups like children, women and displaced populations. Highlighting disarmament efforts, peacebuilding initiatives and the long-term consequences of weapon proliferation brings essential context to stories about SALW. So be sure to include the human impact of SALW in reports can add significant depth. Discuss how SALW contribute to violence, displacement and instability within communities to provide your audience with a more comprehensive view of the weaponry's role beyond statistics.

19 Arapi, L., 2015, "The Balkan Route to Western Europe for Yugoslavia Guns". Deutsche Welle (DW). December 3. <https://www.dw.com/en/the-balkan-route-to-western-europe-for-yugoslavia-guns/a-18896280>

### ***Balance security and public interest***

Reporting on SALW often involves exposing illicit arms networks or analyzing state policies on arms control. Article 4 of the Code calls for balancing public interest with national security. Journalists must balance the public's right to know with potential national security concerns. Revealing too much about ongoing arms investigations or covert military operations could compromise efforts to combat illegal arms trafficking. You should work closely with editors and legal experts to ensure your coverage does not inadvertently jeopardize sensitive operations while still holding power to account.

### ***Raise awareness without stoking fear***

As a journalist, you have the power to influence public opinion and policy, so it is essential to report on SALW in a way that raises awareness of the issues without creating unnecessary fear. Article 2 of the Code emphasizes the promotion of responsible and informative reporting and urges journalists to avoid generating undue fear or panic. In the case of SALW, journalists should be mindful of how their reporting may influence public opinion. While raising awareness about arms trafficking, they should avoid fostering unnecessary anxiety by focusing on solutions and international co-operation to curb arms proliferation and avoiding inflammatory language.

### ***Promote disarmament and control efforts***

Your reporting should also highlight efforts to mitigate the impact of SALW. Article 7 of the Code encourages journalists to support peace and ethical practices through their reporting. This can include covering international treaties or initiatives by non-governmental organizations to reduce arms flows. By promoting these efforts, journalists can contribute to global disarmament advocacy, encouraging informed debate on how to tackle the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

## **1.6 Small Arms and Light Weapons in Albania**

Albania has a significant issue with the illegal possession and proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW). The legacy of past conflicts and weak state controls has contributed to the widespread availability of firearms in the country. This availability exacerbates crime rates, including domestic violence and poses a significant challenge to public safety and security.

The Government of the Republic of Albania is committed to preventing, controlling and eradicating the proliferation of illegal weapons in accordance with regional and international initiatives, standards and documents for control of SALW, ammunition and explosive materials. Albania has joined all of the international agreements on firearms control, including: the Arms Trade Treaty, United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons, the Firearms Protocol and has embraced the regional initiatives to strengthen SALW control in the territory of the Republic of Albania and in the entire region.

The Parliament of Albania has approved a number of laws on weapons<sup>20</sup>, which aim to provide a more effective control of SALW. Furthermore, the Government of Albania has approved normative acts and instructions which aim to complete the legal acts and by-laws package to allow the use of weapons in legal activities, for the category that fulfils the conditions and criteria, but also to penalize those citizens, who intend to exercise and organize illegal activities in this regard.

<sup>20</sup> See section 1.6.2.

In 2016, the Republic of Albania disposed the surplus of weapons and ammunitions inherited by the previous system assisted by international organizations and partner countries. Measures to reduce corruption and organized crime were at the heart of the judicial reforms that were approved in 2016 as well as the establishment of the National Commission on Small Arms and Light Weapons in June 2017, the latter responsible for the development and monitoring of the implementation of a National Strategy and Action Plan on SALW, which was approved on 6 February 2019.

In terms of compliance, the Strategy explicitly notes its close reference to the “Roadmap for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) and their ammunition in the Western Balkans, by 2024” and fully mirrors the roadmap and its performance indicators within the national objectives and the progress monitoring framework.<sup>21</sup> Pursuant to this strategy and in line with EU criteria, Albania also created a Firearms Focal Point, an operational fusion center that investigates all cases involving firearms.

### 1.6.1 SALW proliferation in Albania

After the collapse of the communist regime in the early 1990s and during the 1997 civil unrest, large quantities of weapons were looted from military depots, resulting in widespread availability of firearms. In addition, Albania has been identified as both a source and transit country for illicit arms trafficking, further complicating efforts to curb the proliferation of SALW. This has led to ongoing challenges in disarmament and control.

During the 1997 civil unrest, over 550,000 firearms were reportedly looted from military stockpiles.<sup>22</sup> It is estimated that this included:

- 38,000 hand arms
- 226,000 AK-47s (Kalashnikovs)
- 25,000 machine guns
- 2,400 anti-tank rocket launchers
- 3,500,000 hand grenades
- 3,600 tons of explosives.<sup>23</sup>

In less than a week, such a significant number of arms, ammunition and explosives transitioned into illegal possession of civilians within Albania and the wider region, further exacerbated by the country’s strategic location near conflict zones like the former Yugoslavia.<sup>24</sup> These geographic and historical factors have entrenched Albania as part of regional arms trafficking networks, complicating disarmament efforts.

21 UNDP. (n.d.). Support to Albania’s law enforcement authorities to strengthen firearms criminality, evidence management, and investigation capacities. United Nations Development Programme. Retrieved December 8, 2024, from <https://www.undp.org/albania/projects/support-albanias-law-enforcement-authorities-strengthen-firearms-criminality-evidence-management-and-investigation-capacities>

22 Holtom, P. *et.al.*, 2005.

23 Zhilla, F., & Lamallari, B., 2015, *Organised crime: Threat assessment in Albania*. Open Society Foundation for Albania. <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.1.3825.6481>

24 Arsovska, J., 2019, “The rise of Balkan organized crime”. In M. Natarajan (Ed.), *International and transnational crime and justice* (pp. 198–203). Cambridge University Press.

Despite sustained government initiatives such as voluntary disarmament campaigns and the adoption of a National Strategy on SALW control, estimates suggest that up to 300,000 firearms remain in civilian hands,<sup>25</sup> which continue to present a significant threat to public safety.<sup>26</sup>

Reports highlight that these weapons are frequently implicated in violent crimes, domestic violence and organized criminal activity.<sup>27</sup> In particular, unregistered firearms present significant challenges in rural areas and marginalized communities, where enforcement of control measures is more difficult.<sup>28</sup> Collaboration with international partners, including SEESAC<sup>29</sup> and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), has played a vital role in bolstering Albania's capacity to manage SALW, though enforcement gaps and porous borders remain critical obstacles.

Albania is both a source and a transit country for illicit arms trafficking. The country's geographic location makes it a critical point in the illegal arms trade, especially within the Balkans and towards Western Europe. Efforts to control borders and combat trafficking are hampered by limited resources and corruption.

Although Albania has made progress in strengthening its legal framework, enforcement remains inconsistent. Limited resources, corruption and inadequate training for law enforcement officers undermine efforts to control the spread of SALW.

The Strategy (2019-2024) and accompanying Action Plan (2019-2021) recognize the gendered aspects of SALW control and contain specific measures to improve institutional and policy response to the misuse of firearms in domestic and intimate partner violence. The Strategy also foresees activities aimed at increasing the participation of women in SALW control and improving the capacities of competent institutions to mainstream gender in SALW control policies.

From a gender perspective, the Albanian State Police has set a quota of 50% women in its recruitment policy and has launched a women-only recruitment campaign to increase larger participation of women and girls in police forces.

25 Davis, J., 2016, A European gun culture deadlier than America's. Politico, January 18. Accessed November 26, 2024. <https://www.politico.eu/article/the-european-nation-with-a-deadlier-gun-culture-than-the-us-albania/>.

26 OSCE Presence in Albania, 2023, *Presentation of awareness raising and communication strategy, action plan, and campaign on small arms and light weapons*. OSCE. June 6. Accessed November 24, 2024. [https://www.osce.org/presence-in-albania/545473#\\_ftn1](https://www.osce.org/presence-in-albania/545473#_ftn1).

27 SEESAC, 2019. *Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) Survey: Albania 2012 – 2016*. Accessed November 25, 2024. [https://www.seesac.org/f/docs/SALW-Surveys/web\\_Albania-SALW-Survey\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.seesac.org/f/docs/SALW-Surveys/web_Albania-SALW-Survey_ENG.pdf).

28 Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2021. *Unburying guns from Albania's past*. Risk Bulletin #7, April-May 2021. Accessed November 27, 2024. <https://riskbulletins.globalinitiative.net/see-obs-007/05-unburying-guns-from-albanias-past.html>.

29 Southeastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC). About SEESAC. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Regional Cooperation Council (RCC). Accessed November 27, 2024. <https://www.seesac.org/>.

- Men account for 82.5% and women for 17.5% of victims of firearm-related incidents.
- For 20.5% of female and 18.1% of male victims of firearm-related incidents, the outcome was lethal.
- 76% of women killed with firearms were killed in their homes, apartments or yards.
- 57.1% of women murdered by family members were killed with a firearm, while there were no cases reported of men being killed by family members with firearms.
- 27.8% of women in Albania killed by their intimate partner in 2015 and 2016 were killed with a firearm.
- 26.3% of domestic violence incidents which involved firearms had a lethal outcome.
- Men committed 98.1% all firearm related incidents, while women committed only 1.9% of incidents.
- 20.9% of people killed in Albania were killed by a family member. Between 2012 and 2016, 115 out of a total 550 homicides reported were committed by family members.
- Women outnumber men as victims of the homicides committed by a family member, with 62 (53.9%) of women and 53 (46.1%) of men killed by family members. Domestic violence affects both women and men, but patterns of victimization are different.
- 70.5% of all women killed in Albania were killed by family members, compared to 11.5% of killed men.

Experts caution this area needs to be consolidated and further strengthened in order to create a diversified and non-discriminatory police culture that encourages women and girls to participate in both law enforcement operations and decision-making processes meaningfully. While this is commendable, there is still much to achieve in practice. It is important to both concretely promote gender diversification in police forces and empower all the personnel equally to grow professionally and managerially within the structure.

### 1.6.2 Legal issues

The legal and institutional framework in the area of SALW and explosive control in the Republic of Albania includes the following pieces of legislation.<sup>30</sup>

- **The Constitution of the Republic of Albania, as amended.**  
It establishes the fundamental legal framework and principles governing the state's authority, including the regulation, oversight and control of SALW and explosives to ensure public safety and security.
- **Criminal Code of the Republic of Albania, Law No. 7895, dated 27/01/1995.**  
It defines criminal offenses, including those related to the illicit possession, trafficking and use of SALW and explosives and establishes penalties to deter and address such activities.

<sup>30</sup> SEESAC, 2019, *Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and Explosives Control Strategy, 2019-2024, Albania*, p. 12. Accessed November 24, 2024. [https://www.seesac.org/f/docs/Albania-1/ENG\\_Albanian\\_Strategy\\_on\\_Firearms\\_Control-24-06-2019.pdf](https://www.seesac.org/f/docs/Albania-1/ENG_Albanian_Strategy_on_Firearms_Control-24-06-2019.pdf).



- **Criminal Procedure Code of the Republic of Albania, Law No. 7905, dated 21/03/1995.**  
It outlines the procedural framework for investigating, prosecuting and adjudicating criminal offenses, including those involving SALW and explosives, ensuring due process and legal accountability.
- **Personal Data Protection, Law No. 9887, dated 10/03/2008**, as amended by **Law No. 48/2012**, as amended by **Law No. 120/2014**.  
It establishes the legal framework for safeguarding personal data, including provisions relevant to the collection, storage and processing of data in activities related to SALW and explosives, ensuring privacy and compliance with international standards.
- **State Police, Law No. 82/2024, as amended.**  
It defines the roles, responsibilities and operational framework of the State Police in ensuring public order and safety, including the control, management and prevention of illegal activities related to SALW and explosives.
- **International Agreements in the Republic of Albania. Law No. 43/2016.**  
It establishes the procedures for negotiating, ratifying and implementing international agreements, including those related to SALW and explosive control, ensuring alignment with international standards and commitments.
- **Border Control, Law No. 71/2016.**  
It regulates the management and security of borders, including measures to prevent the illicit trafficking of SALW and explosives, while ensuring compliance with international and national security standards.
- **Weapons, Law No. 74/2014.**  
It establishes the regulatory framework for the control, possession, production, storage and trade of SALW, aiming to prevent their misuse and ensure public safety in compliance with international standards.
- **The Use of Firearms, Law No. 72/2014.**  
It regulates the conditions, circumstances and procedures under which firearms may be used by authorized entities, ensuring compliance with legal and human rights standards.
- **Hunting, Law No. 10253, dated 11/03/2010, as amended.**  
regulates the conditions for hunting, including the use and control of firearms and explosives in hunting activities, ensuring compliance with national and international wildlife protection standards.
- **Civil Use of Explosives, Pyrotechnic Compositions and Fireworks in the Republic of Albania Law, No. 9126, dated 29/07/2003**, as amended by **Law No. 10388**, dated 03/03/2011 and **Law No. 73/2014**.  
It governs the civil use of explosives, pyrotechnic compositions and fireworks, establishing safety standards and control measures to prevent misuse and ensure public safety.



- **Accession of the Republic of Albania in the Convention on the Marking of Plastic Explosives for the Purpose of Detection, Law No. 9020, dated 06/03/2003.**  
It ratifies the Republic of Albania's accession to the above-mentioned Convention, aiming to enhance global security by facilitating the detection of plastic explosives.
- **State Control of International Transfers of Military Goods and Technologies and Goods of Dual-Use, Law No. 46/2018.**  
It regulates the state control over international transfers of military goods, technologies and dual-use goods in the Republic of Albania, ensuring compliance with international non-proliferation standards and security protocols.
- **Accession of the Republic of Albania in the European Agreement Concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road (ADR) and the Implementation Protocol, Law No. 9272, dated 16/09/2004.**  
It concerns the country's accession to the above-mentioned Agreement and its implementation protocol, aiming to regulate the safe transportation of hazardous materials, including explosives, across borders.
- **Ratification of the Arms Trade Treaty, Law No. 6/2014, dated 30/01/2014.**  
It ratifies the Arms Trade Treaty in the Republic of Albania, establishing regulations for the international trade of conventional arms, with the aim of promoting transparency and preventing the diversion of weapons to unauthorized recipients.
- **Customs Code of the Republic of Albania, Law No. 102/2014.**  
It establishes the legal framework for the regulation of customs procedures, including the control of imports and exports of goods, such as SALW and explosives, to ensure compliance with national and international laws.
- **Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 275, dated 01/04/2015, which approves the regulation on the weapons safety rules and conditions.**  
It establishes the regulations on weapons safety rules and conditions, outlining the necessary measures for the safe handling, storage and transportation of weapons, including those related to SALW and explosives.
- **Law on Gathering Combat Arms and Ammunition (1998) and the Law for Collection of Weapons, Ammunition and other Military Materials (2003)** were the first two measures following the events of 1997, when weapons, ammunition, grenades and military equipment were looted from state warehouses in Albania. These laws provided the framework of several amnesties for the voluntary surrender of weapons, aiming to prevent mass penalization of Albanian citizens by offering an opportunity to surrender illegally possessed state-owned weapons. The first amnesty period spanned from August 1998 to August 2002. During this time, Law No. 8388, dated 5 August 1998, titled "On the Collection of Military Ammunition and Weapons," was finalized and approved. This law established the principles and methods for the voluntary surrender of weapons, introduced a registration system for certain business categories and defined the methods the police would use to collect weapons.

The second amnesty was drafted in December 2002 and subsequently approved on 6 March 2003, under Law No. 9018, titled “On the Collection of Weapons, Ammunition and Other Military Equipment.” This law shared similar objectives, principles and duties for police and military personnel and maintained the same structure for weapons collection commissions across Albania. It remained in force until 31 May 2005.<sup>31</sup> There is, however, a bylaw on deactivation that is in place which provides another opportunity for controlling proliferation of SALW.

### 1.6.3 Policy and international co-operation

The Albanian government has engaged in various disarmament and arms control initiatives, often with the support of international organizations like the UN and the European Union. These efforts include improving legislative frameworks, enhancing border controls and conducting public awareness campaigns on the dangers of illegal firearms.

#### Case study: Reporting on police misconduct and SALW in Central Europe

##### Context:

A Central European news outlet conducted an investigation into police misconduct related to the misuse of SALW. The investigation revealed instances where police officers had been involved in the illegal sale of confiscated firearms, which later ended up in the hands of criminal groups.

##### Challenges:

The journalists had to overcome institutional resistance, including stonewalling by police departments and legal threats. They also needed to verify information from anonymous sources, which required careful fact-checking and corroboration.

##### Outcome:

The investigation resulted in disciplinary action against several police officers and led to a broader inquiry into the management of confiscated firearms by law enforcement agencies. Public pressure also forced the government to review and reform its policies on police conduct and firearm regulation.

##### Key lessons:

- The importance of thorough fact-checking and corroboration when dealing with sensitive allegations.
- Effective strategies for holding public institutions accountable through journalism.
- The potential of investigative journalism to drive systemic change in law enforcement practices.

<sup>31</sup> For an exhaustive review of SALW legislation and regulatory frameworks up to 2005, the following report is particularly useful: Holtom, P., et al., 2005. *Turning the page: Small arms and light weapons in Albania*. Report on small arms and security in South Eastern Europe, Center for Peace and Disarmament Education and Saferworld. Available at: <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/15132/Albania.pdf>

For updates beyond 2005 see: *Albania 2023 report: Commission staff working document*. [SWD(2023) 690 final]. Accompanying the communication on EU enlargement policy. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/albania\\_report\\_2023.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/albania_report_2023.pdf).

*Albania 2020 report: Commission staff working document*. [SWD(2020) 354 final]. Accompanying the communication on EU enlargement policy. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/albania\\_report\\_2020.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/albania_report_2020.pdf).

For the latest analysis of the SALW control framework see: UNDP, 2023. *Western Balkans SALW Control Roadmap MPTF Project Document*. Available at: [https://mptf.undp.org/sites/default/files/documents/2023-10/prodoc\\_rev\\_gtw\\_231003\\_0.pdf](https://mptf.undp.org/sites/default/files/documents/2023-10/prodoc_rev_gtw_231003_0.pdf).

## Chapter 2 Gender-based violence (GBV) and its intersection with SALW

### 2.1 What is GBV?

What is GBV and why look at gender-based violence in the context of SALW? Incorporating GBV into discussions of SALW reporting allows journalists to provide a more holistic view of the human impact of firearms proliferation, beyond just the technical or political aspects. It is vital for raising awareness and shaping public discourse around arms control and human rights.

But before we look at the intersection of GBV and SALW, let's take a closer look at GBV: What is it? What is the situation with GBV in Albania? What are some best practices for journalists when reporting on GBV and what are some of the legal and ethical considerations journalists should bear in mind? This chapter will examine these questions and provide you with useful tips.

#### **Key Definition: Gender-based violence**

Harmful acts directed at individuals based on their gender. It includes physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, often occurring in contexts where there are imbalances of power.

Gender-based violence is an umbrella term used by the United Nations, the Council of Europe and other inter-governmental agencies to refer to violence that is directed to an individual based on their biological sex or gender identity. It includes categories such as psychological and physical violence, sexual assault and harassment, forced marriages, female genital mutilation, forced abortion and sterilization, economic or educational deprivation and attacks on transgender people. Note that gender-based violence is a more broadly inclusive term than violence against women.

Reporting on GBV requires journalists to have a deep understanding of the complex factors that contribute to violence against women, girls and other marginalized gender identities. Journalists covering GBV must go beyond merely reporting incidents and aim to provide context that includes the societal, cultural and legal frameworks that enable such violence. Accurate reporting on GBV involves understanding the role of patriarchy, gender inequalities and the normalization of violence within relationships, communities and institutions. This context is crucial for helping your audience grasp the broader patterns that make GBV a systemic issue, rather than isolated acts of violence.

By responsibly reporting on GBV, journalists not only inform the public but also play a critical role in advocating for policy changes and raising awareness about the need for legal and societal reforms to protect vulnerable groups.

## 2.2 Gender-based violence in Albania

### Context

Albania continues to struggle with high rates of domestic violence, with a 2023 study indicating that 53% of Albanian women have experienced some form of domestic violence. Cultural norms, traditional beliefs, strict gender roles and stereotypes, as well as the stigma that surrounds sexual violence and rape results in extremely low reporting rates, remain a serious challenge to combating GBV in Albania.<sup>32</sup> The presence of firearms in domestic settings significantly increases the risk of lethal violence.

GBV is deeply rooted in patriarchal traditions and customs that have long shaped the Albania's strict gender identities and roles, patriarchal authority, adherence to an honor-and-shame system, customs of hierarchal ordering within the family and intergenerational family control.<sup>33</sup>

Such traditional patriarchal attitudes, strict gender roles and stereotypes remain pervasive throughout Albania and contribute to gender inequalities in all spheres of social and economic life and the prevalence of GBV. In this regard, women are discouraged from participating in the workforce. In 2023, women made up 52.8% of the workforce, whereas men made up 67.7%.<sup>34</sup> In 2019, Albania ranked 42 out of 162 countries on the Gender Inequality Index.<sup>35</sup>

The entrenched social norms that shape attitudes and perpetuate gender-based violence are also apparent, with half of the surveyed women in 2019 reporting that their communities still viewed domestic violence as a private matter that should not involve external intervention (52.2% of women aged 18-74 believed that domestic violence between spouses is seen as a private matter, with 46.5% thinking that women should tolerate some violence to keep their families together). Additionally, almost 1 in 3 (27.5%) women reported that community members often believe women are partly to blame for the violence they experience.<sup>36</sup>

These deeply ingrained norms contribute to the normalization of intimate partner violence and hinder women from seeking help. For example, only 13.5% of women acknowledged that men sometimes hit their wives, with 11.4% said this happens when a woman refuses sex. In terms of sexual violence, 26.1% of women believed that rape victims are often ashamed to speak out, while 21.2% felt that women who are raped must have done something careless to invite it.

Despite these pervasive norms, a large majority of women recognized GBV as a serious problem: 75.4% considered domestic violence against women a major issue, with similar views on sexual violence, harassment and stalking. The findings underscore the critical need for stronger legal protections and societal changes, with 83% of women supporting laws to protect women from violence in their marriages and 81.9% advocating for protections against sexual assault and rape. The UNDP study reveals a clear disconnect between public attitudes and the urgent need for structural reforms.

32 Council of Europe, 2024, *GREVIO's First Thematic Evaluation Report on Albania: Building Trust by Delivering Support, Protection and Justice*, p. 6. Available at [rm.coe.int](https://rm.coe.int).

33 UNDP, 2019, *National population survey on violence against women and girls in Albania*. United Nations Development Programme, p. 27. Retrieved from <https://www.undp.org/albania/publications/national-population-survey-violence-against-women-and-girls-albania>

34 Retrieved on 6 December 2024 from: <https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/economies/albania>

35 Retrieved on 6 December 2024 from: <http://www.hdr.undp.org/en/composite/GII>

36 UNDP, 2019, pp. 62-67.

### Policy impact

Recent media coverage of GBV has led to significant policy shifts in Albania. In 2023, the Albanian government passed new legislation that strengthens the legal framework for prosecuting domestic violence cases and increases funding for shelters and support services for survivors.<sup>37</sup>

Media reporting played a crucial role in raising public awareness and pushing the government to prioritize these issues. Data on public awareness further underscores the importance of media in shaping policy and the media's coverage of GBV is central to driving public discourse around such topics.

In particular, the media's role in shifting public perception has been critical in pushing for better protective measures for survivors by enacting new legislation that not only increased penalties for offenders but also improved victim protection mechanisms.

A significant step toward addressing sexual abuse and revictimization of women in Albania is the inclusion of gender equality and non-discrimination principles in the Broadcast Code for Audio-visual Media, introduced by the Albanian Audio-visual Media Authority. These revisions aim to promote gender-sensitive reporting, eliminate sexist language and safeguard women and girls who are victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse from revictimization during media coverage. The updated guidelines apply to approximately 50 television channels and 70 radio stations operating across the country.<sup>38</sup>

## 2.3 The role of SALW in exacerbating GBV

The intersection between SALW and GBV is important to understand because the presence and use of firearms can significantly exacerbate the frequency and severity of violence, particularly against women and marginalized gender groups. GBV remains a pervasive issue in Albania, deeply rooted in traditional gender norms and cultural practices. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by domestic violence, which is often exacerbated by the availability of firearms. Several key aspects of this intersection include:

### *Increased lethality of domestic violence*

SALW, when easily accessible, can amplify power imbalances between genders, often exacerbating violence against women. One of the clearest links between SALW and GBV is the heightened risk of fatal outcomes in domestic violence situations. Studies show that when a firearm is present in the home, the likelihood of intimate partner violence turning lethal increases dramatically. Women, in particular, face heightened vulnerability in environments where SALW are prevalent, as guns are often used as tools of intimidation or murder in intimate partner violence. In many countries, firearms are used to threaten, control and intimidate women, turning abusive relationships into life-threatening situations.

<sup>37</sup> For a full account see: Network Against Gender-Based Violence (2024), *Monitoring Report on Gender-Based Violence in Albania*, pp. 8-9. Available at: [https://rrjetikunderdhunesgjinore-monitorime.al/en/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Report\\_per-publikim.pdf](https://rrjetikunderdhunesgjinore-monitorime.al/en/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Report_per-publikim.pdf)

<sup>38</sup> Network Against Gender-Based Violence, 2024.

### *Sexual violence in conflict zones*

In conflict zones where SALW are widely used, women and girls are often disproportionately affected by sexual violence, trafficking and exploitation. Armed groups frequently use weapons to commit sexual violence as a tactic of war, making reporting on GBV within the SALW context vital for shedding light on these underreported atrocities. The availability of SALW allows perpetrators to wield power over civilian populations and women, in particular, face heightened vulnerabilities. This intersection emphasizes how SALW not only fuel armed conflict but also contribute to widespread human rights abuses, including sexual violence. Journalists need to frame SALW issues with a gender lens to capture the full human impact, particularly the specific threats that women face.

### *Armed conflict and displacement*

In conflict regions where SALW are widespread, women are often displaced and subjected to additional forms of GBV, including trafficking, forced prostitution and forced marriages. Armed actors, including militias and military forces, frequently exploit the chaos caused by war and the lack of legal accountability to target women, using weapons to enforce their control.

### *Underreporting of GBV in armed contexts*

GBV, particularly in the context of armed violence, often goes underreported due to societal stigmas, fear of retaliation and the normalization of violence in conflict zones. Journalists can help break this silence by reporting on the link between SALW and GBV, giving voice to the victims and encouraging broader societal awareness and action.

### *Weaponization of gender-based threats*

Beyond physical harm, the mere presence of firearms can be used as a tool of intimidation. In many cases, weapons are not only used in actual acts of violence but also serve as a constant threat to silence women and control their behaviour. The psychological terror associated with the threat of armed violence perpetuates gender-based power imbalances, making it harder for women to leave abusive situations or report crimes.

### *Policy implications*

The intersection between SALW and GBV has significant implications for arms control policies. Efforts to curb the proliferation of SALW, such as disarmament initiatives and stricter gun laws, can play a crucial role in reducing instances of GBV. By raising awareness of how firearms contribute to GBV, journalists can play a role in advocating for policies like stricter gun control laws and better enforcement of arms trade treaties that include protections against gendered violence.

The availability and misuse of SALW amplify the dangers women and marginalized groups face in both conflict and non-conflict settings. Addressing this intersection requires a concerted effort to both control the flow of weapons and provide targeted protection for vulnerable populations affected by gender-based violence.

The proliferation of SALW in Albania directly impacts the prevalence and severity of GBV. The availability of firearms increases the lethality of domestic violence incidents and can be used to intimidate and control victims. Addressing this intersection requires integrated policy approaches that focus on both disarmament and the protection of women's rights.

## 2.4 Why report on SALW and GBV?

The intersection between SALW and GBV is a critical, yet often underreported, dimension of violence that affects the most vulnerable populations, particularly women. Your reporting of SALW and GBV can be critical for:

### *Amplifying marginalized voices*

Journalists have a responsibility to give voice to the marginalized, especially survivors of GBV who are often silenced or overlooked in public discourse. The presence of SALW in both conflict and non-conflict settings dramatically increases the risk and severity of violence against women, yet these stories frequently go untold. Reporting on this intersection ensures that the real human cost of armed violence is fully understood and that the experiences of survivors are highlighted.

### *Raising awareness on policy failures*

By investigating and reporting on the connection between SALW and GBV, journalists can expose critical gaps in policy, such as inadequate gun control laws or failures in the justice system to protect women from armed domestic violence. For example, highlighting how firearms in the hands of abusers lead to higher rates of femicide can push for more stringent arms control policies, better enforcement of laws and reforms in gun ownership regulations. Journalists can contribute to holding policymakers accountable and advocating for better protections.

### *Understanding the broader impact of armed violence*

The connection between SALW and GBV is part of the broader issue of armed violence and its social impact. SALW do not only affect combatants or criminals but also have a devastating effect on civilians, particularly women and children. Journalists can provide more comprehensive coverage of conflict and violence, revealing the full scale of the problem and its societal implications.

### *Driving informed public discourse*

As a journalist you play a key role in shaping public discourse. By drawing attention to the intersection of SALW and GBV, you can raise awareness about how the proliferation of weapons fuels gendered violence. This, in turn, can foster more informed debates on arms control, disarmament and gender-sensitive policies. Informed reporting helps the public understand that reducing the availability of SALW can significantly reduce instances of GBV.

Ultimately, your reporting can save lives, influence policy change and amplify the stories of survivors whose voices are often drowned out in discussions about armed violence – all essential for responsible and impactful journalism.



## 2.5 GBV and SALW in Albania

Public awareness campaigns on the dangers of firearms in domestic settings in Albania have been crucial in efforts to reduce the number of weapons in circulation. Albania has also worked to integrate its strategies on SALW control and GBV prevention, recognizing that reducing the availability of firearms is essential for decreasing the incidence of GBV. Additional aspects to consider when reporting on GBV and SALW in Albania: Institutional and governance challenges, legal and ethical considerations and international pressure.

### *Institutional and governance challenges*

- **Corruption and weak institutions:** Corruption remains a pervasive issue in Albania, affecting law enforcement, the judiciary and other institutions critical to addressing SALW and GBV. This undermines public trust and hampers the effective implementation of laws and policies.
- **Limited resources:** Albania faces financial constraints that limit the capacity of government institutions to fully address SALW proliferation and GBV. This includes underfunded police forces, insufficient training programmes and a lack of resources for victim support services.
- **Political polarization instability:** Ongoing political challenges and instability can divert attention and resources away from long-term initiatives aimed at addressing SALW and GBV. The political environment can also affect the consistency and effectiveness of policy implementation.<sup>39</sup>

### *International pressure and compliance*

- **EU accession process:** As Albania continues its path towards European Union membership, it faces pressure to align with EU standards, including those related to arms control and human rights. While this presents an opportunity for reform, meeting these standards requires significant effort and commitment from the Albanian government.
- **International co-operation:** Albania is part of various international agreements and initiatives aimed at controlling SALW and combating GBV. However, the effectiveness of these efforts depends on the country's ability to meet international obligations and maintain active co-operation with global partners.

### *Legal considerations*

- **Legal framework:** Albania has taken steps to strengthen its legal framework to address GBV, including ratifying the Istanbul Convention in 2013, which provides comprehensive measures to prevent violence against women and protect survivors.
- **Shelters and support services:** There has been an increase in the availability of shelters and support services for GBV survivors, often supported by international NGOs and UN agencies. However, access to these services remains limited, particularly in rural areas.

<sup>39</sup> For more on this see: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/albania/freedom-world/2024>



## Confidentiality

Journalists and institutions handling GBV cases are required to maintain confidentiality of survivors and sources to protect survivors from further harm or stigmatization. This duty extends to law enforcement, healthcare providers and social services working with survivors.<sup>40</sup> In Albania, the legal framework for confidentiality, particularly concerning the protection of survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) and journalistic source protection, is governed by several key laws and policies.

Law No. 9970 on Gender Equality, along with other supporting legislation like the Domestic Violence (DV) Law, enforces strict confidentiality provisions for survivors of gender-based violence (GBV). Here's how it applies:

1. **Protection of survivor identity:** Legal and support services are required to protect the confidentiality of survivors' personal data. This applies to shelters, legal clinics and support centres that offer accommodation, legal, medical and psychological support. Service providers must ensure that survivors' information is not shared without their explicit consent.
2. **Anonymous and secure access to services:** Survivors of GBV can access shelters and support services under conditions that protect their identity. For example, shelters like "Vatra" in Albania offer secure housing where survivors remain anonymous to prevent retaliation or re-victimization. Support services also offer access to employment, education and psychological support, ensuring that survivors can rebuild their lives without being exposed to further risk.
3. **Institutional protocols and ethics:** Support centres and NGOs follow strict protocols for managing cases of GBV. The process includes case-by-case evaluations by psychologists, legal advisors and social workers. The confidentiality of survivors is a central component of these protocols, as evidenced by the training and awareness-raising initiatives carried out by government and non-governmental organizations alike.
4. **Legal and policy framework:** The National Strategy for Gender Equality (2021-2030) highlights the importance of maintaining confidentiality as part of survivor-centred approaches to service delivery. The strategy seeks to strengthen services for rehabilitation and reintegration, ensuring they operate in line with the Istanbul Convention, which Albania has ratified. This convention obliges the state to take specific measures to protect survivors' privacy and confidentiality throughout all stages of reporting, service delivery and legal processes.

These confidentiality measures aim to provide survivors with a safe space to seek support, ensuring that their privacy is protected from the moment they access services to the time they are fully reintegrated into society.<sup>41</sup>

When reporting on GBV, journalists must navigate several important legal considerations to ensure their reporting is both ethical and within the boundaries of the law. There are several key factors to keep in mind.

40 Rusi, I., 2012, "The Albanian legal framework on non-discrimination and gender equality in employment relationships". *Academicus International Scientific Journal*, 3(5), 131–142. <https://doi.org/10.7336/academicus.2012.05.12>

41 Gender Alliance for Development Center (GADC), 2021, *Newsletter: Roundtable on GBV and women's rights in Albania*. Retrieved from [https://www.gadc.org.al/media/files/upload/GADC\\_Newsletter\\_Round%20Table\\_June%202021.pdf](https://www.gadc.org.al/media/files/upload/GADC_Newsletter_Round%20Table_June%202021.pdf)

## Defamation laws

Journalists should be cautious when naming individuals involved in GBV cases, especially alleged perpetrators, as this could lead to defamation lawsuits if accusations are not sufficiently verified. Defamation occurs when false information harms someone's reputation. It's crucial to ensure that facts are thoroughly vetted and verified, particularly in sensitive GBV cases. Even if the allegations are true, reporters must ensure their reporting is fair and responsible, especially when the case has not yet gone through legal proceedings.

## Privacy and confidentiality

The privacy rights of survivors are paramount. Most legal frameworks protect the identities of survivors of GBV, particularly in cases involving sexual violence. In many jurisdictions, publishing the names or identifying details of survivors without their consent can lead to legal consequences. Journalists should seek informed consent before interviewing or identifying survivors and even with consent, consider whether disclosure could put them at further risk of harm or re-traumatization.

While Albania does not have a dedicated shield law like in some other countries, its media laws provide journalists with the right to protect their confidential sources. This protection is rooted in the Law on the Right to Information and the Albanian Code of Ethics for Journalists which emphasize source protection as a core principle of press freedom. However, this protection is not absolute. Courts can compel journalists to reveal their sources if it is deemed essential for resolving a criminal investigation. This can place journalists in a difficult position, especially when reporting on issues like GBV.

- The Constitution of the Republic of Albania<sup>42</sup> guarantees freedom of the press and explicitly protects journalists' rights to protect their sources. This is essential for ensuring that whistle-blowers and other informants can come forward without fear of retaliation.
- Additionally, Albanian law aligns with European human rights standards, particularly the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), which protects journalistic confidentiality as part of the right to freedom of expression.<sup>43</sup>
- The Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination (CPD) also plays a role in safeguarding non-discrimination and privacy in various contexts, which may indirectly impact source protection in journalism.<sup>44</sup>
- In addition to legal protections, journalists in Albania are guided by ethical codes set forth by professional associations such as the Albanian Journalists' Association (AJA). These codes emphasize the importance of source protection and confidentiality. Journalists are expected to maintain a high degree of professionalism and discretion, particularly when dealing with sensitive issues like gender-based violence (GBV), organized crime, or political corruption.

## Protection of sources

Ethical principles require journalists to protect their sources, especially GBV survivors, since exposure could subject them to retaliation or harm. The Albanian Media Council emphasizes the ethical duty to shield survivors and whistle-blowers, encouraging journalists to resist external pressures to disclose confidential information. In many cases, survivors of GBV or those who provide information may face retaliation.

42 Constitution of Albania, 2016. [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=C-DL-REF\(2016\)064-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=C-DL-REF(2016)064-e)

43 Defending Media Freedom and Journalists' Safety in Albania - <https://www.ecpmf.eu/defending-media-freedom-and-journalists-safety-in-albania/>

44 Law on Protection from Discrimination in Albania, 2020. <https://www.kmd.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Law-on-Protection-from-Discrimination-Albania.-2020.pdf>

tion or further danger if their identities are exposed. Journalists need to understand the legal protections available to them for shielding the identities of their sources.

### ***Court reporting restrictions***

Journalists need to be aware of legal reporting restrictions when covering court cases involving GBV. Many jurisdictions impose *sub judice* rules, which restrict reporting on certain aspects of ongoing court cases to avoid prejudicing the outcome. Furthermore, there may be gag orders or other restrictions that prevent the publication of certain details, particularly in sensitive cases involving minors or sexual violence.

### ***Legal obligations to report crimes***

In some jurisdictions, journalists who come across information related to GBV may be legally obligated to report it to authorities. While this does not necessarily apply in all cases, it is important for journalists to understand their legal responsibilities, particularly when dealing with vulnerable populations or serious crimes.

By being mindful of these legal considerations, journalists can ensure that their reporting on GBV is both responsible and compliant with the law, while also protecting the rights and dignity of survivors.

## **2.6 Case studies**

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The case studies below demonstrate how sustained and informed media coverage of GBV can lead to significant policy changes, improving legal frameworks and increasing support for survivors. They highlight the critical role journalists play not only in raising awareness but also in influencing government actions and ensuring that policy commitments are effectively implemented. These examples also provide deeper insights into the complexities of reporting on gender-based violence across different contexts. They emphasize the crucial role that journalism plays in bringing these issues to light, influencing public discourse and driving meaningful change.

### ***2.6.1 Case study: Media coverage of gender-based violence in the Balkans***

#### ***Context***

A local newspaper in the Balkans published an in-depth series on gender-based violence (GBV) in rural areas, where traditional norms often suppress the voices of survivors. The series included interviews with survivors, insights from social workers and an examination of how local law enforcement handles GBV cases.

#### ***Challenges***

The journalists had to navigate cultural sensitivities and gain the trust of survivors who were reluctant to share their stories. Additionally, there were challenges in accessing accurate data on GBV incidents due to underreporting and lack of transparency from authorities.

### *Outcome*

The series brought national attention to the issue, leading to public debates and calls for stronger legal protections for GBV survivors. It also encouraged more survivors to come forward and share their experiences, contributing to a broader understanding of the issue.

### *Key lessons*

- The critical role of trust-building when reporting on sensitive issues like GBV.
- How to report on GBV in a way that empowers survivors and encourages public discourse.
- The impact of media coverage in sparking legislative and societal change.

## **2.6.2 Case study: Covering domestic violence in Eastern Europe**

### *Context*

An investigative team from a prominent Eastern European newspaper embarked on a series exposing the prevalence of domestic violence in their country. The series included stories from survivors, interviews with legal experts and an analysis of the systemic failures that allowed domestic violence to persist unchecked.

### *Challenges*

The journalists had to work around cultural stigmas that often-silenced survivors. There was also a lack of official data on domestic violence, making it difficult to quantify the issue and hold authorities accountable. The team faced threats from those who were exposed in the reports, including influential local figures.

### *Outcome*

The series sparked national outrage and led to widespread protests demanding better protections for domestic violence survivors. As a result, the government enacted new legislation that provided stricter penalties for perpetrators and improved support services for victims. The newspaper received multiple awards for its impactful journalism.

## **2.6.3 Case study: South Africa's gender-based violence crisis**

### *Context*

South Africa is grappling with one of the highest rates of GBV globally. In 2023, the South African Police Service (SAPS) reported that over 14,000 women were victims of assault with intent to cause grievous bodily harm between July and September. The pervasive nature of GBV has sparked significant public outcry and calls for stronger government action.

Despite various government interventions, including legal reforms and the establishment of a National Council on GBV, the rates of violence against women remain alarmingly high. This case underscores the need for continuous media engagement in educating the public and holding perpetrators accountable, particularly in countries where patriarchal norms are deeply ingrained.

### *Policy impact*

In response to the growing crisis, the South African government introduced the National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (NSP-GBVF) in 2020, which has seen further implementation in 2023. This plan includes measures such as establishing specialized GBV courts and increasing funding for survivor support services. Media coverage has been pivotal in maintaining public pressure on the government to ensure these policies are effectively implemented.

### *Key lessons*

- The media's role in sustaining public attention on GBV issues can directly influence the implementation of government policies.
- Reporting on GBV must be persistent and highlight not only the incidents but also the gaps in policy enforcement and the need for systemic change.

## **2.6.4 Case study: Domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States**

### *Context*

The COVID-19 pandemic led to a significant increase in domestic violence cases worldwide, including in the United States. For example, New York City saw a 30% rise in domestic violence-related calls to helplines during the 2020 lockdowns, a trend that persisted into 2023.

### *Policy impact*

The surge in domestic violence incidents during the pandemic prompted policy changes at both state and federal levels in the U.S. media coverage of the issue played a crucial role in these developments. One notable policy impact was the inclusion of domestic violence prevention funding in the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, which provided emergency grants to support shelters and other services. This policy response was driven by extensive media reporting that highlighted the increased risks to domestic violence survivors during the pandemic.

### *Key lessons*

- Timely and comprehensive media coverage of GBV during crises can lead to immediate policy responses that address emerging needs.
- Journalists should emphasize the connection between societal challenges (e.g., pandemics) and the exacerbation of GBV to advocate for integrated policy solutions.

## Chapter 3 Reporting on security, SALW and GBV: Best practices

Building compelling narratives around the issues of security, SALW and GBV means focusing on human stories, the impact of illegal weapons on communities and the effectiveness (or lack thereof) of current regulations. This chapter provides some tips on finding and developing story ideas and sources, how to use data effectively, interviewing, trauma-informed reporting and collaborative reporting efforts.

### 3.1 Finding and developing story ideas

Stories about SALW and GBV can be found in many places in your community. Here are some places to start.

#### *Follow local crime reports and court cases*

A good place to start is by monitoring local police reports, court cases and crime statistics related to both SALW and GBV. Many domestic violence cases, especially in regions with high firearm ownership, involve weapons and tracking these cases can lead to investigative stories on the broader implications of SALW availability. Court records often reveal instances where firearms were used in GBV incidents, making it a prime source for data-driven stories.

#### *Investigate arms trafficking routes*

Dig into reports on arms trafficking. These reports can reveal the widespread availability of illegal weapons and how they contribute to violence against women and vulnerable groups. Look for government or NGO reports on arms flows in regions known for high levels of SALW proliferation. Investigating how these weapons reach local communities—especially through black markets—can lead to impactful stories. Pay attention to international organizations like Interpol or the UN that track illicit arms flows and link them to patterns of violence.

#### *Engage with human rights and advocacy groups*

Human rights organizations and NGOs working to combat GBV, such as Amnesty International or Women for Women International, often have reports, case studies and data on how SALW exacerbates violence against women. These organizations can provide leads on untold stories, offer survivor testimonials, or connect journalists with experts. Partnering with such groups can also help you cover disarmament efforts and gun control advocacy linked to reducing GBV. See Annex II for a list of some of these resources and organizations.

#### *Explore conflict and post-conflict zones*

In regions recovering from conflict, there are often large numbers of illegal weapons in circulation. Investigate the aftermath of wars and how the availability of SALW affects women and girls. Post-conflict zones

often experience high levels of GBV and the widespread presence of weapons compounds the violence. Look into disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programmes and their effectiveness in reducing violence against women.

#### *Monitor legislative changes and gun control policies*

Keep an eye on legislation related to firearms and gender-based violence. Changes in gun control laws, especially those involving the restriction of firearms for domestic violence perpetrators, can be an excellent basis for reporting. Track the implementation and enforcement of such policies and examine whether they effectively reduce GBV. Investigating loopholes or failures in enforcement can lead to strong advocacy-focused stories.

#### *Analyse data on femicide and armed domestic violence*

Many countries now collect data on femicide (the killing of women, often in the context of domestic violence). A significant portion of these crimes involves firearms. Investigating national or regional crime data on domestic violence and femicide and how often weapons were used, can reveal important trends and systemic issues. Use publicly available crime data or file Freedom of Information requests where necessary to access more detailed statistics. The right to access public information is guaranteed by the Constitution and further regulated by the Law on the Right to Information, adopted in 2014. This law establishes the legal framework governing access to public information.<sup>45</sup>

#### *Conduct interviews with survivors and experts*

Survivors of gender-based violence who experienced armed violence or intimidation with firearms can provide deeply personal insights into the intersection of SALW and GBV. Additionally, interview experts, such as law enforcement officials, domestic violence advocates and firearm policy analysts, to provide context and authority to your reporting. Always prioritize the safety and privacy of survivors when developing stories.

By employing these strategies, you can uncover compelling stories that highlight the deadly intersection of SALW and GBV, contributing to public awareness and policy discussions aimed at curbing both firearm violence and gender-based violence.

## **3.2 Finding sources**

Finding sources for your stories may be challenging; some sources may be reluctant to speak to media or are simply afraid. However, explaining why the story is important and being persistent can often go a long way to making sources more comfortable about sharing their stories. Below are some potential sources you may want to consider as you seek to build a reliable network of sources that will help provide depth and accuracy to your reporting on SALW and GBV.

#### *Local NGOs and advocacy groups*

Local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that focus on human rights, gender equality and violence prevention are excellent starting points for finding sources. These organizations often have first-hand knowledge of survivors and case studies involving GBV and firearms. Groups like Amnesty International,

<sup>45</sup> See: <https://qbz.gov.al/share/B59X38TeSum1t-1GfSthUA>



Women's Aid and Human Rights Watch often have regional offices or partnerships that can connect you with experts and survivors willing to speak about their experiences. See Annex II for a list of local groups.

#### *Law enforcement and judicial officials*

Law enforcement agencies and judicial systems deal directly with the issues of illegal arms and domestic violence every day. Police officers, investigators, prosecutors and defence lawyers can provide valuable insight into the connection between SALW and GBV. Be cautious about potential biases and always verify statements with additional sources. Court documents, such as affidavits, testimony and judgments from GBV-related cases involving firearms, are often public and can serve as valuable material.

#### *Academics and researchers*

Reach out to academics who specialize in gender studies, criminology, security studies, or arms control. Universities or research institutions often conduct studies on the social impact of SALW or the intersection of firearms and GBV. These scholars can provide data, context and expert opinions. Institutions like the Small Arms Survey or think tanks such as the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) are good sources of data and academic studies. See Annex II for a comprehensive list of local experts.

#### *International organizations*

Global organizations like the United Nations (UN), specifically its agencies such as UN Women, UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and UN Development Programme (UNDP), often collect data on violence against women and arms trafficking. They can connect you with experts and policymakers who specialize in these areas. Their reports and case studies can also provide global or regional data on SALW and GBV.

#### *Survivor networks and support groups*

Many survivor networks and support groups offer safe spaces for individuals affected by GBV. These organizations can provide access to survivors who are willing to share their stories, particularly those who have been threatened or harmed with firearms. Examples include rape crisis Centres, domestic violence shelters and women's refuges. Always approach these sources with sensitivity and respect for their privacy and consent.

#### *Court and police reports*

Public records like court transcripts, police reports and legal filings can provide concrete details of cases involving SALW and GBV. These documents can often be accessed through public records requests or directly from courthouses. They offer factual, legally verified accounts of incidents involving firearms and gender-based violence and they may lead you to additional sources, such as lawyers or witnesses.

#### *Government agencies and legislators*

Government agencies involved in arms control, public safety and gender equality often have access to both data and experts. Reach out to ministries or departments focused on public safety, justice, or women's affairs. Additionally, legislators who are working on gun control or domestic violence laws may provide insight into policy discussions and connect you with other relevant experts.



### 3.3 Using data

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When reporting on SALW and GBV, using data effectively can enhance the depth and credibility of your story. Here are some tips on how to use data in your reporting.

#### *Find credible data sources*

Always use reliable sources for data. International organizations like the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Small Arms Survey and World Health Organization (WHO) often provide accurate and up-to-date information on the prevalence of SALW and GBV. Government statistics, academic research and reports from NGOs such as Amnesty International are also valuable. Make sure the data you are using is from a recent and trustworthy source.

#### *Understand the data context*

Numbers alone don't tell the full story. Understanding why the data was collected, how it was gathered and the limitations of the data is crucial. For example, GBV is often underreported, particularly in conflict zones, which can lead to misleading conclusions if the gaps in data collection are not addressed. Always look at the methodology of the report to understand any biases or constraints.

#### *Use comparisons to highlight key trends*

Data can be more impactful when placed in context. Compare current figures to previous years or to other regions or countries to highlight trends in violence or firearm proliferation. For example, showing how GBV incidents rise in areas with high SALW prevalence can draw a clearer connection between the two issues.

#### *Visualize data for clarity*

Use charts, graphs and infographics to make complex data easier to understand for your audience. Visual tools can help break down complicated statistics and make them more engaging. For instance, a map showing regions with the highest levels of firearm ownership alongside incidents of GBV can visually demonstrate the correlation between the two.

#### *Connect data to human stories*

Data becomes more powerful when combined with personal narratives. Use statistics to frame your story, but make sure to connect it to real-world examples. For instance, citing the number of women killed in domestic violence incidents involving firearms in a particular region alongside a survivor's story makes the issue both data-driven and humanized.

#### *Be cautious of over-simplification*

Avoid drawing over-simplified conclusions from data. Just because SALW and GBV incidents are correlated in a specific area does not mean one directly causes the other. Acknowledge the complexity of these issues, including other contributing factors like socio-economic conditions, political instability, or cultural norms.

#### *Fact-check the data*

Before publishing, ensure that your data is accurate and up to date. Cross-reference the figures from multiple reliable sources to avoid errors. Misinterpreting or using outdated data can undermine the credibility of your reporting.

#### *Localize data*

Where possible, use local or regional data to make your reporting more relevant to your audience. If reporting on GBV and SALW in a particular country or community, include statistics specific to that region rather than relying solely on global averages. This gives your story a sharper focus and greater impact.

### **3.4 Interviewing**

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When conducting interviews for stories related to SALW and GBV, there are a number of key considerations to ensure that your approach is both effective and ethical.

#### *Prepare thoroughly*

Before the interview, research both SALW and GBV thoroughly. Understanding the subject matter will help you ask relevant and insightful questions. If you're speaking with an expert on arms control or a survivor of GBV, you want to come prepared with a strong grasp of the issues. This also helps establish credibility and trust with the interviewee.

#### *Communicate with your editors*

Keep your editors informed: To address any special needs of your source, you need the support of your editors. Make sure they're aware of your interview steps, especially if the process is protracted and talk with them about any ethical problems you anticipate or disclose problems you've encountered.

#### *Be sensitive and respectful*

When interviewing survivors of GBV, it is critical to approach the conversation with empathy and sensitivity. GBV survivors often face emotional and psychological trauma, so ensure that your questions do not retraumatize them. Use trauma-informed approaches—ask open-ended questions, avoid graphic language and let the interviewee lead the conversation. Prioritize the interviewee's comfort and avoid pressing for details they are not comfortable sharing.

#### *Ensure informed consent*

Always obtain informed consent from your sources. At the outset, reach an understanding about how the victim will be identified and if their voice and/or photograph can be used. Explain your goals and prepare your source for what lies ahead. Be willing to address any concerns. Explain to the interviewee how the information will be used, where the story will be published and any potential consequences of the interview being made public. How and when would you be contacting the perpetrator (if known), the authorities, others? If the interview involves a GBV survivor, ensure that they understand their right to remain anonymous or have certain parts of the interview withheld if they wish.

**Challenge**

- Balance the public's right to know with the need to protect vulnerable individuals.

**Strategies to navigate this challenge**

- Use anonymity and pseudonyms if necessary.
- Obtain informed consent.
- Focus on broader systemic issues
- Be sensitive in how you frame the story.

*Protect vulnerable sources*

In interviews with vulnerable individuals, such as survivors of GBV or people living in conflict zones, you must take steps to protect their identity and privacy. Consider using pseudonyms or masking identifying details to ensure their safety. Be mindful that revealing their identity could put them at risk of retaliation from perpetrators or authorities.

*Give your source more control*

Allow your source to dictate the timing and setting of interviews and, if necessary, break them up into several meetings. Your source may want to have someone with her during the interview – a counsellor, a lawyer, a victim advocate, or a friend. You should respect this. If you sense that your source is getting fatigued, stressed or otherwise agitated, stop the interview and reschedule. Do no harm!

*Ask open-ended questions*

Use open-ended questions that allow the interviewee to share their experiences without feeling interrogated. Instead of asking “Did your partner use a weapon?” ask, “Can you describe how firearms affected your situation?” This approach allows the interviewee to offer detailed responses in their own words, making the story richer and more personal.

*Focus on life as well as death*

When covering stories that involve a death, we usually know how the person died. We don't know much about their life before then. Ask questions about the person's life. This ensures that we humanize.

*Be mindful of power dynamics*

In interviews related to both SALW and GBV, there may be inherent power dynamics between the interviewer and interviewee, especially if the interviewee is a survivor. Acknowledge these dynamics by ensuring that the interviewee has control over the conversation. Avoid interrupting and give them the space and time to answer questions in their own way.

*Cross-check and verify information*

When interviewing experts, officials, or advocates, ensure that you cross-check their claims and statistics. GBV and SALW issues often involve sensitive data and inaccurate reporting can mislead your audience or harm your sources. Double-check any factual claims or statistics with secondary sources like official reports or research institutions such as the Small Arms Survey.

### *Provide support resources*

If you are interviewing a GBV survivor, consider offering contact information for support services, such as local domestic violence shelters or counselling services. Letting them know where they can find help, if needed, is a good way to show care and responsibility.

## **3.5 Trauma-informed reporting**

To ensure that reporting on SALW and GBV is trauma-informed, journalists must approach their work with an understanding of how traumatic events affect survivors and shape their interactions with the media. By applying these trauma-informed practices, journalists can ensure that their reporting on SALW and GBV is both responsible and respectful, minimizing harm while amplifying the voices of survivors.

Here are key strategies to ensure your reporting is trauma sensitive.

### *Be sensitive in language and framing*

The language used in trauma-informed reporting should be neutral, respectful and empowering. Avoid sensationalizing violence or reducing survivors to their trauma. Instead of focusing solely on their victimization, highlight their resilience, strength and efforts to regain control over their lives. Avoid graphic details and triggering language that may retraumatize both survivors and readers who have experienced similar violence.

### *Survivor, victim or something else?*

One of the first challenges journalists are likely to face when reporting on GBV is how to refer to someone who has been subjected to GBV. The language used in reporting GBV should be careful and precise. Avoid victim-blaming narratives and ensure that headlines and stories do not reinforce harmful stereotypes or misconceptions. Some journalists advise against using the word victim while also cautioning against assuming the word survivor is the best alternative. So, what should a journalist do? Listen to the language interviewees use to define themselves and follow suit. You can also ask your source what their preference would be.

The same applies to the term perpetrator. Many people are abused by a relative or acquaintance and therefore refer to their perpetrator by the term they've always known them as — their father, their uncle, their acquaintance. For example, following a source's lead on language will help you avoid categorizing them. It will result in a more accurate, nuanced story. And it will lead your reporting away from an abstract victim-perpetrator binary, allowing you to interrogate the complex realities that are often inherent to sexual violence and its aftermath.

#### **Challenge**

- Avoid reinforcing harmful stereotypes or victim-blaming narratives.

#### **Strategies to navigate this challenge**

- Focus on holding perpetrators and systems accountable. Include the voices of survivors, advocates, and experts while ensuring that survivors' dignity and privacy are respected at all times.

### *Give survivors control of the narrative*

Survivors should have agency over how their stories are told. Let them frame their experiences in their own words and control which parts of their stories are shared publicly. Acknowledge that trauma can affect memory and cognition, so allow space for inconsistencies and refrain from pressuring survivors for specific details or timelines. Follow up to give them the chance to correct any details they might wish to change after reflection.

### *Create a safe and comfortable environment*

When interviewing survivors, create an environment that feels safe and supportive. This can involve choosing a comfortable, private location for the interview and allowing for frequent breaks. Approach each conversation with empathy and patience, recognizing that trauma can affect the pace and flow of communication. Always reassure survivors that they are not obligated to answer any question they feel uncomfortable with.

### *Avoid re-traumatization*

Be mindful of the potential for re-traumatization in your reporting. Repeatedly asking survivors to relive their trauma or delving into graphic details can cause emotional harm. Focus on empowering questions that allow survivors to reflect on their recovery, the support systems they have used and any insights they wish to share with others. Give them space to talk about the broader systemic issues they think are important, such as legal reforms or societal attitudes.

#### **Challenge**

- Ensure that survivors are not re-traumatized.

#### **Strategies to navigate this challenge**

- Avoid invasive or insensitive reporting practices.
- Use survivor-centred language.
- Secure informed consent for interviews.
- Avoid sensationalism.

### *Acknowledge the limits of your role*

Recognize that as a journalist, you are not a therapist or counsellor. Your role is to report, not to provide psychological support. However, you can connect survivors with appropriate resources, such as local GBV shelters, legal aid, or counselling services. If a survivor shows signs of distress during an interview, be prepared to pause the conversation and offer assistance, including access to support services.

### *Check for potential harms before publishing*

Before publishing a story, assess whether any part of the report might put the survivor at risk of further harm, including retaliation, stigmatization, or harassment. Consider whether details such as location, family dynamics, or identifying characteristics should be withheld to protect their privacy and safety. Consult with the survivor if there are any changes or edits that impact the sensitive information they shared.

### *Collaborate with trauma experts*

When covering complex topics such as GBV and SALW, consult with trauma experts such as psychologists, counsellors, or social workers to gain insights into how trauma affects individuals and how best to frame your reporting. These experts can offer guidance on interviewing techniques and help ensure that your reporting does not inadvertently harm survivors.

### *Practice self-care*

Covering GBV can be difficult emotionally, so it is important to take care of yourself. Talk to colleagues about the stories you are working on. This provides you not only with an outlet but also gives you an opportunity to discuss and understand the best ways to tell your stories. But on your days off, disconnect yourself from your work. Do what you enjoy: Spend time with family or friends, get some exercise and turn off your computer. You may also want to create a peer support group. You will experience emotional reactions when dealing repeatedly with traumatized victims. Whether it's an editor, fellow reporter, family member or good friend, choose someone with whom you can share your feelings. If you need professional help, seek it out.

## **3.6 Collaborative reporting**

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Collaborative reporting can be a powerful tool in your arsenal of covering GBV and SALW for several reasons.

### *Access to diverse expertise*

SALW and GBV issues are complex and often intersect with politics, human rights, law enforcement and public health. Collaborative reporting allows journalists to pool their expertise in these areas, ensuring the story is well-rounded. For example, a journalist specializing in conflict zones might team up with a GBV expert to highlight how the proliferation of illegal firearms exacerbates violence against women. Collaborating with local journalists or NGOs also ensures access to insights about cultural and legal contexts that may be difficult for external reporters to fully understand.

### *Broader geographic reach*

SALW trafficking and GBV are often transnational issues, with arms smuggling routes crossing borders and affecting multiple regions. Collaborative reporting enables journalists to cover these stories from different locations simultaneously, providing a comprehensive view of the issue. For example, one team may focus on how arms flow through conflict zones in Africa, while another investigates how those same weapons reach criminal groups in Europe. This broader geographic reach enriches the story and captures the global scale of the problem.

### *Stronger investigative capacity*

Collaborative reporting combines the investigative resources of multiple journalists or news organizations, making it easier to conduct in-depth investigations. Investigating illegal arms trade or exposing how SALW contribute to GBV often requires access to hard-to-obtain data, such as arms trafficking records, court cases, or testimony from survivors. Working together allows journalists to share data, resources and contacts, making it more likely to uncover hidden networks and connections.

### *Shared risks and resources*

Reporting on sensitive topics like SALW and GBV can involve significant risks, particularly when investigating powerful criminal networks or governments. Collaborating allows journalists to share the burden of these risks, making it safer to tackle sensitive stories. Shared financial and technical resources can also support a deeper investigation, particularly in regions where independent journalism is underfunded or restricted.

### *Amplifying impact*

Collaborative reporting can amplify the reach and impact of stories by allowing multiple media outlets to publish the findings simultaneously. This co-ordinated approach can ensure that the story reaches diverse audiences and has a greater impact on public awareness, policy discussions, or international advocacy efforts. In the context of SALW and GBV, such co-ordinated reporting can pressure governments and international bodies to act on arms control and gender violence issues.

So, you are now convinced that you'd like to pursue a collaborative reporting project on GBV and SALW, but how to go about it? What are some best practices? Here are some key strategies for successful collaborations.

### *Define clear roles and responsibilities*

At the outset, ensure each journalist or team member has a clear understanding of their role in the project. Some team members might focus on data collection, others on interviews with survivors and still others on analysing policies related to SALW. Dividing responsibilities according to expertise not only streamlines the process but also ensures the project covers multiple angles efficiently.

### *Establish a central research and communication hub*

For collaborative projects involving multiple journalists, particularly from different regions or organizations, setting up a centralized digital platform for communication, file sharing and updates is crucial. Tools like Slack, Trello or Google Workspace can help teams share progress in real time, provide feedback and stay aligned on project goals. This is especially useful when working across time zones or regions, such as in covering global issues like SALW and GBV.

### *Leverage local expertise*

When reporting on international SALW and GBV issues, collaborate with local journalists, NGOs and advocates who have a deeper understanding of the cultural and legal context. They can provide invaluable insights, help navigate local customs and connect with sources that may be hard to access otherwise. This approach ensures that the project is both accurate and culturally sensitive.

### *Share data and resources*

Data-driven stories often require substantial resources, from accessing databases to interpreting statistics. Sharing resources, such as access to data on arms flows or GBV statistics, can ensure that each reporter has access to the same foundational information. Collaborative tools like Datawrapper or Flourish allow multiple journalists to work together on data visualizations, enhancing the storytelling.

### *Ensure ethical and trauma-informed reporting*

When covering sensitive topics like GBV, all collaborators should be aligned on ethical guidelines. Discuss trauma-informed approaches to interviewing survivors and handling sensitive material, ensuring that all journalists are working under the same ethical framework to protect the dignity and safety of the sources.

### *Regular check-ins and feedback loops*

Set up regular meetings or check-ins to review the progress of the project, discuss any challenges and provide feedback. This keeps the project on track and allows for adjustments if new findings emerge. Continuous communication ensures that all collaborators are aligned on the story's narrative and goals.

### *Collaborate across platforms*

If the project is being distributed across multiple outlets—such as print, online and broadcast—ensure that each format is optimized. Collaborators should be aware of the different platforms' needs and work together to adapt the content for different audiences. A multimedia approach—combining written reports, video documentaries and data visualizations—can broaden the reach and impact of the project.

### *Consider Co-bylines and shared credit*

Transparency about authorship and credit is crucial in collaborative projects. Discuss how credit will be shared among team members or media outlets, especially if different outlets are publishing parts of the investigation. Providing co-bylines and shared credits ensures recognition of each contributor's work and encourages future collaborations.

## **3.7 Case studies**

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These case studies provide concrete examples of how journalists can tackle the complex and often dangerous task of reporting on SALW, security and gender-based violence. Each case provides insights into the challenges faced, the strategies employed and the impact that rigorous, ethical journalism can have on society.

### **3.7.1 Case study: Investigative reporting on illegal arms trafficking in the Balkans**

#### **Context**

A team of investigative journalists from the Balkans collaborated across borders to uncover a complex network of illegal arms trafficking that supplied weapons to criminal organizations across Europe. Their work involved extensive research into public records, tracking arms shipments and interviewing insiders.

#### **Challenges**

The journalists faced significant risks, including threats to their safety and legal challenges from those implicated in their reports. They also struggled with limited access to official data and the need to protect sensitive sources.



## Outcome

The investigation led to increased scrutiny of the arms trade in the region, prompting government crackdowns on illegal arms dealers and a tightening of regulations around arms exports. The series of reports was also recognized with several international journalism awards.

## Key lessons

- The importance of cross-border collaboration in tackling global issues like arms trafficking.
- Strategies for protecting sources and ensuring the safety of journalists in high-risk investigations.
- The role of investigative journalism in influencing policy and legal reform.

### **3.7.2 Case study: Collaborative reporting on SALW and human rights violations in Africa**

#### Context

A coalition of African journalists worked together to investigate the link between SALW proliferation and human rights violations in conflict zones. Their reporting highlighted how the easy availability of small arms exacerbated violence against civilians, particularly in regions with weak governance.

#### Challenges

The reporters had to operate in dangerous conflict zones, often with limited access to reliable information and communication. They also faced ethical dilemmas in reporting on violence while ensuring the safety of affected communities.

#### Outcome

The series of reports garnered international attention, leading to increased support for disarmament initiatives and stronger international pressure on governments to control the flow of arms. It also sparked global conversations about the humanitarian impact of SALW.

#### Key lessons

- The power of collaborative reporting in shedding light on underreported global issues.
- How to navigate ethical challenges in conflict reporting.
- The influence of media in shaping international policy and humanitarian responses.

### **3.7.3 Case study: Exposing human trafficking and gender-based violence in Southeast Asia**

#### Context

A group of journalists from Southeast Asia partnered with international NGOs to expose the link between human trafficking and gender-based violence. Their investigation focused on how trafficked women were subjected to severe violence and exploitation, often with little hope of escape or justice.

## Challenges

The journalists had to navigate the dangers of working in regions controlled by traffickers and corrupt officials. They also had to gain the trust of trafficking survivors, many of whom were traumatized and fearful of further harm. Additionally, the investigation required extensive co-ordination with NGOs to provide support for the survivors featured in the stories.

## Outcome

The reports brought international attention to the issue, leading to increased efforts by governments and international organizations to combat human trafficking. The series also helped rescue several victims and provided them with legal and psychological support. It received global recognition for its contribution to human rights journalism.

## Key lessons

- The importance of collaboration between journalists and NGOs in tackling complex issues like human trafficking.
- How to balance the need for impactful reporting with the ethical responsibility to protect vulnerable individuals.
- The role of international media in amplifying local issues and driving global action.

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## Local resources

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There are numerous human rights organizations and NGOs that are working in this space. Here are just some of the local resources.

**The Albanian Women Empower Network (AWEN)** Established July 2009), AWEN is a national network of eight non-profit organizations of women's rights organizations that work together to empower girls and women socially, economically and politically to participate and realize their rights [<http://www.awenetwork.org>].

**People's Advocate/Ombudsman** [<https://www.avokatipopullit.gov.al>]

**Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination** [<https://www.kmd.al/>]

**U.S. Department of State's** country reports on human rights practices: Albania [<https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/>].

**The Albanian Helsinki Committee (AHC)** reports on the prevalence of domestic violence and the use of firearms in such incidents. [<https://ahc.org.al/en/>].

**The UN Women Albania** office has been actively involved in addressing gender-based violence, including the impact of SALW on women's safety. [<https://albania.unwomen.org/en>].

**National Population Survey 2018: Violence Against Women and Girls in Albania** by INSTAT and UN Women [<https://data.unwomen.org/publications/national-population-survey-2018-violence-against-women-and-girls-albania>]

**Domestic Violence Survey 2013** by INSTAT and UNDP. [<https://www.instat.gov.al/en/about-us/activities/other/domestic-violence-survey-2013/>]

**Streha Center** [<https://www.strehacenter.org>]

**Albanian Women in Audiovisual** [See here: <https://albanianwomaninaudiovisual.com>]

**Help for Children Foundation** [<https://www.facebook.com/ndihmeperfemijet>]

**Open Mind Spectrum Albania (OMSA)**. [<https://resourcecentre.al/sq/directory-dir-cso/listing/open-mind-spectrum-albania-omsa>]

**Vatra Psycho-Social Center** [<https://qendravatra.org.al>]

**Albanian Center for Population and Development** [<https://acpd.org.al>]

**Human Rights in Democracy Center** [<https://www.hrdc.al/index.php/en>]

**Gender Alliance Center for Development** [<https://www.gadc.org.al>]

**Albanian National Association of Deaf People** [<https://smartbalkansproject.org/grants/albanian-national-association-of-the-deaf>]

**Women Peace Security Association** [<https://www.siguria-paqja.al>]

**Different and Equal.** [<https://differentandequal.org/en>]

For further information on local human rights organizations and NGOs, consult the **National Resource Centre for Civil Society in Albania**, a platform of information and service provision which contributes to the strengthening of civil society's capacities to be more effective, transparent, accountable and independent actors and to the creation of an enabling environment for the civil society, participatory democracy and the integration process of Albania into the European Union. The platform is managed by Partners Albania: National Resource Centre for Civil Society in Albania

## Organizations

**Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM):** Based in Tirana, IDM conducts research on security sector reform, governance and the role of civil society in Albania. Their work often intersects with issues of arms control and community safety. [<https://idmalbania.org>]

**Albanian Institute for International Studies (AIIS):** A non-governmental, non-profit research and policy institute providing in-depth analysis on Albania's international relations, security policies and defense matters. [<https://www.aiis-albania.org>]

**Centre for South East European Studies (CSEES):** Engages in research and policy analysis on security sector reform, governance and civil society's role in Southeast Europe, including Albania. [<https://wbc-rti.info/object/organisation/16844.html>]

## Experts

**Jana Arsovska, PhD:** An Associate Professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, holding a Ph.D. in Criminology. She has extensively studied Albanian organized crime, with research topics including organized crime, corruption and female offenders. Her work offers critical insights into criminology and security studies related to Albania. [<https://www.jjay.cuny.edu/faculty/jana-arsovska>]

**Fabian Zhilla, PhD:** A Fulbright Visiting Scholar at the Center for European Studies at Harvard University and a Law & Ethics lecturer at the Canadian Institute of Technology in Albania. He leads the "Study of Organized Crime" Research Unit at the Open Society Foundation for Albania. His research focuses on organized crime, financial crime, cybercrime and terrorism in the Western Balkans, with an emphasis on the interplay between organized crime and non-state actors in new democracies. [<https://globalinitiative.net/profile/fabian-zhilla>]

**Blendi Kajsiiu, PhD:** An Associate Professor at the Faculty of Law and Political Science, University of Antioquia, Medellin, Colombia. He holds a Ph.D. in Ideology and Discourse Analysis from the University of Essex, UK. His research covers anti-corruption discourses, populism, ideology and Albanian and Colombian politics. [<https://independent.academia.edu/BLENDIKAJSIU>]



**Iris Luarasi, PhD:** An Albanian academic and researcher, she specializes in issues related to gender equality, women's rights and social justice. She is known for her work in gender studies and has contributed to the development of policies and programmes focused on GBV and women's empowerment in Albania. [<https://gov-al.academia.edu/IrisLuarasi>]

**Agron Sojati:** A prominent Albanian expert in security, law enforcement and governance. He has held key positions focusing on security sector reform, counterterrorism and regional co-operation and has participated in initiatives addressing SALW control in Albania and the Western Balkans. [<https://wb-iisg.com/staff/agron-sojati-head-of-iisg-secretariat>]

**Besfort Lamallari:** Deputy Minister of Interior since October 2017, Lamallari is a criminologist with a Master of Science in Criminology and Criminal Justice from the University of Oxford. His research includes organized crime, human trafficking and crime science, with contributions like *Religious Radicalism and Violent Extremism in Albania*. [<https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Besfort-Lamallari>]

**Agustela Nini-Pavli:** A researcher with significant experience in gender equality, she offers technical advice to governments to develop strategies and improve legislation. She has worked extensively with UN Women, contributing her expertise in gender mainstreaming and legal reforms including strategies for combating GBV and promoting women's rights. [<https://albania.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2017/09/experts-take-agustela-nini-pavli-form-un-women>]

**Albert Rakipi, PhD:** Executive Director of AIIS, Rakipi is an expert in international relations, security studies and governance. His work focuses on Albania's foreign policy, regional co-operation and its integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. [<https://www.aiis-albania.org/?q=node/42>]

**Dr. Elton Skëndaj:** An academic specializing in democratization, state-building and governance in Southeastern Europe. He holds a Ph.D. in Government from Cornell University and has researched the role of international actors in fostering democracy in post-conflict societies. [<https://eltonskendaj.com>]

**Enika Abazi, PhD:** A researcher in international relations, security studies and regional geopolitics of the Western Balkans. Her work includes studies on state-building, regional security dynamics and conflict resolution in post-communist societies. [<https://cv.hal.science/enika-abazi>]



## Websites and Resources

- Center for Peace and Disarmament Education: [www.cpde.net](http://www.cpde.net)
- Saferworld: [www.saferworld.org.uk](http://www.saferworld.org.uk)
- Centre for South-East European Studies: <http://www.csees.net>
- Committee for Nationwide Reconciliation: [www.pajtimi.com](http://www.pajtimi.com)
- Institute for War and Peace Reporting: Balkan Crisis Reports: <http://www.iwpr.net/>
- NISAT Databases: [www.nisat.org](http://www.nisat.org)
- Transparency International (Corruption Perception Index): <https://www.transparency.org>





