

The Legal-Illicit Link: Global Small Arms Transfers

TABLE 3.3 National export reports and analogous official data

Country	Data on value of total small arms exports?	Value of small arms exports disaggregated by country?	Quantity of small arms exported disaggregated by country?	Language	Available on Internet?
Australia	no	no	no	English	yes
Austria	yes	by region	no	English, German	no
Belgium	yes	no	no	French, Flemish	yes
Canada	yes	yes	no	English, French	yes
Czech Republic	yes	no	no	English	no
Denmark	no*	no	no	Danish	yes
Finland	yes	yes	no	English	yes
France	yes	yes	yes	French	yes
Germany	yes	yes	no	German	yes
India	partial	no	no	English	yes
Ireland	no*	no	no	English	yes
Italy	yes	no	no	Italian	no
Netherlands	yes	no	no	English, Dutch	yes
Norway	yes	no	no	Norwegian	yes
Portugal	yes	yes	no	Portuguese	no
Slovak Republic	yes	no	no	English	no
South Africa	yes	yes	no	English	yes
South Korea	yes	no	no	English	yes
Spain	yes	no	no	Spanish	no
Sweden	yes	no	no	English	yes
Switzerland	yes	yes	no	French, German	yes
United Kingdom	yes	no	yes	English	yes
United States	yes	yes	yes	English	yes

*Data given on quantity of export licences issued for small arms

According to customs data, exports of pistols and revolvers worldwide decreased substantially from 1995 to 1999.



Exhibitors and visitors shake hands over small arms at an aerospace technology trade show open to the public. The vast majority of small arms sales is legal.

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Roughly 80 to 90 per cent of the global trade in small arms, or approximately USD 4 billion worth of transactions annually, is legal. This trade supplies those states and individuals that arm themselves rightfully for defence, security, or sport. Yet small arms are also used in acts of violence, crime, and human rights abuses that hinder development and democracy, and contribute to regional instability and insecurity. The illicit trade in small arms, which probably accounts for no more than an additional USD 1 billion annually, is one way in which various actors can obtain small arms for misuse.

In terms of the legal trade, an analysis of national customs data shows that certain sectors of the global small arms trade (specifically pistols and hunting rifles) appear to have declined since 1995. However, no such decline can be detected in the global trade in military-style small arms. The top exporters of small arms in 2000 (the latest year for which data is available), in terms of value, were the US and the Russian Federation.

Official statistics on the international small arms trade are far from complete. However, about 50 per cent of the estimated total legal trade (more than USD 2 billion) can be identified from both official and unofficial sources. While there have been significant improvements in transparency in the global small arms trade in recent years, a large number of exporting countries still do not provide meaningful data on their small arms exports. Such data is essential for public and parliamentary oversight of small arms transfers. Oversight is one of the key elements necessary to minimize the diversion of small arms from legal to illicit channels.

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Small arms are diverted from legal to illicit markets in the following ways:

- *Direct government supplies (sponsorship) of arms to non-state actors:* Government patronage is the leading source of arms for most non-state actors.
- *Violations of arms embargoes:* Preliminary research shows that at least 54 countries have been directly or indirectly linked to transfers of small arms in violation of international arms embargoes.
- *Violations of end-user undertakings:* Typical end-user violations include the re-transfers of small arms shipments in violation of a non-transfer pledge, covering up the identity of the real end-user, and forging or purchasing false end-user certificates.
- *The ant trade:* The ant trade is the process by which arms are bought legally in one country and then smuggled in small increments, sometimes one at a time, into another country. This trade occurs frequently on the US-Mexican border and the Brazilian-Paraguayan border.
- *Theft:* from state arsenals or private individuals, including corrupt officials stealing from the stockpiles under their responsibility, is another way legal weapons enter the illicit trade. This also includes theft as a result of the collapse of a state, such as in Albania or Somalia.

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Once small arms are diverted into the illicit market, they continue to circulate, moving from one region of instability or conflict to another, fuelled by demand and the profit motives of traffickers. To a lesser extent, illicit craft production of small arms also contributes to the quantity of weapons available in the illicit market. In general, once weapons enter the illicit market they stay there until they are confiscated, collected, and/or destroyed.

There is a growing amount of evidence of the links between the legal and illicit trade in small arms. Therefore, increasing transparency in the legal trade in small arms will help to identify how weapons are diverted into illicit markets. A key question is: Are governments and the international community willing to monitor and control the legal trade in small arms in order to prevent diversion, and thereby combat the illicit trade?



An arms dealer in Darra, Pakistan, a town known for its illicit production of small arms. Darra's arms are believed to reach non-state actors in India, the Taliban, the IRA, and insurgency groups in Kashmir and the Middle East.