Navigating the choices of human resources reform within security sector reform contexts

Annex I: The Operational Guidance Framework - how to approach HRM reforms in the security sector

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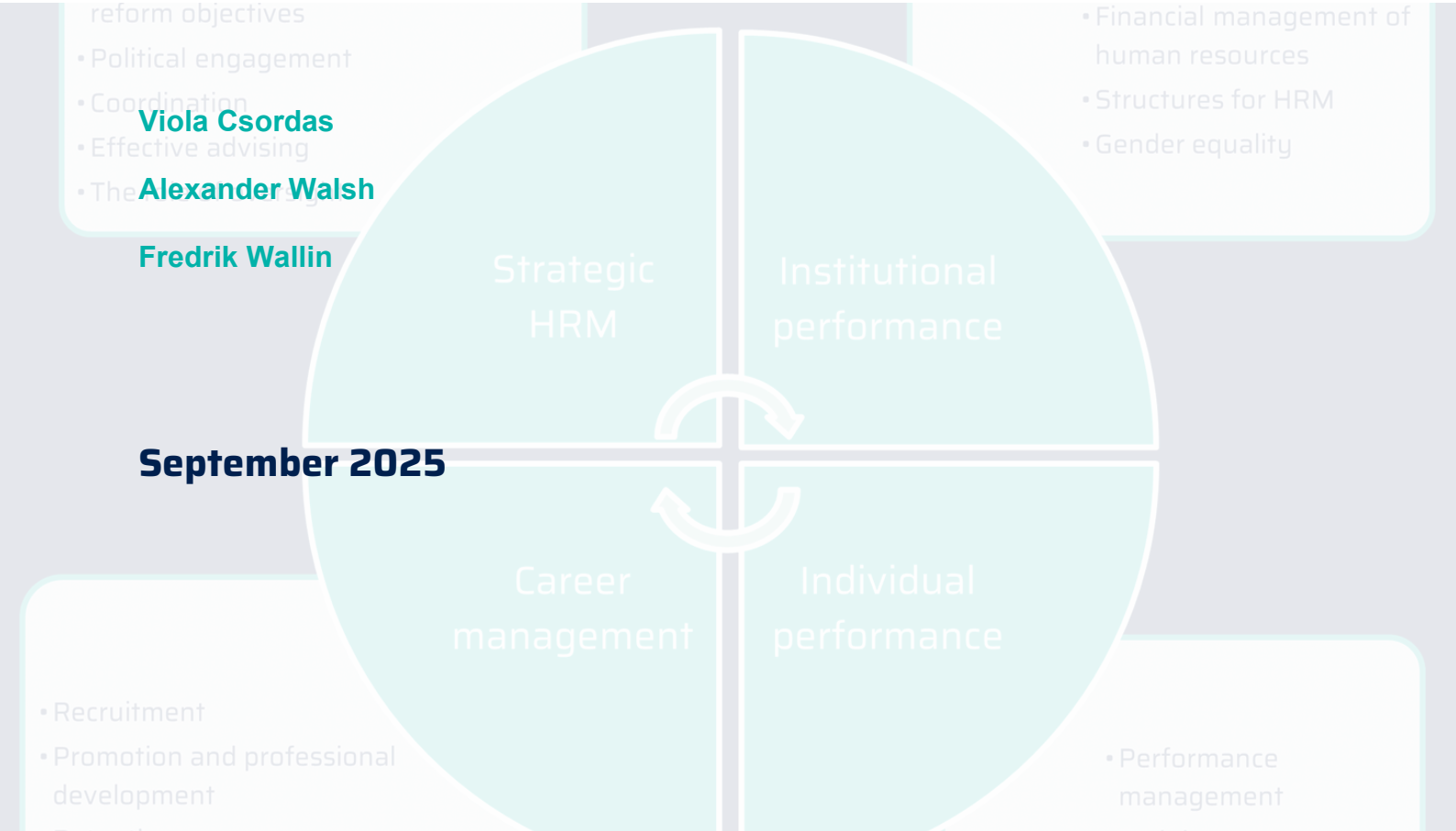

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Purpose

This Operational Guidance Framework presents the practical recommendations of the stocktaking study on good practices and lessons on HRM reforms in the security sector in a condensed manner.

Its intended audience ranges from policy and programming staff at the ministerial level to political officers at embassies and multilateral missions, to advisors implementing HRM reform programs.

The collected lessons and good practices can serve to inform HRM reform programming in the security sector throughout the various phases of the project cycle, ranging from analysis and assessment, programme design, mid-term reviews to final evaluations and lessons learning exercises.

For each of the aspects of HRM reforms, ranging from **strategic reform** aspects to **institutional reforms** and **career management**, a variety of common obstacles and indicators for what good practice could look like are presented. The document is meant to be used as a travel guide, presenting various design options that can be adapted to local contexts, rather than universal instruction. Greater contextual analysis of how these different design options have been used can be found in the Synthesis Report.

Strategic HRM

Linking technical HRM reforms to strategic reform objectives

Strategic-level HRM reforms are those that link technical changes to broader defence and security reform goals, meaning that changes in the way personnel are managed contribute towards the achievement of higher-level objectives.

From an international partners' perspective, strategic reform objectives can be explicit or implicit. They can mean a connection of HRM reforms to strategic SSG/R objectives, such as improving transparency, accountability, inclusion or also furthering the WPS agenda. It can also mean accompanying a partner in a war to peace transitions, e. g. maintaining an ethnic balance and equilibrium in a power sharing agreement between groups, or simply remaining engaged with a partner, to facilitate more substantial future cooperation.

From the national perspective, strategic reform starts with systematic assessments of threats and existing capabilities, to be articulated in documents such as national security strategies, or police reviews. This is usually done with the aim to improve operational effectiveness, identify efficiencies and financial economies, or improve the organization's agility to adapt.

On the other hand, addressing HRM reforms outside of an overarching strategic plan will typically fall short of creating long-term impact or sustainable comprehensive reforms, and can result in unplanned outcomes, such as an HRM system that does not match operational demands.

Common challenges

- There is tension between national priorities that are often tied to an operational security challenge, and the international push towards deep meaningful reform. While the first is necessary, it can also be short-termist. A realistic assessment of whether this is a positive moment for reform is incomplete or missing.

- There is no strategic guidance at partner level on what strategic reform objectives are, such as a national security or defence.

- International partners seem to prefer tactical and visible interventions such as training, at the expense or instead of HRM reforms and do not have a broader strategy themselves.

- Technical HRM reforms are disconnected from strategic reform objectives, resulting in overall reforms limited to the technical level.

Good practices

- There is an alignment between technical HRM reform activities, and strategic reform objectives on the side of the international and national partner.

- Strategic reform objectives can include for example

    - improving the operational effectiveness,
    - aligning the force structure to a threat assessment,
    - seeking efficiencies and financial economies,
    - addressing issues around accountability and clientelist networks,
    - strengthening gender equality and the implementation of the WPS agenda,
    - maintaining peace and stability for example through a certain power sharing equilibrium,
    - staying engaged with a geopolitically important partner.

- Strategic objectives do not have to always be explicit, but implicit objectives need to be fully understood.

- The programme has a clear strategic intent and logic on how individual components contribute strategic reform objectives.

- Where there is limited local ownership or no joint vision, international partners can lower the level of ambition for their programming, engage in a process of discussion and dialogue, and leverage technical entry points to identify joint priorities.

Political engagement and messaging

Since HRM reforms involve choices about the deployment and governance of resources, this is a political process. For instance, who gets a say in how personnel are placed within an organisation, how oversight of those decisions is managed, and how actively gender equality is pursued or marginalized groups included, are sensitive questions.

As such, to execute HRM reforms effectively, international partners need to conduct ongoing political analysis, and work from a clear political engagement strategy that also supports local ownership. This political analysis will also identify how the informal incentive systems works. Trust building and maintaining confidence between international and national partners is of equal importance to the success of the programme. In some instances, where there is a strong bilateral relationship, a bilateral approach can provide the basis of trust required to tackle sensitive reforms. In other instances, however, political messaging on HRM reforms by individual partners can be further strengthened by coordinated efforts between international partners or through a multilateral approach.

Likewise, international programming that is not politically tuned will allow for tactical-level changes through technical solutions but will not address the underlying political economy and culture of HRM systems. Addressing HRM reforms in an uncoordinated way can lead to lost opportunities for political messaging and engagement; moreover, it can lead to inefficiencies in programming, such as duplication and lost synergies. It can also create challenges for national partners to navigate different donors' support.

Common challenges

- Reform objectives meet a lack of political will and local ownership, risking the sustainability of reforms.
- The political economy and corrupt structures hinder progress.
- Organizations or individual donors might be lacking political clout and access to the partner because of historical legacies.
- The technical level (advisors, programme staff) faces difficulties to navigate the political environment because of a disconnect with the political staff within mission/ embassy.
- Donors compete for access to national partners, compromising strategic reform goals for political expediency.
- Geopolitical considerations and competition with non-traditional donors trump the strategic reform agenda.

Good practices

- There is a clear political engagement strategy from the political level, either the embassy, or political level of the mission. It should be based on an understanding of the formal and informal incentives operating in the security sectors. Such analysis will be very sensitive and can be done confidentially.
- The different engagements by one donor are well coordinated, creating synergies between programs and engagements (e. g. one project contributing to another project's strategic objectives).
- This coordination is formalized through joint strategy documents, theories of change and indicators.
- Different donors coordinate their engagements, creating leverage and learning from each other's engagements; this leads to concrete and ideally concerted action, for example disbursement of ODA, or discussions on EU accession tied to the achievement of specific results.
- The centrality of local ownership is recognized and there is sufficient political will to enable sustainable reform.

- In case of insufficient political will, data and evidence can be used to support strengthening local ownership and buy-in, understanding the utility and necessity of reform; similarly, hands-on mentoring and international training courses are used to impact mind-sets and affect cultural shifts.

Effective advising approaches

The more politically sensitive the context, the more important the role of the advisor and the support they receive from the political level. An effective advisor requires both the technical skills in their area of expertise, and the ability to navigate organisational dynamics and political sensitivities. This is especially the case in contexts that have legacies of conflict. Awareness of the crosscutting themes of human rights and gender equality that are always relevant in post-conflict contexts are also critical.

Two common pitfalls are the use of context-blind approaches, and a rapid advisor rotation frequency, where incumbents have insufficient time to understand the situation and become effective.

Common challenges

- Concepts and approaches are transferred without adaptation to partner context and institution, while approaches are short term.
- There is a disconnect between political and technical aspects.
- Frequent rotations make it difficult to fully understand historical, political and socioeconomic contexts as well as build trusted relationships.
- Advisors lack intercultural and interpersonal skills.
- Advisors face a multitude of other advisors, who all promote different approaches (and agendas).
- Advisors are promoting highly technical and/or expensive practices that are facing sustainability challenges regarding local capacities and budgets.

Good practices

- Advisors combine expertise in the subject matter, e. g. through operational experience, with political savviness and advisory skills, for example reframing reforms in the language that resonates with partners.
- Advisors have to have political backup from their donors as a most basic condition for their effectiveness.
- Limiting the frequency of rotations provides room to allow for better contextual understanding and build long-term relationships.
- Advisors prioritize creating respect and trust with partners through observing and listening, creating and leveraging networks.
- Advisors are prepared through extensive pre-deployment preparation and receive support from local cultural advisors to support advisors to deliver context specific solutions.
- Advisors put significant effort into the handover process for their successors.
- Advisors define the content of their roles and nature of relationships with partners – e. g. limiting their role to present options/ modules vs. hands-on mentoring.
- Advisors apply an incremental, step by step approach to change.

The role of oversight

Oversight of the security sector is the practice of monitoring the sector to ensure that it is acting lawfully, effectively, for the good of the population, and in line with Human Rights standards. Oversight can be conducted from internally within the security sector (e. g. Inspector General, oversight and disciplinary committees, mechanisms for recourse) and externally from the outside (e. g. parliament and its committees, ombudspersons, audit institutions, commissions on human rights, anti-corruption, civil society and media). Oversight is relevant to HRM as a practice to check whether HRM processes such as recruitment, promotions and payroll are done in compliance with regulations and the wider law, as well as to scrutinize the alignment between the organizational structure with actual needs (to limit unnecessary spending).

Conducting oversight is a technical and political task. Oversight actors need to have knowledge of the finer workings of the defence sector, from technical aspects such as procurement, to higher-level aspects such as helping shape strategic plans. Procurement is very commonly a difficult area, because defence sectors typically conduct large and complicated procurements that present corruption risks.

Common challenges include the lack of oversight institutions' (or their interest and capacity) as well as sensitivity – and even partisanship – around defence data, which means there needs to be trusted mechanisms to share information so that it does not leak into the wrong hands.

Common challenges

- Even in the presence of official oversight and accountability structures and mechanism, in the absence of a culture shift, oversight and accountability can suffer from a lack of implementation or be circumvented.

- Oversight institutions lack adequate resources, capacity or interest to conduct their mission.

Good practices

- There are clear regulations on spending, budgets are public and salary grids and allowances transparent to oversight institutions, the media and the public.

- Safeguards and policies against corruption are in place for all HR processes, as well as external and internal oversight structures such as the Inspector General, Ombusperson, Parliament and Parliamentary committees, audit institutions, media and the public. This especially offers opportunities to create true synergies for programmes with several components, e.g. when simultaneously working with Inspector General.

- Internal rules and regulations are available for everyone to see, e.g. through a mobile app, including a recourse mechanism, such as a phone number for complaints.

- Oversight is usually only an implicit objective of HRM programming, but ideally it is connected to other similar international initiatives such as Building Integrity; the programme either engages directly beyond the security sector with parliament and civil society, other external oversight institutions such as ombudspersons, audit institutions, or with other programs working with these.

- New policies are approved by military and equal-rank civilian staff in the MoD as step towards civilian oversight.

Monitoring

In order to continually analyse, assess, adjust, and improve HRM programming, monitoring is a crucial aspect. This requires a clear Theory of Change and SMART[1] results indicators at the output but also outcome and ideally impact level. At the same time, rigid log-frames and output-focused reporting requirements following a development programming logic might create a false sense of progress. Given the significance of local ownership, monitoring of uptake of HRM programming with local stakeholders needs to be considered here.

Monitoring frequently seems to be seen only as an after-thought in HRM programming or are limited to tracking progress against only activity-level milestones. This limits the program's ability to learn and adapt, as well as to collect evidence on what works.

Common challenges

- Action plans and milestones are complex and fragmented.
- Monitoring remains at the output level, mostly tracking activities.
- Outputs such as policies, laws or budgets, are not translated into real change but remain on paper only.

Good practices

- Strategic objectives are translated into SMART indicators
- There is a clear theory of change and results framework, including outcome level indicators.
- Information for capturing results is triangulated with different sources (e.g. on degree of implementation and impact of newly approved policies).

Gender

HRM reforms can be promising entry points for promoting gender equality in the security sector, both with regards to increasing the proportion of female personnel and ensuring that women and men have equal career opportunities and access to senior leadership roles. In addition to the norms of guaranteeing non-discrimination, gender equality measures in HRM can improve operational effectiveness by widening the pool of candidates for recruitment, improving retention, and ensuring forces promote and deploy their most competent personnel irrespective of gender and gendered roles.

To that end, potential activities to promote gender equality through HRM include adopting targets and special measures to attract, recruit and retain women; removing formal and informal barriers to women serving in all roles; putting in place family-friendly working practices and supports; supporting women's career development through mentoring and networks; and taking strong action to prevent and deal with sexual harassment and other expressions of institutional gender bias. Such measures are most effective when linked to overarching gender equality policies and strategies, championed by senior leadership, and ongoing analysis of workforce and working conditions with a gendered lens.

In practice, efforts towards strengthening gender equality in the security sector is often met with resistance due to gendered roles and cultural norms. An easy fix seems to be the adoption of gender action plans; however, their implementation risks falling short if not concretely anchored in HRM policies and processes.

[1] Specific, measurable, attainable, reasonable and time-bound

Common challenges

- Low percentage of women in the security sector, difficult access to higher ranks and even more underrepresentation of women in leadership positions

- Existence of gender action plans or national action plans for WPS is not enough – failure to translate into concrete HR practices and regulations

- Cultural context where gender equality is not a shared value, resistance and excuses to increasing number of women / women in leadership positions, or a lack of understanding how gender can affect men and women's needs differently,

Good practices

- Women are equally represented within security sector staff including in leadership positions.

- There is a gender strategy, including gender indicators and targets; the strategy is being implemented through for example the collection of sex-disaggregated data, the integration of specific gender goals and quotas into recruitment targets, the application of gender sensitive recruitment practices (e. g. requiring one female candidate for each vacancy) and integration of gendered targets into professional development and training policies, e. g. a percentage female candidates for leadership courses.

- Assumptions about gendered roles are addressed, e.g. through modules on inclusive leadership in professional military education.

- There are gender advisors or a network of gender focal points providing gender training and sensitization throughout the organization.

- Programming adapts the concept of gender and women's empowerment to the local context and uses a terminology that is well understood but not confrontational.

Institutional management

Organizational structure

An effective security sector institution should have an organizational structure aligned to the threat environment and its subsequent tasks. To delineate roles and responsibilities, and the avoidance of duplication would include clear organigrams, roles and reporting lines / command structures. The institution should also be sufficiently staffed in terms of numbers. Organizational structures should be agile and easily adaptable as threats evolve, with regular and structured review processes.

Addressing the organisational structure can be difficult for various reasons. For instance, it could require significant legal changes necessitating a parliamentary majority, come with strong political ramifications to attempt a structural reform of the security sector, might require the recognition of another state as a growing new threat, which might not be acknowledged by certain constituencies. Finally, an organisational structure that has been shaped as a power-sharing mechanism brings benefits in terms of harmony but costs in efficiency and is difficult to adapt to meeting operational needs.

Failure to engage on the organizational structure, however, frequently results in very limited reforms that address only individual issues in isolation, without comprehensive solutions. Notably, this also means that because HRM affects the entire organizational structure, that pilot approaches tackling only part of the systems, come with significant risks.

Common challenges:

- The organizational structure is not aligned to what is required, and there is a mismatch between current capabilities and capability needs. Processes to realign are either non-existent, weak or unregularly implemented.
- A common trend is a top-heavy structure (inverted pyramid) with a surfeit of senior officers. This can be the result of a legacy system of draft combining problems in recruitment, the retirement system and little employment prospects in the private sector.
- Years without official recruitment campaigns can further exacerbate this and lead to the informal recruitment of personnel outside official payroll and accountability mechanisms.
- Where the organizational structure is the result of a power sharing equilibrium and based on a representational quota system, attempting change can be too politically sensitive.

Good practices

- The organizational structure and threat environment are well aligned (national security, sectoral, threat analysis) and updated through a clear mechanism for regular review to evolving capability needs.
- Recruitment efforts are aligned with required and forecast capability needs.
- The organizational structure is clearly laid out in an organigram and accompanying personnel database, with clearly distinguished mandates/responsibilities/leadership, reporting lines, internal coordination. This avoids duplications/ gaps/ redundancies.
- Programming staff has a strategy to understand and navigate the political ramifications of any discussions or changes.
- Supporting the development of job descriptions can be a subtle way for advisors to discuss the organizational structure.

Financial management of human resources

For effective HRM, the security sector needs to budget and forecast costs. In reform contexts, a common problem is that development or reform projects are not costed, ignoring the fact that the process of change is not normally cost-neutral. Likewise, particularly in post-conflict contexts, security institutions can be severely limited in their financial manoeuvre because they are required to maintain a certain number of personnel; meanwhile, demobilizing them is politically difficult and a potential threat to national security. Finally, the general issue of shortage of resources and unpredictability of allocations is a common challenge. As already noted, running effective and timely procurement processes – and the attendant corruption risks – are also a common challenge.

Common challenges

- There is no costing of the financial sustainability of reforms.
- Payroll reconciliation is weak or absent.
- Salaries and benefits are below a living wage necessitating additional income sources, or low compared to the private sector or other parts of the security sector.
- Costs of retirement are not taken into account for financial planning, especially if retirement benefits are administered by a different entity.
- There is little external scrutiny and oversight over budgets and spending.

Good practices

- Security sector budgeting processes are transparent and comprehensive, including parliament, and the development plan/ defence strategy etc. are costed.
- HRM reforms such as raising the retirement age, planning for pension and retirement costs are costed and checked for their financial affordability.
- Not the entire defence budget is spent on salaries, leaving funds also for capital investments and operations, as well as adequate resources for HR functions.
- Salaries and allowances are aligned to market rates to attract candidate and limit corruption.
- Payroll management is standardized, with a process for payroll reconciliation, clear guidelines for salary/allowance/benefit brackets, as well as access to financial information for external overseers (e.g. parliamentary committees and audit institutions). Salaries are paid into verified bank accounts of personnel to limit the risk of commanders syphoning funds.
- Programs can include the deployment of specific procurement and budgeting advisors.

Efficient management of human resources

Robust mechanisms for aligning available human resources with the strategic objectives of a security organization are a key component towards managing the performance of an institution and maximizing the efficiency of scarce resources. In practice, this means a function that lies between the MOD and the military that together can recruit and professionally shape a force, tracking capabilities and planning for future needs.

Underinvestment in HR functions, and the idea that they are ancillary rather than an elemental part of an organisation are common issues. Linked to this is the situation whereby HRM languishes at the operational levels, disconnected to the strategic capability planning processes. At the same time, the administrative demands of HR can overwhelm the strategic level's capacity for planning.

Common challenges:

- There is no demand from within the organisation for data or analytics, mostly because of organisational culture.
- There is little capacity for capability planning and the provision of HR data.
- Strategic planners are overwhelmed by the demands of administrative HR tasks. Deployments and assignments are not driven by operational needs, but either given as favours, to collect 'rents' or in a random manner because of a lack of data.
- Staff are randomly rotated to new positions instead of building and leveraging specialized expertise.

Good practices

- The HR function is organized in a way that links HR to the strategic vision.
- Capacities for structured force management enable the organization to keep track of personnel numbers, upcoming retirements and recruitment needs. This can be done e.g. through dedicated career or force managers/ an ORCA capacity.
- The organizational structure is operationalized through job descriptions for each role, which link to individual as well as institutional objectives.
- There is a clear division of labour between strategic capability planning (such as forecasting capability requirements, training needs, deployment and assignment planning) and administrative HR functions (contracting, payroll, welfare). The creation of a specific HR Centre can be a way to centralize all HR functions and provide data for strategic decision making.
- Automated human resources information management systems or HR IT systems / databases are the basis of decent HR data and are fit for the contextual capacity to be properly maintained.
- HR provides clear staff rules and regulations which are accessible to all.

Individual Performance Management – good practices, lessons and sample indicators of success

Measuring outputs

In addition to measuring performance at the institutional level, it is equally important to manage performance at the individual level. This links both to the effectiveness and efficiency of the organization as well as allowing merit-based recruitment, promotion and deployment planning.

In security sector institutions, when performance management tools, such as job descriptions, are absent, it is difficult to systematically measure personnel outputs and organisational performance.

Common challenges

- There are no tools for measuring performance such as clear job descriptions and performance appraisal.
- Direct supervision and feedback from line managers is weak due to lack of leadership training and culture.
- The performance appraisal process is not fully understood and indicators not objectively defined. Inflated ratings make it difficult to identify top and low performers.
- Staff have no recourse when dissatisfied with their rating.

Good practices

- Roles and responsibilities are clear to staff and supervisors. This can mean dedicated policies on job descriptions, development of job descriptions and access of staff to their job descriptions (e.g. through an App).
- Performance is appraised regularly in a well-regulated process, which is linked to the tasks and responsibilities in the job description.
- This regular feedback mechanism measures performance and success against objective indicators.
- Job descriptions and performance appraisal process are complemented by dedicated training for staff and supervisors. This addresses the issue of rating inflation.
- There is a recourse mechanism for staff in case of dissatisfaction with the rating.
- Programming acknowledges that launching a performance appraisal process takes time, focusing on incremental change and improvements, and engaging with the partner long-term to demonstrate the performance appraisal's value throughout several iterations.

Training

Training is a key instrument of HRM to bridge the gap between current capability and forecast requirements, as well as enable individual professional development and career paths. On the other side of the coin, HRM is an enabler for trainings to have an impact by recording who has been trained on what and supporting the maximum utilization of new skills.

As training usually is a prerequisite for further career advancement, it is important to develop clear criteria and processes for who has access to what type of training. At the same time, and especially for training in specialized areas of expertise, it is important to match numbers of staff trained and training subject to projected requirements and needs. With regards to ensuring inclusivity, training is an important area to include gender and inclusion through adequate training offers and mainstream into existing training offers, as well as ensuring inclusive access to trainings. Ensuring equal and merit-based access to training opportunities improves organizational performance but can be challenged by the use of these opportunities as a client-reward system.

Dependence on access to training offered by international partners can make it difficult to align strategic capability planning and capacity building needs through training.

Common challenges

- International partners provide capacity building support that do not match actual needs, and are based on their own, un-adapted curricula, while neglecting to coordinate with other international partners.
- No records are kept of past trainings, risking duplication and sub optimally using the new skills.
- Access to training opportunities is not equal or merit-based but a tool for clientelism and favouritism.
- The local training infrastructure is very limited, for example there is no full military academy to deliver professional military education, and/ or an inadequate capacity to deliver even basic and specialist training, increasing the reliance on international partners.

Good practices

- Training offers are aligned with and responsive to strategic objectives and forecast capability needs. Training needs are identified in conjunction with the capability planning process and curricula developed in line with emerging capacity needs.
- Training strategies are well integrated with overall professional development and career paths.
- Programming is conscious of and aims to mitigate the risks of the political economy of access to trainings, especially international courses; e. g. through clear rules and regulation on selection criteria for trainings.
- International partners provide long-term support with regards to international courses that enables partners to plan ahead. This is especially the case for specialties who require many years of consecutive training such as helicopter pilots.
- The local training infrastructure is able to deliver the vast majority of basic trainings.

Career Management – good practices, lessons and sample indicators of success

Recruitment

Successful recruitment efforts are a continuous process to regenerate an institution's personnel. They create the right messages and incentives to attract qualified candidates. They identify the best ways of spreading their message and reaching candidates. Additionally, recruitment processes are an entry point for including targets for female recruits, ensuring gender-sensitive recruitment practices as well as the inclusion of marginalized groups.

A common challenge arises from the transition from draft systems, where defence sectors have to make up a lot of ground in terms of competitiveness, and recruitment strategies.

Common challenges

- Where there is a lack of interest in serving and conditions of service are inadequate, it can be difficult to attract the right candidates (numbers and quality) including deficient specialists.
- Where there are large numbers of candidates, it can be difficult to select the right candidates and corruption-proof the selection process.
- Pausing recruitment over many years creates a top-heavy organisation and incentivizes informal recruitment.
- When there are less applicants from one specific group, it can be difficult to maintain quotas and the representation required for power sharing.
- Recruitment when needing to respect an ethnic/ sectarian quota (e. g. when less interests/ applicants from one ethnicity)

Good practices

- The recruitment and selection process follows standard procedures, including clear criteria for how to apply, selection, vetting, guided by an internal HR review committee.
- Entry exams have shown their utility for selecting in a meritocratic manner, as well as anonymized selection processes to tackle clientelism. Computer based lotteries can help deal with a large number of applications.
- In some instances, a balance needs to be found between a merit-based approach and maintaining a power sharing balance.
- Where recruitment systems are underdeveloped, the need for investment is recognized, especially when transitioning from a draft system. Recruitment strategies which include professional, modern, attractive and easy to access recruitment facilities staffed by inspiring personnel have proven useful.
- There should be clear targets and data to measure recruitment success and informing the work.
- Raising the enlistment maximal age can increase the pool of candidates.
- Improving the remuneration and conditions of service enhances the attractiveness of joining the security forces.

Promotion and professional development

Merit-based promotion can be used as an incentive for individual performance and retention and maintaining staff morale; moreover, planning staff's professional development and career paths strategically with the overall needs and requirements of the organization in mind is one way for HRM to minimize the gap between available capabilities and requirements. Equal access to professional development opportunities and career paths is a way of ensuring equal opportunity for female staff and members of marginalized groups.

Another set of issues comes from the extent to which the defence minister and senior military officers have control over promotions can have consequences for integrity as well as morale. In certain contexts, all promotions, from corporal's stripes to generals' stars, are the decision of the senior-most leadership. Another risk is the absence of clear career paths, promotion criteria and a process for decision-making on promotions. This can create delays in the process and can allow the instrumentalization of promotions, even for clientelist or financial gain.

Common challenges

- There are no clear career paths (including where limited by ethnic quota system).
- Opportunities for promotion and career advancement are used as a tool for clientelism and corruption.
- There is extensive political influence on promotions down to the lowest levels.

Good practices

- Promotions for working level personnel are decided at the technical level, reserving only the most senior promotions to the political level.
- Staff have equal and mostly merit-based access to trainings and professional development opportunities such as assignments in international missions or high-profile assignments.
- There is a clear promotion policy, including merit-based criteria, and an oversight and controls mechanism to ensure their application. Promotion boards have shown to be a useful tool to ensure objectivity but need to have regulations on their composition and functioning as well as the recourse process.
- Promotions happening automatically when all requirements are met can tackle promotion backlogs but also promote unsuitable personnel when not linked to performance. Promotion boards on the other hand might create backlogs and be vulnerable to corruption.
- There is a professional development strategy covering career paths including details on their timelines and objectives to be met; information should be available to all staff.

Retention and reserve

High attrition rates of trained staff can siphon off significant resources from a security institution. Therefore, a robust retention strategy to ensure that strong candidates remain in the organization is an important aspect of HRM. This should include a mechanism to target promising candidates before their contracts are up and provision of incentives for them to remain in the force. Another aspect can be the inclusion of gender-specific data on reasons for leaving as well as possible incentives for remaining in the force. Low pay, bad facilities and poor benefits such as healthcare and accommodation, when combined with a lack of engagement by the organization or even a sense of organisational injustice around matters such promotion, lead to high attrition rates.

The creation of a reserve force is an option to extend the utility of strong candidates and create a pool of ready candidates for surging needs. In case such a reserve force is put into place, it should be gender sensitive and account for the specific needs of women, men, boys, and girls. In addition to the cost associated with a reserve force, it requires a supporting legal framework that specifies the status, rights and responsibilities of reserve members. Moreover, a reserve force might be more useful for certain types of positions and less so for others, such as combat positions.

Common challenges

- Attrition rates in the security sector can be high due to inadequate financial rewards, such as pay, benefits, healthcare, suitable accommodation, decent equipment and pensions.
- Attrition rates can be high also due to social factors, such as little meritocratic opportunity to advance in status, skills and pay.
- Attrition rates can be high due to a lack of disciplinary measures for those leaving early/ breaking their contracts.
- The reserve is emerging as a blind spot programming.

Good practices

- There is a retention strategy aligned to the overall capability development objectives, recognizing the need to invest in those already in the organization.
- The retention function is staff either through dedicated retention officers or mainstreaming retention function into commanders' job tasks, to proactively reach out to staff whose contract is about to end and discuss options.
- Improving material conditions creates incentives for personnel to stay in the security sector.
- Salaries and additional allowances such as for living costs, health care, education etc. need to compete with private sector alternatives.
- Different aspects of the work environment such as the work life balance, clarity of missions and values of organization increase the attractiveness of staying.
- Clear contracts and e.g. a military justice system can limit the opportunity to break contract early.
- Certain specialists might require additional incentives, such as extra allowances, higher salaries, exemptions from physical fitness requirements, rotations etc.
- Creating a reserve force can help to fill certain specialist functions and provide a surge capacity; the reserve duty can already be part of the service obligation contract.

Reintegration and retirement

Providing support to reintegrate into the civilian job market can be an incentive for candidates to join the force in the first place; moreover, it reduces the risks associated with unemployed (and possibly disenchanted) former security sector personnel.

Similarly, including expenditures for the retirement of staff helps inform budgetary decisions at the national and defence budget level; adequate retirement benefits enable further staff to leave the organization when at retirement age, and reduces the risk of a top-heavy organization where the majority of staff is of higher age. Getting personnel to retire, to make space for upcoming talent, can be as much a challenge as recruitment, especially under poor economic opportunities for veterans.

An absence of funds for adequate retirement benefits can be the result of a disconnect between HR payroll and retirement planning. Even if there are retirement benefits, those below the retirement age might face economic hardship without reintegration support.

Common challenges

- Unclear or insufficient pension systems, lack of reintegration support and limited opportunities in the private sector create an economic necessity to remain in the security sector.
- Financial planning of retirement benefits can be challenging if administered by an entity outside the security sector.
- International support to reintegration and retirement benefits is limited.

Good practices

- The costs of retirement benefits are included in the budgeting process and recruitment strategy.
- An effective welfare system provides adequate benefits such as healthcare, pension/ retirement and invalidity benefits. There are clear rules and regulations on accessing benefits.
- Personnel leaving the organization is offered reintegration support, such as (vocational) training, agreements with the private sector to create jobs, or seed funding for starting a business. This includes gender-relevant alternatives.
- Programming recognizes the significance of reintegration support especially in cases of large-scale demobilization during war-to-peace transitions.

Psychosocial health

Recognizing and safeguarding the psychosocial health and mental wellbeing of security sector personnel is now widely acknowledged as vital for operational effectiveness and risk prevention related to conditions like PTSD and other mental health challenges. However, in the defence context, there's a danger of adopting a limited perspective on psychosocial health, prioritizing concerns like post-traumatic stress disorder and suicide prevention while overlooking equally crucial issues such as harassment, bullying, ethnic tensions, and workplace culture, including inclusivity. Broadening the focus beyond PTSD and suicide prevention is essential to address the diverse array of challenges impacting the mental wellbeing of security sector personnel.

Common challenges

- There is limited interest by international and national partners.
- Culture-specific aspects make it difficult to address this topic.

Good practices

- Psychosocial health needs are recognized, with a broadened focus beyond PTSD and suicide prevention.
- Organizational trauma is recognized and addressed.
- There is a provision of psychological debriefings after return from international missions and operations, e.g. in decompression camps in off-site facilities.