

The Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) is a leading centre of excellence in justice and security sector governance.

We are dedicated to improving human and state security through the strengthening of democratic governance, rule of law and respect for human rights, by:

- Supporting states and societies to improve security sector governance (SSG)
- Assisting international actors that support states to improve their SSG
- Contributing to good SSG policy and specialist knowledge



DCAF

a centre for security,
development and
the rule of law

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DCAF

Contributing to citizen security in Latin America and the Caribbean



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Latin America Factsheet

Strategy and vision

DCAF's engagement in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) strives to strengthen citizen security and contribute to a democratic, just and violence-free society by addressing security sector governance (SSG) issues in the region in cooperation with governments, parliaments, security sector providers, and intergovernmental and civil society organizations. DCAF promotes the application of good governance principles to help reduce institutional weaknesses and develop effective, efficient and transparent security and justice providers that are properly managed and overseen by the executive and legislative authorities in the region, while being fully accountable to their societies.

DCAF's work in the LAC region seeks to comply with the broader Sustainable Development Goals of Gender Equality (SDG 5), Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11), and Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (SDG 16). With the opening of a dedicated LAC Unit in June 2017, DCAF reinforced its commitment to supporting and improving security sector governance as a means of strengthening citizen security in LAC.

Thematic areas of engagement in LAC include police and defence reforms; the promotion of gender equality in security institutions and the prevention of gender-based violence; parliamentary oversight of the security sector; private security sector legislation and regulation; small arms and light weapons control; and private security accountability.

Selected Projects

Honduras: Assisting the reform of the National Police

DCAF has been engaged in Honduras since 2013. As of September 2018, DCAF supports the police reform process in Honduras at a national and institutional level through its multi-year Police Advisory Programme as part of the Citizen Security programme of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). The programme's objective is to support the Honduran Secretary of Security and the National Police, in collaboration with the security and justice system to increase their institutional integrity and effectiveness within a framework of human rights and meritocracy. Through its project office in Tegucigalpa, DCAF strengthens the police reform process in the areas of strategic and operational management, community policing, police education and accountability, use of force, human resources management and mentoring with a psychosocial approach.

Colombia: Contributing to an inclusive peace process

With the support of Norway, and in cooperation with the Colombian NGO Corporación de Investigación y Acción Social y Económica (CIASE), DCAF is contributing to the implementation of the peace accords in Colombia by promoting spaces of dialogue on security concerns for women in areas of Colombia that were formerly controlled by the FARC. In these "transition areas", demobilized ex-FARC members are being reintegrated into society. DCAF and CIASE developed a series of recommendations to the Colombian state, the police and the international community on how to adjust the provision of safety to the security needs and priorities of women living in these rural areas. The recommendations were produced through an inclusive consultation process with women in five affected municipalities. Through a second phase of this project, DCAF is expanding the consultation process to other "transition areas" and facilitating the creating of dialogue mechanisms between women's groups and security and justice providers at a local level, in order to contribute to women's access to security and justice.

Publication: Transcending the long Path
<https://www.dcaf.ch/transcending-long-path>

Colombia: Legislative oversight of the security sector

Through a series of conferences, DCAF and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Colombia (FESCOL), with support from the Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA) and the Embassy of Sweden in Colombia, are enabling Colombian members of Congress to share their experiences and have better access to good practices and lessons learned from other regions in order to support the Colombian legislative branch in overseeing the security sector.

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Context

With a homicide rate of 24 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2015 – four times the global average – LAC is one of the most violent regions in the world. In 2016, LAC was home to 42 of the world's most dangerous cities, as well as 14 of the 25 countries with the highest rates of femicide. Local and transnational violence takes its toll as both a human tragedy and an impediment to economic prosperity; in 2014, crime-related costs amounted to approximately 3.55 percent of the region's GDP.

However, the latest numbers reveal a decline in homicides in some of LAC's most violent countries. In 2017, the Northern Triangle witnessed a 23 percent decline in murder rates compared to 2016. In some advanced economies in the region – those with already low levels of homicide – homicide continued to decrease. In other countries, such as Brazil and Mexico, violence has reached new heights due to intensifying clashes between law enforcement and organized crime. The situation is often exacerbated by high rates of firearm ownership, impunity and corruption, which undermine the rule of law and the credibility of state institutions. The root causes of violence in LAC are multidimensional and do not necessarily correlate with the level of economic development, but instead with levels of socio-economic inequality and exclusion, the pace of development, youth unemployment and weak security and justice institutions. This partly explains the “violence-poverty paradox” in a region that has otherwise experienced improvements in democratic governance and poverty reduction.

The relationship between civil society and security institutions in LAC is complex. Armed forces continue to play a significant role in domestic security, with some countries falling back on forceful methods to tackle crime (“mano dura”), an approach characterized by an excessive use of military and police force, which largely fails to address the root causes of violence by further militarizing public security and limiting civilian oversight. Most advances in the prevention of violent conflict in LAC have been preceded by investments in police training, criminal justice reform and social development programmes that have been implemented under the paradigm of citizen security, a home-grown concept that embraces the security-development nexus and naturally refers to violence prevention through localized strategies to create conditions that help prevent the outbreak of violence.