



**UNIDIR**  
UNITED NATIONS INSTITUTE  
FOR DISARMAMENT RESEARCH

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# **ISACS–AT: Software Overview**

**International Small Arms Control Standards  
Assessment Tool**

**United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR)**

**2015**

## **About UNIDIR**

The United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR)—an autonomous institute within the United Nations—conducts research on disarmament and security. UNIDIR is based in Geneva, Switzerland, the centre for bilateral and multilateral disarmament and non-proliferation negotiations, and home of the Conference on Disarmament. The Institute explores current issues pertaining to a variety of existing and future armaments, as well as global diplomacy and local tensions and conflicts. Working with researchers, diplomats, government officials, NGOs and other institutions since 1980, UNIDIR acts as a bridge between the research community and governments. UNIDIR's activities are funded by contributions from governments and donor foundations.

This project is part of UNIDIR's Process and Practice research programme, which focuses on translating ideas for disarmament and security into practical action. This programme of work ranges from supporting treaty negotiation and implementation, conducting capacity building initiatives in identifying priorities, challenges and opportunities for action, as well as designing and developing practical tools, and seeks to strengthen and interconnect the efforts of all actors throughout the international community.

## **Acknowledgement**

The ISACS Assessment Tool is developed by the **United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR)**, with support from the **Middlebury Institute for International Studies in Monterey (MIIS)**. The software is hosted by the **International Small Arms Control Standards Inter-Agency Support Unit (ISACS ISU)**. Support from UNIDIR's core funders provides the foundation for all of the Institute's activities. In addition, dedicated project funding has been provided by Governments of Finland and Germany.

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**Before getting started**

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Before getting started with using the ISACS-AT, follow the instructions below:

**Software**

- Computer operating system may affect the overall performance of the software. Software may not work properly depending on the computer hardware specifications and the environment that it is used in.
- UNIDIR is not liable for performance issues or incompatibilities caused by efforts to modify the software. Attempting to customize the operating system may cause the software to work improperly.
- Images and other media provided by the ISACS–AT are licensed for limited use. Extracting and using these materials for commercial or other purposes is an infringement of copyright laws.

**Training materials**

- Please read the ISACS–AT Basic and Advanced guides before using the software to ensure its proper use.
- Descriptions in the training materials are based on the software’s default settings.
- Images and screenshots may differ in appearance from the actual product.
- Content in software guides may differ from the final product and is subject to change without prior notice. For the latest version of the software and training materials, refer to the ISACS website, [www.smallarmsstandards.org](http://www.smallarmsstandards.org).
- The training materials are currently available in English only.

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**ISACS Assessment Tool**

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**Background**

In collaboration with partners worldwide, the United Nations has developed the International Small Arms Control Standards (ISACS, [www.smallarmsstandards.org](http://www.smallarmsstandards.org)) to provide practical guidance to practitioners and policymakers on establishing effective controls over the full life cycle of small arms and light weapons (SALW). The standards fit within the global framework created by the United Nations Programme of Action, the International Tracing Instrument, the United Nations Firearms Protocol and the Arms Trade Treaty; and build upon best practices elaborated at regional and subregional levels. The ISACS are an integral part of international efforts to combat the illicit trade, uncontrolled proliferation, and misuse of small arms and light weapons. The value of the ISACS has been recognized at the global and regional levels, including by the Security Council (S/RES/2117) and the Secretary-General (S/2013/503; S/2013/354).<sup>1</sup>

Since the launch of ISACS in August 2012, their value has been recognized and their use and uptake has been encouraged at the global and regional levels—the first-ever Security Council resolution on small arms (S/RES/2117) recognizes the value of the ISACS in conducting stockpile management in particular, while the Secretary-General’s report on small arms to the Security Council (S/2013/503) and the Secretary-General’s report on the situation in Sahel region (S/2013/354)<sup>2</sup> encourage its use for a wide range of small arms control activities. In addition, the Fifth Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action (BMS5) held in June 2014 witnessed over 60 states express support in the use of the ISACS.<sup>3</sup>

To support the global application of the ISACS, the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR)<sup>4</sup> has developed a free software tool—known as the ISACS Assessment Tool (ISACS-AT)—designed to facilitate use of the standards and, in particular, to allow users to assess how their policies, programmes, and practices on SALW control align with the international standards and to establish baselines on their implementation efforts (phase I).

The ISACS Assessment Tool enables users to navigate the standards quickly, sort their provisions by priority levels set by the standards, generate assessment questionnaires on operational issues covered by the ISACS, and analyze the assessment results—including quick identification of priorities and potential gaps—in order to evaluate the implementation of existing small arms control policies, programmes, and practices.

**Added value to the ISACS**

The ISACS-AT is designed to:

- Improve the design, monitoring, and evaluation of SALW control programmes by all stakeholders, in particular the United Nations and Member States;
- Enable the United Nations to streamline its policy, programming, and practice on small arms control;
- Help collect, maintain, and share knowledge and effective practices on small arms control;
- Assist in the identification of capacity-building needs and provide a tool for evaluating the effectiveness of assistance programming;
- Create a set of baselines/benchmarks against which to measure the implementation of small arms commitments;
- Facilitate the process for development of national small arms control standards.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on the ISACS and how the standards are being used, see the ISACS Activity Report 2012–2013, <http://www.smallarmsstandards.org/documents/2012-13-activity-report-s.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> For more information on the ISACS, its activities, including how they are being used, look at the ISACS Activity Report 2012–2013, <http://www.smallarmsstandards.org/documents/2012-13-activity-report-s.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> See story via <http://www.smallarmsstandards.org/isacs-news/66-states-express-support.html>.

<sup>4</sup> For more information about UNIDIR, visit <http://www.unidir.org>.

## Potential users

Potential users include the United Nations, Member States, regional organizations, training institutes, and civil society organizations. Users have complete ownership and control over the data generated by the tool, and its use is voluntary.

## Examples of how the tool can be used

- Users can utilize it to identify priority areas for small arms control efforts and better develop and target their programming and activities to the highest level of obligations codified in the standards.
- Users can utilize it to conduct internal assessments for quality assurances of programmes, monitor progress of project implementation efforts, and generate data for strategic and policy planning.
- Recipient states can use it to develop assistance requests by identifying priority areas and ensuring alignment between needs and assistance requests. The tool can also help to generate specific data for national reporting exercises, thereby raising the quality of information reported.
- Donor states can use it to generate baseline data at the beginning of an assistance project and as an evaluation tool at the end; and
- Training institutions can utilize it to design and implement training and capacity-building initiatives on small arms control in line with the international standards.

## Validation through field testing

During the development and testing phase of this project (phase II), the software was validated through field testing of its utility and applicability in several countries representing a range of capacity and geographic locations.

A total of 10 countries were visited in validating the ISACS–AT. Experts, practitioners, and policymakers from states, the United Nations, regional organizations, training institutes, and civil society organizations actively engaged in testing activities and consultations. The software’s applicability was tested at the international assistance, national authority, and operational levels.

## Roll-out through regional capacity-building workshops

To help build a cadre of professionals proficient in using the ISACS–AT—and in training others on how to use it—UNIDIR, in cooperation with the ISACS Inter-Agency Support Unit and regional partners—organized a series of five regional “Training-of-Trainers” style workshops in Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, Europe, and the Asia–Pacific. These regional workshops were designed to establish a global network of institutions that are trained to use the ISACS–AT—and they are prepared to train their own stakeholders/beneficiaries in the use and integration of the tool in their regional/national/local contexts.

This series of workshops has trained 86 small arms control professionals (29 per cent of them female) from 34 organizations working in 28 countries in 11 regions or subregions to use ISACS and its Assessment Tool to support the design, monitoring, and evaluation of small arms and light weapon control programmes in accordance with international standards.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For more information, see the 2014 ISACS–AT Activity Report.

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### ISACS–AT at a glance

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#### Title

ISACS Assessment Tool (ISACS–AT)

#### Purpose

The ISACS–AT is designed to support the practical application of the International Small Arms Control Standards. Users of this tool can conduct self-assessments to establish baselines on their efforts to implement a wide range of small arms control commitments in line with the standards. The tool may also be used for training and capacity-building initiatives, as well as to promote the ISACS for educational and awareness-raising purposes.

#### Indicator-based assessment system

Existing implementation challenges on small arms control cannot be addressed effectively until current implementation status is understood sufficiently. Effective monitoring and evaluation of existing small arms control programmes, as well as planning for new initiatives require adequate collection, management, and analysis of relevant data. The ISACS, through its comprehensive guidance on small arms control, provide a set of benchmarks against which to measure the implementation of global small arms control commitments.

The purpose of the conducting assessments on small arms control is to allow users to better understand their implementation efforts on existing global small arms control commitments and to establish baselines in order to determine the needs for interventions by appropriate stakeholders to address problems associated with the illicit trade, uncontrolled proliferation and/or misuse of small arms and light weapons. The ISACS–AT fulfils this need by allowing users to design, collect, and analyze comprehensive quantitative and qualitative data on small arms and light weapons control based on the standards.

In order to enable users to conduct assessments, a set of indicators was developed by UNIDIR, drawn directly from the ISACS. The indicators help users to identify 1) *whether* measures indicated in the ISACS are implemented, and 2) the *extent* to which they have been implemented (including over time). The indicators provide users with greater detail in assessing how well they are implementing the control commitments outlined in the ISACS, including identification of existing capacities and gaps, and areas for assistance and cooperation.

Each indicator in the software is assigned a level of priority, corresponding to the four levels of obligations defined by the ISACS: **Shall/Should/May/Can**. Through this method, each indicator provides insight into the degree of implementation in relation to the priorities set by the standards. The priority levels of indicators are presented below:

**Shall:** The “shall” level indicates the highest priority for implementation. For those who wish to use the standards, the “shall” category indicates a requirement. The “shall” indicators address the following question: *How well is an user implementing the commitments the ISACS define as requirements?*

**Should:** The “should” level indicates the measures recommended for implementation by the standards. The “should” indicators address the following question: *How well is a user implementing the commitments the ISACS defines as recommendations?*

**May:** The “may” level indicates permissible actions in the ISACS. These indicators address the following question: *How has the user implemented control measures that the ISACS defines as permissible actions?*

**Can:** The “can” level indicates capability actions in the ISACS. In essence, these indicators inform the depth of capacity users have to implement a control measure. These indicators address the following question: *How much capacity does the user have in implementing the capability actions in the ISACS?*

### **Main features**

There are four main features to this software: 1) **Learn**, 2) **Explore**, 3) **Assess**, and 4) **Configure**. The table below (table 1) presents respective functions of the ISACS–AT.

#### *Learn*

The purpose of the Learn feature is to allow users to become familiar with the background of the ISACS and the software tool.

#### *Explore*

The purpose of the Explore feature is to allow users to access the ISACS modules and become familiar with the guidance provided by the standards. This feature allows users to examine the standards through accessing the original ISACS modules and enables them to view targeted guidance quickly through the use of ISACS indicators.

#### *Assess*

The purpose of the Assess feature is to allow users to conduct self-assessments to establish baselines on their implementation efforts with respect to the existing global small arms control commitments, as outlined in the ISACS. The ISACS–AT allows users to design, collect, and analyse comprehensive quantitative and qualitative information on small arms and light weapons control, with a view to determining the needs for informed and effective interventions by appropriate stakeholders to address problems associated with the illicit trade, uncontrolled proliferation, and/or misuse of small arms and light weapons.

The design of this feature allows users to select and assess the thematic issues of the ISACS most relevant to their national/local needs and priorities. The tool can help users to *identify priority areas* for small arms programming and design, *establish comprehensive baseline and/or benchmark progress* in assisting with the implementation of small arms control efforts, *conduct internal “self-evaluations”* of existing small arms programmes to *identify potential gaps*, as well as *provide technical guidance* in operational activities, with the aim to streamline small arms programming and practices with the ISACS.

#### *Configure*

The purpose of the configure feature is to allow users to manage the settings of the ISACS–AT, including creating/connecting to user storage file, protecting user data, backing up storage files, and conducting import/export of assessment data.

**Table 1: Main features of ISACS–AT**

<b>Learn</b>	<b>Explore</b>	<b>Assess</b>	<b>Configure</b>
About ISACS	ISACS Modules	Design a questionnaire	Create/connect to storage file
About this software	ISACS Indicators	Collect responses	Manage storage file
Acknowledgements		Analyse results	Export/import data
		Manage assessments	

The detail of the features and functions of the software are presented in the ISACS–AT Basics and Advanced guides.

### **ISACS tool technology and requirements**

The software tool is stand-alone and functional offline. The offline framework enhances protection of information and facilitates operational support where Internet is not available. Users have complete ownership and control over the data generated. The tool is compatible with both Windows and Mac systems. The software operates on the Adobe AIR platform—all users are required to download and install the Adobe AIR to run the ISACS–AT.

### **Getting Started**

The ISACS–AT is available for download free of cost from the ISACS Inter-Agency Support Unit website ([www.smallarmsstandards.org](http://www.smallarmsstandards.org)). The ISACS website also hosts the training materials on the use of the ISACS–AT. Once the tool has been downloaded and installed on your operating system, please refer to the ISACS–AT Basics and Advanced Guides to get started.

## **CONTACT**

### **Follow up support:**

For more information on the ISACS, contact Patrick McCarthy, Project Coordinator, ISACS Inter-Agency Support Unit: <http://www.smallarmsstandards.org/contact.html>

For more information on the ISACS Assessment Tool project, contact Himayu Shiotani, Project Manager and Researcher at UNIDIR: [hshiotani@unog.ch](mailto:hshiotani@unog.ch)

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