

**Submission to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for the report on civilian acquisition, possession and use of firearms by children and youth mandated by Human Rights Council resolution 45/13.**

**19 October 2021**

## INTRODUCTION

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) continues to welcome the Human Rights Council's (HRC) growing efforts to link human rights perspectives and concerns with arms control and disarmament efforts. In this respect, we welcome the HRC's eight resolutions since 2013 strengthening the links between the protection of human rights and disarmament<sup>1</sup> and related reports by the High Commissioner for Human Rights.<sup>2</sup>

Our submission reflects WILPF's long history of cross-cutting work in the areas of disarmament, human rights, and women, peace and security, as well as our more recent work on transforming militarised masculinities.

In early 2021, the WILPF International Secretariat (hereinafter, WILPF) circulated a survey to its membership in order to obtain information in support of this submission. WILPF received responses from WILPF Sections and partners working on and/or living in Colombia, Cameroon, Iraq, Lebanon, Nigeria, Palestine, and Syria on the topic of children and youth and firearms. Additional input was received from an informal partner organisation in Italy, and partners to WILPF's project "Countering Militarised Masculinities, Mobilising Men for Feminist Peace." These contributions are reflected throughout the report, and are supplemented with relevant literature and previous work and research undertaken by WILPF.

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<sup>1</sup> Impact of arms transfers on human rights in armed conflicts A/HRC/RES/24/35, 8 October 2013; Human rights and the regulation of civilian acquisition, possession and use of firearms, A/HRC/RES/26/1, 16 July 2014; Human rights and the regulation of civilian acquisition, possession and use of firearms A/HRC/RES/29/10, 22 July 2015; Impact of arms transfers on human rights, A/HRC/RES/32/12, 15 July 2016; Human rights and the regulation of civilian acquisition, possession and use of firearms, A/HRC/RES/38/10, 18 July 2018; Impact of arms transfers on human rights, A/HRC/RES/41/20, 22 July 2019; Human rights and the regulation of civilian acquisition, possession, and use of firearms, A/HRC/RES/45/13, 12 October 2020; Impact of arms transfers on human rights, A/HRC/RES/47/17, 26 July 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Human rights and the regulation of civilian acquisition, possession and use of firearms, A/HRC/32/21, 15 April 2016; Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Impact of arms transfers on the enjoyment of human rights, A/HRC/35/8 3 May 2017; Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Impact of civilian acquisition, possession and use of firearms on civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, A/HRC/42/21, 3 July 2019, Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Impact of arms transfers on human rights, A/HRC/44/29, 19 June 2020.

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## KEY TERMS

In the following, the term “firearms” will be understood as defined in the High Commissioner’s report of 2016.<sup>3</sup> The terms firearms, small arms, or small arms and light weapons (SALW) will therefore be used interchangeably.

Moreover, because “civilian” is a term that comes out of international humanitarian law (IHL), we understand a civilian to be any person who is both (1) not a member of a country’s military and (2) not a member of a non-state armed group currently engaged in violence that rises to the level of non-international armed conflict under IHL.<sup>4</sup>

In line with the call for submissions from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, references to children and youth in the present submission refer to persons who are 29 years old and under.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> OHCHR, Human rights and the regulation of civilian acquisition, possession and use of firearms, A/HRC/32/21, 15 April 2016, paragraph 4.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, rules 4 and 5 in Jean-Marie Henckarts and Louise Doswald-Beck, “Customary International Humanitarian Law, Volume I: Rules,” International Committee of the Red Cross, Cambridge, 2005, <https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/other/customary-international-humanitarian-law-i-icrc-eng.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> See Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 1, defining a “child” as “every human being below the age of eighteen” and Security Council Resolution 2250, preamble, defining “youth” as “persons of the age of 18-29 years old”.

## RESPONSE TO QUESTION 1

### A) IMPACTS OF CIVILIAN ACQUISITION, POSSESSION AND USE OF FIREARMS BY CHILDREN AND YOUTH ON THE ENJOYMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The acquisition, possession, and use of firearms by any person, from legal owners and law enforcement officials to persons illegally possessing and using firearms, including children and youth, can have devastating impacts on the enjoyment of a wide range of human rights.

As already indicated in WILPF's submission to the 2016 High Commissioner's report on the impact of firearms on civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights as well as WILPF's submission to the 2020 OHCHR report on arms transfers,<sup>6</sup> there has indeed been a growing recognition by UN human rights bodies, including the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), the Human Rights Council, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (the CEDAW Committee), the Human Rights Committee, and the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) that firearms, including through arms transfers, can have a profound impact on the enjoyment of civil and political as well as economic, social, and cultural rights.

WILPF has long argued and demonstrated that as long as firearms exist, legally or illegally, they will pose a threat to every single human right. For an overview of human rights impacts of firearms we would like to refer OHCHR to WILPF's past submissions to OHCHR reports, referenced below, on this topic. WILPF has produced significant research on various negative impacts on human rights posed by different types of conventional weapons, including firearms, with particular focus on the gendered impacts of firearms.<sup>7</sup> WILPF also contributed to the OHCHR's reports on the regulation of civilian acquisition, possession and use of firearms in 2016,<sup>8</sup> the impact of arms transfers on human rights in 2017,<sup>9</sup> the impact of firearms on civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights in 2019,<sup>10</sup> and the impact of diversion of arms and unregulated or illicit arms transfers on the human rights of women

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<sup>6</sup> Please see for a full list of human rights mechanism references: Submission from the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the impact of diversion of arms and unregulated or illicit arms transfers on the human rights of women and girls, April 2020, pp. 3-5, [https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/WILPF\\_OHCHR\\_submission\\_April2020\\_Final.pdf](https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/WILPF_OHCHR_submission_April2020_Final.pdf) and Submission from the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights of civilian acquisition, possession and use of firearms on civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, 19 February 2019, [https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/WILPF\\_Submission\\_Firearms\\_Human\\_Rights\\_Feb2019.pdf](https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/WILPF_Submission_Firearms_Human_Rights_Feb2019.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> See for example here for a collection of publications: Challenging the arms trade, Reaching Critical Will of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), <http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/resources/publications-and-research/research-projects/10738-challenging-the-arms-trade>.

<sup>8</sup> Submission by WILPF Cameroon, 10 December 2015, <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/RuleOfLaw/CivilianAcquisition/NGOs/WILPF.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Impact of arms transfers on the enjoyment of human rights, A/HRC/35/8 3 May 2017. See also WILPF's submission here:

<https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/RuleOfLaw/ArmsTransfers/WomensInternationalLeaguePeaceAndFreedom.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Submission from the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights of civilian acquisition, possession and use of firearms on civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, 19 February 2019, [https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/WILPF\\_Submission\\_Firearms\\_Human\\_Rights\\_Feb2019.pdf](https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/WILPF_Submission_Firearms_Human_Rights_Feb2019.pdf).

and girls in 2020.<sup>11</sup> WILPF has drawn attention to the impact of firearms on human rights and gender-based violence,<sup>12</sup> as well as arms transfers on human rights and gender-based violence in recipient countries in a number of submissions to UN human rights bodies.<sup>13</sup> WILPF would also like to refer to the High Commissioner's report of 2016 providing a brief but rich overview of major impacts of firearms on human rights.<sup>14</sup>

Testimonies from WILPF Sections and partners surveyed offer some concrete examples of how specific human rights are impacted. All of them affirmed that the acquisition, possession, and use of firearms by children and youth present significant challenges in the contexts that they are working on, including Iraq, Syria, Nigeria, Colombia, Cameroon, Palestine, and Lebanon. Specifically, WILPF Cameroon said that armed youth deprive other people, including other youth of a vast range of human rights. It stressed that firearms possession and use by children and youth impacts on individuals' right to political participation during electoral processes, either as voters or as candidates. A few of these cases have also been documented by Human Rights Watch.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, in relation to the right to political participation, WILPF partners in Syria observed that "the voice of truth and democracy is lowered, while the voice of firearms and its power is the one that is heard."

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<sup>11</sup> Women's International League for Peace and Freedom to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the impact of diversion of arms and unregulated or illicit arms transfers on the human rights of women and girls, April 2020, [https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/WILPF\\_OHCHR\\_submission\\_April2020\\_Final.pdf](https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/WILPF_OHCHR_submission_April2020_Final.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> See for instance this non-exhaustive list:

'Submission to the CEDAW Committee, pre-session Working Group (1-5 March 2021) List of issues prior to reporting (LOIPR) for Italy, which presents detailed information on the documented impact of firearms on violence against women, especially femicides, as well as filicides i.e. deliberate acts of parents killing their own children, [https://www.wilpf.org/wilpf\\_statements/submission-to-the-cedaw-committee-pre-session-on-italy/](https://www.wilpf.org/wilpf_statements/submission-to-the-cedaw-committee-pre-session-on-italy/).

Joint submission to the UPR of Lebanon (July 2020) which includes a section on the "Gendered impacts of small arms proliferation", [https://www.wilpf.org/wilpf\\_statements/joint-submission-for-the-upr-of-lebanon-january-february-2021/](https://www.wilpf.org/wilpf_statements/joint-submission-for-the-upr-of-lebanon-january-february-2021/)  
'Implementing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda for Sustainable Peace in Colombia  
Submission to the CEDAW Committee 72nd session (February 2019), '[https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/COLOMBIA\\_WILPF\\_report\\_CEDAW\\_JAN2019.pdf](https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/COLOMBIA_WILPF_report_CEDAW_JAN2019.pdf);

Submission to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Review of Germany, 64th session (24-12 October), August 2018, [https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Germany\\_WILPF\\_CESCR-Submission\\_2018.pdf](https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Germany_WILPF_CESCR-Submission_2018.pdf);  
"Women, Peace and Security, A review of Germany's National Action Plan 1325," [https://wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Germany-UPR\\_FINAL\\_WEB.pdf](https://wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Germany-UPR_FINAL_WEB.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> See for example this non-exhaustive list:

'The impact of the UK's arms transfers and military spending on women's rights', joint submission by Christian Aid, the Quakers in Britain and WILPF to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 72nd session, February 2019, <https://www.wilpf.org/portfolio-items/the-impact-of-the-uks-arms-transfers-and-military-spending-on-womens-rights/>;

'The impact of Germany's arms transfers on economic, social and cultural rights', joint submission by WILPF and the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 64th session, August 2018, [https://wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/CESCR\\_Germany\\_-Jt-ECCHR-WILPF-submission-.pdf](https://wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/CESCR_Germany_-Jt-ECCHR-WILPF-submission-.pdf);

'Women, Peace and Security – A Review of Germany's National Action Plan 1325', submission by WILPF to the Universal Periodic Review of Germany, 30th session, December 2017, [https://wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Germany-UPR\\_FINAL\\_WEB.pdf](https://wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Germany-UPR_FINAL_WEB.pdf);

'The impact of Italy's arms transfers on women', submission by WILPF to the CEDAW Committee, 67th session, June 2017, [https://wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/WILPF-CEDAW-ITALY-Report\\_Final\\_June\\_17-2.pdf](https://wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/WILPF-CEDAW-ITALY-Report_Final_June_17-2.pdf);

'The impact of Germany's arms transfers on women', joint submission by WILPF and the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights to the CEDAW Committee, 66th session, [https://wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/CEDAW-Shadow-Report-on-Germany\\_20170130.pdf](https://wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/CEDAW-Shadow-Report-on-Germany_20170130.pdf).

See also: Challenging the arms trade, various publications, Reaching Critical Will of WILPF, <http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/resources/publications-and-research/research-projects/10738-challenging-the-arms-trade>.

<sup>14</sup> Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Human rights and the regulation of civilian acquisition, possession and use of firearms A/HRC/32/21, 15 April 2016.

<sup>15</sup> Cameroon: Events of 2020, Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/cameroon>.

Youth owning weapons perpetrate acts of violence against those who do not own weapons, including women, children, other youth, elderly persons, and persons belonging to minorities, as was observed by WILPF Cameroon. WILPF Colombia argued that the presence of a firearm leads to greater rates of sexual violence against children, forced pregnancy, and forced sexual relations. Similarly, WILPF partners in Iraq noted that the possession and use of firearms leads to an increase in gender-based and domestic violence, in particular “honour killings” and other types of femicide; Syrian partners also stressed an increase in domestic violence correlated with firearms.

An informal WILPF partner based in Italy also raised issues relating to family violence, and the use of firearms against children and youth. A 2019 study by research institute *EURES Ricerche Economiche e Sociali*<sup>16</sup> revealed that in Italy between 2000 to 2018 about a third of “family and intimate homicides” were committed with firearms (32.2 per cent). In the 2000-2018 period, firearms were the most frequently used weapon in filicides, i.e. deliberate acts of parents killing their own children. The number of such cases rose sharply in 2018, when more than half of filicides (51.5 per cent) were committed with firearms.

With regard to homicides with firearms, the EURES report does not offer information to distinguish between those that were committed using legally owned firearms and those using illegally owned firearms. Neither the Italian the Ministry of Interior nor the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT<sup>17</sup>) publish information about the number and the incidence of firearms and specifically of legally-owned firearms on homicides (for more information about concerns relating to the lack of data published the Ministry of Interior, see WILPF submission to the CEDAW Committee pre-session of March 2021.<sup>18</sup>) To overcome this lack of information, the *Osservatorio permanente sulle armi leggere e le politiche di sicurezza e difesa (OPAL)*<sup>19</sup> provides an online database on homicides committed with legally owned firearms from 2016 to 2020.<sup>20</sup> Since the data published by the Italian Ministry of Interior on homicides is not fully disaggregated, it is not possible to ascertain precisely in how many of those cases the perpetrator was under 29. However, OPAL has documented that cases of femicides and filicides committed with firearms include perpetrators who were under 29; and that there have been cases of femicides committed by young people who had only recently obtained a gun license.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> “Omicidio in famiglia”. *Rapporto su caratteristiche, dinamiche e profili di rischio dell’omicidio in famiglia*, EURES (“Family homicides” Report on characteristics, dynamics and risk profiles of homicide in the family (unofficial translation)). An overview of the report is available at this link (Source in Italian): <https://www.eures.it/sintesi-rapporto-eures-omicidio-in-famiglia/>. See also: “Gli omicidi in famiglia con armi da fuoco, Illegittima offesa” (“Family murders with firearms, Unlawful offence”), 23 July 2019, [https://www.rivistailmulino.it/news/newsitem/index/Item/News:NEWS\\_ITEM:4818](https://www.rivistailmulino.it/news/newsitem/index/Item/News:NEWS_ITEM:4818).

<sup>17</sup> *Istituto Nazionale di Statistica*

<sup>18</sup> The submission provides, for example, statistics on femicides committed with firearms.

[https://www.wilpf.org/wilpf\\_statements/submission-to-the-cedaw-committee-pre-session-on-italy/](https://www.wilpf.org/wilpf_statements/submission-to-the-cedaw-committee-pre-session-on-italy/)

<sup>19</sup> Permanent Observatory on Light Weapons, Security and Defence Policies.

<sup>20</sup> Using information available in the media, OPAL reports all cases of homicides in Italy committed with legally-owned firearms (including those committed by a family member or a relative using the firearms legally-owned by a member of the family) and by legal firearms’ owners. Data collected by OPAL can be found at: *Database degli omicidi e reati con armi legalmente detenute in Italia* (Database of homicides and crimes involving legally possessed weapons in Italy), OPAL, <https://www.opalbrescia.org/database-degli-omicidi-e-reati-con-armi-legalmente-detenute-in-italia/>.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, the following cases in which the young person bought the gun just a few days before committing a femicide: “Orte, Uccide la ex e si spara, si erano lasciati da poco”, in *La Stampa*, 18 marzo 2017, <https://www.lastampa.it/cronaca/2017/03/18/news/uccide-la-ex-e-si-spara-si-erano-lasciati-da-poco-1.34636748>; Dafne Raot, “«Voglio suicidarmi»: lei accorre ma il fidanzato le spara e si uccide”, in *Corriere della Sera*, 31 luglio 2017.

In addition to these cases of femicides, there are also cases of homicides committed by young people with newly acquired weapons.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, there are a number of cases of homicides, either intentional or involuntary, committed by young people with weapons held by their parents or relatives.<sup>23</sup>

The human rights impact of civilian firearms acquisition and possession on children and youth

The acquisition and use of firearms impact the human rights of adults, as well as those of children and youth. With respect to the latter, the Committee on the Rights of the Child has detailed the negative impact that the availability of arms has on children's human rights in many of its concluding observations, such as in relation to child recruitment, child marriage and child labour, environmental degradation, and with regard to the enjoyment of the rights to life, and development, education, health, water, and sanitation.<sup>24</sup>

The right to freedom and privacy of young people is also strongly impacted by the early and abusive use of firearms in Cameroon, as was stressed by survey response from WILPF

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[https://www.corriere.it/cronache/17\\_luglio\\_31/trento-colpi-pistola-casa-trovati-due-giovani-morti-436fccb0-75fd-11e7-bcc9-f72f41c1edd8.shtml](https://www.corriere.it/cronache/17_luglio_31/trento-colpi-pistola-casa-trovati-due-giovani-morti-436fccb0-75fd-11e7-bcc9-f72f41c1edd8.shtml); "Prato, calciatore sequestra l'ex, la uccide e si suicida", in *Il Messaggero*, 27 maggio 2018, [https://www.ilmessaggero.it/primopiano/cronaca/calciatore\\_uccide\\_ex\\_fidanzata\\_suicida\\_prato-3759041.html](https://www.ilmessaggero.it/primopiano/cronaca/calciatore_uccide_ex_fidanzata_suicida_prato-3759041.html); Alberto Sardo, "Uccide l'ex compagna e la figlia di lei e poi si toglie la vita", *Meridio News*, 31 gennaio 2020: <https://meridionews.it/articolo/85088/uccide-lex-compagna-e-la-figlia-poi-si-toglie-la-vita-voleva-un-chiarimento-ma-ha-portato-con-se-la-pistola/>.

<sup>22</sup> See for example the following cases in which the perpetrator acquired the gun shortly before committing a homicide: Antonio Ravanà, "Nipote confessa l'omicidio dello zio agricoltore ucciso a Licata con 14 colpi", in *La Sicilia*, 19 agosto 2017, <https://www.lasicilia.it/news/agrigento/102119/un-nipote-di-18-anni-avrebbe-ucciso-l-agricoltore-trovato-morto-a-licata.html>; "Omicidio Marchesano: fermato un amico della vittima", in *Pisa Today*, 12 novembre 2018 e "Danny Scotto in tribunale a luglio: premeditazione e crudeltà", in *Go News*, 11 giugno 2019: <https://www.gonews.it/2019/06/11/danny-scotto-rispondera/>.

<sup>23</sup> See for example: "Sparatoria a Giaveno, clinicamente morto il biker degli Hell's Angels di Torino", <https://www.quotidianopiemontese.it/2017/01/19/sparatoria-a-giaveno-clinicamente-morto-il-biker-degli-hells-angels-di-torino/>. "Diciottenne uccide il padre con una fucilata e poi chiama i carabinieri", *Corriere della Sera*, 27 February 2017: [https://www.corriere.it/cronache/17\\_febbraio\\_27/diciottenne-uccide-padre-una-fucilata-poi-chiama-carabinieri-arezzo-5bebf16-fcbd-11e6-8717-6cdb036394a5.shtml](https://www.corriere.it/cronache/17_febbraio_27/diciottenne-uccide-padre-una-fucilata-poi-chiama-carabinieri-arezzo-5bebf16-fcbd-11e6-8717-6cdb036394a5.shtml); "Padova, 16enne uccide il padre con un colpo di fucile: Non volevo, era uno scherzo", *La Repubblica*, 25 March 2017: [https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2017/03/25/news/padova\\_imprenditore\\_ucciso\\_figlio-161380212/](https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2017/03/25/news/padova_imprenditore_ucciso_figlio-161380212/), "Mileto, 15enne uccide coetaneo a colpi di pistola", *Quotidiano Nazionale*, 30 maggio 2017: <https://www.quotidiano.net/cronaca/mileto-omicidio-1.3160341>; "Gioca con il fucile del padre, 13enne spara e uccide nonna", *La Stampa*, 4 October 2017: <https://www.lastampa.it/cronaca/2017/10/04/news/gioca-con-il-fucile-del-padre-13enne-spara-e-uccide-nonna-1.34396826> "Giuseppe Balboni, 16enne di Zocca morto in un pozzo. Minore confessa omicidio. Ha usato pistola del padre", *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 25 September 2018: <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2018/09/25/giuseppe-balboni-16enne-di-zocca-morto-in-un-pozzo-minore-confessa-omicidio-ha-usato-pistola-del-padre/4648872/> "Alghero, 19enne ucciso con un colpo di pistola da un coetaneo", *La Repubblica*, 6 April 2019: [https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2019/04/06/news/omicidio\\_alghero-223414942/](https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2019/04/06/news/omicidio_alghero-223414942/) "Brescia, colpo di fucile uccide una quindicenne: a sparare per errore è stato il fratellino di 13 anni", *La Stampa*, 17 October 2021 <https://www.lastampa.it/cronaca/2021/10/16/news/brescia-parte-un-colpo-di-fucile-e-uccide-la-figlia-15enne-1.40818092>.

<sup>24</sup> For a full list, please refer to Appendix I of WILPF's submission to the pre-sessional working group of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the impact of Canada's arms transfers on children's rights: 'The impact of Canada's arms transfers on children's rights': Submission to the 87th pre-sessional working group of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, 26 June 2020, : [https://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/att/WILPF\\_CRC\\_June2020.pdf](https://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/att/WILPF_CRC_June2020.pdf).

Cameroon. The use of firearms, in addition to the above-mentioned consequences on the lives of young people, has greatly increased the rate of drug use among young people.

As WILPF's Syrian partners noted, a peer's possession of a firearm causes fear, anxiety, and trauma in other children. This has long-term repercussions for children's lives. The World Health Organisation (WHO) also stresses that youth violence "has a serious, often lifelong, impact on a person's physical, psychological and social functioning."<sup>25</sup> In the United States, where school shootings are widespread, statistics show that children and youth have a greater risk of experiencing emotional trauma following the event. As the US-based organisation The Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence finds, studies of children exposed to sudden, unexpected acts of mass violence have reported post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) rates of up to 100 per cent.<sup>26</sup>

A comprehensive analysis of American children who experience gun violence at school reinforces findings that these children have higher rates of school absenteeism, lower high school and college graduation rates, and earn lower incomes by their mid-twenties.<sup>27</sup>

The impacts of youth owning and using firearms are devastating for their own lives, too, contributing to children's and youth's further marginalisation, as noted by WILPF Colombia, including through: lack of employment opportunities, early parenthood, lack of education, and long-term impacts on youth's behaviour and attitudes that are based upon domination and violence. Syrian partners explained that a child owning a gun is ostracised by their peers because of fear of the child's actions.

All of these consequences mean that children and youth find their human rights to education, to rest and leisure, and to engage in play and recreational activities affected by the possession of a firearm, whether they themselves are the owner or in regular contact with another youth who is.

The above case studies confirm empirical evidence and complement existing research by WILPF on the human rights impacts of arms proliferation, as described earlier in this submission.

## B) FACTORS DRIVING FIRE-ARMS RELATED VIOLENCE

### Systemic and socio-economic challenges

The factors driving firearms-related violence are highly complex, and vary greatly depending on context and circumstances. This is evident, for example, in the responses received from Cameroon, Colombia, and Iraq to WILPF's informal survey. Factors range from

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<sup>25</sup> World Health Organisation, Youth violence, 8 June 2020, <https://www.who.int/en/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/youth-violence>.

<sup>26</sup> "The mental health impact of mass shootings," The Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, available at: <https://brady-static.s3.amazonaws.com/Report/MentalHealthImpactOfMassShootings.pdf>.

<sup>27</sup> Marika Cabral et al., "Trauma at school: The impacts of shootings on students' human capital and economic outcomes," National Bureau of Economic Research, December 2020, [https://www.nber.org/papers/w28311?utm\\_campaign=ntwh&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=ntwg1](https://www.nber.org/papers/w28311?utm_campaign=ntwh&utm_medium=email&utm_source=ntwg1).

unemployment, land dispossession, poverty, and lack of opportunities, poor governance, drug abuse, inequality, proliferation of armed actors that recruit children and youth, violent masculinities (see more on this in the section below), and lack of knowledge of the impact of arms. Regarding the latter factor, WILPF Iraq partners explained that the presence of a firearm means that “simple quarrels are leading to death.” These “quarrels escalate into blood baths,” as a WILPF’s partner from Iraq put it.

Other factors mentioned were organised crime and poor access to justice for certain segments of the population, as well as human organs trafficking, such as in Cameroon.

While local nuances exist, the above factors driving firearms acquisition and use can be contextualised within a capitalist, militarist, and patriarchal global system that creates ever increasing inequalities and insecurity to uphold these interlinking systems of oppression. These systems also consume vast amounts of resources, taking away from socio-economic justice and ecological regeneration. This leads to increased levels of insecurity and armed violence, which in turn fuels further arms proliferation. This observation was reflected by Syrian partners, noting that “the spread of violence in general helps proliferate the use of firearms.”

It is worth noting that firearms are used for protection, as was reported by some of the WILPF Sections and partners surveyed. However, the rationale and motivation around the need for armed protection should be viewed in relation to the influence of factors such as insecurity, inequality, oppression, and/or binary gender stereotypes. For example, partners in Palestine explained that young people own firearms to fight the Israeli occupation. As well, in Iraq, the members of the LGBTQ+ community own firearms to feel protected against homo- and queerphobic attacks. In Syria, firearms are used against “unaccepted groups” in society, including members of the LGBTQ+ community. As reported by Syrian partner organisations, there is no disaggregated data available to determine the proportion of youth involved in these attacks. However, since generally a considerable proportion of criminal groups are young men, WILPF partners assume the same applies for this phenomenon. Similarly, in Iraq and Syria, it is also wealthy youth that own firearms for the protection of their property, and against the risk of kidnapping and murder.

In 2018, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) reported that “The results of the 2015 World Values Survey indicate that a high percentage of young people (20.7 per cent) carry arms because they do not feel safe, which makes Libya the number one country with regard to arms proliferation among individuals. Many have come to believe that carrying arms in Libya today is a necessity for people who want to defend themselves against the prevailing state of insecurity. Despite issuing Law No (2) of 2014 on the prohibition of weapons, ammunitions and explosives, and the imposition of sanctions on arms carriers, the proliferation problem still exists in Libya and poses a complex threat to youth and the whole population. This requires careful and timely action, including the collection of weapons, which must necessarily go hand in hand with integrated and effective alternatives that would ultimately lead to the reintegration of ex-youth combatants.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> UNFPA in collaboration with a group Libyan professors and independent experts, “Libyan youth today: opportunities and challenges,” 18 April 2018, <https://arabstates.unfpa.org/en/publications/libyan-youth-today-opportunities-and-challenges>.

Since 2014, fighting in the Donbass region of Eastern Ukraine between Russian-backed separatists and pro-Ukrainian government forces has exacerbated nationalist sentiment—and sown chaos for education systems and their students. As reported in 2020 joint submission on Ukraine by WILPF and partner organisations to the Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, the Ukrainian “government’s support (on national, regional and local levels) to radical far-right groups, political parties and youth initiatives is... rising [with] budget funds... provided to military camps and other endeavours that promote militarisation, traditional patriarchal gender roles and that teach children and youth how to handle weapons.”<sup>29</sup> An article by National Geographic describes how patriotic youth organisations actively train children how to survive combat and handle weapons, but also “how to hate ‘the other,’ how to defend yourself against your neighbor and kill them if necessary for your country.”<sup>30</sup>

While in some contexts, socio-economic marginalisation are key drivers for firearms acquisition, this does not apply to all contexts, as was stressed by partners from Iraq and Palestine. A WILPF’s partner in Iraq stressed that “since the most educated and rich youth are in possession of firearms, it is not a matter of poverty or joblessness that makes the youth acquire firearms.” They therefore stressed that “addressing cultural and social norms affiliated with firearms and dissecting the stereotypes (...) would have a great impact on the youth and their perception of firearms.”

### Militarised masculinities

WILPF wishes to draw attention to the role of militarised and/or violent masculinities as a factor contributing to firearms-related violence and particularly the acquisition of firearms by youth.

In his May 2018 Agenda for Disarmament, the UN Secretary-General António Guterres recognised that, “concerns relating to arms have clear gender dimensions. The ownership and use of arms is closely linked to specific expressions of masculinity related to control, power, domination and strength.”<sup>31</sup>

As Portillo and Molano explain: “The ideals men and boys are expected to live up to are called “masculinities.” Masculinities are socially constructed and reinforced, they vary by time, place, and community, and have hierarchies—some forms are prized as being more valuable for men and boys to aspire than others.” These expectations “often put men under

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<sup>29</sup> Joint submission by WILPF together with the NGO Center “Women’s Perspectives”, the NGO “Insight”, the Charity Fund “Child Smile”, the “Women’s Network for Dialogue and Inclusive Peace,” Kharkiv Regional Foundation “Public Alternative,” Charity Fund “Slavic Heart,” Center for Social and Labor Research, NGO “East Donbass Regional Development Agency,” as well as Viktoriia Zinchuk, Oksana Dutchak, Alena Tkalic, Review of Ukraine: Joint submission to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 67th session, 24 January 2020, [https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Submission\\_Ukraine\\_CESCR\\_Jan2020.pdf](https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Submission_Ukraine_CESCR_Jan2020.pdf).

<sup>30</sup> Laurence Butet-Roch, “Ukrainian children train for combat,” *National Geographic*, 13 March 2019, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/ukrainian-children-train-for-violent-future>.

<sup>31</sup> UN Secretary-General António Guterres, *Securing Our Common Future – An Agenda for Disarmament*, Office for Disarmament Affairs, 2018, page 39, [https://front.un-arm.org/documents/SG+disarmament+agenda\\_1.pdf](https://front.un-arm.org/documents/SG+disarmament+agenda_1.pdf).

pressure” to conform to prevailing masculine ideals, which may or may not be what individual men would otherwise aspire to.”<sup>32</sup>

Weapons, and in particular firearms because of their easy availability, portability, and widespread use, are “the embodiment of violent, often militarized models of masculinity, which, in turn, have broader socio-political ramifications.”<sup>33</sup>

In “Disarming Masculinities”<sup>34</sup> Henri Myrntinen describes how the male bond with weapons is often forged in an early stage of childhood, such as through the types of toys and entertainment provided to boys versus those given to female children. In some contexts, this childhood connection and an early normalisation of guns and/or violent action is reinforced by later societal “rites of passage” for adolescents that can variously involve obtaining a firearm, learning how to use a firearm, or by joining armed forces or armed groups, including gangs or criminal networks.<sup>35</sup>

This is compounded by other socially constructed roles and expectations for men, most commonly that of being a “provider” and “protector” for their families, which may influence recourse to violence including gun violence. “Studies have shown that, in extreme situations of poverty and/or conflict, when men are unable to fill the role of provider (a role they consider quintessential to their identity as men) they are likelier to engage in self-destructive behaviors or to join criminal enterprises or armed groups.”<sup>36</sup>

Indeed, different intersecting factors play a role in creating and perpetuating violent masculinities among children and youth, including where that results in the acquisition or use of firearms. It is important to highlight that the specific factors driving—and manifestations of—violent masculinities can vary greatly by location. Despite differences in the details however, studies often highlight a similar set of recurring factors, many of which are rooted in economic and sociological conditions, as informed by historical and political factors.<sup>37</sup>

A 2018 Promundo report outlines how masculine norms interact with structural and race-based inequalities to drive homicide, often committed by firearms, in Brazil.<sup>38</sup> “Even though overall homicide rates have fallen in Brazil, they have not come down for black men. Many of the young men who are murdered – or who murder – in Brazil are connected to drug-trafficking gangs or live near them. Most of these homicides occur in urban areas, where the drug trade emerged as a response to limited employment and limited presence of the state, and where there is easy access to firearms. For young men who have few things that make

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<sup>32</sup> Héctor Portillo and Sebastián Molano, “Masculinity, Machismo and Corruption”, *VoiceMale Magazine*, Summer 2017, <https://voicemalemagazine.org/category/articles/2017-summer/>.

<sup>33</sup> Henri Myrntinen, “Disarming Masculinities,” *Disarmament Forum: Women, Men, Peace and Security* 4: 37–46, 2003, [http://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/unidir\\_disarmingmasculinities\\_2006\\_0.pdf](http://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/unidir_disarmingmasculinities_2006_0.pdf).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.38-39.

<sup>36</sup> Portillo and Molano.

<sup>37</sup> “Few options but the gun: angry young men,” *Small Arms Survey*, 2006, p.302.,

<http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/A-Yearbook/2006/en/Small-Arms-Survey-2006-Chapter-12-EN.pdf>.

<sup>38</sup> Brian Heilman with Gary Barker, *Masculine Norms and Violence: Making the Connections*, 2018, Promundo-US.

them feel that they are socially recognised adult men, this violence is also related to competition for reputation, recognition, honor, and prestige from female partners.”<sup>39</sup>

A 2017 Control Arms report explores pastoralist conflict in the East and Horn of Africa, and how the introduction of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and ammunition has transformed the nature and scale of conflict and violence within and between pastoralist communities.<sup>40</sup> “Like all armed violence, pastoralist conflict in the East and Horn of Africa region is deeply gendered. It is shaped by cultural norms regarding initiation, dowry and masculinities.”<sup>41</sup> The ownership of a gun and participating in raids are considered rites of passage for adolescent boys, and these “symbols of manhood” also confer social status.<sup>42</sup> Women sometimes also reinforce the connection between masculinity and cattle raiding. For example, Safeworld has reported that in South Sudan, women sing songs to shame men who have not participated in or been successful in a raid.<sup>43</sup>

A 2006 Small Arms Survey report<sup>44</sup> looked at three cities: Belfast in Northern Ireland, Davao City in the Philippines, and Manenberg, South Africa. The report noted that while the three cities differ in many ways, they were all characterised (at the time) as having high unemployment, excessive poverty and relatively high levels of violence, both domestic and community-wide. “These factors come together to produce environments in which young men, faced with few prospects, find violence an attractive, and sometimes necessary, course of action. The three cases suggest that, for young men with few opportunities, being a member of an armed group is a rational activity. Young men often choose to adopt the violent means they recognize as inherent to their communities in the hope of achieving status and material gain.”

The topic of militarised masculinities and dominant gender norms as drivers of firearms possession and use was mentioned by all WILPF partners and Sections surveyed. Traits such as power, toughness, courage, and virility, typically associated with manhood, were mentioned as reasons to own and use a firearm as a means to express these traits. Similarly, young men own firearms for “popularity,” as explained by WILPF partners from Iraq, or for recognition and status, as described by partners working on Syria.

A few of those surveyed also addressed the impacts of firearms possession on relationships and communication skills, especially in the formative age of boys and young men. The construction of a masculinity involving a firearm, in a context of profound inequalities, has significant impacts on young men’s development in terms of their behaviour and attitudes. This, in turn, impacts on their ability to have meaningful relationships with the people

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p.53.

<sup>40</sup> “How to use the Arms Trade Treaty to address armed violence in pastoralist communities,” Control Arms, March 2017, <https://controlarms.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Pastoralist-Conflict-Final.pdf>

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p.9.

<sup>42</sup> Saferworld and Conciliation Resources, “People’s peacemaking perspectives: South Sudan,” 2012; Small Arms Survey, “Symptoms and causes: insecurity and underdevelopment in Eastern Equatoria,” 2010, page 4; Oxfam, “Challenges to security, livelihoods and gender justice in South Sudan,” 13 March 2013, p.13, <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/challenges-security-livelihoods-and-gender-justice-south-sudan>.

<sup>43</sup> Hannah Wright, “Masculinities, conflict and peacebuilding: Perspectives on men through a gender lens,” Saferworld, October 2014, <https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/862-masculinities-conflict-and-peacebuilding-perspectives-on-men-through-a-gender-lens>.

<sup>44</sup> “Few options but the gun: angry young men,” Small Arms Survey, 2006, <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/A-Yearbook/2006/en/Small-Arms-Survey-2006-Chapter-12-EN.pdf>.

around them, including romantic and sexual relationships, as was described by WILPF Colombia.

Similarly, WILPF Lebanon described the presence of a firearm as “decision-making tool” that replaces communication completely. These observations were echoed by Syrian partners. Moreover, in a joint submission to the UPR of Lebanon, WILPF Lebanon stated that “the possession of guns in Lebanon is linked with stereotypical notions of masculinity such as power, privilege, and prestige. The hegemonic, toxic and militarised type of masculinity is further heightened by the expectation of violence to stand as “an inherent part of masculinity,” which perpetuates a widespread gun culture.”<sup>45</sup>

#### Firearms companies’ marketing strategies

Myrntinen notes that while there is an “undeniable and visible ‘special relationship’ between men and weapons”, this is not a “natural consequence” of being a man or a quality shared by all men.<sup>46</sup>

In this context, it is worth noting the role that the media, and gun manufacturers play in perpetuating gendered identities in ways that normalise and encourage gun ownership among adolescents and even children.

A 2016 Violence Policy Center report<sup>47</sup> outlines diverse marketing tactics of US gun manufacturers and pro-gun lobby groups. The report includes instances of websites and magazines that are targeting children, designing “kid-friendly” guns to appeal to the youth market, and even working to create the equivalent of “reality” video games to encourage gun use from an early age, in response to declining household gun rates across the US and generational change. While the first instances of youth-targeted marketing appear in 1993, the report describes two recent trends that also cuts across diverse mediums: “For some gun owners there is almost a race to the bottom to see how young a child can be to handle, and eventually possess, a gun. At the same time, there’s not infrequently an inverse trend to see how powerful a gun the child can handle.”<sup>48</sup>

The report further describes how the gun lobby mass-produces and markets light-weight “tactical” rifles designed for shooters with smaller frames, often color-coded in gendered ways “Pink guns for females are a key marketing tool for girls.”<sup>49</sup>

A prominent gun control organisation in the United States has described the marketing practices of gun manufacturer Smith & Wesson as trying to “market the gun as a totem—a substitute for masculinity to teenagers.”<sup>50</sup> One way in which Smith & Wesson connects “machismo” with its firearms is by creating a sense that its products are somehow affiliated

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<sup>45</sup> [https://www.wilpf.org/wilpf\\_statements/joint-submission-for-the-upr-of-lebanon-january-february-2021/](https://www.wilpf.org/wilpf_statements/joint-submission-for-the-upr-of-lebanon-january-february-2021/)

<sup>46</sup> Myrntinen, page 44.

<sup>47</sup> *Start them Young: How the Firearms Industry and Gun Lobby Are Targeting Your Children*, Violence Policy Center, 2016, <https://www.vpc.org/studies/starttheyoung.pdf>.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, page 12.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, page 18.

<sup>50</sup> Jon Skolink, “Gun manufacturers quietly target young boys using social media, *Salon*, 18 September 2021, <https://www.salon.com/2021/09/18/manufactures-quietly-target-young-boys-using-social-media/>

with the US military or law enforcement.<sup>51</sup> In reality, its weapons are not widely used by military or law enforcement but the company has found it profitable<sup>52</sup> to make this connection and thereby create a so-called “halo effect”—which, in reality, only further exacerbates gendered constructs of masculinity that valorise violence and militarism.

#### Firearms possession and use in schools

WILPF would like to briefly draw attention to the phenomenon of children and youth’s firearms possession and use in schools.

The United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament, and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean (UNLIREC) has conducted extensive research on this increasing phenomenon in Latin America and the Caribbean, discussing both the reasons and drivers of children bringing firearms to schools, as well as the impact this has on children and the wider community. The report notes “Cultural and social acceptance, as well as the fact that firearms are considered symbols of masculinity, respect, prestige, and power, drive some students to seek “a place” in schools (...).”<sup>53</sup>

Similarly, studies conducted in the United States, where school shootings, including mass shootings, are endemic, point to the following driving factors of firearms use: mental health issues; exposure to violence, childhood trauma such as abuse, neglect, interpersonal violence, bullying, and parental suicide; media’s reporting on mass shootings, leading to the “copy cat effect.”<sup>54</sup> However, it is important to note, as the US-based organisation Everytown argues, that “the US is not the only country with mental illness, domestic violence, video games, or hate-fueled ideologies”.<sup>55</sup> The reason why gun violence is 25 times higher than in other countries is the easy access to guns. This point is further elaborated on in Question 2.

#### Availability

Contributions from WILPF’s informal partner in Italy highlighted how lax restrictions on firearms acquisition, including as a result of changes made in recent years that have made it easier to obtain gun licenses for sports, can enable youth ownership. Due to the lack of official data published by the Ministry, the number or percentage of licenses owned by under 29s cannot be determined; but legally, licenses can be requested by 18-year-olds and above. The lack of publicly available disaggregated data hampers the possibility of an informed debate on the issue and the adoption of measures that address these concerns. It is worth noting that the most requested licence in recent years has been for skeet shooting (*tiro al volo*); however, it has been reported that more than half of those who hold sport

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> <https://ir.smith-wesson.com/static-files/c7b18ca7-3dc1-4c06-a3b7-5e0ee38e5816>.

<sup>53</sup> UNLIREC, “Firearms in Latin American and Caribbean schools: Approaches, challenges, and responses,” 2019, page 12, <http://unlirec.screativa.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Firearms-in-Latin-American-and-Caribbean-Schools-Approaches-challenges-and-responses-ENG.pdf>.

<sup>54</sup> See for example, Rebecca C. Cowan and Rebekah F. Cole, “Understudied and underfunded: Potential causes of mass shootings and implications for counselling research,” *Journal of Social Change*, 2020,

<https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1267&context=jsc>.

<sup>55</sup> Issues: Mass shootings, Everytown, <https://www.everytown.org/issues/mass-shootings/#introduction>.

shooting licences do not carry out any sport activity, not even occasionally.<sup>56</sup> There is research showing that almost 70 per cent of owners of a shooting sports licence in 2018 were unknown to the sports facilities, suggesting that the licences were obtained in order to keep a weapon legally at home.<sup>57</sup>

Moreover, there are concerns in Italy about blank-firing guns which can be purchased without a license, and are easily modified into “full-fledged” weapons. For example, it has been reported that four young white supremacists arrested in July 2021 for planning to attack a black Muslim man, had bought a blank-firing pistol and were trying to modify it to make it a full-fledged weapon.<sup>58</sup>

## RESPONSE TO QUESTION 2

### ACQUISITION OF FIREARMS BY YOUTH AND CHILDREN

Every firearm that is used to commit any form of violence came from somewhere, and in many cases, has been transferred across borders. It is therefore important to keep in mind that both illicit *and* regulated arms trade as well as the acquisition, possession, and use of firearms; and their impacts on human rights are inextricably connected.<sup>59</sup> This point was also reiterated in the survey responses from WILPF Nigeria, noting that firearms to youth are supplied from outside of the country. Similarly, in Cameroon, WILPF’s Section reports that firearms enter disassembled via the borders in the South-West with Nigeria, as well as in East Cameroon, via the border with Central African Republic. SALW are then assembled once in Cameroon. Lebanon and Syria made similar observations about porous borders and illegal and diverted arms transfers as key avenues for children and youth to acquire firearms.

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<sup>56</sup>*Legittima difesa: una legge manifesto che mette a rischio la sicurezza* (Self-defence: a poster law that puts security at risk), Associazione Antigone, 11 October 2018, <https://antigoneonlus.medium.com/legittima-difesa-una-legge-manifesto-che-mette-a-rischio-la-sicurezza-720e6119724d>. See also: *Quanti armi circolano in Italia | Intervista a Giorgio Beretta* (How many weapons are circulating in Italy): “*Se pensiamo che le due principali associazioni sportive, l’Unione Italiana Tiro a Segno (Uits) e la Federazione Italiana Tiro a Volo (Fitav), dichiarano di non superare nel loro insieme i 100 mila tesserati e anche ammettendo che altrettanti siano gli iscritti ad altre associazioni e ai poligoni di tiro privati, resta il fatto che più della metà di coloro che detengono questa licenza non svolgono, nemmeno saltuariamente, alcuna pratica sportiva. Essendo questa licenza, insieme col nulla osta, la più semplice da ottenere è evidente che l’intenzione di gran parte dei richiedenti non è quella di praticare uno sport, bensì di poter avere delle armi a disposizione.*” (“If we consider that the two main sports associations, the Italian Shooting Union (UITS) and the Italian Shooting Federation (FITAV), state that they do not have more than 100 000 members, and even if we assume that there are just as many members of other associations and private shooting ranges, the fact remains that more than half of those who hold this licence do not practise any sport, not even occasionally. Since this licence, together with the permit, is the easiest to obtain, it is clear that the intention of most applicants is not to practise a sport but to have weapons at their disposal. (Unofficial translation)), 17 April 2018, <http://www.today.it/cronaca/armi-italia-intervista-beretta-opal.html/pag/2>.

<sup>57</sup> *Armiamoci e sparite. In Italia 400 mila tiratori fantasma ignoti alle strutture sportive.* (Arm yourself and disappear. In Italy, 400,000 “ghost shooters” unknown to the sports facilities). <http://www.ilducato.it/2020/04/13/armiamoci-e-sparite-in-italia-400-mila-tiratori-fantasma-ignoti-alle-strutture-sportive/>.

<sup>58</sup> <https://mianews.it/2021/07/01/neonazismo-4-giovani-suprematisti-progettavano-azioni-violente-un-piano-con-armi-per-colpire-una-persona-di-colore/>.

<sup>59</sup> WILPF underscores that both illicit and regulated arms transfers have devastating impacts on human rights. WILPF has shown numerous times how the “regulated” or “legal” arms trade with end users that include armies, police, and state security services is connected to a high risk of human rights violations. For an more in-depth analysis on this topic, please see Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the impact of diversion of arms and unregulated or illicit arms transfers on the human rights of women and girls, April 2020, [https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/WILPF\\_OHCHR\\_submission\\_April2020\\_Final.pdf](https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/WILPF_OHCHR_submission_April2020_Final.pdf).

Beyond that, and based on responses to WILPF's survey, the following ways of acquisition were mentioned: Corruption of security personnel that are getting supplies from neighbouring countries and are selling those weapons to youth; acquisition and sales on the black market; purchase from armed groups, criminal gangs, and arms dealers; purchase from "firearm" shops that are widespread and located in civil areas; inherited at birth; theft of military SALW stockpiles; and manufacture of local weapons.

The Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence notes that in the US, 4.6 million children live in homes with access to an unlocked or unsupervised gun, and that over 70 per cent of children know where that gun is stored in their home.<sup>60</sup> UNLIREC found that in at least 25 of the cases of school children's possession and use of firearms that it examined, the origin of the firearms was directly related to the students' homes, with some incidents involving students carrying firearms obtained from their parents who were active members of national security forces. Other methods of acquisition found in the report were theft, such as from private military and security companies, and acquisition on the black market or at drug selling points.<sup>61</sup>

## RESPONSE TO QUESTION 4

### RECOMMENDED POLICIES THAT ADDRESS THE DRIVERS OF FIRE-ARMS RELATED VIOLENCE

Due to overlapping systems of oppression that create and maintain inequality, insecurity and violence, ambitious policies are required to address the root causes of the factors driving firearms proliferation, and their acquisition and use by children and youth. Due to cultural, societal, and socio-economic differences, WILPF would like to caution against recommending general or "one size fits all" public policies, and to take into account specific contexts. The success and impact of such policies should be reviewed and implemented on a case-by-case basis. Moreover, the lack of data prevents, in some contexts, the development of appropriate policies.

#### **Governments should:**

- Create job opportunities, youth support and rehabilitation programs, psycho-social support, education opportunities, and awareness raising campaigns<sup>62</sup> (including by diverting resources from firearm purchases to these programmes);
- Increase the age at which individuals are allowed to purchase firearms and apply for a gun licenses to at least 21 years and put in place rigorous processes for the legal acquisition of firearms and licenses, including sport licenses, that account for age,

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<sup>60</sup> "End family fire," The Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, <https://www.bradyunited.org/program/end-family-fire>.

<sup>61</sup> UNLIREC, *Firearms in Latin American and Caribbean schools: Approaches, challenges, and responses*, 2019, <http://unlirec.screativa.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Firearms-in-Latin-American-and-Caribbean-Schools-Approaches-challenges-and-responses-ENG.pdf>.

history of violent behaviour, and substance abuse, among other factors, and require applicants of sports licences to demonstrate that they have indeed practice that activity for a period of time;

- Include young people, including as leaders, in peace-building and decision-making processes that affect their lives and which seek to prevent firearms proliferation;
- Implement public policies and other initiatives to address violent masculinities as a driver of firearms violence without directly or indirectly, reinforcing gender essentialisms by claiming that all men are essentially violent, or protectors, and thus drawn to weapons;
- Challenge restrictive, inequitable, and violence endorsing norms of manhood and strengthen men’s investment in and commitment to non-violence. Effective policies and strategies include mass media campaigns, school-based gender transformative peace education, the provision of psycho-social support to children exposed to violence, and strategies to address economic stress;<sup>63</sup>
- Address structural and underlying drivers of violence and violent masculinities—such as the intersecting factors of poverty, racial discrimination and inequality as described in our response to Question 1;
- Collect, streamline, and publish disaggregated data on the links between youth and firearms, including by age, gender identity, and sex of perpetrators and victims and survivors; type of weapon used; relationship between victim and perpetrator, the place where the violence took place, how the perpetrator acquired the firearm, and total number of licensed firearms, amongst others;<sup>64</sup>
- Accede and effectively implement existing arms control instruments, strengthen and implement ammunition controls;
- End impunity, including through prosecution, for any person who possesses illegally, distributes or engages in illicit sales and brokering of weapons, and put in place measures to provide remedy and reparations to victims;
- Include information, including disaggregated data, about measures to address firearms proliferation, including their acquisition and use by children and youth, in reports to human rights treaty bodies and the Universal Periodic Review;
- Forbid arms companies’ advertising, and companies’ marketing and selling of war-like toys and games.
- Ensure that firearms producing companies and companies marketing and selling war-like toys and games:
  - Uphold their duty to respect human rights and to this effect, adopt human rights due diligence policies and processes covering the risks of human rights abuses linked to the use of the companies’ products and services and take account of their impact on children’s rights and youth. Human rights due diligence should identify and assess the human rights impacts of the companies’ products and services on an ongoing basis.

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<sup>63</sup> A Kerr-Wilson, et al., “A rigorous global evidence review of interventions to prevent violence against women and girls: What works to prevent violence against women and girls global programme, Pretoria, South Africa, 2020.

<sup>64</sup> For further information on challenges related to disaggregated data collection, see for example: WILPF, Italy: Submission to the CEDAW Committee, 8th (virtual) pre-sessional Working Group (1-5 March 2021), List of issues prior to reporting, 5 February 2021, [https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/WILPF\\_-submission\\_CEDAW\\_ITALY\\_LOIPR-website.pdf](https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/WILPF_-submission_CEDAW_ITALY_LOIPR-website.pdf).

- When businesses reach out to children and youth through marketing, advertising, and other forms of communication, for instance to sell war-like toys and games, they must exercise child rights sensitive human rights due diligence. Businesses must not normalise nor reinforce the glorification of weapons, violence, and war to children or youth and should thus stop selling and advertising war-like toys and games to children and youth.
- Arms companies should transparently report on the human rights impacts of products and services, and on the measures they are taking to address the impact, including by providing information on the company's policies and processes and how it has identified and addressed specific human rights risks and abuses arising in its operations.