

# POLICE REFORM

Applying the principles of good security sector governance to policing

## ABOUT THIS SSR BACKGROUNDER

This SSR Backgrounder is about applying the principles of good security sector governance (SSG) to policing through police reform. The police are the primary state security provider responsible for protecting people and property through public assistance, law enforcement, the maintenance of peaceful public order, and the identification and prevention of crime. The goal of police reform is to ensure that policing becomes more effective, more accountable and more responsive to the needs of all members of society within a framework of democratic security sector governance.

## THIS SSR BACKGROUNDER ANSWERS THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

What is police reform? .....	2
Why is police reform necessary? .....	3
Is there a model for police reform? .....	4
How are police reforms carried out? .....	5
How is gender equality part of police reform? .....	6

## ABOUT THIS SERIES

The SSR Backgrounders provide concise introductions to topics and concepts in good security sector governance (SSG) and security sector reform (SSR). The series summarizes current debates, explains key terms and exposes central tensions based on a broad range of international experiences. The SSR Backgrounders do not promote specific models, policies or proposals for good governance or reform but do provide further resources that will allow readers to extend their knowledge on each topic.

The SSR Backgrounders are a resource for security governance and reform stakeholders seeking to understand and also to critically assess current approaches to good SSG and SSR.

## DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector

**Governance** is dedicated to improving the security of states and their people within a framework of democratic governance, the rule of law, respect for human rights, and gender equality. Since its founding in 2000, DCAF has contributed to making peace and development more sustainable by assisting partner states, and international actors supporting these states, to improve the governance of their security sector through inclusive and participatory reforms. It creates innovative knowledge products, promotes norms and good practices, provides legal and policy advice and supports capacity-building of both state and non-state security sector stakeholders.

### DCAF wishes to thank

Ronja Harder and Jasper Linke for contributions to research, writing and editing;  
Jenny Rouse for copy editing in English;  
SwissTranslate for translation into and copy editing in French; and  
Petra Gurtner for layout and design.

### Series editor

Fairlie Chappuis

© DCAF

SSR Backgrounders are available free of charge from [www.dcaf.ch](http://www.dcaf.ch)

Users may copy and distribute this material provided that DCAF is credited.  
Not for commercial use.

### To cite this publication

DCAF - Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance. Police Reform. SSR Backgrounder Series. Geneva: DCAF, 2019.

## DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector

Governance

Maison de la Paix

Chemin Eugène-Rigot 2E

CH-1202 Geneva

Switzerland

+41 22 730 94 00

[info@dcaf.ch](mailto:info@dcaf.ch)

[@DCAF\\_Geneva](https://twitter.com/DCAF_Geneva)

[www.dcaf.ch](http://www.dcaf.ch)

## WHAT IS POLICE REFORM?

In an SSR context, police reform aims to transform the values, culture, policies and practices of police organizations so that police can perform their duties with respect for democratic values, human rights and the rule of law. Such reform aims to achieve a professional style of democratic policing that:

- Takes a people-centred approach to security;
- Protects human rights in accordance with national and international law;
- Is responsive to the different security needs of all people regardless of gender, age, class, ethnicity or other characteristic or association;
- Assists all people, in particular those members of the community in need of immediate help;
- Upholds high levels of accountability in its conduct;
- Establishes an effective system of democratic control and oversight over the police;
- Builds a public service that is efficient and effective.

Police reform also aims to improve how the police interact with other parts of the security sector, such as the courts and departments of corrections, or executive, parliamentary or independent authorities with management or oversight responsibilities (see figure 1).

### THE POLICE

The police are state security providers with the primary task of protecting people and property through public assistance, law enforcement, the identification, investigation and prevention of crime and the maintenance of peaceful public order. Police are on the front line of security provision by the State and thus are the security provider that members of the public most frequently encounter in their daily lives.

The police and other law enforcement agencies hold special powers that, under specific, legally defined circumstances, allow them temporarily to limit the exercise of basic rights, deprive people of their freedom and use force, including lethal force. Because of their powers and their proximity to the public, how the police fulfil their duties has direct impacts on the security of individuals and communities, as well as the State.

→ For more information on the police, please refer to the SSR Backgrounder on “The Police”.

**FIGURE 1 POLICE REFORM INVOLVES A VARIETY OF STATE AND NON-STATE ACTORS**



## WHY IS POLICE REFORM NECESSARY?

The political, legal and social context within which police operate often changes. **Public security institutions need to be created or adapted to meet changing security needs as well as the expectations of the communities they serve.** Police reform in the context of SSR may become necessary for a variety of reasons that depend on the local, national and international context. For example:

- The normal process of responding to changing security requirements, such as changing patterns of crime or new threats to public safety;
- New or updated legal frameworks;
- Changes in political direction through elections or new appointments to office;
- Exposure of police malpractice or corruption;
- Peacebuilding, post-conflict reconstruction or transitional justice measures;
- Implementation of a peace agreement;
- Conflict prevention and mediation;

- Social transformation and changing social expectations, such as greater demand for gender equality;
- Establishment of a new political system through democratization.

Police reform commonly aims to:

- **Achieve equal treatment and opportunities for all in access to security and justice**, with police and judicial services protecting and promoting respect for human rights and the rule of law;
- **Improve public awareness of policing** through the provision of balanced and relevant information about police funding, expenditure, activities and results, as well as the legitimate roles and responsibilities of the police;
- **Address corruption and promote integrity** through training, effective complaint mechanisms and the removal of incompetent or corrupt officers;
- **Modernize outdated procedures** and update legal frameworks, codes of practice, training and operating procedures;

- **Achieve cooperation** among law enforcement agencies with different local and national jurisdictions, including through multilateral frameworks, as well as with other security actors such as the military, civil defence forces and intelligence or border authorities;
- **Improve the efficiency and effectiveness** of the police organization to improve performance of its legal duties, ensuring proper use of public resources.

## IS THERE A MODEL FOR POLICE REFORM?

There is no single model for police reform and every reform process must reflect its own specific context. However, **there are two core goals common to all police reform efforts within an SSR framework: (1) improving police capacity and effectiveness, and (2) improving the integrity and accountability of the police** (see figure 2). This means that police reform sometimes focuses on elements internal to police organizations and other times on the management, control and oversight of police services within the larger security sector.

Internal police reform can involve changes to any part of the police organization and its management structures, for example:

- Organizational structures, chains of command and composition of the police;
- Policies for human resources management, including recruitment, training, promotion and appointments, retirement, benefits, rewards and discipline;
- Regulations, systems for control and supervision, codes of ethics and standard operating procedures;
- Development and operationalization of special competences and specialized units;
- Provisions to protect the rights and safety of police personnel;
- Internal control, supervision, investigation and disciplinary procedures;
- Resourcing, budgeting, equipment and training;
- Policies and strategies for public outreach and community engagement.

### GOOD SECURITY SECTOR GOVERNANCE (SSG) AND SECURITY SECTOR REFORM (SSR)

**Good SSG** describes how the principles of good governance apply to public security provision, management and oversight. The principles of good SSG are accountability, transparency, the rule of law, participation, responsiveness, effectiveness and efficiency.

The **security sector** is not just security providers: it includes all the institutions and personnel responsible for security management and oversight at both national and local levels.

**Establishing good SSG is the goal of security sector reform. SSR** is the political and technical process of improving state and human security by making security provision, management and oversight more effective and more accountable, within a framework of democratic civilian control, the rule of law and respect for human rights. SSR may focus on only one part of public security provision or the way the entire system functions, as long as the goal is always to improve both effectiveness and accountability.

➔ For more information on these core definitions, please refer to the SSR Backgrounders on “Security Sector Governance”, “Security Sector Reform” and “The Security Sector”.

Police reforms that focus outside the police organization usually affect police strategies, roles, functions, management, supervision and control, or the legal framework and the modus operandi within which the police work. For example, reforms might involve:

- **Updating legal frameworks** to reflect international law standards or clarify roles and mandates for law enforcement;
- **Changing budget procedures:** parliaments and finance ministries can change the way the police budget is allocated and hold the police accountable for efficient use of resources;

**FIGURE 2 THE OVERARCHING GOALS OF POLICE REFORM IN TRANSFORMING THE POLICE INTO A SERVICE**



- **Reorganizing police systems:** executive management authorities can change the territorial or jurisdictional responsibilities of police, change national management strategies, reform relevant departments or ministries or implement new national security policies that affect police mandates or operational needs;
- **Enhancing external oversight:** mandates for independent police complaints authorities or national human rights institutions with responsibility for police oversight may be created or updated to enhance accountability.

## HOW ARE POLICE REFORMS CARRIED OUT?

A police reform process requires coordination among multiple stakeholders. National government, together with relevant local governments, should initiate and actively support the reform effort and convince other stakeholders also to support the reform: oversight institutions, management authorities, civil society organizations and the public may all be consulted or involved directly. In peacebuilding or transition contexts, international actors can support national efforts at police reform but national institutions must always lead these reforms.

Police reform typically involves a period of strategic assessment (or pre-analysis), design and strategic planning, implementation and evaluation (see figure 3).

**Strategic assessment:** Assessing the need for and priorities of reform requires a thorough analysis of the police organization, its personnel and relationships with other institutions, civil society and the general public. Consultations with various stakeholders from all groups in society and across all ranks within the police will help to:

- Identify underlying problems within the police;
- Conduct a gender equality audit;
- Determine how different actors perceive existing problems;
- Establish need for reform;
- Test the willingness to reform;
- Rally support and resources.

This information serves as a baseline crucial for evaluating reform progress later on.

## DEMOCRATIC POLICING

Democratic policing is a set of values that describes what is expected of police in a democracy. The purpose of the police should be to:

- Uphold law and order;
- Prevent crime;
- Protect and respect the rights and freedoms of all persons;
- Provide services and assistance to the public.

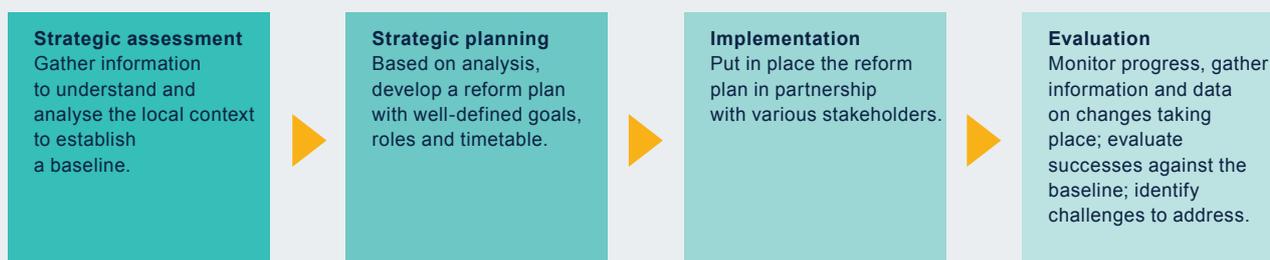
In fulfilling their duties, police in a democracy should:

- Uphold the rule of law in performing their duties;
- Demonstrate professionalism and integrity and respect human rights and civil and political rights;
- Be accountable to the public, the State and the law;
- Be transparent in their operations, use of resources and communications with the public;
- Emphasize restrained, proportional and adequate use of force, when it is required.

The term “democratic policing” is often used interchangeably with other people-centred policing approaches, such as community policing, problem-oriented policing and intelligence-led policing. Implementation of these approaches should always reflect the core values of democratic policing stated above.

➔ For more information on democratic policing, please refer to the SSR Backgrounder on “The Police”.

**FIGURE 3 THE FOUR MAIN PHASES OF POLICE REFORM**



**Strategic planning:** The initial analysis feeds into a detailed reform plan that sets well-defined goals, clear roles and responsibilities and a timeline for achieving them. Democratic governance goals, focusing on greater accountability with strong control and oversight mechanisms, must be balanced with operational objectives to ensure the feasibility of reform and public support. These will be influenced by several factors, including:

- Support from other parts of the security sector;
- Public attitudes and relationship with the police;
- The existing organizational setting;
- Resources available for reform.

This stage also needs to establish monitoring, review and evaluation mechanisms to gauge the success of reform.

**Implementation:** Implementing a reform plan requires sufficient political support and financial and human resources, as well as time. A systematic change management approach and effective internal and external communication strategies provide clarity on the change process and help generate support. Reform will only be successful if it makes sense to all police personnel and those who interact with the police. Establishing a performance management and reward system can cement changes in police values and practices. Committed leadership from the top is essential. If there is a change in leadership, political support for reform should be maintained to ensure proper implementation of the reform plan.

**Evaluation:** Gathering data throughout the process and evaluating results against clear and previously established criteria allows success to be measured and identifies areas where implementation efforts need to be adapted. Evaluating progress demonstrates the benefits of reform to political leaders and the population and helps build support for the police and for future improvements.

## HOW IS GENDER EQUALITY PART OF POLICE REFORM?

**As people have differing gender identities and different security needs, reform must empower the police to respond to all those needs.** It is essential to include an analysis of gender equality in the planning, design, implementation and evaluation of a police reform programme. Gender equality features in police reform:

- **Improving gender equality within the police organization:** Reform is often needed to ensure open recruitment, non-discriminatory policies and equitable career opportunities for women and men. Reform can focus on creating working environments free from all forms of discrimination and harassment and creating the internal capacity to respond to complaints

## POLICE REFORM IN POST-CONFLICT CONTEXTS

A country emerging from conflict may encounter additional challenges in police reform within SSR. In this context, demilitarization of the police is a major objective. This means that the function, personnel and organization of the police and of the military are separated from each other, and that the police changes its behaviour from a culture of force to a culture of service. This is important because, in such contexts, often the police have participated in wartime operations and may have engaged in violence against the population. The reconstruction of the police as a service requires the careful vetting of previous personnel and new recruits to enable a police force that operates with integrity and legitimacy.

Demobilization and reintegration of armed state and non-state groups, as well as reconciliation and transitional justice processes, further challenge the creation of necessary procedures, skills and attitudes to ensure effective conduct in respect of national and international law.

Continued and inclusive political dialogue throughout a peace process and in the aftermath of conflict is imperative to ensure the necessary support of all stakeholders for reforming the security sector. Close coordination of international and national financing and implementation are particularly important to ensure the high quality of reform.

Please refer to the SSR Backgrounder on “Peace Processes” for more information on SSR in the context of peace processes.

effectively. Providing a suitable work environment also means ensuring that women and men have equal access to appropriate facilities, equipment and training, as well as equal opportunity to put their skills to good use.

- **Promoting gender equality to improve police performance:** In their daily work with the population, police officers must recognize that violence and discrimination affect people with different gender identities differentially and to varying degrees. Police reform that promotes gender equality empowers police to respond more effectively to the different needs of all members of the community. Police reform that promotes gender equality can help police culture become more responsive to the needs of people with diverse gender identities.

## WHAT TO READ NEXT

### On police reform in the context of SSR:

---

- Peter Albrecht and Lars Buur  
**An Uneasy Marriage: Non-state Actors and Police Reform**  
Policing and Society, 19(4), 2009: 390-405.
- Megan Bastick  
**Integrating Gender into Internal Police Oversight**  
**Gender and SSR Guidance Note**  
Geneva: DCAF, OSCE, OSCE/ODIHR, 2014.
- Pierre Aepli (ed.)  
**Toolkit on Police Integrity**  
Geneva: DCAF, 2012.
- Paulo Costa and Isaline Thorens  
**Training Manual on Police Integrity**  
Geneva: DCAF, 2015.
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime  
**Handbook on Police Accountability, Oversight and Integrity**  
Criminal Justice Handbook Series.  
New York: United Nations, 2011.
- Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe  
**Police Reform within the Framework of Criminal Justice System Reform**  
TNTD/SPMU Publication Series Vol. 11.  
Vienna: OSCE, 2013.
- CurbingCorruption  
**Sector: Police Services**  
Police services sector review as at 7 October 2018,  
available at: <https://curbingcorruption.com/sector/police-services/>

### On police reform in local contexts:

---

- Querine Hanlon  
**Security Sector Reform in Tunisia: A Year After the Jasmine Revolution**  
Special Report 304. Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2012.
- John Doyle (ed.)  
**Policing the Narrow Ground: Lessons from the Transformation of Policing in Northern Ireland**  
Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2010.
- Robert Peacock and Gary Corder  
**“Shock Therapy” in Ukraine: A Radical Approach to Post-Soviet Police Reform**  
Public Administration and Development, 36(2), 2016: 80-92.

### On approaches to democratic policing:

---

- Sol Iglesias and Ulrich Klingshirn (eds.)  
**Good Policing: Instruments, Models and Practices**  
Asia-Europe Democratisation and Justice Series.  
Singapore: Asia-Europe Foundation; Jakarta: Hanns Seidel Foundation Indonesia, 2011.
- Senior Police Adviser to the OSCE Secretary General  
**Guidebook on Democratic Policing, 2nd ed.**  
Vienna: OSCE, 2008.

### On international police standards and ethics:

---

- Amnesty International  
**International Police Standards: 10 Basic Human Rights Standards for Law Enforcement Officials**  
Toolkit: Legislating for the Security Sector 1.3.  
Geneva: DCAF, 2009.
- Council of Europe  
**The European Code of Police Ethics**  
**Recommendation Rec(2001)10 adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 19 September 2001 and Explanatory Memorandum**  
Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2002.

#### MORE DCAF SSR RESOURCES

DCAF publishes a wide variety of tools, handbooks and guidance on all aspects of SSR and good SSG, available free-for-download at [www.dcaf.ch](http://www.dcaf.ch)

Many resources are also available in languages other than English.

The DCAF-ISSAT Community of Practice website makes available a range of online learning resources for SSR practitioners at <http://issat.dcaf.ch>

**DCAF** Geneva Centre  
for Security Sector  
Governance

**DCAF - Geneva Centre for  
Security Sector Governance**

**Maison de la Paix**  
Chemin Eugène-Rigot 2E  
CH-1202 Geneva  
Switzerland

 **+41 22 730 94 00**

 **info@dcaf.ch**

 **@DCAF\_Geneva**

**[www.dcaf.ch](http://www.dcaf.ch)**